

Title: **The Dangers of Dissimulation: Quenching the Spirit in John Smyth's Separatist Works and Early Modern English State Formation**

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Abstract:

John Smyth (1570-1612), English Puritan and later Se-Baptist, envisioned a separatist church community of voluntary formation bound together by a covenant of grace as the true visible Church of Christ on earth. This separatism, available through Smyth's *Principles and Inferences concerning the visible Church* (1607) and *The difference of the Churches of the Separation* (1608), provides a heuristic point of departure for understanding not only his ideal of the covenanted community and the dangers of "quenching the Spirit" but also the political and ecclesiastical vision of Anglican England in the early modern period. The Crown understood itself as the provider of political, religious, and social order and, lacking a monopoly of violence, pursued this order by seeking legitimization through oaths tendered to those who led as government officials or ministers and those who were perceived as threats to the nascent order. The danger posed by dissimulation, the harbinger of chaos, was precisely the danger of "quenching the Spirit" in John Smyth's covenanted Separatist Congregation. Thus Smyth's notion of "quenching the Spirit" and the possibility of dissimulation under oath before the Crown in late 16th and early 17th century England establish that the tension between the inner and outer, between the Spirit and the Letter, and between the public and the private, made important claims in early modern English life that could no longer be considered "medieval."