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TOWNLEY, GARETH,LEWIS

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Gareth Townley

What do the religious beliefs of the Harleys of Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire, tell us about the nature of early Stuart puritanism?

Abstract

The thesis uses the Harleys as a case study to determine what their own personal beliefs can tell us about the nature of puritanism in the early Stuart period. Two key personal documents are examined in order to establish that the Harleys' 'brand' of puritanism was built upon several fundamental pillars: a belief in the doctrine of predestination, that is the belief that the world was divided into the 'elect' who were assured of salvation and the 'reprobate' who doomed to damnation; the preference for a preaching ministry; the observance of regular private days of fasting and humiliation; a fierce iconoclasm and a mistrust of the power of the episcopacy; all of which were underscored by the belief that the word of God, as found in Scripture, was the only arbiter of religious orthodoxy. The thesis goes on to explore how these beliefs compare to those held by puritan ministers whom were known personally to the Harleys, through a discussion of the ministers' published sermons and other works. Finally, the thesis examines the public life of Sir Robert Harley as a Member of Parliament and the private life of the Harleys in their corner of northern Herefordshire, in order to show that both aspects of their life were heavily influenced by their particular religious beliefs. The thesis concludes that, while early Stuart puritanism was fluid and individual, and that there can be no 'one size fits all' definition, there were certain shared beliefs, the finer details of which were open to debate and discussion among the puritans themselves.

What do the religious beliefs of the Harleys of Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire, tell us
about the nature of early Stuart puritanism?

Gareth Townley

Master of Arts (by Thesis)

History Department

Durham University

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Introduction

In a draft letter to Sir Horace Vere, who was commanding the English volunteer force fighting for the Palatinate, Sir Robert Harley wrote:

A P[uritan] is he that desires to practise what others profess. Is one that dares nothing in wor[ship] of god or course of his life but what gods worde warra[n]ts. His sins are more than other mens because he sees the[m] & greater because he feels them.¹

At the time of writing, February 1621, Sir Robert was a relatively inexperienced MP from the county of Herefordshire. He would go on to be one of the most active supporters of the Long Parliament's religious innovations during the 1640s, chairing several committees and overseeing the removal of idols from churches across the city of London, as well as in his home county. Sir Robert knew that he was considered to be a puritan by many of his contemporaries, but, unlike many seventeenth century godly men and women, this was not a label that he appears to shy away from. Within two years, he was to marry Brilliana Conway, daughter of Secretary Conway, whose religious beliefs were of a similarly godly persuasion. Their shared faith would go on to guide their family life in rural Herefordshire, as well as Sir Robert's public life as an MP. As such, the Harleys present the historian with a fascinating case study that can help to shed light on many areas of the related historiography.

To review the historiography of puritanism is to 'review the history of Early Modern England. The history of Puritanism started almost at the same moment as the emergence of Puritanism as a movement and a sensibility.'² From the sixteenth century to the present day, first contemporaries and now historians have struggled to agree on a definition of puritans and puritanism. So crucial was the question of puritanism that for many years it was the central explanation for the outbreak of the Civil Wars in the 1640s. The two earliest schools of thought surrounding the outbreak of the civil war

¹ Sir Robert Harley to Horace Vere, February 1620/1, BL Loan 29/202, f.47v

² Peter Lake, 'The Historiography of Puritanism' in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 346

shared the same fundamental belief that the war had long-term origins and was a result of the actions of radical non-conformists in the parliamentary camp. First was the long held belief that the outbreak of hostilities between parliament and the King was the result of decades of conflict and adversity between the orthodox national Church and a group of puritan dissenters, who also challenged politically the personal rule of Charles I. The early studies of the outbreak of the civil war have been grouped together as the Whig view of the puritan revolution, because they appealed to the belief that history was a continuous story of man's progress towards liberty. This prevailing view of the inevitable rise from medieval authoritarianism to modern democracy held sway amongst historians until the early twentieth century³, when a group of Marxist historians presented an alternative interpretation of the events of the 1630s and 1640s. Puritanism, it was now argued, was closely linked to the seventeenth-century bourgeois gentry, who were the driving force behind the Parliamentary opposition to the King. And so, a Whig puritan revolution was replaced by a Marxist bourgeois revolution.⁴

It was in the middle of the twentieth-century that the theory of a puritan resistance to a conformist national church was first challenged. It was argued convincingly that the Elizabethan and Jacobean church was built on a foundation of Calvinism, and that many puritans were able to conform, more or less happily, to the established church. While there were undoubtedly individual puritan radicals, and there were also times of heightened puritan opposition to the direction the national church was taking, at other times there was a cohesion that enabled many whom their contemporaries might call puritans to happily conform.⁵ This idea was taken up and expanded upon by the revisionist historians of the latter half of the last century, who argued that the 'first decades of the seventeenth century in England did not witness any straightforward

³ See particularly S. R. Gardiner, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the outbreak of the Civil War* (London, 1883)

⁴ R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the rise of Capitalism* (London, 1926); Christopher Hill, *The Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1965)

⁵ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967)

contest between an 'Anglican' hierarchy on the one hand and the serried ranks of Puritanism on the other.'⁶ The revisionist attempted to demonstrate, with varying levels of success, that it was Archbishop Laud and his followers, who were labelled as Arminians, who were the religious innovators, upsetting the established national church with the changes that they made; and not the puritans as had been previously argued. The main thrust of the early revisionist argument centred on the doctrine of predestination. The acceptance that there were a group of people 'the Godly elect' who had been selected by God for salvation before time began, and that, in contrast, everyone else belonged to the 'reprobate' group who were doomed to damnation, was widespread in late Elizabethan and Jacobean England. In contrast, 'the essence of Arminianism was a belief in God's universal grace and the freewill of all men to obtain salvation.'⁷ The preferment shown to anti-Calvinists during the 1620s and 1630s, and in particular the appointment of William Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury, resulted in a change to the established practices of the church that resulted in resistance. It was, therefore, Laud and the Arminians who were the cause of the outbreak of war, not the puritan gentry as had been argued previously.

The revisionist view was both supported and challenged by the next generation of post-revisionist historians. Many agreed that puritanism was merely the 'most zealous and activist face of far wider bodies of Calvinist or reformed thought that were in fact hegemonic in the church of Elizabeth, James and during the early part of the reign of Charles I'.⁸ However the initial theories of the revisionist have been adapted and improved; for instance the post-revisionists tend to confer less importance on the

⁶ Nicholas Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter Revolution' in Conrad Russell (ed.), *The origins of the English Civil War* (London, 1973), p. 123

⁷ Tyacke, 'Puritanism', p. 119

⁸ Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'orthodoxy' and 'hegemony' and the politics of the parish in early Stuart London*, (Stanford, 2001) p. 12. See also Kenneth Fincham 'Introduction' and Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake 'The Ecclesiastical Policies of James I and Charles I' in Kenneth Fincham (Ed.), *The Early Stuart Church* (London, 1993); Peter Lake and Kenneth Fincham (eds.), *Religious politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge, 2006) and Peter Lake, 'Calvinism and the English Church 1570-1635', *Past and Present*, 114 (1987), pp. 32-76

doctrine of predestination and the term Arminians has been replaced by Anti-Calvinists, Laudian or even avant-garde conformists, particularly when discussing things other than predestination.⁹ What has developed has been dubbed soft and hard versions of what has been called 'the Calvinist Consensus'. The hard version has resulted in puritans almost disappearing into a 'perfect protestant consensus'; while the soft version argues that puritanism was a distinct attitude that operated within 'but [was] certainly not subsumed' by the wider reformed church. So called 'moderate puritan' ministers conformed, to a greater or lesser extent, to the practices of the national church. That is not to say that there weren't radical puritans – laymen and ministers – but they were the minority and even they were able to operate within the established church.¹⁰

There are some historians, however, who disagree with the view that puritans were an integrated part of the early Stuart church. For these post-revisionists, puritanism was a theologically and politically radical school of thought that attempted to dominate and overcome the national church and impose its Calvinist, predestinarian beliefs on the rest of the country. Ignoring, or disputing, most of what the revisionists and their post-revisionist supporters have shown, they revived the argument that it was Charles and Archbishop Laud who were continuing the traditions of the Elizabethan and Jacobean churches, what has been called the *via media*, and they assign the role of dissenters and radicals to those whom they label as puritans.¹¹

Prior to the emergence of revisionism, and subsequently post-revisionism, the majority of historians were not overtly interested in the theology and beliefs of puritanism as much as they were interested in using it to explain something else that supported their

⁹ Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists* (Oxford, 1982) and Peter Lake, 'Lancelot Andrewes, John Buckeridge and Avant-Garde Conformity at the court of James I' in Linda Levy Peck (ed.), *The mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge, 1991)

¹⁰ Lake, *Boxmaker's*, p. 12 For a wide range of discussions relating to puritanism see C Durston and J Eales, *The culture of puritanism, 156-1700*, (Basingstoke, 1996)

¹¹ Peter White, 'The Via Media' in Fincham and Lake (eds.), *Early Stuart*; Peter White, 'The Rise of Arminianism Reconsidered', *Past and Present*, 101 (1983), pp. 34-54; K. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (London, 1992) and Mark Kishlansky, 'Charles I: a case of mistaken identity', *Past and Present*, 189 (2005), pp. 41-80

version of the causes of the Civil War. These more secular explorations of puritanism have been described as extrinsic histories. The few studies that did explore puritan theology were labelled the intrinsic approach; however, these also used puritanism for their own ends; often to place a particular belief or theological theory in a direct link with the people they were studying. Although, on the surface, these two approaches were very different, they shared some fundamental similarities: namely that they relied on the assumption that puritanism was a distinct and definable set of theological ideas and beliefs and that it was a contrast to the orthodoxy of the Anglican Church.¹² Since the emergence of revisionism, puritanism and puritan beliefs have been portrayed by historians as more fluid and the idea of a specific puritan identity has held less sway. A puritan underground has been revealed, particularly in London, where there were many doctrinal and theological disputes between people who would otherwise have been grouped together as puritans; even surrounding such a central plank of puritanism as the question of justification. These theories were discussed and debated in manuscripts, discussion groups, lectures and sermons among the puritan ministers. Where there was dispute, the general consensus was that the protagonists would, on the whole, agree to disagree and it is 'here [that] the social and cultural links and connections through which the "Calvinist consensus" of the Jacobean church was, in practice, constituted and maintained.'¹³

The revisionism of the 1970s and 1980s, which came about due to a reaction to 'consensus [that] was being reached on an interpretation of the causes of the English Civil War in terms of the "rise of the gentry"', did not just focus on the religious beliefs of seventeenth century England.¹⁴ Revisionist historians looked for a range of

¹² Lake, 'Historiography', pp. 348 to 350

¹³ Peter Lake and David Como, "'Orthodoxy" and its discontents: dispute settlement and the protection of "consensus" in the London (puritan) underground', *Journal of British Studies*, 39:1 (2000) p. 46; For a more detailed discussion of the case between Stephen Denison and John Etherington, see Lake, *Boxmaker's*

¹⁴ Christopher Hill, 'Parliament and People in Seventeenth-Century England'; *Past and Present*; 92 (1981); 101-102

explanations for the outbreak of the Civil War, including looking at the local picture in specific counties. The scholarship surrounding local studies has created a debate surrounding the relationship between national and local affairs and it is 'an oversimplification, but not a caricature, to say that two distinct sets of views are current.'¹⁵ On the one side are those who have developed the idea of the 'county community' as the most important influence on the provincial gentry.¹⁶ The main thrust of their argument is that 'Only a small minority of activists were genuinely committed to the Royalist or the Parliamentary side in the Civil War; the most characteristic response...was reluctance to get involved, as shown both in widespread neutralism in individuals and in collective attempts at localism.'¹⁷ Conversely there are those historians who accept that local interests were important, and that the local studies have provided valuable insights into the Early Stuart period, but who argue that the local and national interests were not separate spheres but, rather, were closely intertwined and had an equal influence on the actions and allegiances of those who participated in the hostilities. Similarly they argue that while there was localism and neutralism, there were those in the provinces who were drawn into the events of the 1640s through both religious and political ideologies and convictions.¹⁸

One of the other debates that arose as a result of revisionism is the question of whether the War broke out due to long or short-term reasons. Some believe that England in the 1640s was further away from a civil war than it had been for seventy years, and that the

¹⁵ Anne Hughes, 'The King, the Parliament, and the Localities during the English Civil War', *Journal of British Studies*; 24 (1985); p. 236

¹⁶ Alan Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion*, (Leicester, 1966); Anthony Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and war: Sussex, 1600-1660*, (London, 1975); J. S. Morrill, *Cheshire, 1630-166: County Government and Society during the "English Revolution"*, (Oxford, 1974), and the *Revolt of the Provinces: Conservatives and Radical in the English Civil War, 1630-165*, (London, 1976)

¹⁷ Hughes, 'The King'; pp. 236-237

¹⁸ Clive Holmes, 'The County community in Stuart Historiography', *Journal of British Studies*; 19:2 (1980); 54-73; Christopher Hill, 'Parliament and People'; Anne Hughes, 'The King, the Parliament' 236-263; and 'Warwickshire on the Eve of the Civil War: A "County Community"?'; *Midland History*; 7 (1982); 42-72; David Underdown, 'Community and Class: Theories of Local Politics in the English Revolution', in Barbara Malament (Ed.), *After The Reformation*, (Manchester, 1980); and *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum*, (Newton Abbot, 1975)

war grew out of the policies and failings of a particular King; Charles I.¹⁹ The opposition to the King consisted of three strands: 'localist': a resentment of the King's interference in local government; 'legal-constitutionalist': a belief that Charles was being influenced by evil counsellors; and 'religious': the view that Protestantism was under attack from a covert popish plot and a more obvious change to the Church of England.²⁰ Having said that, it is evident that 'the revolution was *not* a mere accident' and to 'understand it we need to look back once more over the history of the previous century.'²¹ Those that support the argument that the war was caused by long-term themes believe that there were many social, political and religious reasons for the outbreak of hostilities in the 1640s, some of which stretched back to the Elizabethan age. The most convincing and satisfying argument is that there were long-term factors, which have been dubbed 'preconditions' and 'precipitants', but that war only happened when it did due to the short-term triggers.²²

It is clear that the revisionists achieved a lot of good and that the changes they brought about to the study of the early Stuart period were mostly for the better. The move away from the assumption that the war came about because of a long running hostility between a group labelled puritans and the supporters of the King was much needed; as was the realisation that many of the puritans were able to conform to the national church to varying degrees. The work of the post-revisionists, in refining many of these arguments, has shown that the truth probably lies somewhere in between the two opposing theories, and that no whole encompassing truth can be applied when dealing with individuals who each had their own unique thoughts and sets of circumstances.

¹⁹ J. S. Morrill, 'What was the English Revolution?'; *History Today*; 34:3 (1985); p. 12; see also Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution*, (London, 1993), and Conrad Russell, *Unrevolutionary England, 1600-1642*, (London, 1990)

²⁰ Morrill, 'What', p. 13

²¹ David Underdown, 'What was the English Revolution?'; *History Today*; 34:3 (1985); p. 22; for the long term argument see also Christopher Hill, *Intellectual, and Puritanism and revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution*, (London, 1958), Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529-1642*, (New York, 1972)

²² Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529-1642*, Chapter 3.

The Harleys and their particular story, and their reactions to the events happening in the 1630s and 1640s, touch upon many areas of the historiography that has been discussed above. This is why they can be found in the index of most histories of the period and why Jacqueline Eales chose them as the subject for her 1990 work *Puritans and Roundheads; the Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the outbreak of the English Civil War*. An examination of the Harleys' story supports the notion that local and national interests had an equal influence on the actions of the gentry at this time. Their life was, undoubtedly, influenced by their immediate locality, but it was the national events that held their main interest. Sir Robert Harley's involvement in the Short and Long Parliaments, and the repeated requests of his wife Lady Brilliana for news from London and elsewhere confirm this. For the Harleys there was no attempt to remain neutral, or reluctance to get involved. Their strong puritan beliefs, and Sir Robert's, and their eldest son Edward's, involvement with the Long Parliament, compelled them to boldly declare their allegiances, when local events would have made it more prudent to remain impartial. The Harleys' story can also be used to examine the theories regarding long and short term causes for the outbreak of war. It is evident that they were able to live in harmony with neighbours, relatives and friends with whom they disagreed politically and over matters of religion. They had grievances and disagreed with some of the choices that Charles made in matters of state and church, but it was not until the 1640s, and only as a result of the specific events of that decade, that they were able or willing to act on these. Professor Eales' study is so detailed and extensive that any further studies that looked at what the Harleys' story can teach us in relation to the historiography of the Civil Wars run the danger of repeating her findings. As much as their story does touch on all of the different historiographical arguments, there is unlikely to be much to say that Professor Eales hasn't already said.²³

²³ Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads; the Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the outbreak of the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990)

There is, however, an area that is conducive to further research and this is a more detailed examination of the Harleys' puritan beliefs and what they demonstrate about the nature of early Stuart puritanism. It has been demonstrated by the post-revisionist religious historians that the nature of puritanism was fluid and individual, so it is dangerous to draw too many assumptions and generalisations, however there can be little doubt that there were central, recurring theological beliefs amongst puritans, even if the finer, more subtle details were being worked out by individuals; both the clergy and laymen. Assuming that these discussions did take place, is inconceivable that the Harleys, as interested as they were in religious theories, were not aware, and in some way involved, in some of the discussions and debates taking place. The current study will use the Harleys as a case study in order to determine what their religious beliefs can tell us about the nature of Early Modern puritanism. There are a number of surviving documents which can be examined and analysed to create a detailed picture of what beliefs they held. It will be argued that the Harleys' 'brand' of puritanism was built on several key pillars; the belief in the doctrine of predestination, the preferment of a preaching ministry, the observance of private days of fast and religious introspection, a fervent iconoclasm and a distrust of the powers of the episcopacy, all of which were underscored by the belief that scripture, as the Word of God, was the only source of religious orthodoxy.

As has been mentioned above, historians have debated the importance of the doctrine of predestination. For some, a belief in predestination was one of 'the defining features of English puritanism' and that puritans were 'separated from a mainstream which was more cautious and ambivalent in its approach to predestination', while others have 'argued convincingly that...between 1560 and 1625 the doctrine of predestination was accepted without question by virtually all of the most influential clergymen in England, puritan and non-puritan alike.'²⁴ The revisionists placed predestination at the heart of

²⁴ Durston and Eales, p. 7

the 'Calvinist consensus' that existed in the English church during the reign of James I and that was threatened by the rise of the Arminians during Charles's reign.²⁵ Some post-revisionists have refined this position, by arguing that it was not the belief in predestination that contemporaries debated, but instead it was the finer details, such as how assurance was obtained, that occupied them.²⁶ This thesis will begin with the belief that the assurance of salvation 'performed the same psychological function for Calvinists as belief in the perpetual visibility of the church did for Catholics' and so a belief in predestination was popular among protestants because it 'gave some people back that certainty of which departure from Catholicism had deprived them.'²⁷ For believers in predestination it was the assurance of salvation that they searched for to enable them to feel that they weren't bound to be cast out as reprobate; 'for a committed Calvinist the doctrine of predestination is literally, and not metaphorically, the Ark of the Covenant.'²⁸ To the Harleys, their belief that they were members of the elect was the foundation that their religious identity was built upon. It was the other pillars that helped them to look for doctrinal truth that would provide them with the assurance of salvation that they so wanted.

Public fasts provided one of the 'lived experience' opportunities for the Harleys and their contemporaries to seek assurance. Fasts were 'a powerful engine of puritan religion' which were 'in response to the challenge of the ascetic practice of the English Catholic community.'²⁹ Fasts were common among all Christians, but what made a fast 'puritan' was that 'some ministers took it upon themselves, as individuals or as groups organised in conference, to announce a fast.'³⁰ Fasts, along with sermons, were 'the main vehicles for puritan socialism... it was the puritan movement... which showed the

²⁵ Nicholas Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism' p. 25

²⁶ Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge*

²⁷ Russell, *Origins* pp. 79-80

²⁸ *ibid* p. 103

²⁹ Patrick Collinson, *The Religion in Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559-1625*, (New York, 1982) pp. 260-261

³⁰ Patrick Collinson, 'Puritanism as Popular Culture' in Durston and Eales (Eds.), p. 51

most enthusiasm for public fasting and indulged in the practice most frequently, by supplementing the rare opportunities for government-sponsored fasting with their own unauthorised days.³¹

The fight against idolatry was a central plank of puritan thought. Puritans, as members of the reformed church, 'favoured simplicity in worship, and recoiled with iconophobic horror from images and elaborate rituals.'³² Divine law 'as laid in the scriptures, above all the Ten Commandments, prohibited false worship, everything that represented or smacked of idols, and the idol-service of banned or banished images.'³³ At the heart of their iconoclasm, then, was their belief that practices not grounded in scripture should form no part of the true church. The puritan definition of idolatry 'could be so broad as to include all of the sins which they considered to be the most heinous and therefore the most deserving of God's judgement.'³⁴ To many puritans, the reformation had not gone far enough and there were still many parts of the English Church that they considered to be idolatrous, which the puritans thought remained in its liturgy and government.³⁵ Iconoclasm would be a driving force behind much of Sir Robert's political career, as will be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The Harleys' views on episcopacy are not as well documented as some of their other beliefs, at least not before the early 1640s. It is quite probable that they would have been prepared to accept bishops in their desired reformed church, but only with considerably reduced powers. It was not until the events of the 1640s that they appeared to have strongly supported a presbyterian model of church government. If Sir Robert did favour a Presbyterian church, this would have been unusual in 1621 and would come as a surprise to some historians who claim that 'Presbyterian ideas had

³¹ Durston and Eales, pp. 20-21

³² Coffey and Lim, p. 2

³³ Margaret Aston, 'Puritans and Iconoclasm, 156-1660' in Durston and Eales (Eds.) p. 92

³⁴ J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in England: Anglicans, Puritans, and the Two Tables, 1620-1670*, (New Haven, 1976) p. 71

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 72

never been embraced by more than a handful of the Puritan clergy and laity.³⁶ This is not a view held by all, however, and there are some who would argue that 'by the late 1620s it was obvious to [puritans] that there would be no real progress without changes in the ritual and leadership of the Caroline Church of England.'³⁷ The opposition to the episcopate grew throughout Charles's reign as a response to the king's attitude towards his bishops.

Charles believed that in ecclesiastical matter he was bound only to consult a limited number of people whom he appointed, and might thereafter promote. It was therefore one of the attractions of bishops to Charles that they represented a channel for effective and unfettered enforcement of his own will of the church. This, of course, is an important part of the reasons why, as his reign progressed, the number of Scots and Englishmen who wanted to abolish bishops increased with such alarming rapidity. The more Charles defended them as an essential part of his 'authority', the more sharply he spotlighted the reasons why other people thought they had to go, or at least be strongly restrained.³⁸

For many people, the bishops represented all that was wrong with Charles's attitudes to the church and to his own power, both in matters temporal and spiritual, and so even those who had supported the episcopate at the beginning of his reign would come to resent the bishops and call for their abolition.

A belief that the word of God was the only arbiter of religious orthodoxy is something that many historians have identified as a prerequisite for identifying someone as a puritan. Puritanism has been described as 'a movement predicated on the revealed Word of God as transmitted through scriptures' and argue that to puritans 'the Bible was elevated to the status of the sole and complete repository of doctrinal and moral

³⁶ J T Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry* (London, 1984), p. 6

³⁷ McGee, p. 10

³⁸ Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, (Oxford, 1996) p. 115

authority.³⁹ Arguably, the assertion that the Bible was the origin of religious practise underlies all other beliefs that were associated with puritans; the iconoclasm, predestination, their attitudes to episcopacy and the desire for a preaching ministry all had their roots in this strict adherence to the Word of God as found in the scriptures: 'Puritan religion was religion of the Word, and the preaching and reading of the Bible were central to their faith.'⁴⁰

Chapter one of this thesis examines in more detail the draft letter quoted at the beginning of this introduction. This is a unique document, held in the Harley Family Papers in the British Library, that gives an insight into what Sir Robert himself believed constituted a puritan. The letter was written following a debate in the House of Commons surrounding the bill 'for the Punishment of diverse Abuses on the Sabbath day', and included with the letter was a highly sympathetic 'character of a puritan'. This document gives a fascinating insight of what constituted puritanism to the seventeenth century mind, written by someone who knew full well that his contemporaries considered him to be one.⁴¹

Written about the same time as Sir Robert's 'Character', Lady Brilliana's Commonplace Book will be the focus of Chapter Two. The book, written around a year before she was to marry Sir Robert, is a record of her own thoughts about the religious books she had read, which Jacqueline Eales describes as 'primarily based on the Bible, Calvin's *Institutes*, William Perkins' *Cases of Conscience* and his *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*.'

Chapter three will look at the sermons of several ministers that we know were personally known to the Harleys. These include those that were appointed to the living of Brampton Bryan and those that Sir Robert encountered in London when serving as a Member of Parliament. Sir Robert's first appointment at Brampton Bryan, after he was

³⁹ Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, 'Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700' in Durston and Eales (Eds.) *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (London, 1996) p.16

⁴⁰ John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, 'Introduction' in Coffey and Lim (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008) p. 2

⁴¹ Sir Robert Harley to Horace Vere, February 1620/1, BL Loan 29/202, f.47v

bequeathed the running of the estate by his father following his marriage to Brilliana, was Thomas Pierson; a fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, who was linked to several high profile puritans, and who was chosen by the executors of William Perkins to edit some of his sermons for posthumous publication. Pierson was replaced in 1634 by Stanley Gower, a former chaplain to James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh. Letters from both men can be found in the Harleys' papers in the British Library and can be studied to determine their own beliefs and their influence on the Harleys', as can the handful of their sermons that were published.⁴² During his time in London, Sir Robert would have heard sermons from, and become close acquaintances of, such puritan preachers as William Gouge, Thomas Gataker, Nathaniel Ward and the Brinsleys. Later, while lodging in the puritan parish of Aldermanbury, Sir Robert became friendly with two lecturers from St. Mary's: Thomas Taylor and John Stoughton. Taylor would dedicate one of his sermons to Sir Robert, not long before he retired from the parish, and Sir Robert accompanied his successor, Stoughton, before the High Commission in 1635. A study of the writings of all these men will illustrate the kind of sermons and preaching that the Harleys were listening to and will indicate how typical the Harleys' beliefs were of puritans of the time.⁴³

The remaining two chapters will look at private and public lives of the Harleys in order to demonstrate that they were both heavily influenced by their religious beliefs. For the public, Chapter Four will look at Sir Robert's parliamentary service and discuss how this was highly influenced by his religious convictions. There is no doubt that for Sir Robert, religion was the driving force behind his political beliefs and actions. His most enthusiastic speeches and work are those that centre on religious reform. The final chapter will discuss the private world of the Harleys' home in Brampton Bryan as well as the letters sent by Lady Brilliana, a large number of which were edited and published

⁴² Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 53-54 and 56-57

⁴³ *ibid* pp. 62-63

during the nineteenth century by Thomas Lewis.⁴⁴ The letters that Lady Brilliana sent to her husband and to their eldest son, Ned, demonstrate that her private religious beliefs were very much in line with Sir Robert's and that she shared a conviction that public life should at all times be influenced by religious piety.

⁴⁴ T T Lewis (Ed.), *The Letters of Lady Brilliana Harley, Wife of Sir Robert Harley, of Brampton Bryan, Knight of the Bath* (London, 1854)

Chapter One: Sir Robert Harley's 'Character' of a Puritan

Amongst the Harleys' papers kept at the British Library is a document that helps to shed light on the seventeenth century definition of puritanism, as written by someone who was undoubtedly considered to be a puritan by his contemporaries. Sir Robert Harley's 'Character of a puritan' is included in a draft letter to Sir Horace Vere, written in 1621. The letter was a response to an attack on the bill 'for the Punishment of diverse Abuses on the Sabbath day.' Sir Robert stated that

one Shepherd, a lawyer that was of the lower house...Inveved with some bitterness against puritans saying that there were many snares to catch poor papists, but not so much as a mouse trap to catch a puritan...I think the parliament will not proceed to define a Puritan, I take the boldness to present your Lordship with his Character.⁴⁵

In 1621, there were many people who felt that the sanctity of the Sabbath was under threat. Just three years earlier, James I had issued the Book of Sports which outlined the activities that were permissible on a Sunday. The declaration stated that only those people who had attended church were allowed to take part in these pastimes, but many contemporaries, mostly but not exclusively those who might be termed puritans, felt that Sundays should be set aside purely for a full day of worship and that no sports or other such activities should be allowed. In his *A Short treatise containing all the principal grounds of Christian religion*, John Ball discussed the fourth commandment and in response to the question 'What is the general duty here required?' his response was emphatic: 'That the whole Sabbath or Lord's day be set aside apart from all common use, as holy to the Lord, both publicly and privately in the practise of duties of necessity, holiness and mercy.'⁴⁶ In 1619, Thomas Adams preached at St. Gregory's in London that 'It is not the only exercise of a Christian to hear a sermon: nor is that Sabbath well spent,

⁴⁵ Sir Robert Harley to Horace Vere, f.47v

⁴⁶ John Ball, *A Short Treatise: Containing all the principal grounds of Christian Religion. By way of questions and answers* (London, 1617)

that dispatcheth no other business for heaven.' Clearly to Ball and Adams, and many others like them, it was not enough to just attend church and hear a sermon on the Sabbath; for a true Christian 'there must be prayer, praise, adoration and worship of God'⁴⁷ and this should involve a full day spent in the service of God, both public and private.

For some, a strict adherence to the Sabbath was one of the traits that defined a puritan; Sir Robert felt strongly enough about the nature of puritanism that he was inclined to draw up his own definition. The 'character' is a sympathetic portrayal of a puritan that attempts to defend Sir Robert's own religious beliefs. In writing the 'character', Sir Robert 'sought to represent puritanism as a coherent set of positive values, which created an individual who was morally pure and would withstand corruption in both the secular and religious spheres.'⁴⁸ This chapter will examine the religious contents of the 'character' in detail; comparing it with other contemporary sources and placing it within the historiography surrounding Jacobean and Early Stuart puritanism, in order to demonstrate that the Harleys' religious beliefs, and therefore their 'brand' of puritanism, were built on six pillars that they shared with other puritans of the time.

In much of his recent work, Peter Lake has argued that the so called 'Calvinist consensus' that existed through the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the English church was formed, and kept in place, by the members of the church, both ministers and laity, discussing and debating disagreements over the finer points of theology amongst themselves. He argues that 'rather than simply publish their more novel or controversial thought experiments' and, therefore, run the risk of being chastised by church authorities, 'puritan ministers tended to keep their more adventurous doctrinal forays in manuscript, circulating them in that form within the

⁴⁷ Thomas Adams, *The Happiness of the Church, or a description of those spiritual prerogatives wherewith Christ hath endowed her*, (London, 1619)

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Eales, 'Sir Robert Harley, K.B. (1579-1656) and the 'Character' of a puritan', *British Library Journal*; 15 (1989) p. 149

closed circle of the godly community.⁴⁹ The church authorities were not, however, unaware of this taking place. Indeed, Lake has shown that they actively encouraged 'the self-righting, indeed, on some readings, the pseudo-presbyterian, mechanisms of the godly community whereby the doctrinal probity and spiritual charisma of ordinary ministers of the word were invoked to end the dispute.'⁵⁰

In his research, Lake has examined in great detail two disputes between members of the London godly community which, he argues, are notable because they were eventually brought before the church authorities; those between ministers George Walker and Anthony Wotton and minister Stephen Dennison and layman John Etherington. Before they were brought before Bishop King of London and the High Commission respectively, there were attempts to settle both disputes through informal meetings and discussions within the London godly community, attended both by ministers and laity. Lake argues that these discussions over theological minutiae, relating to predestination or other such matters, must have been a common occurrence at the time: 'This sort of unofficial seminary, maintained in the households of eminent Puritan divines, was a common feature of the godly scene'.⁵¹ Lake paints a picture of a puritan 'underground', in London at least, where there were 'doctrinal fundamentals', such as the belief in predestination, within which there was room for differences of opinion over the finer details; indeed 'it became possible to accept with relative complaisance the fact of diversity of opinion and even of quite sharp disagreements and stark changes of mind.'⁵² In this respect puritanism was not a 'one size fits all' set of doctrines that were strictly adhered to and ruled over by authorities, but rather 'the all-important sense of agreement...amongst English protestants...had to be continually produced and

⁴⁹ Peter Lake and David Como, 'Orthodoxy' p. 39

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 46

⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 40

⁵² Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge* p. 233

reproduced, maintained and sustained in the face of the continuous tendency of these inherently difficult and unstable issues to generate debate and disagreement.’⁵³

It is within this ‘world of debate and discussion between all sorts of radical sectaries, separatists, familists and lay puritans’⁵⁴ that we must place Sir Robert’s ‘Character of a puritan’. It fits Lake’s picture of a manuscript, meant only for private discussion and not for general publication, in which a member of this London puritan underground attempts to detail and define elements of puritan belief. It may not have the theological depth and complexity of the documents examined by Lake, but it is certainly in the same vein.

That Harley was part of this underground is indisputable. In his research of the dispute between Dennison and Etherington, Lake describes how in 1626/27 the former looked to get *The White Wolf*, his attack on the latter, published and also dedicated to the King. In his attempt to get royal backing, Dennison turned to Sir Henry Martin, the chancellor of the diocese of London, for help.

Martin wrote to Sir Robert Harley to intercede with his father-in-law, Secretary of State Conway. Harley, of course, was also at this date a client of the Duke of Buckingham. In short the whole episode is redolent of the continuing connections with the establishment that were still open to the godly during the 1620s. Indeed, we have here yet another example of the integrations of puritans and Calvinists in the early-Stuart establishment. For here are zealous London ministers, like Dennison, high-ranking ecclesiastical lawyers, like Martin, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Calvinist George Abbot, and the court of High Commission, parliamentary men like Harley and royal officials, like Conway, all uniting behind the campaign against poor Etherington.⁵⁵

⁵³ *ibid*, p. 240

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 100

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 89

Clearly Dennison and Martin were confident that Sir Robert would be sympathetic to Dennison's book and hoped that his connections to the court would aid in it being dedicated to the king.

There is another link between the Harleys and the 'underground' described by Lake. In the dispute between Walker and Wotton, one of divines called to settle the matter was Thomas Gataker, who would go on to write a response to Walker's accusations that Lake shows to be an example of how 'moderate' puritans attempted to keep the peace between rival viewpoints. Sir Robert had become friends with Gataker during his time in London, and the minister would officiate at the Harleys' wedding in 1623.⁵⁶

Sir Robert's 'character' begins:

A P[uritan] is he that desires to practise what others profess. Is one that dares do nothing in the wor[ship] of god or course of his life but what gods word warra[n]ts him & dares not leave undone anything that the word co[mman]ds him.⁵⁷

Right from the beginning, Harley stressed that a puritan is the true member of the reformed church and that the word of God is to be his guiding light both in his personal life and in matters of church. Sir Robert believed that the Word of God, as found in Scripture, was the only arbiter of Christian truth and worship and this was the foundation of all his other beliefs. Anything that was not found in Scripture was considered superfluous at best and idolatrous at worst.

Sir Robert was not the only of his contemporaries to prescribe to this belief. Thomas Taylor, a minister who was known personally to the Harleys, when preaching on true happiness, argued that 'such a learning is not everywhere to be had, but only is to be drawn out of the Word of God. For nature and human reason teacheth it not, nor can

⁵⁶ Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads* p. 62

⁵⁷ Sir Robert Harley's 'Character' of a puritan, BL Loan 29/27

understand it.⁵⁸ To Taylor there was no way to true happiness other than that which is found in the Scripture and this was an opinion that Sir Robert also held. It was not just happiness that could be found in the word of God. John Terry argued that ‘the word of God, which our blessed Saviour...revealed by his spirit to the Prophets and Apostles, is the word of sanctifying and saving truth. For if we continue in the same, *we shall know the truth, & the truth shall make us free*. And how does truth make us free, but by sanctifying us with *al divine* and heavenly virtues? For a true virtuous man is the only free man.’⁵⁹ Terry, Sir Robert and many others like them believed that only the word of God could provide truth and that this truth was the only way that true freedom could be achieved.

At the head of Sir Robert’s ‘Character’ two Biblical passages are cited. The first of these, 2 Chronicles 34:3, ‘describes King Josiah’s “purge” of Judah and Jerusalem, when “the carved images and molten images” were removed “from the high places and the groves.”’ According to Eales, ‘the marginal gloss in the Geneva Bible, the version which Harley would almost certainly have used, adds that “at twenty year old” Josiah “abolished idolatry and restore ye true religion”.’⁶⁰ Sir Robert’s aversion to idolatry stemmed not only from his hatred of Catholicism but from his firm belief that anything that was not in scripture was false worship. It was his iconoclasm that would, perhaps above all other things, direct his involvement in the Long Parliament; as shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

It was not just the imagery used in churches that the puritans considered to be idolatry. The Laudian innovations that were introduced in the 1630s, such as the surplice, the sign of the cross in baptism and kneeling during communion were considered to be

⁵⁸ Thomas Taylor, *David’s Learning, or a way to true happiness: In a commentary upon the 32 Psalm*, (London, 1617)

⁵⁹ John Terry, *The Reasonableness of wise and holy truth and the absurdity of foolish and wicked error*, (Oxford, 1617)

⁶⁰ Eales, ‘Sir Robert Harley K.B. (1579-1656)’; p. 138

inherently superstitious because they had no warrant in scripture. In his 'character' Sir Robert stated that a puritan

thinks that the making of the cross made between the Holy Sacr[am[en]t of Bapt[ism] & the humble thanksgiving of the co[n]gregatio[n] is like the placing of the Apocrypha between the old & new Testam[en]ts, w[hi]ch being a stream w[i]thout a fountain is unworthy to be joined w[i]th the living water of life.

For he professeth himself utterly ignora[n]t when the Ayeriall sign made on the forehead will be op[er]ative to produce the promised effects in the life of a bold professio[n] of Christ crucified & manful defence of that holy faith.⁶¹

The belief that the sign of the cross during baptism was unscriptural, and therefore idolatrous, was a commonly held belief amongst puritans. 'The puritans insisted that God should never be worshipped except by methods prescribed in the scriptures. Any forms of words, vestments or implements used in worship services were considered idolatrous if they were not of scriptural provenance.'⁶² In comparing the making of the sign of the cross in Baptism with sopping of bread during communion William Armes wrote 'Bread and wine were ordained by Christ to a holy use in the Church: so is not the cross: sopping hath some agreement with reason: crossing hath none; sopping was used by Christ himself the same night, and at the same table where the sacrament was appointed: crossing was never used by Christ or his Apostles.'⁶³ The crux of Armes' argument is that because it has Biblical precedent, the sopping of the bread during Communion is a valid practise whereas no one in the Bible made the sign of the cross during Baptism, so it is not valid.

⁶¹ BL Loan 29/27

⁶² J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in England* p. 72

⁶³ William Armes, *A reply to Dr Morton's general defence of three nocent ceremonies viz. the surplice, cross in baptism, and kneeling at the receiving of the sacramental elements of bread and wine* (London, 1622), p. 8

The making of the sign of the cross was not the only part of the Baptismal service that puritans objected to. They also believed that the baptism should take place 'at the front of the church before the whole congregation rather than more privately at the font', they objected to the selection of godparents – or 'gossips' – 'on the grounds that this implied a dilution of parental responsibility for the child's subsequent spiritual welfare.'⁶⁴

It was not just the Baptism Service that puritans believed was idolatrous, they also objected to 'the use of the surplice, bowing at the name of Jesus, kneeling during communion [and] the use...of the ring in the marriage ceremony' all of which they saw as 'superstitious practices unwarranted by the Bible.'⁶⁵ John Calvin had written that communicants 'ought not...to kneel to adore the sacrament, who securely may receive the Sacrament without adoration, not kneeling', while William Perkins argued that 'ceremonies and bending the knee at the Sacrament is to worship God otherwise than he hath commanded and therefore is Idolatry.'⁶⁶

David Calderwood, writing in 1620, agreed with Calvin. He wrote 'Kneeling before the sacramental elements is idolatry.' He argued that anyone who kneels before the sacrament is 'guilty of idolatry two ways: First, in that he kneeleth by direction before a creature. Next in that he doth kneel for reverence of the sacrament. As for the first, suppose it were true, that they kneeled not for reverence of the symbols, yet there is no difference betwixt them, and the more tolerable sort of idolaters...in their worshipping of images.' He dismissed the argument that those who knelt at the sacrament were not worshipping the object itself but were, instead, directing their worship at that which was symbolised by the object, and denied that there was a 'difference between images and, sacramental symbols', which his opponents argued are 'God's own ordinance, and

⁶⁴ Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, 'Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700' in Durston and Eales (Eds.) *Culture of English Puritanism* p. 18

⁶⁵ Jacqueline Eales, 'The continuity of puritanism, 1559-1642' in Durston and Eales (Eds.) p. 186

⁶⁶ Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry* p. 29

commanded to be used in worship.’⁶⁷ To Calderwood, the act of kneeling during Communion was as idolatrous as the crucifix or the images used in Catholic churches and Sir Robert undoubtedly agreed with this.

While Sir Robert’s hatred of idolatry was shared by his fellow puritans, it was not something that was common among the rest of the Herefordshire gentry. Sir Robert was related to several of the major Herefordshire families including John, 1st Viscount Scudamore. In direct contrast to the Harleys, Viscount Scudamore was an avid supporter, and close friend, of Archbishop Laud, who argued that ‘the External worship of God in his church is the great Witness to the World that Our heart stands right in that service of God’, and that ceremony and practice were ‘the hedge that fence the Substance of Religion from all Indignities, which Prophaneness and Sacrilege too commonly put upon it.’⁶⁸

The most obvious representations of Scudamore’s support for Laud’s views are the churches that he rebuilt and restored; principally Abbey Dore, and his embassy chapel in Paris. The Scudamores acquired the former Cistercian Abbey of Dore, and Viscount Scudamore spent an enormous amount of time, and money, restoring it; including a new ‘altar, new woodwork (rails, screen, pulpit, reading desk and pews) and stained glass. The total cost was £425.’⁶⁹ In Paris he offended the Huguenots with the elaborate decoration of his chapel, including candles burning on the altar, but this would not have concerned him because, according to Clarendon, he believed that ‘the Church of England looked not on the Huguenots as part of their communion.’⁷⁰ In this he, again, contrasts with the Harleys who ‘regarded the plight of the Huguenots as part of the

⁶⁷ David Calderwood, *A Defence of our arguments against kneeling in the act of receiving the sacramental elements of bread and wine impugned by Mr Michelsone* (London, 1620), p. 38

⁶⁸ W. Laud, *A Relation of the Conference betweene William Laud...and Mr. Fisher the Jesuite*, (London, 1639), sig *3

⁶⁹ Ian Atherton, *Ambition and Failure in Stuart England*, (Manchester, 1999) , p. 59

⁷⁰ Clarendon, *A History of the Rebellion, Volume II*, pp. 418-419

international struggle between the true Protestant Church and its foe.⁷¹ There are many examples of the Harleys including the plight of continental Protestants in their prayers.

Later in his 'character of a puritan', Sir Robert stated that a puritan 'thinks a L[ord] B[ishop] is a fallacy a *bene divisis ad male coniuncta B[ishop]*'.⁷² It is clear that even as early as 1621, Sir Robert disapproved of episcopacy, or at least the current model in the English Church, but whether he favoured a complete abolition or a reformation at this date is open to debate. Prior to the opening of the Long Parliament, Sir Robert's views on the subject are not as well documented or as clear as his other religious beliefs, but there is no doubt that he disapproved of the powers that the bishops had, and also of the type of bishops who were gaining that power under Charles I.

There is no doubt that the Harleys were amongst those who desired at least reform of the episcopacy as early as the early 1620s; however despite the evidence of Sir Robert's disapproval of the power of the bishops, it is difficult to tell whether he was for their total abolition or whether 'at the start of 1641 Sir Robert was probably flexible enough to accept a Church settlement which included bishops with greatly reduced power.'⁷³ It will be shown in later chapters, which examine Lady Brilliana's letters and Sir Robert's political career, that during the first session of the Long Parliament 'the Harleys and other future parliamentarians became convinced that only a restraint on the powers of the bishops, or alternatively the abolition of episcopacy altogether, could safeguard the Church against catholic corruption.'⁷⁴

It is entirely conceivable that Harley was influenced in his opinion on episcopacy by John Calvin. In his lecture on the second book of Jeremiah, Calvin argued that Jeremiah calls prophets some who were undeserving of this title because 'God had deprived them of all true light and knowledge.' Calvin argued that this continued in the church of the

⁷¹ Eales, 'Sir Robert Harley K.B', p. 141

⁷² Sir Robert Harley to Horace Vere, February 1620/1, BL Loan 29/202, f.47v

⁷³ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 53

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 13

sixteenth century; 'Even as we at this day call them Bishops, Prelates, Primate and Fathers, who brag much of performing their duty and office of Pastors in the Papacy; howsoever we know some of them are wolves, and others of them are dumb dogs; yet we yield them these titles, wherein they glory, because they deserve double condemnation for usurping wickedly... these sacred titles.'⁷⁵ For many, the worst abuses of power that Calvin was complaining about were curtailed by the reformation; however for some, the Harleys included, there was a need for even further reform to bring about the kind of church hierarchy that they believed was right.

Another pillar of the Harleys' religious beliefs that is evident from Sir Robert's 'Character' is encapsulated by the words:

he says a Dumb Minister is a dry nurse...not able to feed god's children, a man not sent...from God for He gives...his Messengers...the tongue...of the learned neither can he be witness of his truth when he cannot speak it.

He knows eze[kial] will be found a true prophet & so says a non-resident is a profane wretch.⁷⁶

To the puritans the role of the clergy was primarily to preach, as opposed to perform ritual. 'It was of vital importance to puritans that they should have frequent access to 'painful' preachers whose sermons could provide them with the encouragement, admonition and edification which they regarded as essential elements of a healthy spiritual life.'⁷⁷ Unfortunately for the Harleys, Herefordshire was considered to be particularly devoid of preaching clergy at this time; an official report for the King in 1603 shows that in the whole Diocese, which covered all of Herefordshire, southern Shropshire and parts of Worcestershire, there were only eighty-one licensed preachers. The situation did not improve and Stanley Gower, then rector at the Harleys' home at

⁷⁵ Jean Calvin, *Two and twenty lectures on the first five chapters of Jeremiah*, (London, 1620), p.

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⁷⁶ Sir Robert Harley to Horace Vere, February 1620/1, BL Loan 29/202, f.47v

⁷⁷ Durston and Eales, 'Introduction' in Durston and Eales (Eds.) p. 20

Brampton Bryan, reported to Parliament in 1641 'there are in some hundreds one, in some none, in all but 20 constant and conscionable preachers, & yet it is to be feared that there are more in this county than are to be found in all the 13 shires of Wales, upon which it bordereth.'⁷⁸

Sir Robert's concern for a preaching ministry was shown by his own choice for the living at Brampton Bryan. The living was held by Thomas Pierson, a renowned non-conformist, until his death in 1633; and he was succeeded by Gower only after a lengthy search for a suitable replacement. That this search was causing some concern in the Harley household is evident by their praying in January 1634 that 'God would in rich mercy restore the Gospel to us by one after his own heart and continue our existence.'⁷⁹ In the letter inviting Gower to join them, Sir Robert revealed their desperation, that has even led them to consider emigration: 'I beseech you do what you can for us that we be not driven to leave our Native country and friends and which is more, the stage of Europe, that we are all to act our parts in the destruction of the great whore.'⁸⁰ Under both Pierson and Gower, and no doubt with Sir Robert's encouragement, Brampton Bryan was to become a puritan haven in its remote corner of Herefordshire; with two sermons every Sunday, weekday lectures and regular spiritual activities. The activities of both ministers were 'long-standing non-conformist practices, which reflected the desire to strip away Catholic ceremonies and religious garb regarded as superstitious pre-Reformation relics by puritans.'⁸¹

It was not just in his Herefordshire home that Sir Robert sought out ministers who would preach. When in London attending Parliament, he took lodgings in notoriously puritan areas, Blackfriars during 1611 and 1612 and Aldermanbury between 1626 and 1634. It was here that he cultivated friendships with many of the preachers whose sermons he

⁷⁸ Oxford, Corpus Christi, MS. 206, ff. 1r-9r, quoted in Eales, 'Sir Robert', p. 137

⁷⁹ Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, p. 187

⁸⁰ BL, Portland MSS, BL Loan 29/119, quoted in Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, p. 201

⁸¹ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 57

heard. It was, Sir Robert believed, his friendships with non-conformist ministers, particularly John Stoughton and John Workman who both appeared before the High Commission in the early 1630s, which led to Sir Robert losing his office as master of the Mint. In a paper dated circa 1645, he wrote:

in the tenth year of the King, Sir Robert Harley, falling under the disfavour of those who were then powerful at court, especially the late Bishop of Canterbury, and as Sir conceives, for that he did appear in the High Commission court at Lambeth with Doctor Stoughton, preacher at Aldermanbury, London, and for entertaining Mr Workman, preacher at Gloucester, into his house, and visiting him in the Gatehouse where he was imprisoned by sentence of the said High Commission court a *scire facias* was brought against Sir Robert's patent by Mr Noy, then Attorney general.⁸²

Sir Robert was not the only puritan gentryman to present the livings within his gift to clergymen of a non-conformist nature. When Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston's grandfather died in 1619, Sir Nathaniel inherited the gift of four church livings. Whenever one of these became vacant Sir Nathaniel spent 'many days in Fasting and Prayer to invite the Direction of God to guide his bestowing thereof.' When the living of Barnardiston became vacant, there were many applicants, but Sir Nathaniel was determined to appoint Samuel Fairclough, whom he had heard preaching previously. Sir Nathaniel offered him the living and Fairclough was assured that he would receive one of the more lucrative livings when they became vacant.⁸³ Many puritan ministers were willing to accept modest livings in return for the freedom that they offered.⁸⁴ In all cases the desire was for a minister who was an able preacher and some puritans were so

⁸² Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 62 to 64; 'The State of Sir Robert's Harley's case...', BL Loan 29/122/5

⁸³ Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, pp. 175-176

⁸⁴ J. T. Cliffe, *Puritans in Conflict*, (London, 1988), p. 170

concerned that they refused to let their children be baptised by a minister who did not preach.⁸⁵

The ministers themselves were keen to stress the importance of preaching in the fight against evil. In his *Plain and pithy exposition on the second epistle to the Thessalonians*, William Bradshaw quoted Verse 8 of Paul's letter, where it says 'And then shall that wicked one be revealed; whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of his mouth.' Bradshaw's interpretation of these lines was 'The means whereby he will consume the Antichrist, is, *by the Spirit of his mouth*, that is, by the word of God and the preaching of the Gospel...It is not the sword and spear, that shall so much prevail against the Antichrist as the Ministry of the word. Antichrist's glory shall more and more vanish, the more that it prevaieth.'⁸⁶ Here Bradshaw was trying to persuade his readers that preaching was the way to defeat the antichrist, as someone who believed that it was the primary function of a minister naturally would.

That an obsession with preaching was considered to be a puritan characteristic is evident in the fact that it was used as a criticism against them by their opponents. In 1629, Dr John Browning 'an Arminian and Lancelot Andrewes's former chaplain' complained to Bishop Laud about the people of Chelmsford and their support for Thomas Hooker: 'the people hereabouts being overmuch addicted to "hearing the word" as they call it, to the neglect of God's service and worship.'⁸⁷ It has been argued convincingly that it was not preaching, *per se*, that those who complained about the perceived puritan obsession with hearing the word of God disagreed with, after all Lancelot Andrewes 'had some claim to be the greatest preacher of his generation', but rather they preferred to emphasise the importance of prayer, which for them was 'the

⁸⁵ Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, p. 25

⁸⁶ William Bradshaw, *A plain and pithy exposition of the second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, (London, 1620), p. 108

⁸⁷ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, vol. cli, no. 12

repetition of a set and prescribed series of liturgical forms' and they defended above all the Book of Common Prayer.⁸⁸

Chapter Three of this thesis will look in more detail at some of the recent scholarship surrounding preaching and the culture of sermons, particularly Arnold Hunt's *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their audiences, 1590-1640*, and will look in detail at the contents of sermons published by some of the ministers mentioned above who were known to the Harleys.

Dr Eales argues that 'it is noticeable that Harley made no mention in his notes of the doctrine of predestination, which was central to the puritan view of the elect, those chosen by God for salvation, as a beleaguered minority assailed on all sides by the efforts of the Devil and the reprobate to tempt them to sin.'⁸⁹ There is no doubt that the Harleys, and their puritan contemporaries, believed that they were part of a 'godly community that was not grounded in a particular time and place'⁹⁰ and, while there is no mention of the words godly, elect, reprobate or justification in the 'character' the final line perhaps gives a clue as to Harley's personal feelings regarding predestination. He wrote 'he is sure to be welcome to the M[aste]r of the house.'⁹¹ It is entirely plausible that Harley felt that a belief in predestination was so much a part of the English church that it didn't actually set the puritan apart; instead it was the surety of his salvation, the firm belief that he was a member of the godly elect, which was the characteristic of a puritan.

There were some ministers who were cautious about the preaching of predestination. Richard Crakanthorpe admitted, in a sermon of 1620, that there were 'some of later times, following the old *Massilians*, not only themselves avoid and shun this doctrine...but by reason of the great and manifold difficulties which they find herein,

⁸⁸ Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, (Oxford, 1996), pp. 99-100

⁸⁹ Eales, 'Sir Robert Harley K.B. (1579-1656) and the 'Character' of a puritan', pp. 135-136

⁹⁰ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 43

⁹¹ BL Loan 29/27

judge it a *very perilous and dangerous doctrine to be taught: not fit to be published and preached in the Congregations of God's people.*' He, himself, was convinced of the truth of predestination and quoted 2 Peter 1:10 'Wherefore, Brethren, give rather all diligence to make your calling and Election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall' as proof. He argued that others' 'timorousness in this point, should warn us all to be circumspect, and wary, unto which of God's children we deliver and divide this portion of the food of life.' According to him, only the 'most judicious and learned Auditories' are fit to receive this 'most wholesome meat' and it should not be fed to 'those who are but children in understanding and novices in the school of Christ.' In his sermon Crakanthorpe addressed both those who question the validity of the doctrine of Predestination and those who argued that ministers should not preach the doctrine. 'Seeing then this doctrine of Predestination and Election, is not only laid down, but often repeated and inculcated in the Word of God: why should we be wiser than God, to conceal that from God's people, which God will have both us to teach, and them in due time and season to learn, and believe?'⁹²

However widely held the view was in the country as a whole, there can be no doubt that predestination was a key belief amongst puritans like the Harleys. Sir Simonds D'Ewes argued that it was part of the Church's teaching that 'God's children in this life might attain a certain knowledge of their own future salvation by a true and lively faith such as god ordinarily wrought in his elect.'⁹³

A belief that they were part of God's elect did not instil complacency in believers of predestination. It was through the outward signs of piety that the elect were to be recognised. According to his wife, John Hutchinson, a Puritan Colonel in the Parliamentary army who held Nottingham Castle during the war and who would eventually put his name to Charles I's death warrant, believed in the doctrine of

⁹² Richard Crakanthorpe, *A sermon of predestination at Saint Mary's in Oxford*, (London, 1620)

⁹³ BL Harleian MSS 374, ff. 61-63, quoted in Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, p. 19

predestination but 'far from producing a carelessness of life in him...it excited him to more strict and holy walking in thankfulness to God who had been pleased to choose him out of the corrupt mass of mankind.'⁹⁴

The Harleys believed that they were part of a chosen elect, whose salvation was not earned by doing good works, but whose good works were evidence of their salvation. This identification was important in forming a community of puritan gentry whose influence and reputation spread far beyond the boundaries of their own counties.

There is a final pillar of the Harleys' brand of puritanism that is not mentioned in the 'character' itself, but is evident from the inspiration behind it. The document was drawn up as a response to Shepherd's attack on the bill 'for the Punishment of diverse Abuses on the Sabbath day', in which he complained that 'there were many snares to catch poor papists, but not so much as a mouse trap to catch a puritan.'⁹⁵ Shepherd clearly associated the strict adherence of the Sabbath with puritanism, but the desire to keep the Sabbath holy was not a solely puritan trait. Even such an avid follower of Laud as Viscount Scudamore was deeply concerned with the issue. Where the Harleys, and their fellow puritans, differed from their more conformist contemporaries was in the observance of private fast days that were not part of the official church calendar. Undoubtedly, private fasts were 'invariably indicative of advanced, radical Puritanism.'⁹⁶ As will be evident Chapter Five, which examines the effect of the Harleys' beliefs on their private lives, private days of prayer and fasting formed a regular part of their religious life, both at home in Brampton Bryan and when Sir Robert was attending Parliament. 'The Harleys regularly observed such a day during the quarterly ember

⁹⁴ Revd. Julius Hutchinson (Ed.), *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, by his wife Lucy Hutchinson*, (London, 1904), pp. 34-35

⁹⁵ Sir Robert Harley to Horace Vere, February 1620/1, BL Loan 29/202, f.47v

⁹⁶ P. Collinson, 'Lectures by Combination: Structures and Characteristics of Church Life in Seventeenth Century England'; *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*; 48 (1975); p. 190

weeks and in January 1629 the day appointed for a public fast by the Parliament was also observed by Thomas Pierson at Leintwardine.⁹⁷

The Harleys were not the only puritan gentry to hold these days of fasting; Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston, Lady Hester Honywood and Sir Simonds D'Ewes all had their days of humiliation. In 1627, D'Ewes read a discourse by the London minister Henry Mason that 'strongly proveth that Christians ought to set times apart for their ordinary humiliation and fasting.' From then onwards he set aside one day a month for this practice; abstaining from food until six o'clock and spending eight or nine hours for confessing of sins and other religious duties. He observed that 'In the confession of sins we must do it with a sincere heart and resolution to leave them, not make a reservation of any as Naaman did to bow in the House of Rimmon.'⁹⁸

Henry Mason contended that amongst the ways to express repentance of sins there were 'none more effectual (and therefore amongst them we find none to have been more usual) than abstinence and fasting.' He went on to discuss several aspects of fasting. He argued that 'voluntary fasts' are of two sorts; they are either worldly and profane, or religious and holy, the latter of which he said 'do serve for some special use, which concerneth God's glory, and the good of a man's soul.' He quoted the book of Zachariah to argue that 'God doth reject the fasts of his people, because they were not undertaken for God and his service, but for themselves, and to serve their own tunes.' Private fasts were described as 'when men out of their own devotions, and by their own direction do in their private houses use abstinence in a religious manner.' He maintained that both private and public fasts 'have their approbation in Scriptures, and are commendable if they be used aright.' Mason argued that only fasts that are 'for Religion sake' are pleasing to God. He claimed that there are several holy uses of fasting which were: 'they may serve as outward acts to declare our reverence toward God and his

⁹⁷ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 58-59

⁹⁸ Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, pp. 32

sacred ordinances', 'for mortification and, and to take down the pride of the flesh', 'it will serve for elevation of the mind, and to make man more attentive about holy duties' and the 'fourth and last use of fasting is, that it serveth for an act or help of repentance.'⁹⁹

Robert Whittle described fasting as a 'help and furtherance of prayer.' He agreed with Mason with regards the uses and purposes of a religious fasts and said specifically about private fasts that 'if our fast be a private fast, we must fast in secret; and not like the Pharisees, desire to be seen and known of men that we fast: It is sufficient that our fasting be known unto God: of this our Saviour saith, *when you fast, be not as hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast; verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face: that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy father which is in secret: and thy father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* This, of the right manner of fasting.'¹⁰⁰

Sir Robert Harley's 'Character' of a puritan is an almost unique document that provides historians with a definition of a puritan written by someone who was aware that he was considered to be one by his contemporaries – and, indeed, seemed to take pride in the fact. Following the 'literary genre of the Theophrastan 'Character'', it 'displays...the characteristic puritan stress on a scrupulous conscience, combined with a reliance on scriptural guidance in religious matters, which formed the basis of the non-conformist argument against a wide range of ceremonial and symbolic practices.'¹⁰¹ In terms of the scholarship relating to Early Modern puritanism, it confirms many of the main characteristics that historians have ascribed to puritans. It also supports Peter Lake's theory of a puritan 'underground' who shared a set of fundamental beliefs, but who

⁹⁹ Henry mason, *Christian humiliation, or, A treatise of fasting declaring the nature, kinds, uses and properties of a religious fast*, (London, 1625)

¹⁰⁰ Robert Whittle, *The way to the celestial paradise Declaring how a sinner may be saved, and come to everlasting life*, (London, 1620)

¹⁰¹ Eales, 'Sir Robert Harley K.B.', p. 136

debated and discussed the finer theological details amongst themselves in private, and sometimes public, manuscripts and meetings involving clergy and laity alike. In terms of this thesis, it provides a set of six pillars of the Harleys' 'brand' of puritanism: iconoclasm, predestination, a distrust of the episcopacy, which may have verged on Presbyterianism, the holding of private fasts and the wholehearted support of a preaching ministry, all of which are underlined by the belief that the word of God, as evident in scripture, was the only source of religious authority.

At around the same time that Sir Robert wrote his 'character', Brilliana Conway, whom he would go on to marry just two years later, was compiling her commonplace book from sermons and religious texts that she had read. Chapter Two will examine the contents of this book to establish how similar Lady Brilliana's religious beliefs were to those of her future husband.

Chapter Two – Brilliana Conway’s Commonplace Book

At around the same time that Sir Robert Harley was writing his ‘Character’ of a puritan, Brilliana Conway was writing her Commonplace Book. Now housed in the manuscript Collection of Nottingham University, and described by Jacqueline Eales as ‘primarily based on the Bible, Calvin’s *Institutes* and William Perkins’ *Case of Conscience*, and his *Expositions of the Lord’s Prayer*,¹⁰² the Commonplace Book can be compared to Sir Robert’s ‘Character’, and set in the context of the writings of Calvin and Perkins, to show that, just a year before they were to marry, Sir Robert and Lady Brilliana held very similar religious views, based on the six pillars outlined in Chapter One.

In his 2010 article on manuscripts and commonplace books, Fred Schurink quotes ‘an anonymous seventeenth-century treatise on commonplace books’ that instructed its readers ‘legere, et nihil colligere, est negligere’ or ‘it is a waste to read without taking notes.’ It was the belief that the reader should record what they had read, and their reaction to it, that led to the prevalence of commonplace books in the seventeenth century.¹⁰³ The practice dated back to the twelfth century, and became an integral part of an education in the Renaissance period. The keeping of a commonplace book was endorsed by the ‘leading Renaissance theorists of education, Erasmus and Vives’, who gave advice and direction in the correct way to keep one, as did Francis Bacon. The books were seen as ‘an effective means in training young men in virtue, that is in the values of the Christian humanism.’¹⁰⁴

The name commonplace suggests that the books were produced in order to promote a common good that was shared by all and this was undoubtedly part of the rationale

¹⁰² Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads* p. 49

¹⁰³ Earle Havens, “‘Of Common Places, or Memorial Books’: An Anonymous Manuscript on Commonplace Books and the Art of Memory in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Yale University Library Gazette* 76 (2002), quoted in Fred Schurink ‘Manuscripts, Commonplace Books, Literature, and Reading in Early Modern England’, *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 73:3 (2010), p. 453

¹⁰⁴ Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven, 2000) p. 277

behind them. However, while the same source texts were used, how they were copied, and against which other texts they were referenced, meant that commonplace books were 'not only an individual act of writing but a personal construction of meaning.'¹⁰⁵ Although the vast majority of the content of commonplace books was not the original work of the owner, the choice of what was included, and the accompanying notes, do provide the historian with a picture of the beliefs that they held. The very structure of the commonplace book, organising the material into subject headings that have often been decided upon in advance, 'places the reader a more dominant position and forces the text into categories he has conceived.'¹⁰⁶

Studying commonplace books can also help to provide details of the social and cultural history of the Early Stuart period. A survey of over seventy texts, diaries and commonplace books, has established that those who kept commonplace books were avid readers who not only bought books, but also lent and borrowed amongst their friends. As would be expected, there was evidence that the classics and histories were consumed, but 'above all the Bible and religious writings predominate in the notebooks.'¹⁰⁷

The practice of keeping a commonplace book had clearly spread beyond the grammar school and university as many women kept them, despite having not received the same formal education as the boys in their family. In her study of *Gender and the English Revolution*, Ann Hughes demonstrates that 'as the example of Elizabeth I herself suggested, women were not completely excluded from humanist learning' even if 'in the main a classical training for public life was confined to men who had access to grammar schools and universities.'¹⁰⁸ Clearly Lady Brilliana had enough of an education that she was able to read religious texts by the main puritan theologians and to write her own

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, p. 278-279

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, p. 181

¹⁰⁷ Elisabeth Boucier. 'Les Journaux privés en Angleterre de 1600 à 1660', *Publications de la Sorbonne* (1976) as discussed in Sharpe, p. 282

¹⁰⁸ Ann Hughes, *Gender and the Revolution* (Oxford, 2012), p. 28

commentary on them. This was not uncommon among women in the early Stuart period, as they 'had extensive religious duties, domestic and public.' Samuel Torshall, a Cheshire preacher who was tutor to the King's children when they were in parliament's custody, urged women to 'read the scriptures, to attend and discuss sermons, to "privately and familiarly exhort others" to lead family prayers if male heads of households were absent and, in sum, "to get public spirits"'¹⁰⁹

Brilliana Conway wrote her *Commonplace Book* in 1622, when she would have been around twenty four years old. As has been argued above, although much of the contents are the words of others, her own religious beliefs can be determined from the passages that she chose to copy into the commonplace book, and the headings that she organised them under. The book itself is a large bound volume, running to over one hundred and fifty pages; although some of them are blank. The main contents of the book are written in two columns per page, with notes and other marginalia on either side. There appears to have been some consideration to organisation, as quite often similar themes or subjects, for example God's grace, appear together. The writing appears to be all in the same hand, suggesting that it was all written by Lady Brilliana herself, rather than a scribe. On some pages, some of the passages have been crossed out and reworded, suggesting that Lady Brilliana was not always happy with her original phrasing of her ideas.

As will be shown below, the book was a chance for Lady Brilliana to ponder the religious texts that she had read and the sermons that she had heard. As such, it formed part of a symbiotic relationship that existed between the private and public religious practices of the early modern Christian. As Erica Longfellow states, 'in early seventeenth-century England, the areas of life that we traditionally identify as private or personal – family, religious belief, sexuality – were understood to have economic and communal

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, p. 73; Samuel Torshall, *The Woman's Glorie*, (London, 1645) p. 225, 228

resonances that made them much more than the business of the individual.¹¹⁰ Religion, in particular, was an area where the line between public and private was blurred, if not non-existent; 'private devotion was not something separate from or to be protected from public worship; rather it was a necessary part of the whole of worship that prepared the individual to be with the community'. As Daniel Featley wrote in *Ancilla pietatis; or, the hand-maid to private devotion*, 'Premeditation is the Preparation to private prayer; private to public; private, and public to the hearing of the word; private and public prayer, together with the hearing of the word to the worthy participation of the holy sacrament. For the Sacrament receives strength and vigour from the word; the word preached from the public prayer; public prayer from private Devotion; and from that premeditation.'¹¹¹ The contents of the commonplace book, then, were part of a preparation for, and reaction to, the public worship that Lady Brilliana took part in. The sermons that she heard were, themselves, a response to the preacher's own religious reading and personal interpretation of the texts that he had read in his own private worship. Before the contents of the book are discussed in detail, some context will be given, in terms of the national influence of John Calvin and William Perkins.

The influence of John Calvin on the English Church of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is a subject that has caused much debate amongst historians. Some historians, such as Nicholas Tyacke, argue that the English Church in this period was built on a so-called Calvinist consensus, while others, such as Peter White, argue that the official Church under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts was not Calvinist at all.

There can be no doubt that the writings of Calvin were popular in England. Andrew Pettegree writes:

¹¹⁰ Erica Longfellow, 'Public, private, and the household in Early Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies* (April 2006), p. 313

¹¹¹ Daniel Featley, *Ancilla pietatis, or, the hand-maid to private devotion*, (London, 1626), quoted in Longfellow, p. 319

By far the largest market for Calvin's writings in the later part of the sixteenth century was not his native France, but England...Evidence from a painstaking reconstruction of the publishing history suggests that this is wildly exaggerated, for English readers apparently had an almost insatiable appetite for Calvin's works.

His conclusion is that 'by whatever measure one adopts, Calvin emerges as the dominant force in the theology of the Elizabethan church.'¹¹²

Martin Davie disagrees with this; he concedes that Calvin's ideas were popular among certain individuals and groups, but that they 'never shaped the Church's official doctrine, liturgy or pattern of ministry.'¹¹³ In his exploration of the official doctrine of the English Church from the reign of Henry VIII to the Restoration in 1660, Davie maintains that the contents of documents such as the *Thirty Nine Articles* and *Book of Common Prayer* issued during the reign of Elizabeth I did not match the theology of Calvin's writings. It is here that, perhaps, the definition of what constitutes 'Calvinism' comes to the fore.

It is the argument put forward by Bryan Spinks that is most convincing. He proposes that when historians refer to a Calvinist consensus, 'this should be taken as referring to a broad acceptance of a general Reformed (as opposed to "Popish" and Lutheran) theological approach, and certainly not some conscious English "school of John Calvin"'¹¹⁴ As Patrick Collinson argues, within a generation the term 'Calvinism' no longer referred to just the Genevan Church, but 'a loose and free alliance of churches,

¹¹² Andrew Pettegree, 'The Spread of Calvin's Thought', in Donald K. McKim (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Calvin* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 210

¹¹³ Martin Davie, 'Calvin's influence on the theology of the English Reformation', *Ecclesiology* 6 (2010), p. 315

¹¹⁴ Bryan D. Spinks, *Two Faces of Elizabethan Anglican Theology* (Lanham, Maryland, 1999), p. 6

universities, academies, and other intellectual, political, and spiritual resources located in France, the Netherlands, South-West Germany, England, and Scotland.¹¹⁵

Although Calvin's influence on the official church is debatable, there can be no doubt that his writings were a direct influence on the beliefs of the Harleys. As has been discussed in Chapter One, his views on idolatrous practices during Baptism and the Communion and his views on the corruption of the episcopate tally closely with Sir Robert's. His influence on Brilliana Harley is even stronger.

The second major influence on Brilliana Conway's commonplace book was the Elizabethan minister William Perkins. Perkins has been described as 'one of the most widely known authors of his time',¹¹⁶ while R.T. Kendall claims that Perkins is one of the founders of 'experimental' predestinarianism, a theology that he argues was the dominant force in English evangelism until the 1640s.¹¹⁷ Perkins was undoubtedly influenced by Calvin and, like the Genevan reformer, he used the work of ancient Christian theologians to show that his ideas had "consensus and concord" among the most respected writers of the past.¹¹⁸ Perkins' writings ran into many editions and were translated into several languages, including French, Italian and Welsh.

The central theme of the Lady Brilliana's commonplace book was the 'religion of the individual' as it is dominated by discussions on predestination and her belief that faith, good works and obedience to God's law were not, as the Catholics believed, a means to salvation but were, instead, outward signs of election. As such, although several of the five pillars of the Harleys' brand of puritanism are discussed in great detail, others are not. The commonplace book 'contains no reference to any church reforms and gives no

¹¹⁵ Patrick Collinson, 'England and International Calvinism, 1558-1640', in M. Prestwich (Ed.), *International Calvinism, 1541-1715*, (Oxford, 1985), 214

¹¹⁶ W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the making of a Protestant*, (Oxford, 2014), p. 114

¹¹⁷ R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, (Oxford, 1979), pp. 1-9, 51-76, 129-135

¹¹⁸ Patterson, *Making of a Protestant*, pp. 4 and 81-82

evidence of the later anti-episcopal stance' which are evident in Lady Brilliana's letters, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.¹¹⁹

The belief in predestination is discussed in great detail in several places in the commonplace book. Paraphrasing Calvin's *Institutes*, Lady Brilliana wrote, 'God by his eternal and unchallenged counsel hath once appointed whom in time to come he will take to salvation and on the other side whom he would condemn to destruction. This cause touching the elect was grounded upon his free mercy without respect of the worth of man.'¹²⁰ Lady Brilliana clearly subscribed to the belief in so-called double predestination; that is the belief that God had not only foreseen who would be saved and who wouldn't, but had willed both to happen.

Being part of the elect meant that being treated as special by God:

Though God be merciful to all his creatures yet he is chiefly and most especially he is merciful to his elect. God is merciful to them that keep his commandments and to them that fear him, and to them that trust in him. Now none does this but his elect. God is merciful to them because he in his mercy does choose them before the world was. God is especially merciful to them because he calls them effectually in time which blessing he denies to many. God is merciful to them because he reserves for them a crown of glory.

The elect were the only true believers and followers of the commandments and, as such, they received God's particular mercy. This should result in the elect being moved 'to be thankful to God and to express it in many ways, by remembering his blessing, 2 by loving him, 3 by serving him, 4 by thankfulness.'¹²¹

Another special treatment for the elect was the pardoning of sins. Under the heading 'of forgiveness', Lady Brilliana wrote: 'It is God only that can pardon sins... None have their

¹¹⁹ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 49

¹²⁰ Portland MSS, London Collection, Commonplace Book of Brilliana Conway (1622), hereafter referred to as *Commonplace Book*, f. 65 r

¹²¹ *ibid*, f. 3 r

sins pardoned but the elect only...the reason is because none have their sins pardoned but those that are justified and none are justified but the elect. 2 reason is because none have their sins pardoned but those that have peace with God and none have peace with God but the Elect.¹²²

It was the search for assurance of election that Lady Brilliana gave as the reason for why a Christian should seek faith: 'The reasons why we should seek for faith is the gift of God and peculiar to them none can believe but they are truly elected. Secondly it is a gift irrevocable to whom God gives true faith, they never lose it. Thirdly it is our shield against Satan against the wrath of God...'¹²³ If a person had true faith, then they could start to believe that they were part of God's elect and were destined for salvation.

As is evident from the previous quotation, Lady Brilliana clearly believed that salvation and election were forever and could never be lost. Early in the commonplace book, she wrote: 'The elect and chosen of God can never finally fail away from God.' She went on to give reasons why this had to be the case, '[1] God will never suffer them to fail from him, whom he loves to the end and he does love his to the end... 2 Christ will never suffer them to fall away for whom he has prayed and has prayed for all his children... 3 Christ will never suffer them to fall away who are his sheep, and we are his sheep.'¹²⁴

Clearly those who obtained assurance from election were able to take comfort from the knowledge that their sins would be forgiven and they would never fall from grace. This fact, however, did not breed complacency in the elect. In answer to the objection 'If the church can never fall away then the means of perseverance is used in vain as hearing the word and prayer and receiving the sacraments', Lady Brilliana wrote 'this can not be for hearing the word [and] receiving the sacrament are the means to make us persevere for as God has appointed the end so he has appointed the means to obtain the end.' The further objection that 'the doctrine of perseverance in grace breeds security' was

¹²² *ibid*, f. 120 v

¹²³ *ibid*, f. 42 v

¹²⁴ *ibid*, f. 6 v

replied with assertion that 'There are two fold security: a carnal security when a man wholly neglects the means and the spiritual security when a man wholly relies on God for perseverance and this this doctrine teaches.' Although the elect had a sense of security, theirs was different to the reprobate as they continued to observe the means of their salvation; namely hearing the word preached (and here this quotation touches upon two other pillars of the Harleys' beliefs) and the receiving of the sacraments. The elect's surety was 'spiritual' as opposed to the reprobate's surety, which was 'carnal.'¹²⁵

In another section, Lady Brilliana wrote about the difference between man's knowledge regarding predestination and God's knowledge. Because of the way that it is written; featuring reasons, answers, objections and uses, the passage is clearly from a sermon, but the original author is not recorded. With regard's man's knowledge of predestination, 'The number of elect is infinite and uncertain.' There are two reasons for this fact: the first 'may be drawn from God's promise which is that the children of Israel shall be like the sands on the seashore', while the second 'is drawn from the denomination of the church for it is called catholic.' God's elect, then are vast and infinite in the knowledge of man. There is an objection to this fact: 'but this seems to contradict many places in the scripture where it is said that they are but a little flock.' This is easily answered by looking at God's elect in 'two ways: simply of themselves and comparatively with others. Simply of themselves they are a great number not to be numbered, but comparatively with the wicked in respect of them they are but few.' The elect are a large number, but the reprobate are even larger still. The elect, therefore can consider themselves to be part of a select group. This is not the only use for his knowledge; it should also 'move us to examine and try our selves whether we are of this number.' A further use listed is 'seeing the number is so great we should praise God for it and decide still to have them in instead.'¹²⁶

¹²⁵ *ibid*, p. 7 r

¹²⁶ *ibid*, f. 66 v

In contrast to man's knowledge of the elect, 'The number of God's elect in respect to God is finite and certain God knows not only the number but he knows are of the number, he knows the persons.' Again, as per the style of Early Modern sermons, there are reasons given to support this assertion. 'The reason is drawn from the wisdom of God by which he knoweth all things. The 2 reason is drawn from his power for he is able to make those means eternal to our salvation which he has appointed. 3 Reason is drawn from the unchangeableness of God for being unto his we are ever his.' God is all-knowing and, as such, he knows who his elect are and he has also set the means by which people can be identified as elect. Again, election is presented as permanent. The uses of this knowledge are 'this may comfort the children of God against the reproaches of the world for which need they cures sense they are known to God... 2 use It may terrify the wicked to think that knows the person shall be damned.' God's knowledge of the elect should comfort those who are part of the godly while it should also be a reproach to those who are not.¹²⁷

The final passage on predestination to be discussed examines one of the main objections to the belief in an elect godly group who were favoured by God. Lady Brilliana began by writing that although 'God be gracious to all men in respect of his benevolence, yet most especially to his elect in respect of his beneficence.' Again the elect are being singled out for special treatment from God: 'he saveth all men in respect of corporal salvation but God saveth his Elect in respect of spiritual salvation.' There then follows a series of objections and answers relating to whether God's salvation was for all or just the few:

'obj: it may seem God saveth all men spiritually for it is said he would have all men saved.

ans: all sorts of men not every person

¹²⁷ ibid

obj: but it is said Christ died for all men

Ans: he died for all men sufficiently but not effectually

obj: 1 John: 2:2 it is said Christ was our consolation for the sins of the world.

Ans: The world is taken diversely in scripture sometimes it is taken for the whole frame of heaven and earth and sometimes for the world of the wicked and sometimes for the world of the believer and so it is taken in this place.¹²⁸

It is a common criticism against predestination that Christ was said to have died for all, and Lady Brilliana's use of semantics to counter that 'all' meant 'all sorts of men' not all men, was a common argument used by supporters of the doctrine. This way, they were able to use scripture to justify their belief that some were saved while others were condemned.

To John Calvin, predestination was the explanation why some people responded to the Word of God and some did not. Here he was following the example of Augustine who believed that 'If a person comes to faith, it is because the Lord prepares the wills of those he has chosen for himself. Ability to believe ...then, is a gift of nature; believing...is the gift of a special grace, given only to God's elect.'¹²⁹ Calvin wrote that 'the covenant of life is not preached in the same way and that even among those to whom it is preached it does not in all cases fall on the same ground nor always retain its hold.'¹³⁰

Calvin was also a believer in double predestination; the conviction that God had willed not only whom he would choose to save, but also those whom he had condemned to reprobation. To him it was God's will that not all would receive the word as to think otherwise would be to argue that man was able to defy God. Calvin 'accepts the witness of Holy Scripture that the divisions brought about by the declaration of the

¹²⁸ *ibid*, f. 146 v

¹²⁹ B. A. Gerrish, 'The Place of Calvin in Christian Theology', in McKim (Ed.), p. 292

¹³⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes III*, (Geneva, 1559), 21, I

Word to man are grounded in ultimate divine determinations. He develops a doctrine of election because he feels constrained to do so obediently to the word of Scripture.¹³¹

Calvin also believed that those who were God's elect were unable to fall and their salvation was assured: 'It is impossible that those who really belong to the elect people should finally perish or sink unsaved. For their salvation is founded on such sure and firm bases that, even if the whole structure of the world tottered, that certainty itself could not dissolve.'¹³² Like other believers in predestination, the surety of election did not distil complacency in Calvin as he did not believe that the elect could recognise the fact of their election by who they are or what they do; in fact, he 'flatly rejects that idea in his *Institutes*.¹³³

Calvin did believe that the godly could be assured of election and means of their surety is linked to another of the pillars of the Harleys' beliefs; 'if we wished to be assured of our election, we must cling to the Word which the revelation of God in Jesus Christ attests to us and which brings near to us the Mediator Himself.'¹³⁴ Calvin 'devoted himself to the church's reformation. In this he let himself be guided by the Bible. The Bible and then the church – that was the right order for Calvin.'¹³⁵

In 1592, William Perkins published *A Golden Chain: or the Description of Theology*. In the introduction 'to the Christian Reader', he set out what he claims are the four main theories of predestination.

The first is of the old and new pelagians who place the cause of God's predestination in man, in that they hold that God did ordain men either to life or death, according as he did foresee that they would by their natural freewill either reject or receive grace offered. The second of them, who of some are

¹³¹ Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, (Cambridge, 1956), p. 168

¹³² Calvin, *Institutes III*, 24, 6.

¹³³ Niesel, p. 171

¹³⁴ *ibid*

¹³⁵ Wulfurt de Greef, 'Calvin's Writings', in McKim (Ed.), p. 41

termed Lutherans, which teach that God foreseeing how all mankind being shut up under unbelief would therefore reject grace offered, did hereupon purpose to choose some to salvation of his mere mercy without any respect of their faith and good works, and the rest to reject...The third, semi-pelagian papists which ascribe God's predestination partly to mercy and partly to men's foreseen preparations and meritorious works. The fourth, of such as teach that the cause of the execution of God's predestination is his mercy in Christ, in them which are saved, and in them which perish, the fall and corruption of man.

Perkins leaves the reader in no doubt which of these four theories he supported: 'the first three I labour to oppugn as erroneous, and to maintain the last, as being truth which will bear weight in the balance of the sanctuary.'¹³⁶

Like Calvin, Perkins believed in so-called double predestination. For him to argue that God did not will the salvation or damnation of man was an 'attack on the omnipotency and immutability of God.'¹³⁷ He was critical of those who 'make the Prescience of man's faith and unbelief, to be the impulsive cause of God's decree. For they say, that God eternally decrees to save or refuse men because he did foresee that they would believe or not believe.' Instead, Perkins argued that God's will 'is the cause of all things that have been: for we must not imagine that a thing first of all existeth, and then afterwards willed of God, but first of all God wills a thing, and then afterwards it comes to have been.' To Perkins it was unthinkable that God could allow men to choose whether or not to receive the grace that he offered, as this would call into question God's power over them.¹³⁸

As has been shown above, the word of God and preaching, two of the other pillars of the Harleys' beliefs, are mentioned in the commonplace book as 'the means to make us persevere' and they were appointed by God, as he appointed the ends. The word of God

¹³⁶ Ian Breward (Ed.), *The Works of William Perkins* (Appleford, 1970). pp. 175-176

¹³⁷ Bryan D. Spinks, *Two Faces of Elizabethan Anglican Theology*, (Lanham, 1999). p. 58

¹³⁸ William Perkins, *The Complete Works*, (London, 1616-1618), Vol 1; 294, quoted in Spinks, p. 58

is also mentioned in a later passage, taken from Calvin's *institutes*. 'Not in vain hath God added the light of the scripture that there by he might be known to salvation, other scriptures gathering together in our minds the knowledge of God, which otherwise is but confused it doth remove the mists and plainly show us the true God. God has always made us understand assurance for credit of his word which far exceedeth all uncertain opinions.'¹³⁹ God gave the word of scripture so that man could understand his knowledge, which otherwise would be incomprehensible and beyond man's understanding.

The word of God is also presented as the foundation of worship: 'Whatsoever we worship God in, it must be grounded in the word of God.' Again, man is considered incapable of understanding God's wishes without it, 'because the thoughts of God are deep that no man can find them out, and therefore he can not tell what will please God.' If left to decide his own form of worship, man would be doomed to idolatry, because his 'heart is so foolish that it only devises such things as are contrary to God, for the services that man devises are only outward which God hates, for God is a spirit and will he be worshipped in spirit.'¹⁴⁰

To Calvin the only place to learn about God and his relationship with man was Holy Scripture. 'We must go to the Word, in which God is clearly and vividly mirrored for us in His works, and where the works of God are appraised not by our perverse judgements but by the criterion of eternal truth.'¹⁴¹ In the Geneva Confessions of 1537, he wrote 'We confess that we will follow Holy Scripture alone as the rule of our faith and religion without mixing herewith anything derived from human understanding apart from the Word of God.'¹⁴² Like the Harleys, Calvin believed that the word of God was the only resource and arbiter for religious belief and doctrine.

¹³⁹ *Commonplace Book*, f. 36b

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, f. 20 v

¹⁴¹ Calvin, *Institutes I*, 6, 3.

¹⁴² Barth and Niesel (Eds.), *Calvini Opera Selecta Vol I*, (Munich, 1926), quoted in Niesel, p. 51

Calvin viewed preaching 'as among his most important duties.' He was a prolific preacher who preached well over two thousands sermons during his ministry in Geneva. From '1549, his most characteristic pattern of preaching was twice on Sunday and every weekday of every other week. His sermons typically lasted for more than an hour, and they were delivered without a manuscript or notes. Toward the end of his life, when poor health prevented his free movement, he even asked to be carried to church in a chair so that he could fulfil his responsibilities in the pulpit.' Calvin's attitude to preaching was hardly surprising for 'a theologian who argued consistently that preaching was the ordinary means appointed by God for the salvation of the elect'¹⁴³ Calvin believed that 'The preaching of the Word is our spiritual food and our medicine for spiritual health.' He compared preachers to physicians and the word of God to the medicines used for the body. Like the physician, the preacher is able to diagnose spiritual ills and prescribe for and cure them. 'The preached Word is used as an instrument to heal, cleanse, and make fruitful our disease prone souls.'¹⁴⁴ Calvin viewed the preaching of the word of God and the sacraments as the only evidence of the true church: 'We must maintain that the church is not otherwise edified than by oral preaching, and that believers are held together by no other bond of union than their adherence to the divinely prescribed order of the church, their hearing of the Word in unity, and their constant expansion and growth.'¹⁴⁵

William Perkins wrote that 'the word of God confers grace (for it is the power of God to salvation to them that believe) and this it doth by signifying the will of God.'¹⁴⁶ He also wrote that Holy Scripture was 'the source of the truths that ultimately mattered.'¹⁴⁷ The stress on the importance of the word of God was linked to Perkins' belief that preaching was the primary function of a minister. He 'emphasises that the substance of preaching

¹⁴³ Dawn DeVries, 'Calvin's Preaching', in McKim (Ed.), p. 106

¹⁴⁴ Joel R. Beeke, 'Calvin on Piety', in McKim (Ed.), p. 132

¹⁴⁵ Calvin, *Institutes IV*, 1, 5.

¹⁴⁶ Perkins, *Works*, Vol 2: 260

¹⁴⁷ Patterson, *Making of a Protestant*, p. 120

must be the word of God. He states that the word of God is “the perfect and equal object of preaching”¹⁴⁸. Preaching was ‘a matter of intense concern to Perkins from early in his career.’¹⁴⁹ He wrote a guide for preachers called *The Art of Prophecyng*, which was published in Latin in 1592 and then in English in 1607, five years after Perkins’ death. Perkins was a proponent of a ‘plain style’ of preaching and he saw it as the preacher’s job to stress the moral demands of scripture. Perkins, and other preachers who were influenced by him, ‘undoubtedly made some parishioners uncomfortable’ but claims from some historians that his style of preaching ‘became increasingly unpopular in the English Church’ have underestimated the ‘lasting significance of his treatise on preaching.’ *The Art of Prophecyng* provides ‘succinct advice to clergymen...about one of their most important responsibilities’ and it ‘offers clear reasons that preaching is important – namely for the education of their congregations in the meaning of scriptures.’¹⁵⁰

In Lady Brilliana’s commonplace book, idolatry is dealt with in two quotations, one from Calvin and the other from Perkins. On the Second Commandment Calvin was quoted as saying ‘This second commandment of God teaches us the lawful worship of God and to restrain our senses that they represent not God in an form: for God is incomprehensible. The second part forbiddeth us to honour images for religion’s sake.’¹⁵¹ While Perkins’s exposition of the Lord’s Prayer is used to argue against the practise of praying to saints: ‘We ought not in any wise to pray to saints and Angels and this we are plainly taught in the Lord’s prayer which is the perfect platform of prayer.’ It can be seen, therefore, that the iconoclasm that was evident in Sir Robert’s ‘character’ of a puritan, and which would influence so much of his political career, as shall be shown in Chapter Four, was also evident in his future wife’s commonplace book.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 121

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 115

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*, pp. 114-115 and 129

¹⁵¹ *Commonplace Book*, f. 50 v

Calvin's iconoclasm was heavily linked to his reliance on the word of God as his guide in theological matters. His 'struggle against the "idols" is grounded in his reading of the first two commandments of the Decalogue or Ten Commandments.' Calvin believed that 'the second commandment had for centuries in the west been subsumed under the first commandment.' Although most of the 'idol-smashing' in Geneva had taken place before Calvin's arrival, 'Calvin's emphasis on the spiritual nature of worship led him to encourage the simplicity of worship spaces without visual distraction, advice which most Calvinist churches, though not all, reflected till recent years.'

But it was not just the church art that Calvin took to be idolatrous. 'Idolatry for Calvin involved more than the making of images. It implies all forms of superstition and attempts to control and domesticate God. This insidious temptation lurks in the hearts of everyone, for "man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols" (Inst. I.11.8).'

Calvin believed that 'the third aspect of Christian liberty is that, in the sight of God, we are not under any obligation about outward observances which in themselves are matters of indifference, so that we are in a position to use them or not as we please.' He believed that there were no 'exact prescriptions about the ceremonies of the right form of divine worship and the outward order of the church', but stressed that in any such observances 'there must be no superstitions and...they may not be substituted for the Word of God.'

Perkins' attitude to idolatry is, perhaps, not quite as clear as those of the Harleys, or even Calvin. There is no doubt that he was critical of the worship of images that he believed formed part of the Roman Catholic Church. In *A warning against the idolatrie of the last times*, he claimed that members of the Roman Church 'direct their worship to God, in, at, and before crucifixes, or before bread in the sacrament, having no warrant of their doing either by commandment or promise' and to him this was undoubtedly idolatrous. He also said that they made idols of the saints because 'temples, altars,

holidays are consecrated to their honour and worship.¹⁵² To Perkins saints were to be respected, but not worshipped and he said that ‘we utterly deny that we are helped by merits of saints either living or departed.’¹⁵³ However; there is some dispute as to his opinions on what practices used in the English Church would be classed as idolatry. In 1587, early in his career as a fellow at Christ’s College, a complaint was made to the vice-chancellor that Perkins asserted that ‘it was a corruption in our Church that ministers did not receive [communion] a the hand of another minister’, that ‘kneeling when we receive the sacrament [was] superstitious and antichristian’ and that ‘facing east at certain points in the service was objectionable.’¹⁵⁴ These were all opinions that the Harleys would have readily agreed with, however at the subsequent hearing, Perkins denied that he had used the critical terms reported in his sermon, but admitted that he had caused some disquiet and that he ‘might have spoken them at a better time more convenient.’ No punishment was given to Perkins and, according to Patterson, he never wrote or voiced a similar opinion again. Indeed Patterson argues that Perkins was one of the main ‘apologists for the Church of England at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries.’¹⁵⁵

Having said that, in contrast with the Prayer Book, Perkins disagreed with the use of godparents at baptism. Perkins said that the use of godparents dated to a time when the parents themselves were not as knowledgeable in the Christian faith, ‘but now parents among us being better taught and qualified, the other [godparents] is not such a necessity.’ The promises made at baptism ‘ought to be performed by the parents of the

¹⁵² William Perkins, *A warning against the last times and an instruction touching religious or divine worship* (Cambridge, 1601). pp. 30 and 91

¹⁵³ Perkins, *The Works of that famous and worthie minister*, p. 726, quoted in Bruhn, p. 123

¹⁵⁴ Corpus Christi College Archives, Cambridge, Bursary MSS, miscellaneous documents 1430-1700, no. 51

¹⁵⁵ W. B. Patterson, ‘William Perkins as apologist for the English Church’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, (2006: 2), pp. 252-269

baptised.¹⁵⁶ As has been shown in Chapter One, the Harleys' objections to the form of baptism prescribed by the English Church ran deeper than this.

The final pillar of the Harleys' beliefs that is discussed in great detail in the commonplace book is the observance of fasts. Lady Brilliana wrote that there were three kinds of fasts: 'a natural fast which the physician prescribes for the health of the body, 2 a civil fast which is for the good of the country, as the fast of lent, 3 a religious fast and this fast is a voluntary abstaining from all sort of meats for a season, for a religious end.' It is the latter of these that she then discusses in detail.

There are four causes of a religious fast. The first of these is 'for our own sins committed where by we feel the cuts of conscience or wrath of God.' The second was 'the sins of others when some amongst us commits some grievous sin, of which we are clear, yet we may be guilty of their sins, and so we partake of the punishments.' Thirdly a fast was 'to remove some evil imminent or present', while the final use was 'the obtaining of some good.' Fasting, therefore could be broadly sorted into two types: for atonement for sins, either your own or those of a community, or as a means to petition God; either for something evil to be taken away or something good to happen.

There is then discussion, via a series of questions and answers, on how long a fast should last and whether a Christian should eat on a solemn fast day. The answer to the latter question is 'he may eat so it be with two caveats; the first concerning quantity it must, be but little and less than ordinary, no more than to sustain nature. The 2 in respect quality it must be meaner than ordinary.' This also applies to those who may be exempt from a fast; the weak, the old and young children.¹⁵⁷

The final section on fasting is entitled 'the ends of fasting.' There are four ends listed, the first of which is 'to subdue the flesh that is to bring the flesh in subjection to God for much sin is conveyed by the body to the soul, and often times we are made unfit to holy

¹⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:76

¹⁵⁷ *Commonplace Book*, f. 132 v

exercises by eating.’ The second end is ‘to stir our devotion in hearing the word and prayer for fasting as fiery chariots to carry our prayers up to God.’ Thirdly, a fast is ‘to testify our humiliation and sorrow for sins, without which sorrow for sins fasting is superstitious.’ The final end is ‘to admonish us of our guilt of sin for in forbearing of meat we show we are not worthy of meat and the children of Israel struck ashes on their heads to testify they were not worthy of man’s salvation.’ Clearly, Lady Brilliana saw fasting as a way of cleansing the body and spirit so that they were better prepared to take part in religious observance. They were also a means of atonement or petition.

Calvin wrote extensively on the virtues of fasting in his Institutes. He said that, ‘according to the need of the times, [pastors] should exhort the people either to fasting or to solemn supplications, or to other acts of humility, repentance, and faith’. Calvin elaborated on the ‘need of the times’ as: ‘whenever a controversy over religion arises ... whenever there is a question about choosing a minister ... whenever ... any difficult matter of great importance is to be discussed, ... or [in times of] pestilence, war, and famine.’

Calvin defined fasting as:

we do not understand it simply as restraint and abstemiousness in food, but as something else. Throughout its course, the life of the godly indeed ought to be tempered with frugality and sobriety, so that as far as possible it bears some resemblance to a fast. But, in addition, there is another sort of fasting, temporary in character, when we withdraw something from the normal regimen of living, either for one day or for a definite time, and pledge ourselves to a tighter and more severe restraint in diet than ordinarily. This consists in three things: in time, in quality of foods, and in smallness of quantity’

For Calvin this meant for certain periods of time to avoid delicacies and eat more sparingly, “only for need, not also for pleasure.”

A belief in the positive effects of fasting was a common thread that also ran through William Perkins' beliefs. He wrote that fasting 'causeth watchfulness and cuts off drowsiness and so makes a man the more likely and fresh in prayer.'¹⁵⁸

Karen Bruhn argues that Perkins writings on fasting in *A Reformed Catholic*, published in 1597, were an example of him trying to adapt pre-existing Catholic practices for a reformed church. She says that he, and other theologians like him, would 'examine a particular practice, conclude that it is not essential to salvation, reconstruct it as a sign of repentance rather than a cause, and then praise its moral or "civil" merits.'¹⁵⁹ Perkins was critical of the Roman Catholic habit of prescribed periods of fasting and their belief that fasting was 'a work of satisfaction to God's justice for the temporal punishment of our sins.' However he did admit that fasting had its uses, as it was 'an help and furtherance to the worship of God' and that it was 'highly to be esteemed of all the servants and people of God.' Even set times of fasting were acceptable if they were 'not upon necessity or for conscience or religion's sake but for politic or civil regards.'¹⁶⁰

The remaining pillar of the Harleys' beliefs, the criticism of episcopacy, is not mentioned in the commonplace book but, as has already been mentioned, her feelings towards the bishops are very evident from her letters, which were written at a later date. Lady Brilliana and her future husband were, in all likelihood, prepared to accept a form of episcopal church in the 1620s and were only emboldened to be more critical of the bishops due to events of the 1630s and 1640s.

Like the Harleys, Calvin's views on the episcopacy were not as clear as his other beliefs.

Marcus Harmes states that 'when congregations in Geneva regulated and formulated their faith in the Genevan Confessions of 1536, they stated their opposition to episcopal

¹⁵⁸ William Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, p. 330, quoted in Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, (Oxford, 2013), p. 198

¹⁵⁹ Karen Bruhn, 'Pastoral Polemic: William Perkins, The Godly Evangelicals, and the shaping of a Protestant community in Early Modern England', *Anglican and Episcopal History* (72:1, 2003). p. 120

¹⁶⁰ William Perkins, *The Works of that famous and worthie minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M W Perkins* (1603) pp. 716-717, quoted in Bruhn

government.’ He also claims that ‘Confessional statements indebted to Calvin’s writings and sometimes his direct participation in the affairs of individual communities developed this opposition to episcopal jurisdiction.’¹⁶¹ However, he then goes on to argue that followers of Calvin had refracted Calvin’s view on church authority ‘in divergent directions.’ He goes into great detail about how two successive Archbishops of Canterbury, John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft, were able to use Calvin’s works to argue that he would have approved of the English Episcopacy, despite the fact that on just about every other theological argument they disagreed with him. Indeed he argues that various tracts by Bancroft were ‘in some measure anti-Calvinist.’¹⁶²

That Calvin’s views on the episcopacy could be interpreted in such diverse ways could be argued as being a sign of a lack of clarity on the subject. However, Niesel argues that his attitude to the church government was similar to that towards the outward practises of the church discussed above. ‘Christ alone is the Lord of the church. Neither one individual nor individuals as a collective body may rule over the church.’ Calvin, himself, wrote that ‘The right method of governing the church can be learnt from no other source but from Him alone, the Lord.’¹⁶³ Calvin accepted that ‘there is in the church the fact of superiority and subordination...But God places men in office over us only in order to keep inviolate His right.’¹⁶⁴ To Calvin, then, with regards church government, as with everything else, it was the word of God that should guide man’s actions, and not the other way round, and as long as prelacy fulfilled that, it was valid.

In September 1589, William Perkins attended a meeting in Cambridge with ministers involved in the Classis movement, who advocated a Presbyterian church government. He was questioned about this meeting under oath two years later, Perkins refused to

¹⁶¹ Marcus K. Harmes, ‘Calvin and the English Episcopate, 1580-1610’, *Anglican and Episcopal History*, (81:1, 2012), p. 22

¹⁶² *ibid*, p. 24

¹⁶³ Baum, Cunitz and Reuss, *Corpus Reformatorum*, (Brunswick, 1863-1900), 13, 284, quoted in Niesel, p. 189

¹⁶⁴ Niesel, pp. 188-189

give much more detail other than that he attended the meeting and to confirm some of the other attendees, although he did say that he 'does not know that any minister did at any time meet at any place to the purpose to conclude, debate or order how the said discipline [Presbyterianism] might be advance or practised.'¹⁶⁵

Most historians, however, agree that Perkins was in no way a Presbyterian. Spinks writes that 'Perkins himself never expressed an opinion on church polity in England'¹⁶⁶, although Patterson quotes him as saying, 'indeed there is controversy among us touching the point of Ecclesiastical regiment: but mark in what matter. We all jointly agree in the substance of the regiment...the difference between us is only touching the persons, and the manner of putting this government in execution.'¹⁶⁷ Again, as with the Harleys and Calvin, the objection to episcopacy is not so much in the existence of bishops, but in the kinds of people who held the office and the manner in which they exercised their power.

Given that the views of the two main influences on the commonplace book are not clear when it comes to episcopacy, it is no surprise that Lady Brilliana, and others like her who were disciples of Calvin and Perkins, had mixed feelings towards the power and role of the bishops.

It can be seen, therefore, that at the same time that Sir Robert was writing his 'character' of a puritan, his future wife was writing her own religious document that shared most of the same beliefs. There was a real conviction in the doctrine of predestination and the existence of a godly elect who had been chosen for salvation; of which they would undoubtedly have believed they were part. There was an enthusiasm for a preaching ministry and the observance of fast days, and an abhorrence of anything that was considered to be idolatrous. Underlying all of this was the firm knowledge that only scripture could define what true religion was. The next chapter will examine the

¹⁶⁵ Breward (Ed.), p. 10

¹⁶⁶ Spinks, 23, see also Patterson, 'Perkins as apologist' and *The making of a Protestant*

¹⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, p. 502

published sermons and theological texts of ministers that were friends of the Harleys, in order to demonstrate that these views were common among their puritan circle.

Chapter Three – The Harleys’ religious beliefs in context

Chapters One and Two sought to identify the main features of Sir Robert and Lady Brilliana Harley’s ‘brand’ of puritanism – a strong belief in predestination, fierce iconoclasm, the keeping of private fasts and days of observation, a mistrust of the power and nature of the episcopacy and a desire for a preaching ministry, all of which were underlined by the belief that scripture was the only true arbiter of religious orthodoxy and the true cause of salvation – by examining two primary sources, which were written at roughly the same time but before they were married. This chapter will put those beliefs into further historical context by discussing printed sermons, and other theological texts, written by ministers that we know the Harleys were friends with, in order to highlight the similarities and argue that the Harley’s religious beliefs were typical of many early Stuart puritans. These ministers will include the two men that Sir Robert appointed as rectors of the Harleys’ home parish of Brampton Bryan in Herefordshire – Thomas Pierson and Stanley Gower – and four ministers that Sir Robert became friendly with during his time spent in London, while serving as an MP; Thomas Gataker, William Gouge, Thomas Taylor and John Stoughton.

Modern scholarship surrounding early modern sermons has had something of a renaissance in recent years, and historians are starting to see sermons as just as important as other printed and manuscript works from the era.¹⁶⁸ With the rise of the study of the ‘public sphere’ in the early modern period, sermons and preaching are now seen as ‘having played an important part in the transmission of news and the formation of public opinion’ as well as being ‘one of the crucial means by which religious ideas were transmitted from the clerical producer to the lay consumer.’¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ See especially, Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough (eds.), *The English Sermon Revised* (Manchester, 2000); Arnold Hunt, *The art of hearing; English preachers and their audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge, 2010) and Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington and Emma Rhatigan (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the early modern sermon* (Oxford, 2011)

¹⁶⁹ Hunt, *The art of hearing*, p. 3 & 5

Preaching was seen by many as the primary role of the minister and this view was shared by both the ministers themselves and members of the laity, from all religious hues. The Devonshire preacher Richard Carpenter declared 'This is our work...as conduit pipes of grace to convey to the thirsty souls of our hearers, the living waters of God's word and to be as the mesaraicall veins in the body natural, through which the spiritual food must pass, whereby the members of Christ's body mystical are to be nourished up unto everlasting life. This is our work.'¹⁷⁰ This quotation is revealing in two ways. The first is that many protestant ministers saw themselves 'first and foremost as preachers.' To them, their primary role was to preach the word of God to their congregation, sometimes almost to the exclusion of other activities. This is because, and this is the second reason why the quotation from Carpenter is revealing, many ministers believed that the word heard had more power over the word read and so was the true means of salvation.¹⁷¹

While it is true that preaching was valued by all protestant ministers, the superiority of hearing the word over reading the word has been convincingly proposed by Dr Hunt as a possible distinction between puritans and their more conformist contemporaries. He argues that 'the distinction between reading and preaching was one of the points at issue in the Admonition Controversy, the polemical exchange between Thomas Cartwright and John Whitgift, which effectively defined the terms of debate between puritans and their opponents.'¹⁷² For the puritans, the hearing of the word of God preached was like listening to God himself and the preacher served an explanatory role for the more complicated messages the Bible contained; while for the conformists, the word of God written in the Bible had a purity that was not affected by the interpretation of the minister who had written the sermon. That is not to say that conformists did not

¹⁷⁰ Richard Carpenter, *A pastoral charge, faithfully given and discharged at the triennial visitation of the Lord Bishop of Exon*, (1616), D5v

¹⁷¹ For an extended analysis of the hearing/ reading debate, see Hunt, *The art of hearing*, Chapter One.

¹⁷² *ibid*, p. 31

preach - indeed Lancelot Andrewes, who was a staunch advocate of religious orthodoxy, is considered to be one of the greatest preachers of the Jacobean church - but they argued that reading and hearing the word of God had equal weight and both had advantages and disadvantages. This was an argument that was also advocated by Archbishop Laud and his followers during the 1630s.¹⁷³ As has been shown in the previous chapters, both of the Harleys believed that preaching was the primary function of the ministry and this is why Dr Hunt's argument that the dominance of the word heard over the word read was one of the distinctions between the puritans and their conformist opponents is very persuasive, although as he stresses, 'this does not mean that puritans and conformists were locked into fixed ideological positions, endlessly repeating the same old arguments. For a start, there was a good deal of common ground between the two sides.'¹⁷⁴

Sermon attendance during the early modern period was not a passive experience. Auditors were encouraged to listen and respond to sermons in specific ways and, indeed, some clergy published guides on how this should be done. In 1592, Henry Smith published a pair of sermons on the 'art of hearing' and this was followed by similar texts, such as Robert Wilkinson's *A Jewel for the Eare* (1593), Thomas Wilcox's translation of Wilhelm Zepper's *Ars Habendi et Audiendi Conciones Sacras* published in English as *The Art or Skil, Well and Fruitfullie to Heare the Holy Sermons of the Church* (1599) and Stephen Egerton's *The Boring of the Eare* (1623).¹⁷⁵ These guides recommended that auditors should take notes during sermons and that repetition of the sermons once the auditor had returned home, either by themselves or to family members, was a good way of making sure that they remembered the key messages preached. The taking of notes during sermon formed part of the curriculum at grammar schools and universities and there is no doubt that Sir Robert Harley would have been trained in note taking as part

¹⁷³ *ibid*, pp. 32-45

¹⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 39

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*, pp. 64 & 65

of his education.¹⁷⁶ As is evident in the inclusion of sermon notes in Lady Brilliana's Commonplace Book, as discussed in Chapter Two, learned women, who had not had the benefit of a grammar school or university education, were also able to take notes during sermons and then copy those notes into books for private devotional uses. This should not be too surprising as 'women constituted by far the largest part of the parish church's congregation'.¹⁷⁷ It is only natural that someone as devout as Lady Brilliana would have wanted to respond to the sermons that she had heard in such a way.

The desire to hear a particular preacher or style of sermon led some members of the laity to travel outside of their own parish to attend a sermon; the so-called act of sermon-gadding. There are some historians who argue that sermon-gadding was 'the most characteristic offence of puritan laypeople'¹⁷⁸; however the more persuasive argument is that, actually, the puritans' attitude to sermon-gadding was 'considerably more ambivalent' than this. Most puritans would agree that if there was no preaching minister in a particular parish, the members were entitled to travel to find one, but were less supportive of those who had a preacher in their parish, but went elsewhere to hear a different preacher whose sermons they preferred. For many moderate puritans, this went against their preference for a settled parish community. Indeed, many puritans' views were more in line with their supposed opponents when it came to sermon-gadding than their more radical fellow puritans, whose views were seen as the first steps to congregationalism and separatism.¹⁷⁹

One location where sermon-gadding was reluctantly accepted was in London. The number of godly preachers and the number of parishes so close together meant that keeping a tight rein on sermon-gadders was impractical. For 'many visitors to London...the abundance of preaching was one of the capital's main attractions' and 'was

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*, pp 64-81

¹⁷⁷ Jeanne Shami, 'Women and Sermons' in McCullough, Adlington and Rhatigan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of early modern sermons*, p. 166

¹⁷⁸ Martin Ingram, 'Puritans and the Church Courts', in C. Durston and J. Eales p. 87

¹⁷⁹ Hunt, *The art of hearing*, pp. 192-202

the reason why so many country gentry had chosen to move to London with their families.¹⁸⁰ As shall be discussed below, when Sir Robert was attending Parliament in London, he was able to find lodgings in areas that were notoriously puritan and this was almost certainly a conscious decision on his part. He would have been able to attend sermons within the parishes in which he stayed, as well as in neighbouring parishes.

The advowson of Sir Robert's home parish of Brampton Bryan was purchased by his father, Thomas Harley, in 1602 when he acquired the manor of Wigmore in the north of Herefordshire. When Sir Robert married his first wife the following year, Thomas Harley gifted it to his son as a wedding present. Sir Robert's first appointment was Thomas Pierson, a Cambridge educated minister from Cheshire who had held various posts in Cambridge, his native county and in Bedfordshire, where he was a private chaplain to Oliver St John, Baron Bletsoe. Pierson would dedicate some of his later written works to St John and his son, Oliver, the future Earl of Bolingbroke.¹⁸¹

During his time at Brampton, Pierson preached twice on Sundays, on fast days and he also preached many weekday lectures at Brampton Bryan and other places. He found the north of Herefordshire to be particularly short of preaching ministers and so he established a 'clerical training scheme' not long after his arrival. This injection of a godly minister found favour with Sir Robert, but not so his father, who was still living in Brampton Castle at this time. Thomas Harley's religious tastes were a lot more conservative than his son's and the elder Harley made several complaints between 1611 and 1615 to Robert Bennett, Bishop of Hereford, about Pierson's non-conformity. The charges against Pierson included not wearing the surplice and not making the sign of the cross during baptism and such was Thomas Harley's disapproval of Pierson that he refused to receive communion from him at Easter 1615. Sir Robert was able to buy time for his rector by mediating with the bishop and offering to arrange a conference with

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 204

¹⁸¹ Jacqueline Eales, 'Thomas Pierson and the transmission of the moderate puritan tradition', *Midland History*, (20: 1995) pp. 78-79

other local ministers and this seems to have helped to bring about a reconciliation between Thomas Harley and Pierson, as it was probably through the former's 'influence that Pierson preached before the Council in the Marches of Wales in St Lawrence's church, Ludlow, on 4th November 1616, when Prince Charles was created Prince of Wales.'¹⁸²

It is evident that Sir Robert valued Pierson's views on theology by the fact that, in 1628, he asked for his opinion on a book by Thomas Jackson, a royal chaplain and 'Arminian protégé of Bishop Niele.' As will be discussed in the next chapter, Sir Robert would go on to denounce the book in Parliament and associate it with 'those of other Arminians Richard Montagu, John Cosin, Robert Sibthorp and Roger Mainwaring' arguing that these men were not really followers of the Reformed Church and looked to introduce 'popery.'¹⁸³

Pierson died in 1633 and his replacement, appointed the following year, was Stanley Gower. Gower had studied at Trinity College, Dublin, from 1621 and in 1627 was appointed chaplain to James Ussher, the Archbishop of Armagh. Sir Robert had become acquainted with Ussher 'probably through their mutual friendship with Lady Vere' and it likely that it was the Archbishop who recommended Gower to Sir Robert. Once at Brampton, Gower's 'non-conformity was even more extensive than his predecessors.' A document dated 1638 charged him with 'omitting the absolution and litany from the prayer book service and only rarely reading the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments...not allowing parishioners to stand during the readings from the gospels nor to bow at the name of Jesus; using his sermons to exhort his congregation not to kneel in prayer on entering the church and to persuade them to wear their hats throughout the lesson and the sermon...omitting the sign of cross during baptism, catechising the local youth on the subject matter of his sermons, and not wearing the

¹⁸² *ibid*, pp. 84-87

¹⁸³ *ibid*, p. 89

surplice' all of which were 'long-standing non-conformist practices'. Gower was also charged, however, with 'a new religious offence, which had been instigated under the aegis of Archbishop Laud', namely that the communion table at Brampton was not railed and that on communion days it was brought down into the main body of the church, not left at the east end. The charges against Gower also implicated Sir Robert, who was charged with allowing his rector to commit such offences and for 'maintaining Richard Symonds, a suspended minister, as his schoolmaster.'¹⁸⁴

It is clear, therefore, that in appointing the rector at Brampton Bryan Sir Robert looked to employ ministers who held similar, puritan views to his own. The area of Herefordshire around Brampton Bryan had been short of such godly influence and the fact that Sir Robert was seen by his supporters as the saviour of the county is reflected in his funeral sermon, preached by Thomas Froyseil:

He was the first that brought the gospel into these parts. This country lay under a veil of darkness till he began to shine...providence led him to the knowledge that now blessed servant of God, Mr Pierson, whose exemplary graces and ministry shed a rich influence abroad the country.

And as God removed godly ministers by death, he continued still a succession of them to you. Not only Brampton, but ye of Wigmore, ye of Leintwardine, owe your very souls to Sir Robert Harley, who maintained your ministers upon his own cost, that they might feed you with the gospel of Jesus Christ...

His planting of godly ministers, and then backing them with his authority, made religion famous in this little corner of the world.¹⁸⁵

During his time serving as an MP, Sir Robert also looked to surround himself with the godly. In 1611 and 1612, he lodged in Blackfriars, 'one of the most notoriously puritan

¹⁸⁴ Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads* pp. 57-58

¹⁸⁵ T. Froyseil, *The Beloved Disciple, Or a sermon preached at the funeral of the Honourable Sir Robert Harley...at Brampton Bryan in Herefordshire December 10 1656*, (1658) pp. 98-109

parishes in London', where he became friendly with William Gouge, the puritan lecturer at St. Anne's Church. Between 1626 and 1634, Sir Robert had lodgings in Aldermanbury, where he became friends with two successive lecturers, Thomas Taylor and John Stoughton. Taylor dedicated one of his sermons to Sir Robert, in 1630, and, in 1635, Sir Robert accompanied Stoughton on his appearance before the High Commission; an event that Sir Robert claimed was influential in him losing the office of master of the Mint. It was also probably during his time in London that Sir Robert became friendly with Thomas Gataker, who would go on to officiate at Sir Robert and Lady Brilliana's wedding in 1623.¹⁸⁶

It is on the sermons and other theological writings of these ministers that the remainder of this chapter will focus. For Thomas Pierson, there is one surviving sermon and another theological tract, while for Stanley Gower there is only one sermon that made it into print which, as it was preached before Parliament in 1644, needs to be handled with care in terms of what it tells us about his religious beliefs prior to the turmoil of the 1640s. For the other ministers there are many sermons and tracts that can be used to compare their own beliefs with those of the Harleys.

Almost all of the ministers in question preached or wrote about the doctrine of predestination (and it is highly likely that Stanley Gower also preached on the doctrine in sermons that have not survived to the present day) and the evidence from the sermons studied would dispute the arguments of many historians who claim that the debate over predestination was confined to the universities and theological debates and did not concern the ordinary layperson.¹⁸⁷

Thomas Pierson was in no doubt that man's destiny was in the hands of God and was not influenced by the actions of the individual: 'saving grace to the soul is a supernatural

¹⁸⁶ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 62-63

¹⁸⁷ For a detailed discussion on the preaching of predestination and modern historiography on the subject, see Hunt, *The art of hearing*, chapter 7

gift of God, neither is it in the power of man of himself to get saving grace'¹⁸⁸ The argument that saving grace comes from God alone, and is not acquired by good works, is something that he returned to several times during his sermons and expositions: 'behold a great prerogative and privilege of all the godly that be true believers, for they have ever in themselves, though not of themselves but from the Lord; a comfortable ground of encouragement to go to God in prayer for any needful blessing: which is, beside his command and promise'¹⁸⁹

and:

the honourable title whereby God's people here be styled; namely, that they are his Saints... The reason and ground of this happy and honourable estate is in God alone... First, in God the father electing and choosing them to be holy... Secondly, in God the Son, redeeming them from sin ... Thirdly, in the work of the Holy ghost, applying the merit and power of Christs death unto them, for the abolishing of corruption, and the renewing of the graces of his holy image... Fourthly, in a work of all three persons vouchsafing unto them an effectual calling¹⁹⁰

Elsewhere, Pierson asserted that the election of God's chosen people happened before the world was made: 'God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the spirit'¹⁹¹ He also believed that those chosen by God to be his people were saved for all eternity and could never fall from his grace: 'man's being in the state of grace may be truly and certainly known. For regeneration or the new birth may be certainly known which is the unfailing foundation of the state of grace...God's children

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Pierson, 'David's Heart's desire: Or an exposition Of the 84. Psalm' in *EXCELLENT Encouragements AGAINST AFFLICTIONS; OR, Expositions of four select Psalms: the XXVII, LXXXIV, LXXXV, and LXXXVII*, (London, 1647) p. 48

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 67

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Pierson, 'The Churches Exercise under affliction. Or, an exposition of the LXXXV Psalm' in *EXCELLENT Encouragements AGAINST AFFLICTION*, p. 61-62

¹⁹¹ Thomas Pierson, 'The Great Charter Of The Church Containing, A Catalogue of gracious Privileges, granted unto it by the King of Heaven. Or, an exposition of the LXXXVII Psalm' in *EXCELLENT Encouragements AGAINST AFFLICTION*, p. 105

shall undoubtedly persevere in the state of grace. They that be endued with true faith and repentance, and other saving graces, shall never lose the same.¹⁹²

In his exposition of the eighty-seventh psalm, Pierson provided a neat summary of predestination that the Harleys would undoubtedly have recognised as being very similar, if not identical, to their own beliefs:

God, writing men's names in the book of life; and that is only God's good pleasure. According as he hath chosen us in him, before the beginning of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame, before him in love. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will... the state of the true members of God's Church, is for Gods special favour and life eternal most stable and firm: for God hath written their names amongst his people in the book of life, and accompts them for his own¹⁹³

Thomas Gataker also believed that man's destiny was in the hands of God alone, and he preached '*Gods saving Grace...in the same there is no choice but God's will alone*, and so our salvation dependeth on Gods free-favour and good pleasure only, not on man's merit.'¹⁹⁴ He repeated the same idea elsewhere, when he asserted that 'It is [God] alone that can give sweet comfort, and quietness, and contentment of mind, and this grace he vouchsafeth to none but his beloved, to the Godly that love him, and are beloved of him.'¹⁹⁵

The belief that salvation was a result of faith, not achieved through good works, was not necessarily a puritan trait as it was a dividing line between Catholics and Protestants,

¹⁹² *ibid*, pp. 108-109

¹⁹³ *ibid*, p. 124

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Gataker, *Of the nature and use of lots a treatise historical and theological*, (London, 1619), p. 148

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Gataker, 'True Contentment In The Gain Of Godliness, With its Self-Sufficiency. A Meditation on 1 TIMOTH. 6.6' in *Certain sermons, first preached, and after published at several times, by M. Thomas Gataker B. of D. and pastor at Rotherhithe. And now gathered together into one volume: the several texts and titles whereof are set down in the leafe following*, (London, 1637), p. 157

but to puritans like Gataker and the Harleys the saving faith was only available for those few that God had chosen before time began. Gataker argued that 'as Parents love their children, not so much for their wit or comeliness, or the like qualities, as because they are theirs; so doth God love his Children, even because they are his Children: yea had he not loved them before they had any good quality in them, for which he might affect them, they had never come to have any such.'¹⁹⁶ Here he was claiming that God's elect were not chosen because of their faith and their pious lives, rather these things were present in them only because God had chosen them to be his elect.

William Gouge agreed with Thomas Pierson that those who have been chosen by God cannot fall from his grace and he made this claim several times in his sermons and writings. In his commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews, he argued 'The Elect being effectually called, cannot in truth totally and finally fall away. This *Proviso* (*if it were possible*, Matth. 24. 24.) being interposed in the case of falling away, and that in reference to the Elect, showeth, that it is not possible, that the Elect should utterly be drawn from Christ'¹⁹⁷

He returned to the subject again on the next page, when he claimed 'The stability of God's Decree, *Whom God did predestinate, them he also led: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them glorified*, Rom. 8. 30. So as God will bring his Elect to glory. Therefore cannot finally fall.'¹⁹⁸ For Gouge, and many puritans like him, the elect were in God's grace forever and although they may sin and fall away from God, he would not let them fall entirely.

Elsewhere, Gouge criticised the Lutherans, who denied the certainty of election. In his exposition on the fifth chapter of John's Gospel, he described 'that gross error of the Lutherans, who say, that those who are Elect, may not only wholly, but finally fall away;

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Gataker, 'The joy of the just, with the signs of such, A discourse tending to the comfort of the dejected and afflicted and to the trial of sincerity' in *Certain Sermons*, p. 214

¹⁹⁷ William Gouge, *A learned and very useful commentary on the whole epistle to the Hebrews wherein every word and particle in the original is explained* (London, 1655), p. 363

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*, p. 364

an opinion strange, contradictory in it self, to be a chosen vessel, and to be damned, and contrary to the Scripture: it breaks in sunder that golden chain'¹⁹⁹

However, Gouge was quick to caution those who believed that they were part of God's chosen people not to take their election for granted: 'whereas many flee unto Predestination, that they need not use the means, seeing if God have elected them, they shall be saved; we must consider, that God, who chooseth us unto this end, hath ordained means to bring us unto it. Neither doth this use of the means withdraw our hearts from depending on the providence of God, but in a moderate use of them, our hearts are more lifted up to the consideration thereof.'²⁰⁰

He argued that the elect had to show their election through the things that they thought, did and said. Like Gataker, Gouge believed that piety was as a result of election, not a means of acquiring salvation.

it becomes us all, who account our selves to be in the number of God's elect, and to be given by him as sons to Christ; it becomes us every way to show our selves to be Christ's sons; even in our inward disposition, and also in our outward conversation: and thereupon to love him, and fear him: to reverence and obey him: in all things to please him and honour him, to depend on him for all needful good things, and to be content with that condition wherein he sets us, and with those gifts of soul, body or state, that he is pleased to bestow upon us. In a word, what duties soever in God's Word are required of sons as sons, we must conscionably perform to Christ, whose sons we are²⁰¹

Thomas Taylor's preaching on predestination indicates that he too shared a similar view on the doctrine. In his commentary on Paul's epistle to Titus, he wrote:

¹⁹⁹ William Gouge, *An exposition on the whole fifth chapter of S. John's Gospel also notes on other choice places of Scripture, taken by a reverend divine, now with God, and found in his study after his death, written with his own hand* (London, 1630), p. 66

²⁰⁰ *ibid*, p. 9

²⁰¹ William Gouge, *A learned and very useful commentary on the whole epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 181-182

that *eternal election* of God, which is according to grace; whereby of his good pleasure he chooseth from all eternity, out of all sorts of men, some to the certain fruition and fellowship of life eternal, and salvation by Christ... number of which is comparatively small, *for many are called but few chosen, a little flock, and a few* that have found the narrow way. These few, I say, are chosen, 1. from all eternity, for no new thing can fall into the prescience, and will of God. 2. they are chosen of his good pleasure, even before they have done good or evil. 3. and they are chosen to the certain fruition of life eternal, as being immutably elected.²⁰²

Again, election is argued to have taken place before time began, irrespective of the individual's action and is eternal.

Later in the same sermon, he used Jacob as an example of someone who was chosen by God to do good work, not because of the things he had done. 'If we look at God's *predestination and election*, the names are written in the book of life from everlasting: Jacob was loved, not only before he had done good, but before he was to do it.'²⁰³

He returned to the certainty of election elsewhere, when he claimed that 'this is promised the grace of perseverance, that it shall never be taken away. For as salvation is the happy part of the elect, which shall never be taken away; so neither shall this care to attain that end in the means, whereby the Lord preserveth it.'²⁰⁴

Just as William Gouge used the certainty of election to argue against the Lutherans, Taylor uses the same belief to argue against the Arminians: 'whereas the Arminians hold, that the Elect do persevere by a discontinued perseverance, and shall at length be

²⁰² Thomas Taylor, *A commentary upon the Epistle of S. Paul written to Titus. Preached in Cambridge by Thomas Taylor, and now published for the further use of the Church of God. With three short tables in the end for the easier finding of 1. doctrines, 2. observations, 3. questions contained in the same* (London, 1612), p. 12

²⁰³ *ibid*, p. 39

²⁰⁴ Thomas Taylor, *The progress of saints to full holiness described in sundry apostolical aphorisms, or short precepts tending to sanctification, with a sweet and divine prayer to attain the practise of those holy precepts* (London, 1630), p. 5

saved, though sin drive them quite out of the state of grace, and drive all grace away: We plainly affirm, that the Elect persevere in the state and habit of faith, by perseverance continued, and not interrupted; and in the act or exercise of faith sometimes discontinued, but after returns to it, and holds it on (though with combat) unto the end.²⁰⁵

Taylor uses the certainty of election to urge his auditors to do all they can to ensure that they are part of God's chosen elect. Like Gouge, he does not believe that the elect can be complacent and should do all they can to show that they are part of God's chosen people. 'Content not thy self to be well read and seen in the Scriptures, nor to shine in light of knowledge and pure doctrine, nor in seemly, sober and civil conversation, but labour especially to make thine own Election sure, for the dragon can cast down none of the elect, no not the weakest of them, whereas he prevaieth against strong Cedars of most excellent common graces, who are called to the means, but not of purpose.'²⁰⁶

It can be seen, therefore, that the Harley's belief in predestination, that is evident in the documents examined in Chapters One and Two, was reflected and supported by the preaching of ministers that were friends of the Harleys and who, by any definition, can be described as puritans. For them God's elect were a small minority who were chosen before time began to be his people. They were chosen not because of the pious lives that they would lead, but their piety was as a result of their election. God's elect were

²⁰⁵ Thomas Taylor, *The parable of the sower and of the seed Declaring in four several grounds, among other things: 1. How far an hypocrite may go in the way towards heaven, and wherein the sound Christian goeth beyond him. And 2. In the last and best ground, largely discourseth of a good heart, describing it by very many signs of it, digested into a familiar method: which of it self is an entire treatise. And also, 3. From the constant fruit of the good ground, justifieth the doctrine of the perseverance of saints: oppugneth the fifth article of the late Arminians; and shortly and plainly answereth their most colourable arguments and evasions.* (London, 1621), p. 424

²⁰⁶ Thomas Taylor, *Christ's victory over the dragon*, p. 236

assured of his saving grace because, as John Stoughton preached, 'the elect of God, whom he loved from all eternity, never fall from that love.'²⁰⁷

Iconoclasm was an important part of the Harleys' puritan beliefs and the ministers they befriended shared their hatred of idolatry. Thomas Pierson used his sermons to attack various Catholic practices, including transubstantiation, the belief that the bread and wine used during communion is transformed into the body and blood of Christ, as worshipping false idols. 'So we may say for idolaters, as Papists be, in the worship of Saints, and of their breaden God, they have another master then God, namely vain idols... Now none can serve two masters.'²⁰⁸ Pierson also criticised those who clung to the belief that saints and idols could help their prayers be heard by God, again linking the practise to Catholicism. 'Idolaters say to Saints and Idols, *hear us, help us, pray for us...* This we know is the common practise of Papists, to the Virgin *Mary*, and to all the Saints. But, herein they show themselves not to be God's people, but such, as have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out broken cisterns, that can hold no water.'²⁰⁹

When preaching before Parliament in 1644, Stanley Gower urged them to purge the country of the idolatry that he believed still remained, arguing that the reformation of the old religion had not gone far enough. 'You, (Right Honourable) have confessed justly, that the guilt of Idolatry and blood lay upon our fore-fathers; I may say of these... *we are not cleansed from it to this day...* God will have our Land made white from these'²¹⁰

Preaching some twenty years earlier, and at a more peaceful time, Thomas Gataker linked the reformation of 'Romish Idolatry' with the relative peace that the country had enjoyed in recent times. 'since *God's truth* and *Gospel* established with us, and that

²⁰⁷ John Stoughton, *The heavenly conversation and the natural man's condition In two treatises* (London, 1640), p. 170

²⁰⁸ Thomas Pierson, 'David's Heart', p. 34

²⁰⁹ Thomas Pierson, 'The Churches exercise under affliction', p. 29

²¹⁰ Stanley Gower, *Things Now-a-doing: Or, The Churches Travaile Of the Child of Reformation now-a-bearing. In a Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons, at their solemn Fast, July 31 1644* (London, 1644), p. 10

Romish Idolatry expelled from among us, this *land* of ours hath enjoyed the *quietest*, the *peaceablest*, the *most prosperous times*, that ever it did, for so long time together, at any time, that any memory of man, or record of story can be produced of.²¹¹ Gataker was preaching on the anniversary of the failed Spanish Armada and it is interesting that both Gower and Gataker linked the peace of the country, or lack thereof, with the relative presence of idolatry. Both men perhaps saw political danger or turmoil as a punishment from God for idolatrous practices.

To William Gouge, a Christian's relationship with God was like a marriage and so, idolatry, the worship of anything other than God was 'a spiritual *adultery*. For God is as an *husband* to his people that profess his name. As adultery therefore is the most capital crime that a wife can commit against an husband (thereby the matrimonial bond is broken) so idolatry against God. Idolaters choose other gods. So they give Gods highest honour to others. No marvel then that the fire of Gods jealousy is inflamed against them.'²¹² There was no greater crime against God, to Gouge, than idolatrous worship of images, objects or people that were not God himself. As such, Gouge saw it as one of the key roles of the ministry to protect the people from, and warn them against, idolatry, which, in 1630, he believed was starting to infiltrate the English church. 'For idolatry, though the bright light of the Gospel hath for many years dispelled the thick cloud of Popery, a detestable idolatry: yet in many places that cloud gathereth, and thickeneth again...Too many seducers are among us: too great countenance is given to them. We Ministers have need to inculcate this Apostolicall prohibition, *Flee from idolatry*.'²¹³

Gouge identified two forms of idolatry. The first was the use of images and other objects in worship. He argued that man was unable to represent God and so should not try to

²¹¹ Thomas Gataker, *An anniversary memorial of England's delivery from the Spanish invasion delivered in a sermon on Psal. 48. 7,8* (London, 1626), p. 19

²¹² William Gouge, *An exposition on the whole fifth chapter of S. John's Gospel*, p. 74

²¹³ *ibid*, p. 79

create his image. *'in Prayer we conceive no Image of God.* For whereunto can he, who is in heaven, be resembled? It cannot but much impair the surpassing excellency of God's glorious Majesty, to be likened to any creature: and that much more than if a great Monarch should be said to be like a toad, or viper. Oft and earnestly hath God forewarned his people to take heed thereof: and much contested against them for it. This one point of palpable idolatry, if there were no other, is enough to keep us from communion with Papists.²¹⁴

The second form of idolatry to Gouge was the use of practices in worship that were founded on human invention and not the word of Scripture, which he compares to paganism and irreligion. 'Those visible Churches which refuse to be governed by Christ's word, and are wholly governed by humane traditions, which rise against Christ and play the adulteresses by committing Idolatry, are not of this catholic Church which is *subject to Christ*. No more are Infidels that defy Christ, Heretics that deny him, ignorant persons that know not his will, profane persons that despise him, wordlings that lightly esteem him, nor any that persecute or scorn him in his members. By this we may see that many have a name that they are of the Church, who in deed are not.'²¹⁵ To Gouge, those who follow the human practices were no more part of the true church than those who dispute Christ's divinity.

Thomas Taylor also likened Papists and other idolaters with non-Christians in their lack of true faith. 'The Popish idolatry is as gross as ever was any: for they worship the wooden cross, and pieces of bread with religious worship: and why is Rome called Egypt, Sodom, Babylon, but because it is a source into which all heathenish idolatry runneth: and why is it called an habitation of devils? if any thing can be spoken worse of any

²¹⁴ William Gouge, *A guide to go to God: or, An explanation of the perfect pattern of prayer, the Lord's prayer* (London, 1626), p. 25

²¹⁵ William Gouge, *Of domestical duties eight treatises. I. An exposition of that part of Scripture out of which domestical duties are raised. ... VIII. Duties of masters* (London, 1622), pp. 41-42

heathenish idolatry, it shall not be the worst...Our danger is more from them, than any or all the heathen.²¹⁶

Elsewhere, Taylor argued that the truly godly could never bring themselves to use idols as part of their worship: 'much less can any godly man pray to dead things, to Images, stocks, and stones, to a piece of bread in the Masse, to Relics as bones and rags, and much less to the wooden Cross: all which directly overthrows the horrible Idolatry of the Church of Rome.'²¹⁷ However, like Stanley Gower and William Gouge, Taylor was concerned that some forms of idolatry were beginning to reappear in the English church: 'a secret infection poisoned a number of our travellers, who falling in love with Romish idolatry, have brought the fashion, and pattern, and workmanship of it over with them'²¹⁸

These quotations show that the Harleys' iconoclasm was a common trait amongst early Stuart puritans. Heavily associated with Catholicism, their hatred of idolatry encompassed the use of idols and objects for worship, praying to Mary and other saints as well as church practices that were considered to be human inventions, rather than based on Scripture.

The third pillar of the Harleys' 'brand' of puritanism to be discussed is the observance of private fasts and days of observation. In his sermon before Parliament, on the occasion of a fast day, Stanley Gower preached:

and the Lord says, what a do is here with fasting, *execute true judgement, &c.* else you fast not to him; look into the prisons if this fasting day be not a feasting day, and if they mock not God with something else than religious fasting on their *Friday*. Be *made white once more in your Zeal*, and sincerity to reform the

²¹⁶ Thomas Taylor, *A commentary upon the Epistle of S. Paul written to Titus.*, p. 719

²¹⁷ Thomas Taylor, *David's learning, or The way to true happiness in a commentary upon the 32. Psalm* (London, 1617), p. 218

²¹⁸ Thomas Taylor, *Christ's combat and conquest: or, The lion of the tribe of Judah vanquishing the roaring lion, assaulting him in three most fierce and hellish temptations. Expounded, and now (at the request of sundry persons) published for the common good* (Cambridge, 1618), p. 184

house of God by denying your selves and giving up thereto that which may make it glorious.²¹⁹

Gower believed that fasts should be observed for self-reflection, cleansing and to provide religious strength, not just as an outward show of piety.

Thomas Gataker believed that observing fasts was a prerequisite of being part of God's church and that 'he that observeth not *the Passover* in his due time, or that *humbleth not his soul* at the solemn time of *fast*, *that soul shall be cut off from among his people*'²²⁰

William Gouge saw fasting as an aid to prayer: 'In the best manner that thou canst, seek help of God. Humble thy Soul: sharpen thy prayer by fasting'²²¹ He also saw it as a way to show true repentance for sins: 'let us (my brethren) be admonished to repent: and as a fast is proclaimed, so let us keep it after a right manner, humiliation of soul, and contrition of spirit: renting our hearts, turning to the Lord: fasting from sin as well as from food.'²²² Gouge urged people to ensure that the fast was not just an outward sign of piety for show: 'this opportunity now at length offered for public humiliation by prayer and fasting: and what you outwardly make show of before men, do inwardly and effectually before God the searcher of hearts'²²³

When preaching before Parliament in 1648, Gouge went into detail about the reasons why fasts should be observed as part of religious life:

It's a means of quickening a dull spirit, and rousing up a drowsy body. Ye know that eating and drinking use to send vapours into the head which make a man drowsy in body, and heavy in spirit. Now fasting preventeth these impediments,

²¹⁹ Stanley Gower, *Things Now-a-doing*, pp. 23-24

²²⁰ Thomas Gataker, *A spark toward the kindling of sorrow for Sion A meditation on Amos 6. 6. Being the sum of a sermon preached at Sergeants Inn in Fleet-Street* (London, 1621), p. 9

²²¹ William Gouge, *A learned and very useful commentary on the whole epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 209

²²² William Gouge, *God's three arrows plague, famine, sword, in three treatises. I. A plaster for the plague. II. Dearths death. III. The Churches conquest over the sword* (London, 1631), pp. 13-14

²²³ *ibid*, p. 51

and thereupon putteth a kind of life into a man, and maketh him to pour out his spirit in prayer the more ardently.

2. It enableth a man to continue longer in his devotion. A man after eating and drinking cannot so long hold out in duties of piety as he that fasteth. Besides that time which useth to be spent in eating, drinking, and other refreshments and delights, is by fasting gained for prayer and other sacred duties. Well observe the most ardent and long continued supplications in Scripture, and you shall find them supported by fasting.

3. Fasting is a visible testification of our ardent prayer, and of our earnest desire to obtain that which we pray for: in that, by our voluntary abstaining from our bodily food and other delights of the body, we shew, that we prefer the thing that we pray for, before them. Yea fasting is not only a testification of our humiliation, but it is a means to humble the soul the more: for that is the use of outward rites, both to testify the inward disposition of the soul, and also to help it on the more.²²⁴

Thomas Taylor discussed how Biblical Law and Jewish tradition dictated that a yearly fast should be observed and he believed that a Christian, in addition to his daily private humiliation, should observe at least an annual day of fasting and contemplation of his and others' sins:

it [is] not amiss once a year to set apart a day of humiliation in serious fasting and prayer, to make atonement for our own and others' sins. The equity of which seems not only grounded in that Law, *Levit. 16. 29.* which enjoins the Jew a yearly standing fast, wherein once a year every soul should humble it self with fasting before the Lord in one of the great assemblies binds all unto it: But also

²²⁴ William Gouge, *The right way: or A direction for obtaining good success in a weighty enterprise. Set out in a sermon preached on the 12th of September, 1648. before the Lords on a day of humiliation for a blessing on a treaty between His Majesties and the Parliaments commissioners* (London, 1648), p. 5

in good reason, seeing a year's space might bring about many just occasions, 1. Many sins might be committed to provoke the Lord, 2. Many judgements let in, or to be let in for those sins, 3. Many mercies wanting, which by ours and others sins we are worthily deprived of. And although we ought continually to humble our selves for our sins; yet to help our infirmities, and to do it thoroughly, it shall avail us much, to set a special time apart for it, as such who out of sound judgement esteem we have sufficient cause once a year thus deeply to humble our selves. For howsoever the Jews had daily expiatory sacrifices, yet the Lord held it not superfluous to appoint them besides one set and solemn day of expiation. So is it no less needful for any Christian (notwithstanding his daily humiliation) to help himself in his repentance by one day in a year at least, of more solemn expiation.²²⁵

Taylor also recommended fasting as an aid to decision making, as it assisted with clarity of thought and brought the person observing the fast closer to God. He argued that Christ's example taught 'us, not rashly and headily to enter upon or undertake any calling, but by fasting and prayer to prepare our selves, who have more need of preparation than Christ had, and to get God's blessing on the same: but especially this concerns the Magistrate and Minister.'²²⁶ For those undertaking official duties, 'This example of Christ teacheth us of what great necessity this exercise fasting is, both for the entrance, & comfortable continuance of the duties of our calling, both general and special...Fasting in an holy and religious manner, helpeth forward graces that are necessary for our calling... If we want public or private benefits, fasting joined with prayer is the means wherein God will have them sought and obtained'²²⁷

²²⁵ Thomas Taylor, *Christ revealed: or The Old Testament explained A treatise of the types and shadows of our Saviour contained throughout the whole Scripture: all opened and made useful for the benefit of Gods Church* (London, 1635), p. 150

²²⁶ Thomas Taylor, *Christ's combat and conquest*, p. 50

²²⁷ *ibid*, p. 52

Like the Harleys, these puritan preachers considered private and public fasts and days of humiliation to be an integral part of a pious life. They were used to add brevity to prayer, for self-reflection and the repentance of sins and also to look for guidance from God.

The importance of the preaching role of the ministry was another belief that the ministers in question shared with the Harleys. Thomas Pierson linked the hearing of the word preached with the obtaining of the grace of God, and advised his readers to 'be frequent and diligent in those sacred ordinances, and religious services, wherein God begets, and increaseth grace in their hearts: which now are, the solemn parts of the Evangelicall ministry, in the word preached; sacraments reverently administered; and prayer with thanksgiving'²²⁸ Elsewhere, he made further links between preaching and man's salvation:

see here the great necessity of the faithful dispensation of the word in the preaching of it, unto man's true happiness; for without regeneration there is no salvation... And the word preached, is the means in which God works... Consider, that though God can convert without preaching, by his absolute power, yet he is pleased to work by this means. For, after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them, that believed²²⁹

Pierson was aware that there were those who criticised or mocked the puritans' love of the word preached, but in Pierson's eyes it was the critics who were mistaken. 'The world doth account God's children, for their zeal in following the preaching of the Word, brain-sick persons, giddy-headed, and such like. But the truth is, these censurers... mistake the place affected... they are sick indeed, yet not brain-sick, but heart-sick, sick of love... after Christ. Whereof they need not to be ashamed, for God the father loves

²²⁸ Thomas Pierson, 'David's triumph over death, Or an exposition on the XVII Psalm' in *EXCELLENT Encouragements AGAINST AFFLICTION*, p. 35

²²⁹ Thomas Pierson, 'The Great Charter Of The Church', p. 126

them, and Christ...Now it is no news that those that are in love should frequent the places, where they may meet with their beloved'²³⁰ Thomas Gataker agreed with Pierson that preaching, along with administering of the sacraments, were means of grace and salvation. In fact, he went as far as to say that the '*marks of a Church, to wit, preaching of true doctrine and a rightful administration of Sacraments*'²³¹ To him, a church that did not prioritise preaching was not a true church at all.

As discussed above, there were those in early Stuart England who believed that the hearing was the only true way to receive the word of God and William Gouge was one of them. He wrote at length on the subject in his exposition of the fifth chapter of John's Gospel:

hearing is a cause of knowledge, now knowledge and illumination are a ground of Faith...

Use. 1, For Ministers that they be faithful, diligent, and conscionable in preaching of the Word: for it there be no preaching, there can be no hearing...

2. For the people to stir them up to diligence to hearken and attend unto this Word when it is preached, &c.

The object of hearing is here said, to be the Word of Christ. Whence we learn²³²

Gouge pointed out that those who do not preach, or who preach to show their own learning and not to instruct the people, are not really members of God's church:

many among us, although they have an outward Calling, yet comes not in God's Name, in that they aim not at the edifying of the Church by preaching, but their

²³⁰ Thomas Pierson, 'David's Heart', pp. 15-16

²³¹ Thomas Gataker, *A discussion of the popish doctrine of transubstantiation* (London, 1624), p. 198

²³² William Gouge, *An exposition on the whole fifth chapter of S. John's Gospel*, pp. 47-48

own maintenance, ease and honour; or if they preach, they preach themselves to show learning, not for instruction of the people²³³

He argued that in areas where there has been little or no preaching, when someone starts to preach, the locals soon spread the word and encourage others to hear: 'for such places (as many in the country are) where the preaching of the Word is rare; that if happily a faithful Minister coming that way, be willing there to bestow his pains; one Neighbour do make it known to another, and encourage them to come'²³⁴

His advice to ministers was that they should be preachers, because preaching is a gift from God: 'Ministers must not be discouraged from preaching, but regard: First, that the Lord hath sent them. Secondly, The Talent that God hath bestowed upon them, which they must employ, if the Lord himself hinder them not. Thirdly, that there be some honest hearted hearers, and their good is to be respected'²³⁵ To support this argument, he uses the example of Jesus who, Gouge argues, 'Christ doth account this viz. Preaching his chief work: when they would have made him a judge, he refused it. And it codemneth the practise of many Ministers of the Word now a days, who busy themselves in other matters, who will be justices of peace, and decide controversies, &c. But regard Preaching least of all.'²³⁶

In his commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews, Gouge returned to the subject of preaching, which he described as '*Under the Gospel there is one only way of making known Gods will... That only way is preaching*'²³⁷ and '*The preaching of the Gospel is by Gods institution the power of God unto salvation.*'²³⁸ He again argued that preaching is 'the ordinary means of salvation...Preaching is a clear revelation of the Mystery of Salvation by a lawful Minister...Preaching being a means sanctified of God unto

²³³ *ibid*, p. 91

²³⁴ *ibid*, p. 139-140

²³⁵ *ibid*, p. 141

²³⁶ *ibid*, p. 161

²³⁷ William Gouge, *A learned and very useful commentary on the whole epistle to the Hebrews*, p.

29

²³⁸ *ibid*, p. 119

salvation, how diligent and faithful ought Ministers of the Gospel to be in preaching the same!... If this great salvation, the effect of preaching, were duly weighed, Ministers would be diligent in preaching, and people patient in hearing the same. For this is a strong motive to enforce the one and the other. Both preaching and hearing have need to be pressed upon men's consciences²³⁹

He offered advice and instruction for those who are to hear the word of God preached:

It is therefore our duty when the Word of God is preached,

- 1. To open the ears of our head; for they are the doors to let in God's Word. This is one main end why ears are given to us: and they cannot be better used.
- 2. So to heed the Word heard and meditate thereon, so as we may understand the mind of God therein. This is it which Christ requireth, *Matth. 15. 10*. For this end the Apostle prayeth for *the spirit of wisdom and revelation*, *Eph. 1. 17*. This grace is promised to the wise, but denied to the wicked, *Dan. 12. 10*.
- 3. Mix faith with hearing: else the word will lose its power. *For it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth*, *Rom. 1. 16*. God gives Preachers, *that men should hear the word and believe*, *Act. 15. 7*.
- 4. Add obedience: All blessing is annexed to this, *Luk. 11. 28*. This giveth evidence of our right understanding the Word and believing the same.

They who thus hear have hearing ears: such ears to hear as Christ requireth, *Matth. 13. 9*. *Rev. 2. 7*. And they who thus hear, will be kept from hardness of heart. This supposition, *If ye will hear*, and the consequence inferred thereupon, *harden not your hearts*, doth evidently demonstrate, that a right

²³⁹ *ibid*, p. 132

hearing will prevent hardness of heart: especially *hearing of Christs voice*, that is the Gospel. It is the Gospel that maketh and keepeth a soft heart.²⁴⁰

Thomas Taylor also agreed that preaching was a means of receiving salvation and grace: 'the evidence of the doctrine of salvation is to be sought and found in the preaching of the word.'²⁴¹ He described the preaching of the word as 'the greatest blessing that the Lord bestoweth upon any people'²⁴² Taylor acknowledged that some did not share the puritan zeal for hearing sermons when he included the following objection in his 1609 work *The beauties of Beth-el*:

Ob. But though it cannot be denied, but it is some-times good to go hear a Sermon: yet what need so much preaching? what, would men have vs Saints on earth? our fore-fathers (who we hope are well, and wish our selves no better) never were troubled with Sermons, and our selves have lived some thirty, forty, fifty, or sixty years in good case and credit, and yet were never so forward to run to Sermons; we hope to GOD we can learn to love God above all, and our neighbour as our selves, and pray to God, and carry good hearts to God-ward without all this a doe.'

Taylor was quick, however, to dismiss such objections to regular sermon attendance:

Answ. Can I believe any man that sayeth he seeth, when I see him shut his eyes? can I think that a man hath any true knowledge of God, who desireth not to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord JESUS CHRIST? How can I believe that that man is in earnest, or if he be that he is in his wits that shall thus plead against his life.'²⁴³

²⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp. 319-320

²⁴¹ Thomas Taylor, *A commentary upon the Epistle of S. Paul written to Titus*, p. 43

²⁴² *ibid*, p. 49

²⁴³ Thomas Taylor, *The beauties of Beth-el Containing: sundry reasons why every Christian ought to account one day in the courts of God, better than a thousand besides* (London, 1609), pp. 89-90

To Taylor, the idea that someone would not want to attend regular sermons, and thereby increase their own growth in grace, seemed ridiculous.

John Stoughton describes the power of preaching as 'like the sounding of Rams-horns...towards the shaking of the walls of *Jericho*.'²⁴⁴ He sees preaching as more important and more worthy than any earthly honours or riches: 'it is not Silks, nor Velvets, nor Scarlet, nor a goodly train (what do I speak of these) it is not Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor any dignities, that can make a man so truly honourable, as the preaching of the Gospel to poor souls, to be God's Ambassadors.'²⁴⁵

To these ministers, who were among the Harleys friends and who would undoubtedly have had an influence on the Harleys' religious beliefs, preaching was the most important of a minister's duties. Sermon attendance and contemplation were seen as a way of helping to receive God's grace and to understand God's word. For the preachers themselves, preaching was their way of transmitting the word of God to their flock and this was essential because, to puritan ministers like those being discussed, the word of God was the only arbiter of religious orthodoxy – a belief upon which the other pillars of the Harleys' 'brand' of puritanism was founded.

For Thomas Pierson, the word of God was the means to obtaining grace and faith. He wrote, 'Labour to get the grace of faith, for that is engrafting grace...Now the means of both these is word and prayer. The law prepares the heart for grace by the sight of sin, and by working humiliation for our sins...The Gospel is the word of his grace...and the blessing of the spirit is immortal...it is the word of faith, which is the spirit of faith...therefore the disciples by prayer sought faith of Christ.'²⁴⁶ In the same text, he went on to call the Word of God 'the seed of our new birth.'²⁴⁷ He repeated the idea of

²⁴⁴ John Stoughton, *XI. choice sermons preached upon selected occasions, in Cambridge. Viz. I. The preacher's dignity, and duty: in five sermons, upon 2. Corinth. 5. 20. II. Christ crucified, the tree of life: in six sermons, on 1. Corinth. 2. 2* (London, 1640), p. 38

²⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 99

²⁴⁶ Thomas Pierson, 'David's triumph over death', p. 6

²⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 14

the Word of God being the means of achieving faith and grace in another work. Anyone who claimed to be godly had to 'labour after holiness... For this cause we must exercise our selves in the word and prayer, the Lords ordinances sanctified to his elect for the beginning of holiness, and increase thereof in their souls.'²⁴⁸

To Pierson, strict adherence and observation of the word of God was the arbiter of true orthodoxy, because 'the way to become true members of Christ's Church, for sure title to God's special love, is humbly and reverently to receive the word of the covenant, and conscionably to yield obedience thereunto.'²⁴⁹ Pierson felt that those members of the true church would seek to study the word of God because 'the people, seeing the benefit is theirs, must conscionably exercise themselves in the same Christian duties, viz. hearing the Word, praying unto God, and a godly living. For the word, it is the seed, therefore receive it both morning and evening.'²⁵⁰ He urged his readers to search for their own assurance of election by diligent adherence of the word of God and saw both the Old and New Testaments as playing a part in this: 'this must stir up every one, to give all diligence, to get into the state of regeneration. It is indeed God's work, but ordinarily by his spirit, in the ministry of the word; both the law, to break up the fallow ground, and the Gospel, to cast in the feed of grace as before... We must therefore exercise our selves in this word, and pray for the word of the spirit, and so to use these ordinances, that we may have title to the work, and blessing of the spirit.'²⁵¹

Thomas Gataker was insistent on the role of Scripture in conferring religious orthodoxy: 'That which no *Scripture* enforceth upon us, that in matter of *Faith* we are not bound to believe For the *Scripture* is the *Rule* of our *Faith*'²⁵² and 'For upon the Word of God in

²⁴⁸ Thomas Pierson, 'The Churches Exercise under affliction', pp. 62-63

²⁴⁹ Thomas Pierson, 'The Great Charter Of The Church', p. 93

²⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 117

²⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 127

²⁵² Thomas Gataker, *A discussion of the popish doctrine of transubstantiation*, p. 1

Scripture... do I ground my Faith.²⁵³ Like Thomas Pierson, he also believed that election of God's chosen was conferred, or confirmed, by adherence to the Word of God: 'the belief of the truth either of the word of God in general, or of the Gospel in special, that Jesus Christ is the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, to be that Faith whereby we are said here to be justified.'²⁵⁴

To William Gouge, God's infallibility meant that the Word of God had to be respected as the truth and as the arbiter of religious orthodoxy and faith: 'the highest and soundest ground of truth, which is the word of God; for it is impossible for God to lie.'²⁵⁵ Gouge argued that anything that was not founded on the Scriptures was not valid and idolatrous: 'To make pretence of worship for which there is no warrant in the Word of God, savoureth...of intolerable insolency'²⁵⁶ and 'the Means, which is the Word of God: that sets forth the very Image of God, and *that which is pleasing and acceptable unto him*. This therefore must be set before us as a rule to conform our selves thereunto.'²⁵⁷

Like Pierson and Gataker, Gouge saw the Word of God as conferring godliness to those who followed it correctly: 'The Gospel only, and the preaching of it, is *the power of God to salvation*.'²⁵⁸ In his *Guide to God*, he expanded on these points: 'take more distinct notice of God in and by his word. The Scriptures are they that testify of God.'²⁵⁹ He compared God to an earthly king and explained the role of Scripture in his reign: 'The Word of God (which is that will of God that is here especially meant) is the Sceptre of his

²⁵³ Thomas Gataker, *An antidote against error concerning justification, or, The true notion of justification, and of justifying faith, cleared by the light of scripture, and solid reason* (London, 1670), p. 1

²⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 55

²⁵⁵ William Gouge, *A learned and very useful commentary on the whole epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 34

²⁵⁶ *ibid*, p. 150

²⁵⁷ *ibid*, p. 273

²⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. 403

²⁵⁹ William Gouge, *A guide to go to God*, p. 45

Kingdom, and the law thereof. All the Statutes and Ordinances of his Kingdom are comprised in his Word; they therefore that do it must needs be his best subjects.²⁶⁰

Again, he criticises those who follow doctrine other than can be found in Scripture:

It is derogatory to Gods honour and wisdom, and a degree of presumption...such are they as acknowledge and believe that the word of God is perfect, and yet think it no harm to have humane traditions added thereto: or that Christ only is able to save, and yet the help of Saints to do no harm: or that faith only is sufficient for justification, and yet no hurt to join works also with faith, in the office of Justifying a sinner, &c²⁶¹

and

That which Heretics, or other wicked men allege to justify any error in doctrine, or corruption in life, is only the bare letter of the Word, not the true sense thereof, and so not the word of God, but conceits of their own brain: for if all the Scriptures which they allege, be well sifted and thoroughly examined, we shall find them either mangled, or mingled, perverted or misapplied.²⁶²

In his commentary on the epistle of St Paul to Titus, Thomas Taylor describes the word of God as both the immortal seed wherof we are begotten to God; & that food, which daily preserveth us that we perish not²⁶³ and elsewhere he calls it 'the sentence and rule of righteousness.'²⁶⁴ He urges people to 'Acquaint thy self with the word of God, often read, repeated, preached, meditated, and conferred on: this is *the word of faith*, and every thing is fed and preserved by that whereof it is begotten; and the often hearing, reading, meditating, and conferring of it doth fixe and digest it, and makes it at

²⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 84

²⁶¹ William Gouge, *The whole-armor of God*, p. 120

²⁶² *ibid*, p. 331

²⁶³ Thomas Taylor, *A commentary upon the Epistle of S. Paul written to Titus*, p. 274

²⁶⁴ Thomas Taylor, *Christs combat and conquest*, p. 84

hand to comfort the weary hands and weak knees.²⁶⁵ The reason that he urges a familiarity with Scripture is that ‘the word of God is the law of God: now what is the use of a law, but to keep a man within the bounds of godly life? then he lives according to the law, when he sayeth, I must, or must not doe such a thing, because the Law willett me so: so he is a good Christian.’²⁶⁶

When arguing for the doctrine of predestination, John Stoughton uses the fact that it is based on the word of God as a proof of its truth: ‘if I speak this without the warrant of the Word of God, then say, if you will, that my tongue is noslander: but if I bring that to avouch so much as I have said of every unregenerate man; consider well whether I have not slandered them with a truth.’²⁶⁷ As with all the ministers discussed, Stoughton claimed that it was the word of God that should guide and rule men’s lives: ‘In a word, all must be regulated by the Word of God; that must be the rule of our actions, if we will perform right obedience²⁶⁸ and ‘the irrefragable authority of the word of God, upon which all divine truths must stand.’²⁶⁹ He also believed that orthodoxy was only to be found in Scripture: ‘There may be no words, no Doctrines, no principles delivered in the Church of God; but such as may be full of certain, and holy, and pious truths, such as are agreeable with truth, according to the word of God, according to the analogy of faith; that is the first, the soundness of truth.’²⁷⁰

It can be seen, therefore, that, like the Harleys, the ministers that have been discussed based their version of religious orthodoxy on the word of God and believed that Scripture could help the elect to confirm and to receive their saving grace.

The one pillar of the Harleys’ religious beliefs that does not occur regularly in the writings or sermons of these ministers is the one about which their own feelings and

²⁶⁵ *ibid*, p. 87

²⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 124

²⁶⁷ John Stoughton, *The heavenly conversation*, pp. 110-111

²⁶⁸ John Stoughton, *The righteous man’s plea to true happiness*, p. 128

²⁶⁹ John Stoughton, *XI. choice sermons preached upon selected occasions*, p. 30

²⁷⁰ John Stoughton, *A form of wholesome words, or, An introduction to the body of divinity in three sermons on 2 Timothy, I.13* (London, 1640), p. 34

beliefs are not obvious until the events of the 1640s; namely their attitude towards episcopacy and church government.

Of the six ministers discussed only two, Thomas Gataker and William Gouge, mention their attitudes to bishops or the role of episcopacy in the published sermons and writings that survive, and both documents, significantly, date from the 1650s. This may have been due to a fear of censure or reprisals or due to the fact that their own attitudes to episcopacy, like the Harleys', changed over time. The most likely explanation, however, is probably a combination of both of these reasons, as is evident in the quotations themselves.

Thomas Gataker mentions bishops, or his attitudes towards them, in two documents. The first is a rebuttal of accusations made against him by 'Lillies' in his 'Merlin or Pasquil for the year 1654.' Gataker claims that the accusation is:

He would, at least, have men believe that I was sometime *Prelatical*; but have of late turned my coat or my copy, and gaping after some fat gobbets of the *Bishops or Deans Lands, pretended to be a Presbyterian.*

Gataker is accused of supporting bishops until he was able to profit from their abolition, at which point he became a Presbyterian. This is something that he refutes strongly and his response gives an indication of his attitude to church government; and probably that of many other puritans like him.

For my judgment concerning *Church-Government*, it is the same still that ever it was, since I first began to enquire into matters of that nature. A duly bounded and well regulated *Prelacy* joined with a *Presbytery* one as *President, Superintendent* or *Moderator* (term him what you please,)... hath some *pre-eminence* above the rest, yet so, as that he doth nothing without joint consent of the rest. Such a manner of *Prelacy*, I say, I never durst, nor yet dare condemn....But such a *Prelatical power*, as was here constituted and exercised

among us, wherein *Bishops* and *Arch-deacons* were enabled and ordinarily used by their *Chancellors*, *Officials*, and *Surrogates*, mostly mere *Civilians*, assuming to them any sorry fellow in Orders to fit by, as a cipher or a shadow, to pass the highest and heaviest of all *Church-Censures*, besides *Civil Penalties* in their Purses, on the Persons both of Pastors and People, and for trifles and trivial things, mere matters of Ceremony, oft-times silence, suspend, and deprive, while scandalous, idle, or insufficient ones, were little regarded or looked after; Visitations being by either usually held once only in a year, and then rather of Course and Custom, or to receive Procurations, then to any effectual Reformation of ought. Such a Prelatical power so constituted, and so executed, I never could effect or approve; and truly much less, when I came to see the manner of it, which I had heard too much of before, when living so long in a *Pastoral Charge*, I never in all my time saw the face of a *Bishop* personally present in Court, or Arch-deacon but once, (though both constantly exacting Fees of us.) And observed, how things were shuffled up, when Presentments were made, and in that manner managed; without any course taken to bring any Delinquent, to a serious sight of, or sincere sorrow for his sin; that their Visitations might well be deemed to be held, as one anciently complained.²⁷¹

Gataker was clearly happy to support an episcopacy that worked alongside some form of lay council to exercise the church government. However he believed that the model of episcopacy that had been present in early Stuart England was abused by overbearing '*Chancellors*, *Officials*, and *Surrogates*', who used the threat of the bishops and other members of the church hierarchy to punish those crimes that were most profitable and,

²⁷¹ Thomas Gataker, *A discourse apologetical; wherein Lilies lewd and loud lies in his Merlin or Pasquil for the year 1654. are clearly laid open; his shameful desertion of his own cause is further discovered; his shameless slanders fully refuted; and his malicious and murderous mind, inciting to a general massacre of God's ministers, from his own pen, evidently evinced. Together with an advertisement concerning two allegations produced in the close of his postscript. And a postscript concerning an epistle dedicatory of one J. Gadburie. By Tho. Gataker B.D. autor [sic] of the annotations on Jer. 10.2 and of the vindication of them* (London, 1654), pp. 24-25

in the process, ignore the real discretions and neglect the necessary reform of the church. As he said in his last will and testament, 'To the intent the world may take notice, I was never so great an Enemy to the persons, as I was to the function of Bishops.'²⁷²

William Gouge also attacks the power of the bishops, rather than the role itself. In his commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews, he wrote:

sundry Bishops and others that pretend to be Christs Vicars, are far from performing that which Christ did in this kind: and many that lay claim to *Peters* Keyes, are far from observing the advice which he, for the right use of them, thus gave; *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly: not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: Neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*, 1 Pet. 5. 2, 3. Many took more Lordship upon them over Gods flock, then Christ the true Lord did while he was on earth; yet it was he that brought this great salvation.²⁷³

It is significant that both of these men were writing in the 1650s, when their comments would have been much safer politically than ten or fifteen years previously. It is evident from the letters that Stanley Gower wrote to Sir Robert Harley that as events unfolded in the House of Commons regarding the 'Root and Branch' Bill, his own criticism of the bishops became bolder and bolder.²⁷⁴ As will be shown in Chapter Five, this increasing hostility to the bishops and the role of the episcopate was mirrored in Lady Brilliana's letters to her husband too.

²⁷² Thomas Gataker, *The last will and testament of Thomas Gataker (B.D., author of the Annotations on Jeremy 10. ver. 2 and the Vindications of them, as also of the new-come out discourse apologetical) : wherein is showed the manner and order of the disposing of his estate, with the certain legacies given to friends, together with the manner of burial of his aged corps without superficial rites or ceremonies*, (London, 1654) p. 40

²⁷³ William Gouge, *A learned and very useful commentary on the whole epistle to the Hebrews*, p.

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²⁷⁴ See Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 45, 105-108, 110-111 and 114

It can be seen therefore, that the pillars of the Harleys' 'brand' of puritanism that have been established in the previous two chapters were shared by the six ministers discussed, who were part of the Harleys' circle of fellow puritans. Like the Harleys, these men believed in the doctrine of predestination, observed private fasts and humiliations, had a strong iconoclasm, they believed that the primary function of a minister was the preaching of the word of God and they had a mistrust of the church hierarchy, that probably increased during the political turmoil of the 1640s; all of which was built on the firm belief that the word of God, as found in Scripture, was a means of assuring salvation and the only source of religious orthodoxy. The final two chapters of this thesis will discuss how these beliefs shaped the two main areas of the Harleys' lives; the public life of Sir Robert as a leading Member of Parliament and the private life at their home in Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire.

Chapter Four – Public puritanism; the political life of Sir Robert Harley

Having established the key elements of the Harleys' puritan beliefs, and the influences behind them, attention will now turn to the political career of Sir Robert Harley. It is here that the distinction, or lack thereof, between the public and private nature of the Harleys' religious life will be examined. This chapter will examine Sir Robert's time serving in various Jacobean and Caroline parliaments. It will be argued that early in his political career his politics were guided by the patronage of his father-in-law, Viscount Conway, but that the influences of his religious beliefs were never far away. In later parliaments, particularly the Long Parliament, Sir Robert's religious zeal came much more to the fore and his speeches and involvement in various committees were heavily influenced by the key puritan beliefs that have been examined in earlier chapters.

For those involved in politics in Early Modern England, the 'principles which were expected to guide the service of the commonwealth and country' could be divided between two elements which were seen by many as diametrically opposed; the public and the private. Private gain and profit were legitimate concerns, but they 'could have no place when it came to the work of the magistrate' as they signified what was 'selfish, corrupt, even tyrannical.' Public interests, on the other hand, 'embraced the common good of the 'country' and the duty of every good citizen to serve it unselfishly.'²⁷⁵

A belief in the public good, and the associated terminology of commonwealth, country and patriot, was derived from the humanist readings of the classical authors, particularly the Stoics: Quintilian, Plutarch, Sallust, Seneca and, above all, Cicero. However, there was also a religious element, as 'many of the same themes were highlighted in the Calvinist readings of the scripture.' Many Calvinist ministers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw public service as a magistrate or Member of Parliament as a religious vocation to do good for the sake of the whole country. To many Calvinists,

²⁷⁵ Richard Cust, 'The 'public man' in late Tudor and Early Stuart England', in Peter Lake and Steve Pincus (eds), *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England*, (Manchester, 2007). p. 121

the 'public man' was not just 'a virtuous bulwark against corruption and tyranny; he was also the spearhead of a godly crusade.' A godly gentleman could only 'validate his personal claim to be numbered among God's elect saints' if he performed his political duties in a manner that responded to divine expectations. 'In the final analysis, it was only the man who had planted in him 'the right roote, faith in Christ' who could be relied upon to 'take to heart the good of the country.'²⁷⁶ For Sir Robert Harley, however, it could be argued that there was no distinction between the private and the public. His own 'private' religious beliefs compelled him towards a 'public' life that sought to bring about further reform in the church. To Sir Robert, there was no clash of interests involved as it was the push for religious reform that dominated both his private worship and his public politics.

The emergence of the early modern public sphere has been pushed back in recent scholarship from the Enlightenment period to the Civil War and even as far back as the Early Stuart and Elizabethan periods. Public political discourse, both from the opponents of the Government of the time and from the regime itself, was 'no longer perceived as episodic, but had come to be seen by many as unavoidable, even to some as normal.'²⁷⁷ As a result, the existence of a variety of public spheres tells a 'dialectically coherent story of cumulative change that runs from the later sixteenth century through the eighteenth century' and the changing nature of politics, and the expanding of the political nation, can be seen as a cause of the outbreak of war and even the form that the war would take.²⁷⁸ This development of the notion of a public sphere allows religious conflict to be seen as 'a major motor for political conflict and change.'²⁷⁹ It will be shown that for Sir Robert, this was undoubtedly the case as his religious and political beliefs combined in his public life.

²⁷⁶ *ibid*, pp. 123-125

²⁷⁷ Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, 'Rethinking the public sphere in Early Modern England' in Lake and Pincus (eds.)

²⁷⁸ *ibid*, pp. 15 & 9

²⁷⁹ *ibid*, p. 3

The Harley family papers do not contain very much evidence of Sir Robert's opinions on national politics during the 1620s and early 1630s, certainly not as much as there is for the period 1638-1643, but what is there can be supplemented by the reports of his speeches in Parliament. These speeches demonstrate that his 'antipathy towards Arminians and Catholics in England was the counterpoint of his sympathy for the reformed churches abroad.' Despite his outspokenness regarding religious matters, Harley was rarely directly critical of Royal policies and this is probably down to his relationship with his new father-in-law, Viscount Conway. 'His relationship with Secretary Conway undoubtedly restrained Harley from direct political opposition in these years.'²⁸⁰

Sir Robert's first period in Parliament was between 1604 and 1610 as the burgess for the borough of Radnor. As a new member of the House, his first sitting in Parliament was 'not overly distinguished.'²⁸¹ He was, however, keenly interested in the main topics of the day; he was appointed on the committee that met with the House of Lords to discuss the proposed union between England and Scotland and spoke in a debate on the Great Contract on 20th July 1610.²⁸²

Sir Robert was not returned for the Parliaments of 1614 and 1621, due to strong competition for the available seats. He was, however, involved in the selection of candidates for the 1621 election. A letter amongst his personal papers, written towards the end of 1620, was circulated among the gentry of Herefordshire asking them to delay choosing candidates for the county seats 'till we shall meet to deliberate and resolve of the fittest for that service, wherein I desire that neither faction nor affection, but discretion and true understanding may point us out the men.'²⁸³ As the letter suggests, the election of a candidate was not decided at the polls, but was a result of the

²⁸⁰ Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads* p. 71

²⁸¹ *ibid*, p.73

²⁸² *Journal of the House of Commons*, 172 & 453

²⁸³ T. T Lewis (Ed.), *The Letters of the lady Brilliana Harley* xliii-xliv

negotiations between the most influential members of the county community. It was normal for candidates for each seat to stand unopposed so that 'the public rejection of one or more candidates and subsequent loss of esteem for those who had failed to be returned' was avoided.²⁸⁴ For Sir Robert, the 'fittest' for public service would undoubtedly have meant someone whom he considered to 'godly'; however the lack of many 'godly' gentry in Herefordshire would have probably resulted in him having to accept someone whose religious beliefs were different to his own, as at this point in his career he lacked the prestige to challenge the predominance of the Croft, Coningsby and Scudamore families. Sir Robert would still have been keen to be involved in the selection procedure, as this was a means of helping his selection prospects in the future.

In 1624, Sir Robert was able to break the hegemony of the major Herefordshire families and was elected to Parliament as the junior knight for the county, with Sir John Scudamore as his senior partner. There are several possible reasons for this sudden upturn in Sir Robert's fortunes. The first is the 'much publicised' conversion of Sir Herbert Croft to Catholicism and the others are linked to Sir Robert's marriage to Brilliana Conway in 1623. Following their marriage, Sir Robert's father passed over full control of the Brampton Bryan estate to his son, resulting in Sir Robert becoming one of the wealthiest gentlemen in the county. The marriage also gave Sir Robert a powerful court patron in Viscount Conway and this will, no doubt, have increased his prestige in Herefordshire, although there is no evidence that Conway intervened directly in the election. Despite this increase in influence, Sir Robert was not returned for the Parliament of 1625, but was elected as senior knight for Herefordshire for the first time in 1626. In 1628, he represented the borough of Evesham in Worcestershire and there is evidence that his father-in-law, who had represented the borough himself in 1621 and 1624, was directly involved in Sir Robert's selection.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 73

²⁸⁵ *ibid*, p. 75

There can be no doubt that Sir Robert's new family connections had an impact on his political career during the 1620s, when he became 'more confidently a 'Parliament man''. In 1626, his connection to the court was probably an influencing factor in his being appointed as Master of the Mint. Sir Robert acted as Secretary Conway's 'aide in the Commons' while he was with the King and unable to attend the house. A letter from Conway to Sir Robert, dated 29th April 1624, asks him 'I pray you, if you be upon any royal points in Parliament, or have passed any, either concerning the subsidies or otherwise, to give me an account thereof, that I may labour to dispose humours and make answers as shall be most requisite.' Clearly, Conway looked to Sir Robert to keep him abreast of any Parliament business relating to the King, so that he could respond to it. The back of the letter has Harley's reply and he notes, first, the insertion of the names of the council of the war in the subsidy act, secondly, that the session should not end before the passage of 'our good bills' and, finally, that the House desired the expedition of a proclamation to banish Jesuits.²⁸⁶

The close relationship between Sir Robert and Conway was noticed by contemporaries and Sir Robert was approached on several occasions to put in a word with his patron. In 1624, the Cheshire puritan, John Bruen, asked Harley to persuade Conway to present a petition to the king on behalf of two Cheshire justices who had been affronted because of their zeal 'for the reformation of profanations.' As has already been shown in Chapter One, Sir Robert was also approached on behalf of Stephen Dennison to assist in the dedication of his book to the King.²⁸⁷

Conway's elevation to the peerage in 1625 resulted in him needing Sir Robert's reports of the business of the Commons even more. It was after this, that Sir Robert felt compelled to shield Conway's patron, the Duke of Buckingham, from impeachment in 1626 and parliamentary censure in 1628. Sir Robert was 'one of Buckingham's most

²⁸⁶ Conway to Harley, 29th April 1624, BL Loan Add Mss 7001:Vol 1 (29/202) ff.122r, 123v

²⁸⁷ John Bruen to Harley, 10th September 1624, BL Loan Add Mss 7001: Vol 1 (29/202) f. 138r and Sir Henry Marten to Harley, 11th April 1627, BL Loan Add Mss 7001: Vol 1 (29/202)

energetic defenders' in the House of Commons and opposed the critics of the Duke, led by a former favourite of his, Sir John Eliot. Sir Robert tried to divert attention away from the Duke by arguing that a more pressing matter was the danger of Catholics, both home and abroad. However his words were 'ambiguous and barbed' and suggest that Harley was critical of the conduct of the King's court and his speech suggested that 'Buckingham could only be protected if he was able to prosecute the war successfully.'²⁸⁸ Sir Robert's support for Buckingham was never totally unguarded and was probably a result of both his loyalty to Conway and, perhaps more significantly, the Duke's support for war to recover the Palatinate. Sir Robert's support of the war was 'dictated almost entirely by his religious convictions',²⁸⁹ as he saw it as a defence of English Protestantism against a religious enemy. When the joint committee of the two Houses drew up a list of the reasons for ceasing diplomatic relations with Spain, Sir Robert bemoaned that religion was not included: 'the main thing left out – the maintenance of our religion at home.'²⁹⁰ Despite his loyalty to his new father-in-law, Sir Robert felt able to speak his mind in Parliament and his religious beliefs appear to have been a guiding factor in his speeches.

Throughout the 1620s, Sir Robert's speeches exposed his deeply felt anti-Catholicism, which, in turn, led to him criticising the English Arminians in 1628 and 1629. During the debates in Parliament over whether England should join the war against Catholic Spain, Sir Robert drew attention to the danger of home grown Catholicism, which, as a Member of Parliament during the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, he was well aware of:

Sir Robert Harley moves consideration of our foreign enemies to be great, but those at home much more, who lie in our bosoms are not distinguished or know of us, but are familiar and conversant in all companies and councils; shews that it is impossible that the King can break off the treaty of the marriage and

²⁸⁸ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 76-77

²⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 78

²⁹⁰ *Journals of the House of Commons*, 729

continue that for the Palatinate, that it must join with the other, and that the care and ease of the King's grandchildren does not concern us chiefly; that it is high time to make sure with the Hollander, who wants not offers and will assuredly join with support and friends elsewhere, if they should be still made jealous of us by continuing the treaties, either of them.²⁹¹

Anti-popery in the early Stuart Period was a fluid and ambiguous construct that could mean different things to different people – and, indeed, could mean different things to the same people at different times. At its heart was the issue of binary opposites – Catholics were portrayed as the other that exemplified everything that Protestants were not and so it is often a more useful tool to examine the latter than the former. Across Sir Robert's political career, as was the case with many puritans, the focus of his anti-popery switched from the foreign threat of invasion and forced conversion to the political and religious advisers to the King. The usefulness of linking members of the court and government to popery was two-fold. First, it struck a chord with the general public, who could be rallied against the common enemy of Catholicism. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, it allowed Parliament to criticise the political and religious policies of the king without blaming him personally. In this sense, Sir Robert's anti-popery can be seen as more than just a prejudice; it was a real and relevant concern that he was able to adapt and manipulate to his own ends.²⁹²

Sir Robert became something of an unofficial spokesman for the House of Commons on religious matters; along with other members such as John Pym and Sir Robert Phelps. At the beginning of April 1624, Sir Robert gave a speech in the House against Catholics: 'that the recusants may be disarmed and confined, that Jesuits and all seminaries to be

²⁹¹ Transcript of the 1624 Parliamentary Diary of Sir William Spring, Yale Centre for Parliamentary History, 1st March 1624

²⁹² For more on the nature and relevance of anti-popery, see Peter Lake, 'Anti-popery: the structure of a prejudice' in, Richard Cust & Ann Hughes (eds), *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in religion and politics, 1603 – 1642*, (London, 1989) and 'Anti-puritanism: The Structure of a prejudice' in, Peter Lake and Kenneth Fincham, *Religious politics in Post-Reformation England*

banished and the receivers of them to be had under the law. For such as resort to ambassadors, that the law may be inflicted upon them not only in this, but that their revenues be employed for the wars.²⁹³ Most of the points raised by Sir Robert were included in a petition from the House to King James on 23rd April of that year.²⁹⁴

The next Parliament in which Sir Robert sat, in 1626, saw the beginning of his attacks on the growth of Arminianism. He joined the Commons' attempts to suppress the writings of Richard Montagu and suggested that the King should ban Montagu from publishing while he was being investigated by the House.²⁹⁵ Two years later, Harley added the names of four more Arminian theologians to the list of writers whose works should be examined:

I will add another to Montagu, no less dangerous. 'Tis one Dr Jackson. They would introduce popery. They pretend they are the reformed religion and Church of England. They do introduce a supremacy. They are possessed of churches amongst us. The new way is to bring in popery. Let there be a committee named to consider of the books of Cosin, Sibthorpe and Mainwaring.²⁹⁶

The concerns that there may be a change in the established church were 'linked to the spectre of arbitrary government in debates in the House', coinciding as it did with the Petition of Rights, in May 1628, which was an attempt to address the forced loan. The King's response to the Petition was not to the liking of the Commons and a Remonstrance was presented to the King some weeks later. This linked 'subversion of religion' with 'innovation and change in government.' On 6th June, Sir Robert pushed for

²⁹³ Transcript of the 1624 Parliamentary Diary of Sir William Spring, Yale Centre for Parliamentary History,, 2nd April 1624

²⁹⁴ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 80

²⁹⁵ *ibid*, p. 81

²⁹⁶ R.C. Johnson, M.F. Keeler, M. Jansson Cole and W. B. Bidwell (eds.), *Proceedings in Parliament, 1628*, Volume II, (New Haven, 1978), p. 86

the Remonstrance to proceed and listed the heads of grievances that had been debated the day before:

yesterday we collected diverse heads and named a subcommittee. Moved to have those heads read and, where we like not, we may alter. The heads: for fear of

- 1 Innovations of religion
- 2 Innovation of government
- 3 Disasters in all our designs abroad
- 4 Causes of all these.²⁹⁷

It is telling of Sir Robert's priorities that he listed the innovations of religion before those of government. The attack on the Arminians was ignored by the King and three of the ministers who were named by Sir Robert were awarded pardons and new livings, or in the case of Montagu appointed Bishop of Chichester, when Parliament ended at the end of June, in what can be interpreted as an act of defiance by Charles.²⁹⁸

The following year, Parliament renewed its attack on the Arminians and Sir Robert was heavily involved. At the beginning of the session, he called for 'a public declaration by the Commons of their religion and a Remonstrance to be presented to the King asking once again for the punishment of the Arminian apologists.'²⁹⁹

It was during this debate that Sir Robert's comments give a picture of what he considered to be true religion. He describes 'our religion' as comprising 'the articles made in Queen Elizabeth's time, the articles made in Lambeth, the articles in Ireland. King James also by his wisdom and pen in the Synod of Dort being solely guided by our example.'³⁰⁰ The various articles mentioned by Sir Robert were not officially adopted by

²⁹⁷ Johnson *et al*, *proceedings in Parliament, 1628*, Volume IV, pp. 311-317

²⁹⁸ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 83

²⁹⁹ *ibid*, p. 83

³⁰⁰ W. Notestein and R. H. Relf (eds.), *Commons Debates for 1629*, (Minneapolis, 1921), p. 116

the Church and supported the Calvinist interpretation of predestination much more strongly than the 39 Articles. This illustrates the fact that the Elizabethan Settlement was unstable and labile and that individuals like Sir Robert could pick and choose the elements that they supported and ignore the rest. However, the fact that Sir Robert's description of 'our' religion was adopted by resolutions drawn up by a sub-committee for religion on 24th February 1624 is a clear indication that his views on religion were approved of by many members of the House.³⁰¹ The protestations and declarations made by Sir Robert and the rest of the Commons was to come to nothing, however, as Parliament was dissolved just a week later and would not meet again for eleven years.

Sir Robert Harley's early political career, then, can be seen as one that was influenced by two main factors. The first was his relationship with his father-in-law, Viscount Conway. He acted as Conway's eyes and ears in the House when he was either away on business with the King or, after 1624, a Member of the House of Lords. Sir Robert felt loyalty to Conway and this led him to argue against the opposition to the Duke of Buckingham, despite the fact that he probably disapproved of most of what the Duke stood for. The second major influence was Sir Robert's own religious beliefs. These helped him to see some common ground between him and Buckingham, with regards the war to recover the Palatinate, but were much more visible in his pronouncements against Catholics and Arminians. It would be these religious beliefs that would drive Sir Robert in the Parliaments of the 1640s, when he was free from any restraints that the ties of patronage may have put on him.

The period of the Personal Rule saw the links between Sir Robert and the King's court disappear. Viscount Conway, his main link to the court, died in 1631. Four years later, in 1635, Sir Robert was removed from his office as master of the Mint. It is here that Sir Robert's religious sympathies had a negative effect on his political career. He believed that his removal from office was due to the fact that he had accompanied the puritan

³⁰¹ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 83

preacher John Stoughton before the High Commission and visited another preacher, John Workman, at the Gatehouse prison. A document found amongst Sir Robert's papers states:

in the tenth year of the King, Sir Robert Harley, falling under disfavour of those who were then powerful at court, especially the late Bishop of Canterbury, and as Sir Robert conceives, for that he did appear in the High Commission court at Lambeth with Doctor Stoughton, preacher at Aldermanbury, London, and for entertaining Mr Workman, preacher at Gloucester, into his house, and visiting him in the Gatehouse where he was imprisoned by sentence of the said High Commission court a *scire facias* was brought against Sir Robert Harley's patent by Mr Noy, then Attorney-General.³⁰²

Clearly Sir Robert believed that his association with such nonconformists had upset some influential people, including Laud himself. Sir Robert's attitudes towards the King and his court changed immensely over the course of the 1630s, so much so that by the end of the decade he 'clearly no longer identified himself with the court and its interests.'³⁰³

Although not able to be directly involved in the national politics during the Personal Rule, Sir Robert was still heavily involved in the local politics of Herefordshire. He served time as a magistrate and a Justice of the Peace during this period and was involved with the opposition to collect extra-parliamentary revenue, including, from 1634 onwards, ship money.³⁰⁴

Despite not being personally involved, Sir Robert remained intensely interested in the national politics of the 1630s and his religious beliefs can be shown to have influenced his opinions on one event in particular; namely the war against the Scots that began in

³⁰² 'The State of Sir Robert Harley's case...', BL Loan Add MSS 70107, (29/122), Vol CVII

³⁰³ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 84

³⁰⁴ *ibid*, pp. 85-89

1637. The war 'provoked disapproval' against the King because it was seen by many as 'aggression against a fellow protestant nation.'³⁰⁵ In May 1628, Sir Robert had described the Scots as 'our brethren in Scotland' in the House of Commons and he clearly saw them as kindred spirits in terms of religion.³⁰⁶ War against a fellow protestant nation was in direct opposition of the foreign policy that was advocated by Sir Robert, who saw 'continental politics as the outcome of the battle between the true Church on one hand and its foes on the other.'³⁰⁷ In 1633, the Harleys prayed for 'a worthy general to succeed the King of Sweden' after the death of Gustavus Adolphus at the battle of Lutzen and also hoped for the conversion of the King of France. The lists of things to be prayed for are in Sir Robert's hand and they give a clear indication that the Harleys viewed the preservation of the reformed church as one of the key outcomes of national and international politics.³⁰⁸ Also amongst the Harleys' papers is a copy of one of the Scottish manifestos that the King tried to have suppressed in England. The manifesto, entitled 'an information to all good Christians within the Kingdom of England from the noblemen, barons, burroughs, ministers and the Kingdom of Scotland for understanding their intentions and actions from the unjust calumnies of their enemies', had been printed in Edinburgh but was circulated in manuscript form in England to avoid the ban on publication. It dwelt in 'detail on the Arminian innovation taking place in England and accused the Arminian clergy of subverting the government in England.'³⁰⁹

we regret together with our dear christian brethren of our neighbour nation that we should have so evident and sensible experience of the dangerous plots set a foot and entertained by the churchmen of greatest power in England, for introducing innovations in religion, by corrupting the doctrine, changing the discipline, daily innovating the eternal worship of God, pressing publicly and

³⁰⁵ *ibid*, p. 88

³⁰⁶ Johnson *et al*, *proceedings in Parliament, 1628*, Volume III, pp. 58-9

³⁰⁷ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 88

³⁰⁸ List of prayers dated 22nd February 1632/33 and 12th April 1633, BL Loan 29/27 part 1

³⁰⁹ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 91-92

maintaining points of Arminianism and heads of popery, defending and advocating preachers and professors of that judgement and allowing books stuffed with that doctrine. Fining, confining and banishing all such as in conscience of their duty to God labour to oppose the doctrine, discipline, or worship of the Church of Rome, by their encroaching and usurping upon his majesty's prerogative, tyrannising over the consciences, goods, and estates of persons of all qualities of that kingdom.³¹⁰

The linking of Arminianism and Catholicism in the manifesto would have struck a chord with Sir Robert who had done the same in his speeches in the House of Commons during the late 1620s. He would have seen the writers of the manifesto, and all of the Scots who opposed Charles's introduction of the Book of Common Prayer in Scotland, as fellow defenders of the true reformed church.

During the 1630s and Sir Robert's enforced absence from London and his fellow MPs, the circulation and availability of news became of huge importance. Both he and Lady Brilliana were keen to hear the latest developments and they were able to obtain information in a variety of ways. As well as word of mouth, they obtained printed news sheets, known as corantoes, which 'dealt mainly with foreign news and which had first appeared in England in the early 1620s.' They were, however suppressed by the Privy Council in 1632 and would not reappear until December 1638. Press censorship during the Early Stuart period has been the subject of much discussion among historians.³¹¹ The picture that emerges is one of a change in approach and attitudes across the decades leading up to the outbreak of war. In the 1620s, the two sides of the religious and political debates attempted to censor each other in an attempt to claim control of the

³¹⁰ 'An Information to all Good Christians', BL Loan Add Mss 70082, Vol LXXXII (29/ 46/30)

³¹¹ See, among others, Anthony Milton, 'Licensing, censorship and religious orthodoxy in Early Stuart England', *The Historical Journal*, (41:3, 1998); Richard Cust, 'News and politics in early Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, (112, 1986); S. Lambert, 'State control of the press in theory and practise: the role of the Stationers' Company before 1640' in R Myers and M Harris (eds), *Censorship and control of print in England and France, 1600-1910*, (Winchester, 1992)

output of the press. The success, or failure, of an attempt to publish a religious or political text depending very much on to which licenser it was given to authorise. The censorship of the 1620s was neither stringent nor impotent, but, depending on circumstance and individual, could lie anywhere in between.³¹² In the 1630s, censorship became much more targeted, as the rival religious groups attempted to 'provide rival versions of the doctrinal orthodoxy of the Church of England.' To the Laudians, the more moderate Calvinists, who tried to challenge the perception that objections to the direction the English Church was taking were the 'preserve of an oppositionist radical fringe', and who tried to 'keep within the orbit of the established, orthodox Church of England the very same puritans whom the Laudians were trying to eject from it', were much more dangerous than the more radical writers, because they challenged the very orthodoxy of the Laudian regime.³¹³ This accounts for the fact that not all texts or writers who expressed Calvinist or puritan views were suppressed; only those considered to be most of a threat to the Laudian picture of orthodoxy. There was also an attempt to indirectly censor Calvinist writers like John Prideaux, a regius professor at Oxford University, by publishing them in such a way that they seemed to support, and therefore provide orthodoxy to, Laud's ideas. Calvinists were even selected to license books that they fundamentally disagreed with, which they did under duress, in order to taint their names among their fellow Calvinists.³¹⁴

To avoid any official censorship that was encountered by printed sources, much information was circulated in manuscript form, such as separates. These were 'transcripts of reports of parliamentary speeches, state trials and other news of national importance' which could be produced by MPs privately for circulation amongst a select group of friends.³¹⁵ For Lady Brilliana, the desire to be kept updated only intensified

³¹² Milton, pp. 625 - 634

³¹³ *ibid*, p. 646 - 647

³¹⁴ *ibid*, 648 - 649

³¹⁵ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 92-93

when Parliament reconvened in 1640, and the next chapter will discuss in more detail the Harleys' use of separates and private letters.

Parliament was eventually recalled in the spring of 1640 and Sir Robert was elected for Herefordshire, along with Sir Walter Pye. Surviving records of the Short Parliament show that Sir Robert was 'an active participant in the debates.' He called for the House to examine the records of the Star Chamber relating to ship money and agreed with proclamations that it was an illegal taxation. In the debate of the subsidies on 4th May, he expressed his dislike of the war with the Scots and hoped that 'we might avert this threat without the shedding of blood.'³¹⁶ According to the *Commons Journals*, Sir Robert was named to a number of committees, including that of privileges and the committee chosen to investigate the commission of the convocation, which 'met at the same time as the Parliament and which had been authorised by the King to make canons for the first time since 1604.'³¹⁷

Sir Robert's religious beliefs were, again, clearly evident in his dealings in the Short Parliament. He presented to the House a petition from Peter Smart, who had suffered 'at the hands of the High Commission for criticising the ceremonies introduced at Durham by Archbishop Neile.' Smart had lost his prebend at the Cathedral and had refused to pay a fine of £500, which led to him being imprisoned in King's Bench. He was not released until 1641 following the intervention of the Commons.³¹⁸ Religious reform was at the fore of a list of 27 queries that Sir Robert took with him to Parliament and which still survive amongst the Harley papers. Although not written by Sir Robert himself, it was clearly compiled for him to take to London. The majority of the queries deal with religious reforms, including whether altars and church decorations such as pictures and crucifixes were legal. The document also suggests that to solve the King's

³¹⁶ Scottish Records Office, Hamilton Mss, G. O. 406/1/8253. 4th May 1640

³¹⁷ *Journals of the House of Commons*, II, 4 & 8; Eales, p. 95

³¹⁸ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 95-96

financial woes, he should absorb the profits from bishoprics.³¹⁹ Although Sir Robert did not have time, before the Short Parliament was dissolved, to fully explore these queries, it was the matters of idolatry and episcopacy that would go on to dominate his time in the Long Parliament. His religious beliefs were undoubtedly the driving force behind his political endeavours over the coming years.

Sir Robert was again elected as senior knight for Herefordshire in October 1640. His support for reform was initially popular amongst his fellow Herefordians and he was described by his rector at Brampton Bryan, Stanley Gower, as the 'mouthpiece of the county.'³²⁰ Sir Robert's support at this point came from both future Royalists and Parliamentarians but by 1642, his 'uncompromising stance was no longer widely endorsed by his county.' Over the course of the opening months of the Long Parliament, the Herefordshire gentry divided into two 'ideologically opposed parties.'³²¹

Soon after taking his seat in Parliament, Sir Robert became one of the most ardent supporters of the reform group, whose 'main leaders were John Pym, Oliver St John, and John Hampden in the Commons and the Earls of Bedford, Warwick and Essex, and Lords Brooke and Saye in the Lords.' Sir Robert had connections with these 'reform peers'; Lady Brilliana was related to Lord Brooke and the family held many of the others in high esteem, but he did not have 'any obvious patronage links' and his time in the Long Parliament can be described as 'largely those of an independent MP.'³²² It was undoubtedly his personal religious beliefs, not loyalties to any members of the peerage, which drove Sir Robert during the Long Parliament.

As a long serving member he was granted a place on the committee of parliamentary privileges and was also appointed to many of the committees set up to investigate grievances against the royal government and church. He served on the committee that

³¹⁹ List of queries dated 1639, BL Loan Add Mss 70002, Vol II (29/172), ff. 251r-252r

³²⁰ Stanley Gower to Sir Robert Harley, 23rd January 1640 BL Loan Add Mss 70105 Vol CV (29/119)

³²¹ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, pp. 100-101

³²² *ibid.* p. 102

drew up charges of impeachment against Archbishop Laud and the select committee of twenty four chosen to report the state of the kingdom. Sir Robert was chairman of the committee that was set up to examine abuses in the government of the universities and, temporarily, the grand committee for trade. Sir Robert's stature was such that he was 'considered a natural deputy for John Pym in various offices' and he replaced Pym as chairman for the committee for Irish affairs in 1642. Pym was also replaced by Sir Robert on the committee for the Assembly of Divines when he died in December 1643.³²³

Other than Lady Brilliana, whose letters will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, Sir Robert's main correspondent in Herefordshire was Stanley Gower, whose letters demonstrate that religious reforms and fears of a Catholic plot were the most urgent concerns in the minds of Sir Robert's puritan circle. Gower wrote regularly to Sir Robert with suggestions of church reforms that included further restrictions on English Catholics, the removal of the bishops and the abolition of the Laudian ceremonies introduced during the previous years.³²⁴

Although not universally popular in the county, there were members of the Herefordshire puritans who supported Sir Robert's zeal in pushing for religious reforms. The justice James Kyrle wrote to Sir Robert while he was at Parliament requesting his help to remove the vicar of Walford, who Kyrle described as 'a most scandalous vicar...our drunken, debauched guide.'³²⁵ While John Tombes, the vicar of Leominster, wrote to Harley to complain about the low level of stipends he and his curate received and also that the local Justice of the Peace, Wallop Brabazon, had turned the communion table in his church 'altar-wise and to be railed'. Tombes saw the local troubles that he was encountering as linked to the national call for reform and told Sir

³²³ *Journals of the House of Commons*, II, p. 92; Report from the Commission for Trade, 16th February 1640/1, BL Loan Add Mss 70082, Vol LXXXII (29/46/36); Eales pp. 102-103

³²⁴ Stanley Gower to Sir Robert Harley, 9th November, 20th November 1640 BL Loan, Add Mss 70002, Vol II (29/172) ff.308r, 309r and 28th November 1640, BL Loan Add Mss 70105, Vol CV (29/119)

³²⁵ James Kyrle to Sir Robert Harley, undated, BL Loan Add Mss 70206 (29/120)

Robert that he could no longer survive unless 'this Parliament take some course for the providing for the ministry.'³²⁶

Sir Robert's puritan sympathies were well known in the English and Welsh counties surrounding Herefordshire in and he was asked to present a petition from Wales to Parliament by the Shropshire minister Oliver Thomas.³²⁷ Another Salopian cleric, William Voyle, wrote to Sir Robert in November 1640 regarding the reform of the church:

human wisdom will say: in business of reformation, content yourself at this time to go so far. This voice did prevail in the beginning of Queen Elizabeth.

But the present way...is not a horse left in Egypt. Exodus 10, v. 26 and we know not, what innovations and encouragements, and opportunities you may have beyond the common exception.³²⁸

There are many other examples of letters from puritans in the Marcher Counties who looked to Harley for support, guidance and leadership and 'their letters indicate that not only was Harley's reputation for godliness well know, but that many people looked to him to lead the way in Parliament for religious change.'³²⁹ For many in the counties of England and Wales, their Member of Parliament provided a vital link to the centre of government in London. The MPs were the representatives for their county in the political debates that were taking place and, as the war of words between the supporters of the king and parliament developed, the perceptions that those in the provinces held of their MPs varied according to their respective allegiances.

For all the supporters of Sir Robert's push for reform, there were as many members, if not more, of the Herefordshire gentry who were strongly opposed to it. One of the 'major divisions in opinion throughout the country centred on the Church hierarchy.'

³²⁶ John Tombes to Sir Robert Harley, 12th December 1640, BL Loan Add Mss 70002, Vol II (29/172)f. 344r

³²⁷ Oliver Thomas to Sir Robert Harley, 5th June 1641, BL Loan Add Mss 70106, Vol CVI (29/121)

³²⁸ William Voyle to Sir Robert Harley, 23rd November 1640, BL Loan Add Mss 70002, Vol II (29/172), f. 315r

³²⁹ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 106

The majority of Sir Robert's supporters 'blamed the ills of the church squarely on the bishops.'³³⁰ Stanley Gower wrote to Sir Robert in November 1640, informing him that a number of the ministers in Herefordshire had not been notified of the elections for the convocation. Gower complained that 'in the most general business that concerns all the clergy, the bishops' party are alone and exempt us from our votes that they make up that number.' It is significant that Gower calls them 'the bishops' party', as this was clearly how he saw the supporters of Charles in the county and he obviously saw himself and his fellow puritans as being against the bishops. He presented to Sir Robert two petitions, one against the elections and the other against the Church canons of 1604 and 1640. The ministers sought legal advice from William Littlejohn and Justice Littleton of Shropshire who Gower describes as 'both like exceeding well what we have done, assuring us...that Parliament will both take due notice of us and that it will be a good remonstrance against the corruption of that hierarchy, whose downfall we expect daily.'³³¹ This is 'the first direct reference' to the abolition of the bishops in the Harley papers and shows that the Herefordshire puritans were discussing the matter well before the presentation of the 'root and branch' petition.³³² It is debatable, however, just whether total abolition of episcopacy was the only aim of those pushing for reforms of the church hierarchy, or whether they would have settled for a much more restrained episcopate. Gower himself appears to favour the former, but would have accepted the latter if there was 'much alteration at least, of the government by bishops.'³³³ Sir Robert seems to share these views, as the Ministers' Petition and Remonstrance, which he presented to the House in January 1641, did not call for abolition of the episcopacy, but did call for reformation in the Church government.³³⁴

³³⁰ *ibid*, p. 108

³³¹ Stanley Gower to Sir Robert Harley, 12th December 1640, BL Loan 70002, Vol II (29/172), ff. 346r, 309r

³³² Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 108

³³³ Stanley Gower to Sir Robert Harley, 28th November 1640, BL Loan Add Mss 70105, Vol CV (29/119)

³³⁴ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 109

When the 'root and branch' bill was debated in Parliament, there is evidence from two separate parliamentary diaries that it was Sir Robert who called for the debates to go ahead. He was aware that his support for the bill would be widely reported and in doing so he 'was sending a clear signal to the godly in the land that he and his fellow reformers were acting decisively against the bishops.'³³⁵ The message would also have been received by the members of Harleys' constituents who were opposed to the bill and it received very little support in the county. Stanley Gower wrote to Harley complaining about the lack of support for a petition against the bishops, saying that he 'was ashamed to see the causeless timidity of justices of our country to subscribe to the petition against the episcopacy, though they had Gloucestershire and other counties for their precedent.'³³⁶

It can be seen, therefore that it was Sir Robert's personal religious beliefs that drove his actions in Parliament relating to the bishops, not his sense of duty to his constituents, the majority of whom were in favour of the episcopate. It is to another of the six pillars of his 'brand' of puritanism, namely his iconoclasm, that attention will now turn. The iconoclasm that occurred in England during the early 1640s had historical precedent, but it also 'represented an attempt to restate the correct use of sacred space in direct response to the ecclesiastical policies of the 1630s.'³³⁷ The ceremonialist practices introduced by Charles and Archbishop Laud had proved unpopular with a certain section of the public and the iconoclasm was a direct response to these. Far from being a random act of violence, 'acts of iconoclasm had precise religious meanings for their enactors.'³³⁸ Indeed, even the timing of such acts could be significant. There are many recorded incidents where the iconoclast would wait until the sermon of a service was

³³⁵ *ibid*, pp. 112-113

³³⁶ Stanley Gower to Sir Robert Harley, 23rd January 1640/1, BL Loan Add Mss 70105, Vol CV (29/119)

³³⁷ John Walter, 'Abolishing superstition with sedition? The politics of popular iconoclasm, 1640-1642', *Past and Present*, (183: May 2004), p. 95

³³⁸ *ibid*, p. 82

over before performing the destructive acts and, in doing so, they 'were making a clear statement of their preference for sermon over sacrament.'³³⁹

One of the major offences that the Laudian innovations introduced, was the repositioning and railing in of the communion table. It has already been shown above that Sir Robert received letters from members of the Herefordshire clergy complaining of this change in the county churches. 'In the cultural wars of Caroline England...few topics were potentially as divisive as the positioning and treatment of the furnishings for Holy Communion. Tables and altar rails...stirred some people to veneration while incensing others to violence.'³⁴⁰ The rails that were erected around communion tables across the country 'stood as an obstacle among neighbours, a barrier between priest and parishioners, and a physical reminder of worrisome changes that seemed to be leading the Church of England to Rome.'³⁴¹ The removal of the rails became a symbolic act that represented a rejection of the increasingly Papist, in the eyes of their opponents, reforms that were being implemented. 'Activists in dozens of parishes sought the removal altar rails, anticipating by a year or more the official order to pull them down...Local religious animosities focused on such seemingly trivial items as church furnishings because they were immediate and familiar as well as controversial, and because they stood for larger problems of theology, liturgy and discipline.'³⁴²

Even before the opening of the Long Parliament, Sir Robert was carrying out his own acts of iconoclasm. In 1639, his daughter Brilliana wrote to her eldest brother Ned, who was at university in Oxford, describing how their father had found a painting of 'the great God of Heaven and Earth' in a stable on his estate in Buckton that he had

³³⁹ *ibid*, p. 93

³⁴⁰ David Cressy, *Agnes Bowker's Cat: Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2000), p. 186

³⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 188

³⁴² *ibid*, p. 187

destroyed with his own hands. Brilliana had then cast 'the dust of it upon the water.'³⁴³

During the Parliamentary recess of September and October 1641, Sir Robert was able to use his own influence, as patron of several churches, to carry out further acts of iconoclasm. Whereas the incident recounted by his daughter was a private affair, Sir Robert was now 'acting with the full authority of the House of Commons.' His visit to the church at Wigmore was described as 'Sir Ro: Harlowe's vehement course in pulling down the cross at Wigmore...and caused it to be beaten in pieces, even to dust, with a sledge, and then laid it in the footpath to be trodden in the churchyard.' Four days later, he visited the parish church at Leintwardine 'and broke the windows in the church and chancell and broke the glass with a small hammer, and threw it into the Teme, in imitation of King Asa 2 Chronicles 15:16: who threw the images into the brook Kidron.'

However, Sir Robert did not have it all his own way. At Aymestry, where he was not patron, he was met with opposition from minister Lake and several parishioners who 'withstood him' and so Sir Robert had to depart.³⁴⁴ There is also a letter amongst Harleys' papers that complains of:

in your churchyard of Lempster [Leominster], one crucifix upon the great stone cross there, and another crucifix of stone over the great church porch, and in the great windows in the west end of the church two crucifixes painted, and other scandalous pictures of the persons of the Trinity, and in the great window in the east end of the church one other crucifix painted, all which I require you to abolish, according to the order of the House of Commons, which I send you herewith, as also to see carefully performed the further directions of said order.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ Brilliana Harley to Edward Harley, 14th January 1638/9, BL Loan Add Mss 70002, Vol II (29/172), f. 207r

³⁴⁴ Huntingdon Library, Ellesmere Mss7350, quoted in Eales, p. 115

³⁴⁵ Harley to Churchwardens of Leominster, 8th October 1641, BL Loan Add Mss 70003, Vol III (29/173), f.165r

In the face of local opposition to the Commons orders, there was little that Sir Robert could do, in the churches in which he was not patron, than make complaints to the clergy and laity and hope that they would be acted upon.

On his return to London, Sir Robert would be provided with the opportunity to act out his iconoclasm on a major scale. In April 1643, he was selected as the chairman of the committee for the destruction of monuments of superstition and idolatry. The original remit to remove images from Westminster Abbey and 'any church or chapel in or about London', was widened to include any monuments 'as they shall find in any public or open place in or about the cities of London and Westminster.'³⁴⁶ The committee under Sir Robert were responsible for destroying stained glass in Westminster Abbey, St. Margaret's church and in the royal chapels of the palaces of Whitehall, Greenwich and Hampton Court. They also ripped out statues of saints and the altar in the Henry VII Chapel of Westminster Abbey.³⁴⁷ Sir Robert was also directly involved in the destruction of Cheapside Cross, one of the most famous public monuments in London, which had significant royal connections. The cross had been used as part of the coronation processions of several monarchs and had survived several attempts to have it pulled down in the past; including a call by Sir Robert himself in 1626.³⁴⁸ It took just three days from Sir Robert's appointment as chair of the committee for the London Court of Alderman to give orders for 'the demolishing and pulling down of the Cross in Cheapside, in regard of the idolatrous and superstitious figures thereabout set and fixed.'³⁴⁹ The destruction of the cross was a combination of 'political, religious and military factors'. The act was a 'collusion' between Parliament and the City of London, that some in the parliamentary camp considered the cross to be 'an impediment to victory and hoped that its downfall would bring about a flow of blessings.' Sir Robert,

³⁴⁶ *Journals of the House of Commons*, III, pp. 57 & 63

³⁴⁷ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 182

³⁴⁸ Joel Budd, 'Rethinking Iconoclasm in Early Modern England: The Case of Cheapside Cross', *Journal of Early Modern History*, (4:3-4 (2000)), p. 398

³⁴⁹ *Cheap-side Crosse Censured and Condemned*, 13-14, quoted in Cressy, p. 247

supported by the Lord Mayor of London, the radical Isaac Pennington, 'seem to have engaged in an act of assuagement and propitiation, a kind of sacrificial cleansing with elements of godly conjuration.'³⁵⁰

That there were political as well as religious factors to Sir Robert's iconoclasm did not escape the attentions of royalist commentators. In a newsbook entitled *Mercurious Aulius*, it was reported that Sir Robert had carried out much of the destruction in the churches on London with his own hands:

Sir Robert Harlow, who sits in the chair of reformation, having already so reformed the churches of Westminster...that it was unfit for the service of God; betook himself to the reforming of his Majesty's palace of Whitehall, and made it as unfit for the use of the King. For calling for the keys of the house with as much authority, as if he were the Lord Steward and Lord Chamberlain both, his first case was to get a ladder...which having been procured, he caused it to be set up against the east window of the chapel, which he reformed of all the glass, because all was painted; and afterwards proceeded to the reforming of the rest of the windows. Which done, he broke in pieces the communion table...pulled up the rails...and cast the broken fragments on the...pavement. Thence he proceeded in his visitation to his Majesty's gallery, which he reformed of all such superstitious vanities...and so went on, according to the principles of reformation, till there was nothing left which was rich or glorious.³⁵¹

While the destruction described undoubtedly took place, it is unlikely that Sir Robert carried out himself. There are receipts among the Harley papers that show that he paid several workmen to carry out the destruction of iconography on the committee's behalf.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ Cressy, p. 247

³⁵¹ *Mercurius Aulicus* (16-22 June 1644) 1040

³⁵² Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 183

It is clear, therefore, that Sir Robert's religious beliefs, based on the pillars of his 'brand' of puritanism, were the driving force behind his political career. Following his marriage to Lady Brilliana, his loyalty to his new father-in-law was an influencing factor on his time in Parliament during the 1620s, particularly in his defence of the Duke of Buckingham, but even this could be justified by some religious links. During the 1630s, Sir Robert's regarded the war against the Scots as an anathema as it involved two protestant nations fighting each other, rather than joining together to fight for the reformed church against Catholicism. Once the parliaments of the 1640s were in session, Sir Robert worked tirelessly for the reform of the church in England and two of the pillars of his 'brand' of puritanism were the main focuses of his zeal. He saw the growing appetite for reform as an opportunity to push for the reform, if not abolition, of the episcopacy and set out on a campaign of iconoclasm both in his native county of Herefordshire and in the churches of London and Westminster.

Chapter Five – Private puritanism: life at Brampton Bryan and the letters of Lady

Brilliana Harley

The previous chapter looked at the public life of Sir Robert Harley's political career to demonstrate that it was heavily influenced by his 'brand' of puritan religious beliefs. This chapter will focus on the family's life at their estate in Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire, and the letters of Lady Brilliana Harley, to establish that the same can be said for the private life of the Harleys. To them, there was no dividing line between their public and private lives; there was just a concerted effort to live a godly life, based on the pillars of their religious beliefs that have been established in previous chapters.

In Chapter Three, it was shown that Sir Robert used the powers in his possession to further the careers of ministers who held similar views to his own by granting them the livings in his power and supporting them when they were in trouble with the authorities. The Harleys also looked to surround themselves with the godly when it came to their family, their household and their friends. In relations with their kinsmen, the Harleys shunned Sir Robert's Catholic relatives on his father's side, but kept close links to his mother's more puritan relatives and they were particularly close to the Vere family to whom they were related through Lady Brilliana.³⁵³ Thus, it can be seen that even in their familial relationships and their close friendships, the Harleys applied strict religious criteria. In a draft letter to Sir Edward Herbert, Sir Robert wrote that 'religion...makes friends at first sight.'³⁵⁴

The preference for the godly was also extended to the household servants that the Harleys employed at Brampton Bryan. In 1612 a cook was recommended to them by Thomas Pierson on account of him being a 'very proper man of person, religious and sufficiently qualified for his place.'³⁵⁵ Pierson himself was later advised that if the

³⁵³ Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads* p. 60

³⁵⁴ Sir Robert Harley to Sir Edward Herbert, 12th January 1617/18, BL Loan Add Mss 70105; Vol CV (29/119)

³⁵⁵ Thomas Pierson to David Harper, 4th July 1612, BL Loan Add Mss 70106; Vol CVI (29/121)

Harleys were looking for a new housekeeper and wanted 'one religious' then Julines Herring knew just the very person.³⁵⁶ In a letter to Sir Robert in 1633, Lady Brilliana advised him that she had heard of a possible servant who 'they say, is religious and discreet' and when the Harleys' son, Ned, was looking for a manservant, Lady Brilliana wrote to him hoping that 'God send you a religious and good natured servant.'³⁵⁷ The Harleys clearly hoped to fill their household with suitable servants in order to nurture Brampton Bryan as a godly haven and there is even record of Sir Robert choosing to lease land to a godly tenant who could not afford to pay the highest level of rent. Again, Thomas Pierson was influential in this decision as he wrote to Sir Robert 'I would fain have him or some honest man be your tenant to it. Mere worldlings will give the most, but such will not further the gospel among us.'³⁵⁸ Clearly there was a deliberate attempt to fill their private lives – their close family ties, their friends and their servants and tenants – with people of a similar religious persuasion as themselves. Perhaps this was down to a feeling that their corner of the world, rural Herefordshire and the surrounding marcher counties, was not godly enough and they were attempting to plant a seed of godliness in order to see it grow and expand across the area.

The rest of this chapter will concentrate on life at Brampton Bryan as seen through the letters written by Lady Brilliana Harley. There are several hundred letters from her that survive to this day, some of which are held at the British Library and others are in her descendants' private collection. A selection of just over two hundred of her letters were edited and published in the mid nineteenth century by T T Lewis. For the most part, these are letters sent to the Harleys' eldest son Edward, or Ned, at first when he was studying at Oxford and later when he had joined his father in London after the opening of the Long Parliament.

³⁵⁶ Julines Herring to Thomas Pierson, undated, BL Loan Add Mss 70109; Vol CIX (29/124)

³⁵⁷ Lewis (Ed.), *The Letters of the lady Brilliana Harley* pp. 6 & 131

³⁵⁸ Thomas Pierson to Sir Robert Harley, undated, BL Loan Add Mss 70106; Vol CVI (29/121)

Letters were just one of many ways that the gentry in the localities were able to stay connected to events in the rest of the country. The Harleys were keen to remain up to date on the latest political developments and research shows that this was common among the political classes.³⁵⁹ The most common form of spreading news was still word of mouth, but there were many printed or manuscript sources of news available to the Harleys. During the Personal Rule of the 1630s, the Harleys had to rely even more on the news that they received in order to keep abreast of matters of state importance. They received printed news sheets called corantoës, which had emerged during the 1620s, but were suppressed in 1632 until they were re-licensed in 1638. When Lady Brilliana heard the news of the re-licensing, she wrote to Ned Harley 'now the corantoës are licensed again you will see their relation' and she sent many copies that she had received to him in Oxford, as well as printed newsbooks.³⁶⁰

A major manuscript form of receiving news were the separates, which were transcripts of important state matters, such as speeches made in parliament and state trials. These could be written by MPs, or other people who were personally involved, but many members of the gentry employed people to write to them about the events that were taking place, including Sir John Scudamore of Herefordshire, who paid John Pory £20 a year to keep him up to date with the latest developments.³⁶¹ During the Short Parliament Ned Harley sent several separates to Lady Brilliana and she valued these above all other forms of news that she received; 'I have heard of many bold speeches that have passed there; and the passage between the Archbishop and my Lord Saye is diversely reported, but I believe that which I received from you.'³⁶²

Personal letters were also used to send information, but these were generally more factual rather than opinionated, in case they fell into the wrong hands. Lady Brilliana

³⁵⁹ Cust, 'News and politics' pp. 60-90

³⁶⁰ Leis (ed), *Letters* 19, 27, 32, 26, 51, 62, 66

³⁶¹ Cust, 'News and politics', p. 63

³⁶² Lewis (ed), *Letters*, pp. 90-91

was certainly aware of this as she advised Ned 'when you write by the carrier, write nothing but what any may see, for many times the letters miscarry' and she remarked once that she would rather speak to him face to face so that she could speak 'more of my mind.' Lady Brilliana had clearly picked up some tips and tricks from being the daughter of a diplomat, as she wrote several letters to Ned using a code. In April 1639, she wrote 'I have told you if you remember of a paper that some statesmen make us of, when they would not have known what they write of. Write me word whether you understand what I mean.' Clearly Ned did know what she meant, as during the siege of Brampton Bryan, Lady Brilliana sent him at least two letters that were coded. The letters make no sense on their own, but have to have a corresponding piece of paper, with holes cut out in certain places, placed on top so that the real message could be read through the holes.³⁶³

During the Long Parliament and the first years of the war, Lady Brilliana was keen to hear all the latest developments and both Sir Robert and Ned, who had abandoned his studies in Oxford to join his father in London for the opening of Parliament, wrote to her as often as possible. Upon receiving the King's speech to open Parliament, Lady Brilliana asked Ned to send her also the Speaker's speech and to advise her 'what good men there are of the Parliament.' Ned continued to write to her regularly, but Sir Robert's work in the Parliament itself meant that he could not write with as much frequency.³⁶⁴

The time that it took for Lady Brilliana to receive the letters from London varied significantly. Many letters were sent by carrier to Shrewsbury, where they had to be collected. Although this meant that the news could be weeks old by the time it arrived, Lady Brilliana wrote that 'the sureness of the carrier, though he is slow, makes me write by him.' In April 1641, a new post was established in Ludlow and Lady Brilliana asked Sir

³⁶³ Cust, 'News and politics', pp. 88-89; Lewis (ed), *Letters*, pp. 11, 37, 40, 191-194

³⁶⁴ Lewis (ed), *Letters*, pp. 100-101, 104, 106,

Robert and Ned to use this as 'it will be easier than to send to Shrewsbury.'³⁶⁵ The Harleys also made use of any friends or locals who were travelling to and from London to deliver letters for them as this would ensure a quicker delivery than the carriers.³⁶⁶

Lady Brilliana heard various rumours of events taking place in London, but waited until she had received confirmation from either Sir Robert or Ned before she believed them. In February 1641, she received a copy of the speech given by the King to uphold the powers of the bishops. She had previously received a version of the speech but it 'was various to yours.' On the 8th May, she advised Ned that 'we hear of great matters that have been done at London this week, but I believe nothing till I hear it from a sure hand.' A month later, she requested that Ned send her a report of the 'outburst in the Commons' against the Scots by Herbert Price as she had received 'various reports' of the incident. Clearly there were rumours of things happening in London that were reaching Herefordshire, but Lady Brilliana was shrewd enough to 'defer my belief' until she had the events confirmed by either Sir Robert or their eldest son.³⁶⁷

The Harleys' consumption and dissemination of news confirms the picture of a populace in the localities who were keen to find out the happenings in London in as many ways as possible; word of mouth, printed and manuscript sources. The news from other localities was woven into the news from London to try to create a full picture of political events across the country.³⁶⁸ Lady Brilliana, whose father had been a diplomat and Secretary of State, did not believe all that she heard and waited until events had been confirmed by her husband or eldest son before accepting them as true. The remaining part of this chapter will look at the contents of her own letters to identify the religious elements that run through them in an attempt to show that her private life was influenced by the same beliefs as Sir Robert's public life.

³⁶⁵ Lewis (ed), *Letters*, pp. 111, 113, 130-131; Lady Brilliana to Sir Robert Harley, BL Loan Add Mss 70003; Vol III (29/173) f. 91r

³⁶⁶ Lewis (ed), *Letters*, pp. 103, 104, 105, 106

³⁶⁷ *ibid*, pp. 112, 118, 135, 129-130, 103

³⁶⁸ Cust, 'News and politics', p. 71

Lady Brilliana's letters paint a picture of her as 'well educated' and a 'thoughtful, genuinely pious woman' who held her own opinions in matters of state and religion and who knew how to express them intelligently and precisely.³⁶⁹ Her correspondence illustrate a genuine desire to be kept informed of the events happening in London and elsewhere and in no way support the idea of an apathetic gentry who somehow stumbled into the war without any real support for either side. However, among 'all her other preoccupations' even during the time of the siege of Brampton Bryan, Lady Brilliana 'never forgot her obligations as a wife and mother' and her letters are full of maternal advice, both practical and spiritual; indeed the letters, which reflect the concern to 'maintain the correct religious behaviour', are full of 'practical religious piety which was applied constantly to the real problems encountered in everyday life.'³⁷⁰ In one of her early letters to Ned she warned him

you are now in a place of more varieties than when you were at home; therefore take heed it take not up your thoughts so much as to neglect the constant service you owe to your God. When I lived abroad, I tasted something of those wills; therefore I may the more experimentally give you warning.³⁷¹

Clearly Lady Brilliana's times living overseas with her father made her concerned that Ned might be tempted to stray from God's path and she hoped to prevent this by providing him with advice based on her own experiences.

The belief in predestination is clearly evident in the letters that Lady Brilliana wrote, which are littered with references to God's chosen, the elect and God's people. On 13th November 1638, she wrote to Ned at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, saying, 'I beseech the Lord bless you with those choice blessings of His spirit, which none but his dear elect are partakers of; that so you may taste that sweetness in God's service which indeed it is:

³⁶⁹ Alison Plowden, *Women all on fire: The women of the English Civil War* (Stroud, 1998), p. 48

³⁷⁰ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 49

³⁷¹ Lewis, *Letters*, p. 7

but the men of this world can not perceive it.³⁷² This greeting indicates that Lady Brilliana believed that the elect were a small number and she repeated this at the end of November, when she wrote, 'the Lord in heaven bless you, and give you that principle of grace, which never die in you, but that you may grow in grace and so have the favour of your God, which is better than life, and the favour of good men, which small number is worth all the millions besides.'³⁷³

In January 1638/9 she again described the love of God as 'not common to all', but she rejoiced in the exclusivity of the elect and dismissed the scorn of those who are not God's chosen few

but none tastes his love but his chosen ones; and if we be the loved of the Lord, what need we care what the men of the world think of us? We in that respect, should be like a good wife, who cares not how ill favoured all men else think her, if her husband love her. And, my dear Ned, as this love of the Lord is a peculiar gift, only to his dear ones, let it be your chief care to get assurance of that love in of God in Christ; and since he has loved you, show your love to him by hating that which he hates, which is sin.³⁷⁴

She had no kind words for those who are not God's children. In February 1638/9 she wrote:

I beseech the Lord to bless you with those choice blessings which are only the portion of his elect; in which the men of this life, have no part. They are hid from their eyes. Only in the day of trouble and death, then they know there is a happiness belonging to God's children which they would then partake of, and howl, for the want of that comfort.³⁷⁵

³⁷² *ibid*, p. 9

³⁷³ *ibid*, p. 14

³⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 20

³⁷⁵ *ibid*, p. 31

This is clearly a puritan mother trying to ensure that her son, away from home among others who may not be of the elect, behaved himself in a way that she would approve of, by reminding him that he must at all times seek to show that he is one of God's chosen few. She was more direct with her advice in April of that year, when she warned Ned, 'be still watchful over your heart, that nothing steal away your affections from your God, who alone has loved us and who alone is to be loved.'³⁷⁶

Lady Brilliana reminded Ned on several occasions that the elect need not fear when they are in troubles, because they know that their God will deliver them to him eventually. In November 1638, she wrote 'The Lord has promised to give his spirit to his children, which shall lead them in the truth. Beg that blessed spirit and then errors will but make the truth more bright.'³⁷⁷ Much later, in May 1641, she saw the time of troubles was coming to an end, when she heard of Lord Stratford's demise and she wrote to Ned, 'let these examples make you experimentally wise in God's word, which has set forth the prosperity of the wicked to be but for a time... but the godly has that continual feast, the peace of a good conscience, and his end is peace, and his memory shall not rot.'³⁷⁸ To Lady Brilliana, the troubles that she and the rest of the godly were going through were only temporary and they would prevail against their enemies, and having been through the bad times would only serve to make the good times even better. Fast days and periods of self-examination were a common occurrence at Brampton Bryan and they feature many times in the letters that Lady Brilliana sent to Ned. These days were not just an opportunity for the Harleys to demonstrate their religious zeal, they were also 'an excellent opportunity to for puritans to gather together whilst excluding the ungodly from their midst.'³⁷⁹ In December 1638, she wrote to Ned, saying 'I hope in a special manner that we shall remember you at the fast; and, dear Ned, think upon that day, how your father is used to spend it, that so you may have like affections to join with us.

³⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 43

³⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 10

³⁷⁸ *ibid*, p. 131

³⁷⁹ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 59

Let your desire be oftener presented before your God that day; and the Lord, who only hears prayers, hear us all.' She was clearly hoping that Ned would observe the fast in Oxford so that he could be spiritually with the rest of his family.

In an undated letter, but set as January 1638/9 by Lewis, Lady Brilliana is

exceeding glad that you did set Wednesday apart; I hope the Lord did hear us all; and now our duty is, when we have so prayed, and so promised, to be more watchful and obedient to our God, that we do not turn again to folly...for so shall we lose our pains, and the sweet fruit of our prayers and bring more sorrows upon our souls.³⁸⁰

Fasting in and of itself was not enough for Lady Brilliana, the fast was just the day to fortify the soul for the days ahead when they were to endeavour to be more pious and obedient. A month later, on 2nd February 1638/9, she wrote to Ned praising the private fast and its effects. 'My dear Ned, be watchful that you grow not slack in keeping the Sabbath and the performing of private duties. O it is a sweet thing to have private conference with God, to whom me may make known all our wants, all our follies, and discover all our weaknesses, in assurance that he will supply our wants, and will not abrade us with our infirmities.' She ended the letter by saying that 'I hope, we shall have a private day the next week, when I trust we will remember you.' her next letter confirms that 'we kept Wednesday last, and I bless God, I joined with them, and so did your sister Brill and brothers.' She goes on to give some indication that the private day was held to petition God for further reforms in the church: 'If ever we had cause to pray, it is now. Sure the Lord is about a glorious work; He is refining his Church: and happy will those days be, when she comes out like gold: and if ever wicked men had cause to fear, it is now; for certainly the Lord will call them to account.'³⁸¹ This is the private fast as the

³⁸⁰ Lewis, *Letters*, pp. 22-23

³⁸¹ *ibid*, pp. 28-29

means to ask God for his work to be carried out so that the Church would be further reformed and purged of all that the Harleys disagreed with.

In October 1639, Lady Brilliana urged Ned to continue with his private days of fasting in Oxford; 'omit not private duties, and stir up your self to exercise yourself in holy conference, beg of God to give you a delight in speaking and thinking of those things which are your eternal treasure. I many times think Godly conference is as much neglected by God's children, as any duty. I am confident you will noways neglect the opportunity of profiting in the ways of learning, and I pray God prosper your endeavours.'³⁸² Two weeks later she returned to the same subject, again urging Ned to keep private days, but this time her advice was much more detailed about how he should self-examine:

always keep a watch over your precious soul; tie yourself to a daily self examination; think over the company you have been in, and what your discourse was, and how you found yourself affected, how in the discourse of religion; observe what knowledge you were able to express, and what affection to it, and where you find yourself to come short, labour to repair that want; if it be in knowledge of any point, read something that may inform you in what you find you know not; if the fault be in affections, that you find a weariness in that discourse of religion, go to God, beg of Him new affections to love those things which by nature we can not love. After discourse, call to mind whether you have been too apt to make exceptions, or whether any have provoked you, and examine yourself how you took it.

Lady Brilliana was advising Ned that he must make a daily self-examination relating to the company he has kept, the things he has said and how he felt about any religious discussions that he had had. She was urging him to repair anything that he was not

³⁸² *ibid*, p. 65

happy about, either by attaining new knowledge on subjects he felt he didn't know well enough, or by asking God to give him the necessary attitude towards religious discourse.

She went on to give her reasons why she wants Ned to take on this daily practise, and to state that she was not asking him to do anything she didn't already do herself:

My dear Ned, you are next to my own heart; and this is the rule with myself, and I think it is the best way to be acquainted with our own hearts, for we know not what is in us, till occasions and temptations draws out that matter which lays quiets; and in a due observation, we shall find at last, in what we are proud, in what fearful, and what will vex and eat our hearts with care and grief. I can speak of it myself; there are many things which I can see wise men and women trouble themselves with, that I bless my gracious God for they never touched my heart, but I will not clear myself, for there are some things that of myself I can not bear them: so that if I should have only observed myself in some things should think I were of so settled a mind I would not be moved; but I know there are blasts that trouble any calm, which is not settled upon that rock, which is higher than ourselves.³⁸³

Lady Brilliana was showing here that, to her, days of private fasts and daily self-examination were not just a means to petition God, but were for self-reflection and self-improvement. She was providing Ned with practical advice meant to ensure that he kept his spiritual health in good order and kept himself among the company of God's elect.

The days of private fasts continued at Brampton Bryan well into the early 1640s and were often linked to events in Parliament, such as on 28th June 1640, when 'we at Brampton kept the day to sue our God for His direction of the Parliament.'³⁸⁴ In December 1642, they even held a day of fasting to prepare for a siege that they believed was imminent; 'on the Sabbath day after I received the letter from the marquis, we set

³⁸³ *ibid*, pp. 69-70

³⁸⁴ *ibid*, pp. 94, 102, 108 & 111

that day apart to seek our God, and then on Monday we prepared for a siege.’ Lady Brilliana clearly believed that their fast had been successful, because she wrote ‘but our God called them another way; and the marquis sent me word he remembered him to me, and that I need not fear him, for he was going away, but bid me fear him that came after him.’³⁸⁵

Lady Brilliana’s letters to Ned regularly stressed the importance of a preaching ministry and the word of God. In November 1638, not long after he had first arrived in Oxford, she wrote that ‘I am glad that you find a want of that ministry you did enjoy: labour to keep a fresh desire after the sincere milk of the word, and then in good time you shall enjoy that blessing again.’³⁸⁶ It seems strange, at first, that she is happy that Ned is missing hearing the word preached in the way that he was used to at Brampton Bryan, but to Lady Brilliana, it was evidence that Ned placed the same importance on it that she and Sir Robert did. The following month, Lady Brilliana advised Ned that the secret to good health was ‘a good diet and exercise’ and went on to link physical and spiritual health, ‘I hope you are much more careful with your soul, that the better part of yours may grow in knowledge. And in some portion it is, with the soul as with the body; there must be a good diet; we must feed upon the word of God, which when we have done we must not lie idle, but we must be diligent in exercising of what we know, and the more we practise the more we shall know.’³⁸⁷ In February of the following year, Lady Brilliana repeated to Ned the importance of a preaching ministry: ‘It is my greatest joy that you thirst after the sweet waters of God’s word in a powerful ministry. I hope the Lord will grant you, your desire in that kind.’³⁸⁸

There is also evidence in the letters that Lady Brilliana shared religious texts with Ned that she would have him read. In May 1639, Lady Brilliana had gone through a period of

³⁸⁵ *ibid*, p. 186

³⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 10

³⁸⁷ *ibid*, p. 15

³⁸⁸ *ibid*, p. 28

ill health and being 'confined to so solitary a place as my bed, I made choice of an entertainments for myself.' This entertainment was reading 'the life of Luther, written by Mr Calvin.' She had chosen this text because she wanted to find out for herself whether the things she had hear about Luther were true: 'I did the more willingly read it, because he is generally branded with ambition, which caused him to do what he did, and that the papists do so generally abrade us that we cannot tell where our religion was before Luther.' Lady Brilliana was satisfied from her reading 'how falsely these were raised, I put it into English, and here enclosed have sent it you; it is not all his life, for I put no more into English than was not in the book of Martyrs.'³⁸⁹ This last part is clearly a reference to Foxe's Book of Martyrs, a text that she obviously expected Ned to be familiar with.

Lady Brilliana went on to detail to Ned the things 'of note I find in it.' The first thing was 'what Luther acknowledged, he was instructed in the truth by an old man, who led him to the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ: and Erasmus when his opinion was asked of Luther, said he was in the right.' The use of Erasmus to support Luther's ideas on justification illustrates that Lady Brilliana felt that Erasmus was someone whose opinion she could respect. She continued by saying that it took Luther some time to find the truth of God's word. 'It is true the truth was much obscured with error; and then it pleased the Lord to raise up Luther as a trumpet to proclaim His truth, and as a standard bearer to hold out the insignia of His truth: which did but make those to appear of the Lord's side, who were so before.' She rejected the accusation that 'ambitious ends moved Luther' explaining that 'though he loved learning, yet, as far as I can observe, he never affected to be more learned than he was.' Lady Brilliana argued that those who claim that Luther was driven by ambition are just projecting their own faults onto him; 'in Luther we see our own faces; they that stand for the old true way bring up new

³⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 52

doctrine, and it is ambition, under the veil of religion.³⁹⁰ Luther should, according to Lady Brilliana, be seen as an example to the godly, for ‘another observation that I find in Luther, that all his fasting and strictness, in the ways of Popery, never gave him peace of conscience; for he had great fears till he had thoroughly learned the doctrine of justification by Christ alone; and so it will be with us all; no peace shall we have in our own righteousness.’³⁹¹

This letter clearly shows that as well as stressing the importance of a preaching ministry and the power of the word of God, Lady Brilliana also encouraged him to engage with the religious writers and thinkers of the reformed faith. She was able to discuss their ideas in an intelligent and detailed way in order to educate and advise him. Her reasons for doing so, demonstrate that she sees this as part of her motherly duties; ‘you may see how willingly I impart any thing to you, in which I find good. I may truly say, I never enjoy any thing that is good but presently my thoughts reflect upon you; but if any thing that is evil befall me, I would willingly bear it myself, and so willingly would I bear the ill you should have, and rejoice that you should enjoy what is good.’³⁹²

The letters that Lady Brilliana wrote in the late 1630s to Ned can be seen, therefore, to be full of the kind of practical religious advice that she believed he needed to ensure that he remained part of God’s chosen elect. They were not, however, totally devoid of political content. In November 1638, she wrote to him ‘I hope the news of the Swedes is not true’ and it is clear that she saw the events on the continent as part of a struggle between the true, reformed religion and God’s enemies; ‘in all these things we must remember the warning , which our saviour has given us, when he had told his disciples that there must be wars and rumours of wars...great troubles and wars must be, both to purge the church of hypocrites, and that his enemies at the last be utterly destroyed.’ Lady Brilliana was optimistic that the godly would be saved, ‘but you my servants be not

³⁹⁰ *ibid*, p. 52

³⁹¹ *ibid*, pp. 52-53

³⁹² *ibid*, p. 53

careful for your selves, you are my jewels, and the days of trouble are the days when I take care of jewels: and, my dear Ned, though I firmly believe there will be great trouble, considering the glory that the Lord will bring his church to; and happy are they that shall live to see it, which I hope you will do.³⁹³ In April 1639, it was, again, news from abroad that Lady Brilliana wrote to Ned about. 'We hear that the King of Spain begins to deal with the monasteries, as Harry 8 did in England. My dear Ned, let me upon this put you in the mind that this year 1639, is the year in which many people are of the opinion that Antichrist must begin to fall. The Lord say Amen to it: if this be not the year, yet sure it shall be, in His due time. What news I hear concerning Germany you may see by this enclosed, which I received this morning.'³⁹⁴ It is, again, clear that to Lady Brilliana the events in various parts of Europe were all linked as a religious struggle between Protestants and Catholics and that she expected the reformed church to prevail.

In May 1639, the news that she sent to Ned came from much closer to home. She enclosed with her letter 'a copy of a sermon preached in Scotland.' She was clearly worried about the possible repercussions of his having the speech because she advised him 'you must take care who sees it; you never read such a piece.'³⁹⁵ A month later, she gave Ned an update on the events involving Scottish troops; 'the Scots were entrenched 12 miles [from] Berwick, and that it is a difficult thing to know what they do; for if any English man go to them, they are used kindly, but they return as wise as they came, for none discovers their councils to them. That they surrounded my lord of Holland's company, they say is true...that they meant not to take advantages to do wrong, only to defend themselves.' This last statement, perhaps, reveals some of the Harleys' attitudes to the situation; they would undoubtedly have been dismayed with the fighting between fellow Protestant nations and may even have felt some division in their

³⁹³ *ibid*, p. 10

³⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 41

³⁹⁵ *ibid*, p. 55

loyalties. This is evident when she wrote to Ned to tell him of 'so good news of peace' following the Treaty of Berwick.³⁹⁶

It was with the recalling of Parliament in 1640 that the political content of Lady Brilliana's letters increased significantly. At all times, her comments on the events unfolding across the country were tinged with a belief that the supporters of Parliament were doing God's work. This began in March 1640, when she wrote to Ned to advise him that his father had been returned as one of the MPs for Herefordshire and she hoped that 'the Lord fill them with wisdom for that work.'³⁹⁷ In January 1641, Lady Brilliana was pleased that the Parliament seemed to be succeeding in their endeavours; 'I much rejoice that the Parliaments goes on so well. I trust the Lord will finish this good work begun.'³⁹⁸ And just days later, she praised Parliament for deferring 'private business for a time, to settle public; in which I beseech the Lord direct and give them a unanimous consent in those things which may be for the glory of God and the peace of His church; that all these things, without which God may be served without burdening the conscience of any of God's children, may be cast out, as those things which have long troubled the piece of the church.'³⁹⁹

Lady Brilliana clearly saw the work that Parliament was doing as the culmination of the struggle to reform the English Church that had been going on for a long time. This is further evident in a letter dated 19th February 1641, in which she wrote 'I have always believed that the Lord would purge His church from all these things and persons, that have been such a hindrance to the free passage of His glorious Gospel; and I trust, now is the time. The death of the King of Spain, I think, will make some alterations in those parts. I much rejoice the Parliament goes so well.'⁴⁰⁰ Her joy in the work of Parliament continued in the months ahead and in June 1641, she wrote 'I desire to give our gracious

³⁹⁶ *ibid*, p. 58

³⁹⁷ *ibid*, p. 87

³⁹⁸ *ibid*, p. 107

³⁹⁹ *ibid*, pp. 109-110

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid*, p. 115

God the glory of those great things that have been done in the Parliament; that the king has passed the 3 bills, in which the high commission goes down; and that they have proceeded so far against the bishops. The Lord our God, who can do great things, I hope will perfect that great work.'⁴⁰¹ But even when things seemed not to be going Parliament's way, Lady Brilliana still expressed her belief that they were doing God's work and would prevail in the end; 'I am persuaded things are now come to their ripeness, and if God be not merciful to us, we shall be in a distressed condition; but the Lord has promised to hear His children in the day of trouble, and to deliver them, which I am persuaded He will do now.'⁴⁰²

As the situation in Herefordshire became increasingly dangerous for her, Lady Brilliana clung to her belief that the supporters of Parliament were doing God's work and that he would ensure that they prevailed in the end. She wrote to Ned in July 1642, 'you will know how poor Herefordshire is affected; but, dear Ned, I hope you and myself will remember for whose cause your father and we are hated. It is for the cause of our God, and I hope we shall be so far from being ashamed of it or troubled, that we bear the reproach of it, that we shall bind it as a crown upon us; and I am confident the Lord will rescue His children from reproach.'⁴⁰³ She returned to the same theme, just two days later on 19th July 'My dear Ned, I thank God I am not afraid. It is the Lord's cause that we have stood for, and I trust, though our iniquities testify against us, yet the Lord will work for His own name sake, and that He will now show the men of the world that it is hard fighting against heaven.'⁴⁰⁴ There can be no doubt that Lady Brilliana saw the work that her husband and the rest of the Parliament were undertaking was guided by religious reform and that they had God on their side, which meant that, whatever hardships they had to endure, they would win in the end. This belief seems to become a comfort to her

⁴⁰¹ *ibid*, p. 140

⁴⁰² *ibid*, p. 153

⁴⁰³ *ibid*, p. 179

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid*, p. 180

as her position in Herefordshire becomes increasingly dangerous and worrying and throughout the siege of Brampton Bryan in 1643.

The letters that Lady Brilliana wrote to Ned in the 1640s contain references to two more of the pillars of the Harleys' 'brand' of puritanism which have been set out in previous chapters. The first of these is their iconoclasm. In June 1640, she wrote to Ned about her nephew Pelham, who had joined Ned in Oxford. She asked Ned to 'be still kind to him though it may be, his uncle may make him something strange, but let your love (if it be so) over come it.' Pelham was clearly not as godly as the Harleys, and other branches of their family, and Lady Brilliana chose to view this in a compassionate, some might say patronising way, as if his ignorance of the reformed religion was not entirely his fault and was due to a lack of intelligence or refinement; 'I believe he thinks all well done that is new to him and that he sees gentlemen to do with a good grace, which he thinks they do when the bow to the altar; but I pray God teach him another lesson; but he must be warily dealt with.'⁴⁰⁵ The other reference to iconoclasm comes months later, in February 1642, when Lady Brilliana advised Ned that 'in Hereford, they have turned the table in the Cathedral, and taken away the cups and basins and all such things. I hope they begin to see that the Lord is about to purge His church of all such inventions of men.' She was clearly very happy that these religious innovations had been removed from Hereford Cathedral and saw it as triumph of the reformed church.⁴⁰⁶

It is Lady Brilliana's attitudes to the episcopate that become much clearer and more pronounced in her letters of the 1640s. As has been argued in previous chapters, the Harleys' views on episcopacy in the 1630s are ambiguous and it is only as a reaction to the events of the 1640s that they become strongly opposed to bishops and strong supporters of a Presbyterian system. Prior to the calling of the Short Parliament, there are no mentions of bishops or the church hierarchy in Lady Brilliana's letters to Ned.

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid*, pp. 96-97

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid*, pp. 148-149

However, in June 1642 she wrote, 'Monday, as I heard from you and others, was to be the day of the debate about bishops. We at Brampton keep the day to sue to our God for His direction of the Parliament. I believe that hierarchy must down and I hope now.'⁴⁰⁷ In February of the following year, she wrote to Ned 'I hope the Lord will so clear the judgements of all the Parliament, so that they may see the errors of those who term themselves the fathers of the church.'⁴⁰⁸ This is not as vehement as the previous quote and, perhaps, shows that her attitude towards the church hierarchy was still open to persuasion, should they be suitably reformed. However, just a month later, she was back to her more impassioned stance, when she wrote 'I am glad that the Bishops begin to fall, and I hope that it will be with them as it was with Haman; when he began to fall, he fell indeed.'⁴⁰⁹ This reference to Haman, whose plot to kill the Jews is foiled by Queen Esther in the Old Testament, demonstrates that she associated the bishops with the enemies of God.

Lady Brilliana was delighted in June 1641 to hear of the vote against the bishops; 'I much rejoice that the Lord has showed Himself so mightily for his people, in hearing their prayers; that it is come so far as that the bishops and all their train is voted against. I trust in God they will be enacted against, which I long to hear; and I pray God take all those things away which have so long offended.'⁴¹⁰ Later on that month, she was keen to hear news of how things with the bishops go, when she told Ned, 'now I much desire to hear what is become of the business of the bishops, which I hope shall down; but I fear it will find might opposition; but the Lord can make hard things easy.'⁴¹¹ Lady Brilliana clearly realised that the abolition of the episcopacy would meet some strong opposition, but she was confident that God would find a way to achieve success.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 111

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid*, p. 113

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid*, p. 119

⁴¹⁰ *ibid*, pp. 132-133

⁴¹¹ *ibid*, p. 135

By July of 1641, her optimism had returned, as she wrote 'I thank you for giving me some hope of the bishops bill passing this week. I pray God affect that mighty work' and 'I much rejoice that there is hope of passing the bill against the bishops; the Lord say Amen to it; we do not deserve to see such a mercy; but our God, I hope, will work for His own name sake.'⁴¹² Her optimism was ultimately well placed and in February 1642, she wrote to Ned 'I take it for a great blessing...that you meet with so good news there, as that the bishops are voted in both houses to lose their votes there. I hope the Lord will perfect His own glorious work.'⁴¹³ It is a sign of just how tumultuous the events of the period 1640 to 1642 were that Lady Brilliana went from not mentioning bishops or the hierarchy in her letters to Ned at all, to celebrating their loss of voting powers in Parliament in less than two years. The evidence from other sources, discussed in previous chapters, would suggest that the Harleys would have settled for an episcopacy that was reformed, and whose powers were restrained, at the beginning of the Long Parliament, but in a short space of time, emboldened by the events in London, became strong advocates of a Presbyterian system that abolished bishops altogether.

In complete accordance with Sir Robert's political career, the private life of the Harleys at Brampton Bryan, and the letters sent by Lady Brilliana to their son Ned, illustrate that their lives were strongly influenced by their 'brand' of puritanism. Their belief in the existence of a comparatively small group of people who were chosen as God's elect meant that they chose their close family links and friendships very carefully, based firmly on a shared set of religious beliefs. It also influenced their choice of servants and tenants at Brampton Bryan, as they attempted to build a godly haven in their corner of northern Herefordshire. Lady Brilliana's letters to Ned in the 1630s are full of practical piety and religious advice that urged him to do all he could to remain part of God's chosen few; by observing private days of fasting and daily self-examination and by

⁴¹² *ibid*, pp. 138 & 141

⁴¹³ *ibid*, p. 146

stressing the importance of the word of God and a preaching ministry. After the recalling of Parliament in 1640, the letters became much more political as they stressed that God's work was being carried out by those who opposed the King and mentioned several times the other two pillars of their beliefs; namely their iconoclasm and their distrust of the episcopacy, which eventually developed into a call for it to be abolished altogether. Lady Brilliana's private letters reveal that she, and all of the Harley family perceived 'the Civil War as a struggle between the godly few against the enemies of true religion...it was not a sense of county community or even of gentry community which claimed Lady Brilliana's ultimate loyalties, it was her belief in the community of the godly.'⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁴ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 177

Conclusion

Looking back on the Civil War, Richard Baxter observes that:

all over the kingdom, save here and there a sober Gentleman and a formal Clergyman, the Religious Party and all that loved them were generally for the Parliament...And the Profane Party in all Countries (Debauched Gentlemen, Malignant Haters of Piety, The Rabble of Drunkards, Blasphemers) were generally against the Parliament.⁴¹⁵

Clearly this statement is too simplistic, but it was a belief that was held by many Parliamentarians at the time, and the Harleys' story and their situation in Herefordshire illustrate why this was so. The Harleys were part of the Godly Elect; sober, righteous, pious puritans, who shared their religious beliefs with many of the other puritan gentry families, and for whom the choice of where to place their allegiance was an easy one.

The Harleys' story is one that can tell a great deal about the English Civil War, and one that encompasses much of the historiography that has surrounded the period during the last century. Lady Brilliana's letters illustrate that despite the importance of the changing situation in Herefordshire and her fear for her safety, she was intensely interested in the events in London and elsewhere. There was no desire on the part of the Harleys to stay neutral. Their story illustrates that those who supported Parliament did have long-term grievances; at least as far as religion was concerned. The Harleys are a good example of a gentry family whose puritanism was 'primarily a reflection of genuine conviction rather than political dissent; and that concern about the future of "true religion" was a key factor in the growing alienation of families of this type during the 1630s.'⁴¹⁶ The Harleys' dislike of the Laudian innovations had grown during the 1630s and the political climate of the early 1640s enabled them to push for the reform that they so desired.

⁴¹⁵ Richard Baxter, *Penitent Confession*, 18-19

⁴¹⁶ Cliffe, *Puritans in Conflict*, p. xi

The Harleys' 'brand' of puritanism, as evident in Sir Robert's 'Character' of a puritan and Lady Brillaiana's commonplace book, was built upon a firm belief in predestination, aggressive iconoclasm, the desire for a preaching ministry, the observance of private fasts and days of humiliation and a mistrust of the powers of the episcopate, all founded on the unwavering belief that scripture was the true arbiter of religious orthodoxy and the source of salvation.

The doctrine of Predestination was hugely important in the Harleys' belief structure and in their own sense of identity. Like many of their Puritan contemporaries, the Harleys believed that they were part of the 'Godly Elect', whom God had chosen to be saved. This belief gave them the confidence that what they were doing was God's work. Every victory for Parliament was a sign of God's pleasure, while every setback was a sign that they needed to be more thankful and not to take things for granted. This lack of complacency that Predestination could have bred was echoed in the belief that it was through good works, and a pious lifestyle, that the elect could be recognised. As Jacqueline Eales states, the Harleys 'believed that they were involved in a war to secure true religion in England and that Parliament was the bulwark which would protect the Church from its enemies. Their belief that they were members of the elect, who were a definable group on earth, also provided the Harleys with a ready formed set of loyalties, which were quite separate from their loyalties to the local community, and which proved in the testing ground of civil war to be stronger than their allegiance to either the county or the crown.'⁴¹⁷

The importance of observing fast days provided the Harleys with a means to undergo self-examination and to petition God for his support and guidance. These days were

⁴¹⁷ Eales, *Puritans*, pp. 200-201

held on a regular basis and on extraordinary occasions when God's guidance was especially required.

The Harleys put a lot of emphasis on the need for preaching ministers and used the gifts within their possession to promote this. Thomas Pierson, Sir Robert's first appointee to the living of Brampton Bryan was a nonconformist minister who was more interested in the content of his sermons and lectures than the ceremonial aspect of the service. The Harleys' search for a replacement for Pierson caused them some distress and the person that they would eventually find, Stanley Gower, was to play an important part as a Puritan divine in the Long Parliament.

The two elements of the Harleys' religion which were to take up most of Sir Robert's time in the Long parliament were the campaigns against idolatry and the episcopacy. Sir Robert's views, and his actions, regarding idolatry were longstanding and the political radicalism of the Long Parliament provided him with the freedom to push this even further, with the official backing of Parliament. Sir Robert was the obvious chair for the committee set up to purge the churches of the Cities of London and Westminster of sacrilegious images. On his return to Brampton Bryan during the recess of Parliament he pursued this with as much zeal, but the evidence suggests that on his return to London, the parishioners in Herefordshire returned to their familiar ways.

The political climate in Parliament also enabled the Harleys to confirm their views on the episcopacy. While their other religious views are well documented prior to 1640, there is some ambiguity regarding their attitudes towards bishops. Clearly they disapproved of the bishops' power, and abuse of power, but there is some evidence that he would have settled for a restricted episcopacy. However once the idea of a total abolition became an achievable reality, Sir Robert put his wholehearted support behind the Presbyterian alternative.

The final two chapters of this thesis demonstrate that the Harleys' religious views influenced both Sir Robert's political career and the family's life at Brampton Bryan. In both their public and private lives, the Harleys' looked to live piously, following their religious beliefs and surrounding themselves with like-minded 'godly' friends and servants.

That the identified pillars were commonly held beliefs amongst those who would be identified as puritans by any reasonable definition of the term, is evident in the sermons and religious tracts discussed in Chapter Three. The ministers examined in that chapter were all friendly with the Harleys and their sermons and writings clearly demonstrate that they held very similar religious beliefs.

It is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate that Early Stuart puritans shared many commonly held beliefs, but it is not the intention to argue that puritanism was a static entity. Within the common beliefs there was room for much disagreement and debate, as the discussion of Peter Lake's work in Chapter One demonstrates. Puritanism is not purely a modern construct forced upon historic individuals by historians looking for a neat label, but neither is it a one-size-fits-all description that applies to all who are identified as puritans. The truth, as it so often does, lies somewhere between the two extremes, and it is only by careful and precise studies and comparisons of individual puritans that a true picture of the nature of Early Stuart puritanism can be built.

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