A model of English early modern entrepreneurship, George Calvert (the first Lord Baltimore) invested significant portions of his family’s wealth in several transatlantic business enterprises. However, this son of a Roman Catholic Yorkshire gentleman did not merely invest capital in colonial ventures. He risked the lives of his own family members by crossing the Atlantic and braving the wild and largely unknown frontier. Ultimately, emigrating with his family cost him dearly with the deaths of his second wife and some of his children. Yet even this personal tragedy failed to dissuade him from establishing his own colony in the New World. Thus, the simple quest for greater wealth cannot fully explain why Calvert chose the fatal course that he did. For Calvert, his English settlement in the New World promised to fulfill three primary objectives: to create wealth, to provide a safe haven for English Catholics, and to reestablish Roman Catholicism as the true Anglo faith in the post-Reformation era. Not a man to rule by the sword, Calvert would have to create a religiously tolerant modern society—founded upon the separation of Church and State—in order to subtly and peacefully bring misguided Anglicans back to the faith while strengthening the piety of English Roman Catholics by offering a place to worship in public. In order to succeed in this monumental task, Calvert needed the support of the Crown, the Roman Catholic Church, and his colonists.¹

Calvert lived on the cusp of the traditional² and modern worlds and his life reflected this tension, as would his son’s.³ The acceptance

¹ An early version of this chapter appeared in Meyers, Common Whores, Vertuous Women and Loving Wives, chapter one. I would like to thank Stanley Engerman, John Krugler, Carla Pestana, and John J. Waters, Jr. for their comments on initial drafts of this work.

² Edward Shorter uses this “traditional” and “modern” dichotomy in his work, The Making of the Modern Family.

³ None of the past characterizations by historians fully capture George Calvert’s
of the centrality of property, innovation, education, and risk taking as a means to wealth accumulation, in addition to religious toleration and a belief in rational scientific thought, often taken to be hallmarks of a modern worldview, were certainly present in George Calvert. Calvert was always interested in increasing the family’s wealth through property accumulation and he and his kin encouraged an extensive education as a means to this end. George obtained his first degree at Trinity College in 1597 and an honorary Master of Arts degree in 1605. Calvert was willing to take substantial financial risks as he invested his wealth in many transatlantic opportunities—innovative means for his time. George was one of the original associates of the Virginia Company who also served as a provisional council member in England for the temporary government of Virginia in 1624 in order to protect his assets. He also invested capital in the East India and the New England Company in addition to purchasing a plantation in Newfoundland. His dedication to wealth accumulation, innovation, financial risk-taking, education, and the establishment of a religiously tolerant society— instituted by his son—seems to firmly place him in the secularized modern world. And yet his vision for an ordered society in the New World was based upon position in straddling two worlds. While celebrating Calvert’s integrity and the self-discipline that made him the statesman, gentleman, and founding father they generally admired, historians differed on why we should honor George as a great man. Some historians chose to focus on his pious altruistic Catholicism that drove him to embrace religious tolerance—values inculcated in his son, Cecil, who put them into practice in the New World—with little or no regard for his own personal aggrandizement. Yet others paid tribute to George’s foresight in establishing a province in the New World, but they welcomed the Protestant ideals concerning toleration and democracy that came from the majority of Anglican settlers once the province was established. Still others, more recently, applauded Calvert’s pragmatism. A man before his time, Calvert made decisions about colonization and settlement based on his own self-interest that allowed a modern State to evolve founded upon the fundamental idea of the separation of church and State. John Krugler said it best when he claimed that a true understanding of the Calvert family’s insistence upon religious toleration in Maryland must rest firmly on the fact that the Calverts were “hardnosed pragmatic Catholic entrepreneurs who were attempting to prosper in a world that was predominately Protestant.” In sum, the practical Calverts, as new modern Catholics moving towards secularization, expediently seized the political and economic advantages that lay before them intent upon carving out a significant place for themselves in the modern Protestant world. More recently Krugler has coined the term “The Calvert Vision” to emphasize the Calverts’ invention of a modern model for church-state relations predicated on religious toleration, Krugler, “With the Promise of Liberty in Religion,” 25; “The Calvert Vision,” and English and Catholic.