John Wallis, Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford and one of England’s leading mathematicians in the seventeenth century, was simultaneously a minister in the Church of England over a period defined by tremendously volatile politics and theology. Drawing on a rich variety of print and manuscript sources and an extensive secondary literature on Wallis and English politics and theology, the author explores the connections between these two sides of Wallis’s long career, arguing that anti-Catholicism represented a relatively stable political and theological position that directly informed Wallis’s scientific activity and his mathematical and philosophical interests and commitments. While Wallis maintained valued correspondence with some Catholic scholars and respected and used the work of others, the author identifies and contextualizes a career-spanning through-line of anti-Catholic rhetoric and argument that helps to explain and unify several of the mathematician’s contentions and projects. The most-studied of these is Wallis’s campaign against the Gregorian calendar reform, a project that profoundly implicated mathematics, religion, and politics in this period. After considering this in its wider contexts, the author interprets claims about the metaphysics of time and place in Wallis’s first publication, then attempts to explain Wallis’s later decision to produce an anonymous Latin translation of a numerological treatise based on a “dubious calculation of the square root of 666”. Together, these discussions suggestively illuminate the deep interpenetration of religious politics, philosophy, and mathematics in the work of a central figure in a context of extraordinary intellectual ferment.

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