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‘Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord’: Puritan Spiritual Diaries and Autobiographies in Seventeenth-Century England.

Claire Louise Vivian

Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Swansea University

2008

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Summary

Recent analysis of early modern spiritual diaries and autobiographies has tended to focus on 'self-fashioning' – how authors used their texts to create their own identity – but little interest has been shown in the degree of variation present in this form of writing and how the various identities related to one another once created. If anything, scholars have been reluctant to admit that there are any notable differences between such texts, instead preferring to uncover the 'pattern' that all spiritual relations follow.

Through a study of texts by seventeenth-century English Puritans this thesis argues that a definite degree of individuality is present within each account. Even though common themes, such as the need for assurance and a belief in mankind's inherent depravity, may be found, a more detailed consideration reveals subtle, yet important variations. My main aim has not been to uncover new, previously unstudied, spiritual autobiographies, but to examine new possibilities for widely-read writings, such as John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* and George Trosse's *Life*. Nevertheless, discussions of little-known texts such as Cicely Johnson's *Fanatical Reveries* and Rose Thurgood's *Lecture of Repentance* have also proved fruitful.

Somewhat tempering this emphasis on individuality is the central discussion of the influences on the composition of these works. Here it is argued that, despite the seemingly private nature of some accounts, spiritual diaries and autobiographies played a vital role in communal life and were generally intended to be read by an audience of some description – even if only family and friends.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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As always, Swansea University Library proves to be a very convivial place to work and I am especially grateful to Lynne Cooling, Sophie Randell, Colin Lawson and the rest of the shelvers for putting up with my continual anxieties about my thesis and providing very welcome distractions by making work fun.

Lastly, but by no means least, I want to thank my parents for their continued support and tolerance of my role as a seemingly perpetual student.

Abbreviations

- Archer, *Diary* Isaac Archer, *Diary* printed in M. Storey (ed.), *Two East Anglian Diaries, 1641-1729: Isaac Archer and William Coe* (Woodbridge: Suffolk Records Society, 36, 1994).
- Beaumont, *Narrative* Agnes Beaumont, *The Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont* (c.1674) reprinted in J. Stachniewski and A. Pacheco (eds.), *Grace Abounding with Other Spiritual Autobiographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Bunyan, *GA* John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) reprinted in J. Stachniewski and A. Pacheco (eds.), *Grace Abounding with Other Spiritual Autobiographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Bunyan, *PP* John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) edited by R. Sharrock (London: Penguin, 1987).
- Calvin, *Institutes* John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1559 Edition* reprinted in *Calvin's Institutes* (Florida: MacDonald Publishing Company, no date given). NB. References are by book, chapter and section number, as well as by page reference to the MacDonald reprint.
- Clarke, *Lives* Samuel Clarke, *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in This Later Age in Two Parts: I. Of Divines, II. Of Nobility and Gentry of Both Sexes*, (London: Printed for Thomas Simmons, 1683).
- Halyburton, *Memoirs* Thomas Halyburton, *Memoirs of the Life of Rev. Thomas Halyburton* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, c. 1847).
- Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries* Cicely Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries* (c.1636-1637) printed in N. Baker (ed.), *Scripture Women: Rose Thurgood, 'A Lecture of Repentance' and Cicely Johnson, 'Fanatical Reveries'* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2005).
- Perkins, *Work* I. Breward (ed.), *The Work of William Perkins* (Abingdon: The Sutton Courtney Press, 1970).
- Powell, *Life* Edward Bagshaw, *The Life and Death of Mr. Vavasor Powell, that faithful minister and Confessor of Jesus Christ* (London: 1671). NB. Although this text is

attributed to Edward Bagshaw (1629-1671), *The Life and Death of Mr. Vavasor Powell* was actually written by Powell himself. The other sections included in this edition, such as ‘Powell’s Deathbed Expressions’ and ‘Poems on the Death of Mr Vavasor Powell’, were written by friends, and the whole was probably collated by Bagshaw.

- Rogers, *Diary* T. Webster and Kenneth Shipps (eds.), *The Diary of Samuel Rogers, 1634-1638* (Woodbridge: Church of England Record Society, 11, 2004).
- Thurgood, *Lecture* Rose Thurgood, *A Lecture of Repentance* (1636-1637) printed in N. Baker (ed.), *Scripture Women: Rose Thurgood, ‘A Lecture of Repentance’ and Cicely Johnson, ‘Fanatical Reveries’* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2005).
- Trosse, *Life* George Trosse, *The Life of the Reverend Mr George Trosse* (1714) reprinted with an introduction by A.W. Brink (ed.), (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1974).
- Wallington, *Growth* Nehemiah Wallington, *The Growth of a Christian: Being the second book consarning the fruit and Bennifeet that (through the marcy of God) I gaine by the Sacrament* (British Library, Add. MS. 40883).
- Wallington, *Notebooks* D. Booy (ed.), *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618-1654: A Selection* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
- Wallington, *Record* Nehemiah Wallington, *A Record of God’s Mercies, or A Thankeful Remembrance, wherein is set down my miserable and sad condition of my corrupt nature with some of the many mercies of God to my soul and body to the year 1630* (Guildhall Library, London, MS. 204).

Note on Quotations

Quotations from printed sources and manuscripts are given as they appear. If a word is unclear in a quotation from a manuscript its modern equivalent is placed next to it in square brackets. Biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version.

Introduction

This thesis began with a desire to answer two interrelated questions: firstly, how were the structure and content of seventeenth-century spiritual diaries and autobiographies influenced by the Calvinist theological beliefs of their authors; and secondly, is there a set pattern to which these works adhere? To answer these questions my research analyses the spiritual diaries and autobiographies of one particular group of seventeenth-century nonconformists - English Puritans. It might be wondered why the texts of Puritans have been chosen as the focus of this study rather than works by other types of nonconformist groups or sects, such as the Quakers, Muggletonians or Fifth Monarchists.¹ Whilst it would certainly be interesting to analyse the structure of other nonconformist spiritual diaries and autobiographies this would not satisfy my purpose, for my main intention is to see how *Calvinist* theological beliefs influenced the writing of such texts and I believe that these doctrines are best exemplified in the writings of the ‘hotter sort of Protestants’, the English Puritans, who were known for their religious fervency and ‘attachment to the doctrines of Calvinism’.²

Calvin and Calvinism: Historical Debates

John Calvin was ‘univocally celebrated by English Protestants’ as a whole, becoming ‘England’s most published author between 1548 and 1650’.³ His works passed

¹ O.C. Watkins identifies 125 Quaker spiritual autobiographies written before 1725. See O.C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 241-260.

² Perceval Wiburn quoted in P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 27; J. Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 15. See also A. Ganoczy, ‘Calvin’s Life’ in D.K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 24, and W. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 84 where Ganoczy avers that Puritanism had ‘Calvinistic roots’ and Haller maintains ‘that Puritan doctrine was indebted to Calvin hardly requires to be said’.

³ J. Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 17; N. Jones, ‘Known from their Works: Living and Writing in Early Modern English Religious History’ in S. Wabuda and C. Litzenger (eds.), *Belief*

through ninety-three English editions between 1559 and 1603 thus causing Andrew Pettegree to maintain that ‘by whatever measure one adopts, Calvin emerges as the dominant force in the theology of the Elizabethan church’.⁴

Calvinist soteriological doctrines, such as predestination, were first synthesized into a coherent form during the late sixteenth century by William Perkins (1558-1602). Yet here we must remember that some historians and theologians see a clear distinction between the thought of John Calvin and the ‘Calvinism’ of his successors. Basil Hall maintains that Calvin’s later successors, such as Theodore Beza, ‘distorted the balance of doctrines which he [Calvin] had tried to maintain’.⁵ Whilst R.T. Kendall refutes the ‘general assumption’ that ‘William Perkins and his followers were followers of the Genevan reformer John Calvin and that the theology embraced in the Westminster Confession of Faith was true Calvinism, or, at least the logical extension of his thought’.⁶ Indeed, Kendall claims that the English Calvinism expounded by Perkins and the Westminster Assembly actually followed the thought of Beza, rather than Calvin. Whilst he acknowledges that Perkins may have ‘assumed that Beza was but an extension of Calvin, and that Beza merely stated Calvin’s theology better’ he is adamant that ‘Calvin and Beza were not alike’.⁷ To support this contention Kendall argues that Calvin believed Christ died for all men (universal atonement) whilst Beza believed that Christ died for the elect alone (limited atonement) and also that Beza’s understanding of faith differed from Calvin’s, for Calvin calls faith ‘a persuasion; Beza says one must “persuade himself certainly”’ – thus indicating that Calvin saw faith as a divinely granted gift whilst Beza believed it

and Practice in Reformation England: A Tribute to Patrick Collinson by his Students (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 15

⁴ A. Pettegree, ‘The Spread of Calvin’s Thought’ in D.K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, p. 210.

⁵ B. Hall, ‘Calvin against the Calvinists’ in G.E. Duffield (ed.), *John Calvin* (London: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966), p. 25.

⁶ R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), pp. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

to be an act of will.⁸ For the purpose of this thesis I will consider the religious thought expounded by both Calvin and Perkins to be ‘Calvinism’.

Yet this is not the only debate surrounding the nature of Calvinism as, for example, there is no agreement on the interpretation of central Calvinist doctrines. Calvinism is frequently considered to be an austere form of theology which drove those who adhered to it into fathomless and inescapable despair thanks to the power of that ‘decretum horribilis’, predestination, and its allied doctrines.⁹ Blair Worden, for example, maintains that ‘the volume of despair engendered by the Puritan teaching on predestination is incalculable’ and John Stachniewski concurs with Worden’s estimation stating that Calvin’s thought in the *Institutes* provides ‘the matrix for English cases of despair’.¹⁰ However, this is not the only perception of matters. Loraine Boettner declares that predestination (which is viewed by many as

⁸ R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, pp. 13, 29, 34. Thus we see that the crux of Kendall’s argument is that later day ‘Calvinists’, including the ‘experimental predestinarians’, or Puritans, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, did not follow the thought of John Calvin on several major points including the scope of atonement and the nature of faith. Since the original publication of Kendall’s book in 1979 numerous historians and theologians have challenged Kendall’s thesis and demonstrated that Calvinist/Puritan theology is wholly consistent with Calvin’s own position. Such studies include P. Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) where Helm’s professed aim is to demonstrate the truism that ‘Calvin was a Calvinist’ and that ‘Calvin and the Puritans were, theologically speaking, at one’ (p. v); J.R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and his Successors* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999) which argues that later Calvinists differed from Calvin in emphasis, rather than substance, when discussing assurance and M.E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000) which finds many flaws in Kendall’s methodology, criticising his ‘sweeping synthetic study’ for its ‘ignorance of particulars and slighting of specifics’ which misleads the reader, in contrast, Dever claims his study raises serious questions about the ‘Calvin against the Calvinists’ theme by suggesting a model ‘that relates English Puritanism to its Reformed forefathers with less discontinuity than the interpretation that is regnant’ (pp. 216, 217, 167, 7). Moreover, J.D. Moore’s, ‘Calvin versus the Calvinists? The Case of John Preston (1587-1628)’, *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, 6:3 (2004), pp. 327-348 argues that Kendall was inaccurate when he claimed that Preston distorted Calvin’s theology by expounding limited atonement; Moore demonstrates that Preston actually expounded universal atonement thereby exposing a flaw in Kendall’s argument.

⁹ This view was also held by seventeenth-century Quakers. George Fox, a founder of the movement, termed the north Warwickshire Puritan clergy ‘miserable comforters’. Moreover, the German Pietist, Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644-1724), also found double-decree predestination an unpalatable doctrine for she maintained that she ‘could not grasp how God, who is essentially love, would condemn so many to eternal condemnation’. See A. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 319; Johanna Eleonora Petersen, *The Life of Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen, Written by Herself*. Translated and edited by Barbara Becker-Cantarino (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 86.

¹⁰ B. Worden quoted in J. Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, p. 1; *Ibid.*, p. 19.

the central core of Calvinism) should not be viewed as a ‘cold, barren, speculative theory’, but rather as ‘a most warm, . . . vital and important account of God’s relations with men’.¹¹ Ann Hughes reminds us that the Calvinism espoused by godly Puritans ‘did not lead to a fatalistic acceptance of God’s decrees but to an active promotion of God’s service in the world’, and so concerns about election or reprobation could be assuaged by a commitment to fighting sin and corruption in this life.¹² Whilst E.A. McKee emphasises Calvin’s spirituality and maintains that his piety was ‘that of a pastor passionately and wholly committed to living out God’s claim on him, and calling others to hear and heed, to rejoice in and witness to God’s claim on them as the purpose and joy of their lives’ rather than a cold, purely intellectual form of faith.¹³ Calvin himself believed that ‘heart and head must go together, but the heart is more important’.¹⁴

Richard A. Muller has also drawn attention to scholarly disagreement over the central tenets of Calvinism. He observes that one can read that ‘Calvin’s theology rested on the divine decrees as a central principle; Calvin’s theology rested on the principle of the sovereignty of God; Calvin’s theology centred on the doctrine of the Trinity; Calvin’s thought was Christocentric’.¹⁵ In almost identical words Stephen Edmondson concurs with Muller and notes that Calvin’s theology has been variously declared ‘centered on the sovereignty of God, predestination, Christology, the Trinity, the knowledge of God, and faith’ with some scholars even alleging that it has no centre at all.¹⁶ With such disparate interpretations of Calvin’s theology existing

¹¹ L. Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), p. 327.

¹² A. Hughes, *Godly Reformation and its Opponents in Warwickshire, 1640-1662* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, 35, 1993), p. 5.

¹³ E.A. McKee (ed.), *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁵ R.A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁶ S. Edmondson, *Calvin’s Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.1.

amongst modern day scholars, it would be interesting to discover whether Calvin's thought had a uniform effect on those who followed it, or if it could affect different people in different ways. These are questions which this thesis will address by analysing the spiritual diaries and autobiographies of seventeenth-century English Puritans.

Yet English Puritans are elusive characters. There is considerable disagreement - both among seventeenth-century contemporaries and modern day historians - over who should be labelled 'Puritan' and why they deserve such an appellation.¹⁷ It will therefore be useful to begin this section with a survey of the respective views: I will firstly consider the views of modern academics to show the state of current research into the subject and to illustrate where I hope my own work will fit in with Puritan scholarship; I will then explore seventeenth-century views of Puritanism and discuss the ways in which the use of the term altered during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

¹⁷ We need only consider Peter Lake's essay 'Defining Puritanism – again?' which identified three different approaches to defining Puritanism and posited a fourth. Lake considered Patrick Collinson's description of a movement committed to further reformation in the government or liturgy of the church to be the first approach to defining what it meant to be a 'Puritan'. He then saw attempts to 'define the Puritan style as a distinctively zealous or intense subset of a larger body of reformed or protestant doctrines and positions' to be the second approach to the definition. Historians who practised this approach did not search for a point of view or position that was uniquely 'Puritan', but rather sought to 'describe the totality of relations, the internal articulations and interconnections between the individual tenets and tendencies which made up the Puritan style', and Lake includes some of his earlier work, such as his *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* in this approach. Whilst the third approach asserted that it was impossible to describe any particular group of people as 'Puritan' because the constituent parts of 'Puritan style' are 'so close . . . to wider bodies of reformed or protestant thought, that residual notions of Puritanism as a free-standing view of the world are best jettisoned' and was advocated by historians such as C.H. George and K. George in their *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation*. Lake then asserted that his own 'current' position on the matter was an amalgam of the second and third approaches for he believed that 'Puritanism' was a synthesis 'of strands most or many of which taken individually could be found in non-Puritan as well as Puritan contexts, but which when taken together formed a distinctively Puritan synthesis or style'. See P. Lake, 'Defining Puritanism – again?' in F.J. Bremer (ed.) *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), pp. 3-6. Also of interest here is Andrew Cambers' description of the four different phases of research into Puritanism which can be found in his 'Reading, the Godly, and Self-Writing in England, circa 1580-1720' in *Journal of British Studies*, 46:4 (2007), pp. 796-825, especially pp. 799-801.

Historiography of English Puritanism

The most notable feature of the recent historiography of English Puritanism is the disparity of viewpoints shown by historians and literary scholars. Not only do many scholars dispute the exact characteristics present in 'Puritan' individuals but some even argue that 'Puritanism' itself did not exist because they cannot identify a clearly definable movement – a frustrated J.W. Allen declared that 'Puritanism seems to have been a discovery of later thought and research'.¹⁸ Historians such as C.H. George and J.C. Davis consider that the term should be abandoned because of its nebulousness whilst others, such as J.S. McGee, consider the term has been 'so stretched as to lose most of its shape'.¹⁹ Patrick Collinson has also argued that it is not a helpful description because it is one which the men and women described in this manner detested, since 'Puritans did not call themselves Puritan but suffered the name as an objectionable stigma'.²⁰

¹⁸ J.W. Allen quoted in C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.15.

¹⁹ See C.H. George, 'Puritanism as History and Historiography', *Past and Present*, 41 (1968), pp. 77-104; J.C. Davis, 'Puritanism and Revolution: Themes, Categories, Methods and Conclusions' in *Historical Journal*, 34:2 (1991), pp. 479-490 and J.S. McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans and the Two Tables, 1620-1670* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 10. Compare with I. Breward, 'The Abolition of Puritanism' in *Journal of Religious History*, 7 (1972-1973), pp. 20-34 which offers the counterargument and asserts that 'far from leading to the abolition of 'puritanism', further study will lead to its reinstatement as an important factor in the causation of the civil war and the search for a new basis for church and society that marked the interregnum' (p.34).

²⁰ P. Collinson, *The Puritan Character: Polemics and Polarities in Early Seventeenth-Century Culture* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1989), p. 12. Kate Peters provides an interesting parallel here for she argues that 'one of the reasons for the Quakers' strong identity, was the alacrity with which they appropriated their own nickname, and presented it in their publications as a term which epitomized their causes and their beliefs'. Perhaps we could extend Peters' argument and say that one of the reasons historians have problems identifying a specific 'Puritan movement' is because 'Puritans' resented their nickname and did not attempt to create a more palatable name which 'members' would have been proud to own. See: K. Peters, "'The Quakers quaking": Print and the Spread of a Movement' in S. Wabuda and C. Litzenberger (eds.), *Belief and Practice in Reformation England*, p. 250.

However, Peters' essay makes no reference to Edward Burrough's (1633-1663) 'Epistle to the Reader' in George Fox's *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded, and Antichrists Kingdom Revealed unto Destruction* (London: Printed for Tho. Simmons, 1659). Here Burrough maintains that the text's purpose is to make the reader 'come to the perfect knowledge of the ground of difference between the Priests, and Professors, and all Sects in these Nations; and Us, who are in scorn called *Quakers*' (sig. A1r).

In a similar manner to Christopher Hill who believed that the word ‘Puritan’ was ‘an admirable refuge from clarity of thought’, C.H. George believes ‘Puritanism’ to be a confusing term that hinders rather than helps analysis.²¹ He also maintains that he ‘has strong reservations about granting that there is any “history of the puritanism” from 1560 to 1660’, sees no continuity between pre-revolutionary Puritanism of the 1630s and revolutionary Puritanism of the 1640s and only endeavours to discuss the subject because ‘the convention is so entrenched in our historiography’.²² George suggests that whilst there were definitely ‘Puritans’ at this stage (loosely defined as those who wished to improve the quality of ministers and preaching and aimed to raise the moral and ethical standards of the laity), there was no party or movement that represented these ideas, neither were there any identifiable religious beliefs attributable solely to Puritans for he is adamant that ‘there was no theology separating Puritans from Anglicans or binding Puritans to Puritans’.²³ Collinson also supports this line of thought when he argues that ‘all attempts to distinguish this person, or that idea, or a certain practice or prejudice, as Puritan rather than otherwise are liable to fail’ – thus causing us to wonder whether too much emphasis has been placed on a label.²⁴

²¹ C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 15. cf. with C.H. George, ‘Puritanism as History and Historiography’, p. 104.

²² C.H. George, ‘Puritanism as History and Historiography’, p. 78. See also W. Lamont, ‘Puritanism as History and Historiography: Some Further Thoughts’ in *Past and Present*, 44 (August, 1969), pp. 133-146, which refutes George’s argument and contends that there is continuity between pre-revolutionary Puritanism and revolutionary Puritanism, for they share a common denominator – chiliasm (millenarianism).

²³ C.H. George, ‘Puritanism as Historiography’, p. 101. See J.F.H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of their Opposition, 1558-1640* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) and J.S. McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans and the Two Tables, 1620-1670* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), for the counter argument. New argues that there were clear doctrinal differences between Anglicans and Puritans during this period – he maintains that the two groups were even diametrically opposed on some theological issues. McGee argues that ‘an Anglican could recognize a Puritan when he met one and vice-versa because each viewed the other from behind lenses strongly tinted by a particular ideal conception of true Christianity’ (p. 2).

²⁴ P. Collinson, *The Puritan Character*, p. 15.

However, this said, the vast majority of historians do acknowledge that Puritanism existed - G.E. Aylmer concludes that it must have existed because why else 'were some people and not others called Puritans'? - and many other scholars offer their own definitions of the term.²⁵ Christopher Hill concludes that 'there was in England in the two or three generations before the civil war a body of opinion which can usefully be labelled Puritan. There was a core of doctrine about religion and Church government, aimed at purifying the Church from inside'.²⁶ E.S. Morgan, for example, terms 'Puritan' 'all who thought the Elizabethan settlement to be not sufficiently reformed' and, in a similar fashion, Francis J. Bremer terms 'Puritanism' to be, at a very basic level, 'an agenda calling for furthering the perfection of Protestant reform'.²⁷

William Haller, however, takes a much broader view of Puritanism than Morgan and Bremer when he declares it to be a 'spiritual outlook, way of life and mode of expression'.²⁸ Yet David Como narrows the field once again when proclaiming it 'a cultural, rather than political, doctrinal or ecclesiological, phenomenon' whose members shared several traits namely 'devotion to word-centered religion, shared modes of speech and behavior, an affection for Calvinist or reformed divinity, deep suspicion of Popery in all its forms'.²⁹ He also considers that

²⁵ G.E. Aylmer, 'Collective Mentalities in Mid Seventeenth-Century England: I. The Puritan Outlook' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 36 (5th series, 1986), p. 2. Patrick Collinson offers an alternative view in his essay 'Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*: The Theatre Constructs Puritanism' where he argues that "'Puritans" in Elizabethan and Jacobean England existed by virtue of being perceived to exist, most of all by their enemies, but eventually to themselves and to each other' - in other words, the 'Puritan' stereotype was created on stage before it entered real life. See P. Collinson, 'Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*: The Theatre Constructs Puritanism' in D.L. Smith, R. Strier and D. Bevington (eds.), *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre and Politics in London 1576-1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 158.

²⁶ C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 30.

²⁷ E.S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 6-7; F.J. Bremer and T. Webster (eds.), *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia* (2 vols, Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2006), I, xiii.

²⁸ W. Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, p. 9.

²⁹ D. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 29.

Puritans were marked out by distinctive forms of social integration such as ‘sermon-gadding, public and private fasting and, above all, informal meetings for prayer and discussion which were known amongst puritans as “conferences” or “communion”, and to outsiders as “conventicles”’ as well as by their desire to form communities of their own where they married like-minded godly individuals, ensured their children studied under godly tutors and socialised with other Puritans.³⁰ Como’s definition is akin to Francis J. Bremer’s observation that ‘those who were perceived as Puritans felt themselves to be members of a special community – a communion of saints, a fellowship of the elect, a godly people’.³¹ Moreover, both these statements are reflected in Peter Lake’s *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* where he maintained that ‘Puritans’ were ‘a godly community brought together by a common experience of, and response to, the doctrine and reality of the providence of God, called to that common experience by the word of God as preached by his ministers, and united against the profane, the sinful’ and any who ‘did not inwardly share the same experiences and attitudes based on those beliefs’.³²

Como, Bremer and Lake’s viewpoints clearly suggest that ‘Puritans’ formed an identifiable element of society and that they could easily recognise like-minded individuals. This notion of fellowship and community amongst those labelled ‘Puritan’ is a central theme of this thesis, for my research shows how spiritual diaries and autobiographies fitted in with communal piety – since their composition was influenced by the author’s surrounding community and they, in turn, had the power to influence those who read them. This suggests that a considerable degree of continuity may be expected in the texts under discussion yet, paradoxically, my work

³⁰ D. Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, p. 30.

³¹ F.J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610-1692* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), p. 5.

³² P. Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 133.

also stresses that each of these accounts was unique and did not follow a set pattern governed by theological beliefs or communal expectations - thereby upholding the notion that Puritans formed a distinct religious grouping yet also emphasising that the existence of such a 'communal identity' did not prevent Puritans from expressing themselves with individual flair in their spiritual diaries and autobiographies.

As well as recognising that Puritans formed a clearly identifiable community, Peter Lake also acknowledges the existence of a specific Puritan style or attitude which operated 'within . . . the wider bodies of reformed thought and feeling that did indeed dominate, if not entirely monopolise, the commanding heights of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theological and ecclesiastical establishments'.³³ T.D. Bozeman also believes that 'Puritans' were a clearly definable group with a distinct attitude in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for he avers that 'beginning in the 1560s there was for a century and more a distinct pattern of principled dissent within English Protestantism. By virtue of its sustained pre-occupation with moral and primitive purity, it logically can be called Puritan'.³⁴ Whilst Nicholas Tyacke acknowledges that 'an organized movement aiming at the further reform of the English Church, and one which contemporaries christened "Puritan", is traceable from the earliest years of Queen Elizabeth'.³⁵ Conversely, Tom Webster prefers the terms 'the godly' or 'the professors' to 'Puritan', though he acknowledges that when he does use the appellation, it is 'to denote an anti-formalist search for "heart

³³ P. Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'Orthodoxy', 'heterodoxy' and the politics of the parish in early Stuart London* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 12.

³⁴ T.D. Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 7.

³⁵ N. Tyacke, 'The "Rise of Puritanism" and the Legalizing of Dissent, 1571-1719' in O.P. Grell, J. Israel and N. Tyacke (eds.), *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 18.

religion”, for truly valid religious experience that found it difficult to endure any stumbling block [e.g. Prayer Book ceremonies] to that search’.³⁶

Whether Puritanism was an identifiable movement is not the only issue that modern day historians disagree on. It is also debated whether Puritanism was an oppositional movement (i.e. a radical Puritan movement in conflict with a conservative Anglican establishment) that possessed theological beliefs that were diametrically opposed to those of the established church – it is reported that James I warned his son that the Puritans were a scourge to the kingdom ‘breathing nothing but sedition and calumnies, aspiring without measure, railing without reason, and making their own imaginations . . . the square of their conscience’.³⁷ Nicholas Tyacke’s research has turned this argument on its head for he has shown that a ‘Calvinist consensus’ existed in England during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries where Anglicans (those who conformed to the Church of England) and Puritans shared an adherence to Calvinist theology. He suggests that Calvinism was the ‘characteristic theology’ of English Protestantism during this time as ‘Calvinist doctrine provided a common ameliorating bond’ which was only upset by the rise of an aggressive form of Arminianism under Archbishop Laud in the 1630s which imposed theological and ceremonial innovations on the Church, thus alienating the more radical element among the Puritan faction and eventually causing the outbreak of Civil War.³⁸

As a consequence of this, historians such as Collinson and Tyacke view Archbishop Laud as ‘the greatest calamity ever visited upon the Church of England’,

³⁶ T. Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement c. 1620-1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 3.

³⁷ James I quoted in J. Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 11.

³⁸ N. Tyacke, ‘Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution’ in M. Todd (ed.), *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 56. NB. Tyacke’s essay was originally printed in C. Russell (ed.), *The Origins of the English Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

yet they are gainsaid by Kevin Sharpe and Peter White. Arminianism, argues White, was demonised by John Pym and turned into ‘a bridge to usher in popery’ whilst in reality Calvinism was not suppressed and ‘some “Calvinist” churchmen imposed the changes [i.e. the repositioning and railing off of the altar and communion table] with less hesitation than Laud’.³⁹ Moreover, we must not forget that there has also been a backlash against the research of ‘revisionist’ historians such as Tyacke who see Calvinism as a feature which unified Anglicans and Puritans. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, for example, do not accept that Puritanism ‘was part of a broad and indistinguishable Calvinist consensus’ for Puritanism could be a disruptive and divisive influence, whilst Seán Hughes argues that ‘not all English theologians could be associated with Calvin’s doctrine of predestination’.⁴⁰

It has also become fashionable to attempt to define Puritanism by looking at individual Puritans and assessing their qualities and attributes - as William Lamont has done in his analyses of William Prynne, Richard Baxter and Ludowick Muggleton as well as Peter Lake’s study of Laurence Chaderton, Edward Dering, Thomas Cartwright and William Whitaker.⁴¹ This, however, is a difficult task, for the Puritans were as diverse a group as can be imagined and many different strands of puritanical thought can be found. For example, if one were to consider Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) and John Milton (1608-1674) to be ‘true’ Puritans then it is possible to view Puritanism as a militant political movement seeking to forcibly restrict the power of the monarchy through the use of parliament - as many Royalists would attest, ‘the real origin of the Civil War lay in the hypocritical and subversive

³⁹ P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 90; P. White, ‘The *via media* in the Early Stuart Church’ in M. Todd (ed.) *Reformation to Revolution*, pp. 89, 91.

⁴⁰ R. Cust and A. Hughes (eds.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England. Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603-1642* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 21; S. Hughes quoted in N. Jones, ‘Known from their Works’ in S. Wabuda and C. Litzenberger (eds.), *Belief and Practice in Reformation England*, p. 15.

⁴¹ See W. Lamont, *Puritanism and Historical Controversy* (London: UCL Press, 1996), pp. 15-52; P. Lake, *Moderate Puritans in the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982).

religion of the Parliamentary leaders'.⁴² If John Bunyan (1628-1688) is considered typical, then Puritanism was an intensely spiritual and introspective movement which sought to clarify the relationship between God and the individual. If the theologian, John Owen (1616-1683), exemplifies it, then Puritanism may best be termed a theological movement.

This approach, however, makes it seem almost impossible to label such disparate characters with the same term. It may even cause us to question if there is a common 'Puritan experience' and agree with Patrick Collinson's statement that 'the coherence of our concept of Puritanism depends upon knowing as little about particular Puritans as possible' – thereby going against what Norman Jones has termed one of Collinson's guiding principles which is that 'it is very dangerous to think of religious history apart from the people who attempted to live the religion'.⁴³ Nevertheless, it *is* possible to link these strands together when overriding characteristics which appear to unite most Puritans under one banner are found. For instance, the ardent belief in one's own election (divine selection for salvation), the 'Puritan impulse - that drive to show in their lives their strong sense of personal salvation', providentialism, an awareness of the astounding graciousness of God's mercy and mankind's fallibility, a virulent dislike for popish ceremony, an inherent desire for reform and the belief that 'true faith involved a constant struggle against the enemies of God' were notions shared by the majority of Puritans alike.⁴⁴

Thus we see that Puritanism has engendered considerable debate amongst modern historians. Some refuse to admit there was a clearly defined movement that existed in the seventeenth century; others suggest that there was no correlation

⁴² R.C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 22.

⁴³ P. Collinson, *The Puritan Character*, p. 8; N. Jones, 'Known from their Works', p. 16.

⁴⁴ J. Spurr, *English Puritanism*, p. 202; D. Oldridge, *Religion and Society in Early Stuart England*, p. 65.

between pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Puritanism; some maintain there was no specific Puritan style or culture, for those labelled ‘Puritan’ were immensely diverse, others still claim that Puritanism possessed its own theological beliefs and was diametrically opposed to Anglicanism.⁴⁵ Historians also disagree on what formed the cornerstone of ‘Puritan theology’ (assuming that such an entity may be discerned) – is the experience of the Holy Spirit, predestination, divine grace or Christ at the very heart of the movement? Dewey D. Wallace, John Stachniewski, John von Rohr and William Haller all argue for the primacy of the doctrine of predestination in Puritan thought; Geoffrey Nuttall argues for the centrality of the Holy Spirit to the Puritan mind.⁴⁶

It is unlikely that these issues will ever be resolved thus making the establishment of a universally accepted definition of Puritanism unlikely. Having discussed the differing views of modern day historians on this subject we shall progress by asking two interrelated questions: firstly, what common beliefs were shared by those identified as ‘Puritans’ by their contemporaries?; secondly, did ‘Puritan’ remain a static term throughout the course of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?

⁴⁵ See J.F.H. New’s *Anglican and Puritan* which shows that the conflict between these two groups was doctrinal in nature.

⁴⁶ D.D. Wallace, Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Thought, 1525-1695* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1982); J. Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); J. von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) and W. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper, 1957) – especially p. 83 where Haller terms predestination ‘the central dogma of Puritanism as it applied to the life of men in the seventeenth century’; G.F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), especially p. 9 where Nuttall explains that differences in theology sometimes turned on varying perceptions of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

English Puritanism: Seventeenth-Century Definitions

Any analysis of seventeenth-century Puritanism is immediately confronted with the complex notion that although all Puritans were Protestants, conversely, not all Protestants were Puritans. So, how did they differ in the eyes of contemporaries? According to the Puritan divine, William Bradshaw (1571-1618) Puritans were members of the 'rigidest sort' who differed from their neighbours in matters of liturgical practice, for they believed that 'all ecclesiastical actions invented and devised by man, are utterly to be excluded out of the exercises of religion' because every act of worship 'ought evidently to be prescribed by the word of God, or else not be done'.⁴⁷ Henry Parker (1604-1652) seconds this statement and claims that 'dissent in ecclesiastical policie about ceremonies and other smaller matters, being not of the substance of religion, first gave occasion to raise this reproachful word Puritan in the Church'.⁴⁸

Thus a key feature of Puritanism and, by extension Calvinism, becomes visible: its strict adherence to the Bible and attention to the 'substance of religion' for, in the words of John Geree (1601-1649), Puritans 'did not wholly reject the liturgy, but the corruption of it'.⁴⁹ Their faith was firmly anchored in the word of God, for the Puritan dared 'do nothings in the worship of God or course of his life, but whatt gods worde warrant[ed] hym' since he 'overflowes so with the Bible, that . . . [he] spills it upon every occasion'.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ William Bradshaw, *English Puritanisme* (London: 1641), title page and p. 1.

⁴⁸ Henry Parker, *A Discourse Concerning Puritans* (London: Printed for Robert Bostock, 1641), p.5. NB. This text is variously attributed to Henry Parker and John Ley.

⁴⁹ John Geree, *The Character of an Old English Puritan or Nonconformist* (London: Printed by W. Wilson for Christopher Meredith, 1646), p. 2.

⁵⁰ Sir Robert Harley (1579-1656) quoted in D. Willen, 'Godly Women in Early Modern England: Puritanism and Gender', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 43:4 (1992), pp. 561-580, quotation on p. 563; John Earle, *Micro-cosmographie. Or, A Peece of the World Discovered in Essayes and Characters* (London: Printed by R. B[adger] for Robert Allot, 1630), sig. K4r-v.

In actual fact, Puritans deemed the Bible the sole repository of God's truth because they considered that the word of God contained in the scriptures was 'of absolute perfection'.⁵¹ Arthur Dent (c.1553-1607), the rector of South Shoebury in Essex, declared that 'both public and private reading of the scriptures are very necessary and profitable' for they 'increase knowledge and judgement' and 'make us more fit to hear the word preached'.⁵² John Bunyan (1628-1688) also considered the Bible to be an essential part of religion for he believed that 'the holy scriptures, of themselves, without the addition of human interventions, are able to make the man of God perfect in all things'; Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* also taught that the Bible was central to spiritual awakening for Christian was first made aware of his heinous spiritual state by reading the Bible.⁵³ Consequently, many Puritans passionately believed in 'reformation' and insisted that any aspects of worship not prescribed in the Bible should be abandoned, thereby giving rise in some to an earnest desire to reform the Church and abolish practices not prescribed by the Bible. These, of course, are clerical views.

Yet if we consider the role Bible reading played in the lives of the laity, we soon see that their views on this matter were virtually identical to the beliefs of their ministers. Samuel Clarke's *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons* (1683) records many examples of intense Biblicism being a vital feature of everyday life for the subjects of his short biographies. From Clarke's text we learn that 'there was no Day that passed over' Katherine Clark's 'head (except Sickness, or some other unavoydable necessity hindred) wherein she did not read some portions of the Sacred Scriptures,

⁵¹ William Bradshaw, *English Puritanisme*, p. 1.

⁵² Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Man's Path-Way to Heaven* (1603), (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd., 1974), p. 301.

⁵³ John Bunyan, *A Confession of My Faith and a Reason of My Practice* reprinted in T.L. Underwood (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, (13 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), IV, 152; see Bunyan, *PP*, p. 11.

both in the *Old*, and *New Testament*, and of the Psalms'.⁵⁴ Lady Elizabeth Langham was also a constant reader of the Scriptures for Clarke notes that 'studying of the Sacred Scriptures, . . . always took up a considerable part of her daily hours of retirement'.⁵⁵ The same is true for John Row who 'read some part of the Scriptures, with some Commentary upon the same [every day], especially with *Calvins Exposition*, which he much delighted in for the Spirituality, and solidness thereof'.⁵⁶

The problem here, however, is that all these examples were recorded by Samuel Clarke – who was himself a clergyman. In order to obtain the opinion of the laity we need to look at the writings of individuals who were unconnected with the ministry – though, as shall be seen, even this does not mean there will be no evidence of ministerial influence on the authors themselves. For example, Nehemiah Wallington noted that he had 'read over the Bible many tims [times]' and we can also see how 'biblical incursions' (comforting scriptural quotations and voices 'heard' by Puritans and thought to be sent by God) are linked to Bible reading for Wallington states that when thinking how best to improve his life 'some places of holy scriptur came in my minde which I think very nessesary for my Life to bee guided by I did then between two and three a cloke I did [sic] a rise to find them & wright them out'.⁵⁷ Elizabeth Isham (1609-1654) also recalled how John Dod, her local minister, advised 'my selfe Sister & Brother to read 2 chapters a day the one in the Old Testament in the morning & the other in the New at night'.⁵⁸ Isham

⁵⁴ 'The Life and Death of Mrs. Katherine Clark' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 154. Clarke's work offers biographies of seventeenth-century ministers and noble men and women.

⁵⁵ 'The Life and Death of the Lady Elizabeth Langham' in *ibid.*, p. 200.

⁵⁶ 'The Life and Death of John Row' in *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁵⁷ Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 296; Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 188v.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance* [sic.] (c.1640), edited by Isaac Stephens. Available online at: http://www.history.ucr.edu/people/grad_students/stephens/TheAutobiography.pdf, p. 23.

For a brief biography of Isham see appendix 1. John Dod (1550-1645) was a nonconformist minister who took up a living in Hanwell, Oxfordshire in 1585. A refusal to subscribe to Archbishop Whitgift's three articles meant that Dod was suspended from Hanwell in 1604. Shortly after, Sir Erasmus Dryden invited him to Northamptonshire where he preached at Canons Ashby and from here

considered this to be such good advice that she continued to read the Bible in this manner for a long while after: ‘save thatt my being at London cast me a little behind to read thus & one psalme a day when we come to it wilbe 3 yeeres & reading the old Testament & thus one may read the New twise in the yeere’, which presumably means that it took Isham three years to read the Old Testament and six months to read the New Testament when reading one chapter of each a day.⁵⁹ Moreover, Rose Thurgood (b.1602/03) exhorted her readers to ‘search the scriptures, for therein is aeternall life’ - which clearly shows the important role Bible reading played in obtaining salvation.⁶⁰

It was not only important for Puritans to read the word; they were also acutely aware of the necessity of hearing it preached, for as Paul Seaver has noted, ‘the Puritan layman . . . frequently ascribed his conversion to an efficacious

he was able to evangelise the surrounding parishes; he also became a spiritual advisor to Lady Judith Isham. Dod acted as an intermediary between Sir Erasmus Dryden and Sir John Isham in the attempted marriage negotiation between Dryden’s grandson (John) and Isham’s daughter (Elizabeth). He was certainly a greatly respected minister who built up ‘a national reputation as a godly guide’ and was termed ‘the only fit person, with his so milde, meek and mercifull spirit’ to help Joan Drake - a spiritually troubled lady who received help from John Dod, Thomas Hooker, John Preston and James Ussher before her death in 1625 - overcome her spiritual distress in 1625. See J. Eales, ‘A Road to Revolution: The Continuity of Puritanism, 1559-1642’ in C. Durston and J. Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), p. 193; John Hart, *Trodden Downe Strength, by the God of Strength, or, Mrs Drake Revived* (London: Printed for R. Bishop by Stephen Pilkington, 1647), pp. 17-18; J. Fielding, ‘Dod, John’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) - available online at: www.oxforddnb.com - henceforth: *Oxford DNB*.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 19. Very little is known about Rose Thurgood, but we do know that she was living in Colchester when she wrote *A Lecture of Repentance* in around 1636-1637 and was impoverished. At the time of writing she was in her mid-thirties and had six siblings. She was also influenced by the preaching of the millenarian prophets Richard Farnham and John Bull. The *Lecture* is framed as a letter to Thurgood’s mother recording God’s mercies and her conversion, yet there are indications that she had a wider audience in mind – she addresses her ‘loving mother, sisters & friends or whatsoever thou art’ (p. 19). The text was transcribed by ‘E.A.’ in March 1638, but was not published until 2005; it is unclear whether it was circulated in manuscript form.

Thurgood was apparently illiterate and the fact that her narrative was recorded by a scribe links in with the issue of authorship – we might consider how far Thurgood is ‘constructed’ by the scribe and whose voice (Thurgood’s or the scribe’s) is being heard at any one time. These issues parallel recent debates over, for example, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (c.1436) - which was written by two scribes - where the question of who wrote what is a major topic of scholarly debate. Since very little is known about Thurgood and the identity of the scribe it is not possible to tell whether sections of the *Lecture* were written by anyone other than Thurgood herself and so, for the purposes of this dissertation, I shall consider the *Lecture* to be a verbatim record of her words. See: R. Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), esp. pp. 110-115.

sermon'.⁶¹ John Bunyan considered preaching to be his God-given gift and was humbled to hear members of his congregation refer to him as 'God's Instrument that shewed to them the Way of Salvation'.⁶² Bunyan was not alone in receiving this epithet, for godly ministers were often regarded in this fashion and, as Laurence Stone notes, 'one of the keys to Puritanism was belief in the value of preaching the word, as the sole efficacious method of winning souls and preventing their subsequent backsliding'.⁶³ Thomas Taylor claimed that preaching was 'the greatest blessing that the Lord bestoweth upon any people'.⁶⁴ William Perkins maintained that preaching the scriptures had the power to 'humble a man . . . and to cast him down to hell and afterwards restore him and raise him up again' thus suggesting that preaching could be a useful catalyst for conversion.⁶⁵ The diary of Samuel Rogers (1613-c.1642) also shows that preaching could be both 'soule pricking' and 'thawing', whilst in gleeful reference to a sermon he has just attended Rogers exuberantly states: 'oh what a heaven is it, to injoy powerful, savoury preaching in a saboth; the life of the life'.⁶⁶ Arthur Dent would certainly have concurred with Rogers on this matter, for he firmly believed that preaching was 'the chiefest and most principal means which God hath ordained and sanctified for the saving of men [since] . . . faith commeth by hearing the word preached . . . [and thus] no preaching, no faith: no faith, no Christ: no Christ, no eternal life'.⁶⁷

Thus far we have seen the impact of preaching on those who were ministers themselves at the time of writing their accounts – yet how did it affect the Puritan

⁶¹ P.S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970). p. 38.

⁶² Bunyan, *GA*, p. 77.

⁶³ L. Stone, *The Past and the Present* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 148.

⁶⁴ Thomas Taylor quoted in T. Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ William Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian Religion* reprinted in I. Breward (ed.), *Work of William Perkins*, p. 162.

⁶⁶ Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 72, 73.

⁶⁷ Arthur Dent, *Plaine Man's Path-Way to Heaven*, pp. 371-372.

laity? To ascertain this, we may once again look at Samuel Clarke's *Lives*, for here Clarke records how Margaret Baxter (wife of Richard Baxter) heard a sermon preached by a certain Mr. H. Hickman upon Isaiah 27:11 which, 'wrought much upon her' and enabled 'the Doctrine of Conversion, preached by *Mr. Baxter* . . . [to be] received on her heart, as a Seal on the wax. Whereupon she presently fell to self-judging, frequent Reading, and Prayer, and serious thoughts about her present and future estate'.⁶⁸ Moreover, Clarke also notes that John Row 'heard those Preachers as were in the greatest Repute in those times, as Dr *Gouge*, Mr. *Stock*, &c. and by them he was much holpen [sic] forward in spiritual knowledge and quickened in his love to the ways of God'.⁶⁹

Rose Thurgood also commented that when she heard a sermon on Rev. 2:17 she felt her heart become 'inflamed with love' and felt herself drawn to God.⁷⁰ Whilst Cicely Johnson noted that she 'delighted to heare' the sermons of her town preacher, Mr Liddall, and that 'the Lord blessed his ministry unto my soule'.⁷¹ Nehemiah Wallington wrote a letter to Matthew Barker, the minister of his church in Eastcheap, where he exclaimed 'O sir what shall I say to you concerning your preaching [?] I know and find it to be very sweet and profitabl to mee praised be God[.] And my heart is indeared unto you'.⁷² Yet Wallington castigated Barker for treating his congregation too kindly when he mainly urged them to flee to Christ and

⁶⁸ 'The Life and Death of Mrs. Margaret Baxter' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 182.

⁶⁹ 'The Life and Death of Mr. John Row' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 106.

⁷⁰ Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 9.

⁷¹ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 32. Little is known about Cicely Johnson as she provides few details about her external life in the *Fanatical Reveries*. We do know that she was married to Thomas Johnson, moved to Colchester (a town known for its Puritan leanings) in 1617-1618, was a member of the 'middling sort' and that she was also the mother of at least five children. She wrote her text c.1636-1637 after being inspired to do so by the town preacher, Mr Knowles. Johnson suffered from a period of despair in 1629, but was helped to overcome it by Richard Maden, who was the Town Preacher before Knowles. She was also influenced by the preaching of the millenarian prophets Richard Farnham and John Bull. The *Fanatical Reveries* is addressed 'to the Reader' (p. 29) which suggests that Johnson was not simply recording God's mercies and retelling the story of her conversion for her own benefit, but actually had a wider audience in mind; the *Fanatical Reveries* was first published in 2005.

⁷² Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 261.

failed to call them to repent their sins at every possible occasion; he told Barker that ‘there is a foundation in a true and sound Repentance as well as a building up with a laying hold on Jesus Christ’ for it is only ‘the broken harted undone sinner that prises Jesus Christ [.] The more bitter sinne is the more sweet will Jesus Christ be to that soule’.⁷³ Wallington candidly maintained that he feared ‘some may sleepe and lye snortting in their sinnes for many yeers and scarce be ever awakened by so sweet preching as yours is’ – he obviously considered that ministers played a pivotal role in awakening souls.⁷⁴

Wallington was certainly not alone in condemning ministers for treating their congregations too softly. Richard Greenham believed that in order to save souls it was ‘necessarie that the Minister of God, doe very sharply rebuke the people for their sinnes, and that he lay them before God grievous judgements against sinners’.⁷⁵ Rose Thurgood maintained that ‘Christ saith, hee is the dore by which all that goe to heaven must Enter in att, And yet our Ministers would have men Creepe in at the wyndowes I thinke. For they show them, how they may lye upon bedds of Downe & goe to heaven’ when they fail to correct the errors of their congregation and keep them on the true path to Heaven.⁷⁶ ‘But let us have A minister, or a good Lectorer, who will tell them of their whoredome, pride, Covetousnes, and drunkenes’, says Thurgood.⁷⁷ ‘Then will they saye, what a Puritant [sic] fellow have wee gotten here? and such like words will they vent out of their gall against him, & it may chauce they will pinch him of his Lecture money’.⁷⁸ This certainly suggests that Thurgood, like Wallington, valued a minister who denounced the sins of his congregation but

⁷³ Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 261.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁷⁵ Richard Greenham quoted in E.J. Carlson, ‘The Boring of the Ear: Shaping the Pastoral Vision of Preaching in England, 1540-1640’ in L. Taylor (ed.), *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers Inc., 2003), p. 257.

⁷⁶ Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

considered that such good ministers were few and far between for many were incompetent; it also shows how ‘Puritan’ was used as a term of abuse for a particularly zealous minister.

Indeed, all of these examples clearly show the importance of preaching to Puritan piety, for it is clear that Puritans truly believed their salvation depended upon hearing the word preached; a fact that was reiterated by the Westminster Assembly of Divines in their *Confession of Faith* (1643) where it is noted that ‘the Ordinances in which this Covenant [of grace] is dispensed are the Preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments of Baptisme and the Lord’s Supper’.⁷⁹

Consequently, the role of the Puritan pastor was recognised as being of the utmost importance. He was expected to play a pivotal role in the eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil which, according to Puritan thought, was faced by all true Christians - as John Gere notes, the English Puritan considered his whole life ‘a warfare, wherein Christ was his captain, his arms, prayers and tears, [and] the cross, his banner’ for, as Darren Oldridge observes, ‘the idea of conflict was fundamental to the self image of these men [Puritans]’.⁸⁰ John Downname supports this assertion for he maintains that ‘as soone as we seeke for assurance of salvation in Christ, and endeavour to serve the Lord in a holie and a Christian life, wee are to prepare our selves for a combat . . . for the spiritual enemies of our salvation bandie

⁷⁹ Westminster Assembly of Divines, *The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisme First Agreed Upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (Amsterdam: Printed by Luice Elsever [i.e. Gideon Lithgow], for Andrew Wilson, 1649), p. 14.

⁸⁰ John Gere, *The Character of an Old English Puritan or Nonconformist*, p. 6; D. Oldridge, *Religion and Society in Early Stuart England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 65. Here it would be wise to mention the case of Cicely Johnson whose version of Puritanism saw no place for direct temptation from the Devil after full assurance had been granted (although there was room for indirect temptation – see below Chapter 7, Post-Conversion Experiences). Johnson believed that ‘the higher the soule is carried by the winges of true devotion into heavenly meditation and divine contemplation . . . the deeper doth the heavenly comfortes sinke down to the soule’. See Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 52.

themselves against us as soone as we have given our names unto God'.⁸¹ Moreover, Samuel Rogers also appears to have believed that his whole life would be one long battle for he notes that 'there will be a time, when sin will be no more for which I[']le waite and attend the lord in a sp:[iritual] warfare'.⁸²

It was the Puritan minister's duty to guide his congregation along the tortuous path to salvation and open their eyes to the precarious position of their souls, for he must 'call on his listeners to examine their consciences . . . [and] accept their sinful condition' and he must also teach them to repent for their sins thereby 'pull[ing] his people into the sheepfold of Jesus Christ, where they are without daunger [*sic*] of destruction'.⁸³ In short, he was deeply involved in the lives of his congregation and had to learn how to denounce their sins without driving them to despair. Indeed, as Neal Enssle has observed, the ideal English pastor in seventeenth-century England 'was expected to attend to a wide range of . . . moral and social needs within the parish community' alongside his traditional role of caring for the spiritual health of their souls - hence he may be deemed a counsellor as well as a spiritual advisor.⁸⁴

Yet Puritans did not consider all preaching to be of equal value. According to Paul Seaver, Puritans expected sermons to be held frequently, and be 'sound and profitable in substance' (i.e. be edifying). They were disgusted with any sermons that did not match these criteria or any minister who neglected the needs of his parishioners, for a good minister watched over his congregation as a shepherd watches his flock.⁸⁵ For example, Richard Baxter (1615-1691), who served as a preacher at Kidderminster during the 1640s, complained about the quality of

⁸¹ John Downname, *The Christian Warfare* (1604) (reprinted Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd., 1974), pp. 1-2.

⁸² Rogers, *Diary*, p. 23.

⁸³ D. Oldridge, *Religion and Society*, p. 68; Richard Greenham quoted in E.J. Carlson, 'Boring of the Ear' in L. Taylor (ed.), *Preachers and People*, p. 256.

⁸⁴ N. Enssle, 'Patterns of Godly Life: The Ideal Parish Minister in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Thought', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 28:1 (1997), pp. 3-28, quotation on p. 4.

⁸⁵ P.S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, pp.18-19.

preaching available in his home county (Shropshire) and emphasised the local preachers' incompetence as clerics by stating that near his home town of Eaton Constantine there were 'near a dozen ministers that were eighty years old a piece, and never preached; poor ignorant readers, and most of them of scandalous lives'; indeed, the fact that preachers led 'scandalous lives' was particularly galling to Puritans who considered that ministers must 'attend to themselves . . . that they may be precedents . . . of Godly life'.⁸⁶ Puritans also compiled lists of unworthy ministers which castigated preachers who laxly performed their ministerial duties such as the impious Mr Levit, parson of Leden Roding, 'a notorious swearer, a dicer, a carder, a hawker . . . a verie careles preson', the spiritually ignorant James Allen, vicar of Shopland, 'some time serving man, unable to preach, for he cannot render an accompt of his faith, neither in Latine nor English' and the licentious Mr Mason, parson of Rawrey, who 'had a childe by his maide, and is vehementlie suspected to have lived incontinentlie with others'.⁸⁷ Whilst in his diary Samuel Rogers frequently berated the sermons he heard at Great St Mary's, Cambridge, claiming that 'Maryes

⁸⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter*, J.M. Lloyd Thomas (ed.), (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1931), p. 4; George Downname quoted in N. Enssle, 'Patterns of Godly Life', p. 3.

⁸⁷ These examples relate to 1586 Essex and are taken from *A Parte of a Register* (Edinburgh, 1593), reprinted in E.S. Morgan, *Visible Saints*, pp. 8-9. Further information on these lists may be found in P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), pp. 41-42, 280-282. Collinson highlights how, in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, Puritans were distressed that 'a high proportion of those ordained were incapable of anything more than a "bare reading ministry" and lacked the minimal qualifications for the reformed pastor' (p. 42). He later discusses the survey of the condition of the ministry in a large number of parishes in seventeen counties which Puritans performed between 1584 and 1586. The lists that emerged as part of this survey detailed the value of each benefice, the names of the incumbents and stated whether the ministers were 'non-resident, pluralists or non-preachers, or, by contrast, worthy, resident, preaching pastors' (p. 280). In Warwickshire, for example, the quality of the clergy ranged from 'learned, zealous and godly and fit for the ministry; a happy age if our Church were fraught with many such' to 'an old priest and unsound in religion, he can neither preach nor read well, his chiefest trade is to cure hawks that are hurt or diseased, for which purpose many do usually repair to him' (p. 281). The information in these lists was made a debating-point in Parliament where it was used to push for further reform of the Church.

sermons move mee not I thinke; they may stand there all the yeare long, and there auditors goe away as wise they came, in the things of god'.⁸⁸

Given the importance of the godly minister's task (i.e. saving souls), the insistence on the 'right sort' of preaching and the prevalence of the belief that 'God held every minister accountable for every soul entrusted to him', it is unsurprising that many young Puritan preachers were eager to learn how to perform their pastoral duties by observing the actions of ministers who had a reputation for being exemplary in their field (such as the Elizabethan preacher, Richard Greenham [c.1535-c.1594]).⁸⁹ Indeed, ministers who seemed to personify the ideal image of a preacher were highly valued and were often able to gather a large number of followers eager to emulate their pastoral work. Consequently, it could be said that preaching was a mainstay of Puritan piety, for the Godly acknowledged that by preaching the word ministers were able to awake the soul to its sinful state, induce repentance and place the listener on the correct pathway to heaven.⁹⁰

The depth of Puritan religious zeal was also a feature frequently remarked upon by contemporaries. Henry Parker suggested that the term 'Puritan' was most commonly used to describe 'men of strict life, and precise opinions, which cannot be hated for any thing but their singularity in zeale and piety'.⁹¹ Yet even on this point there was disagreement. Perceval Wiburn commented that 'it is good to bee zealous in a good thing, *alwaies saith the holy Ghost*' though, conversely, in *Bartholomew*

⁸⁸ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 23.

⁸⁹ E.J. Carlson, 'The Boring of the Ear', p. 256.

⁹⁰ Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* shows how a sinner can be awakened to the perilous condition of his own soul. According to Bunyan, the first step of the journey is reading the Bible - the first time we meet Christian he has a great burden upon his back (sin) and is reading a book (the Bible) which causes him to weep, tremble and lament his own abominable condition. However, although Christian is now aware of the danger he is in he does not know how to find his saviour; he needs a guide to place him on the correct path to salvation. Bunyan shows that the only person able to fulfil this role of 'spiritual mentor' is a minister, when he informs us that Christian is assisted by Evangelist (who is the personification of the ideal parish minister). See Bunyan, *PP*, pp. 11-12.

⁹¹ Henry Parker, *A Discourse Concerning Puritans*, pp. 8-9.

Fair (1614) Ben Jonson represented Puritans in a negative light and presented Zeal-of-the-Land Busy as an interfering and hypocritical busybody and killjoy who was ‘of a most *lunatique* conscience, and splene, and affects the violence of *Singularity* in all he do’s’ and was also ‘one that rejoiceth in his affliction, and sitteth here to prophesie the destruction of *Fayres* and *May-games*, *Wakes*, and *Whitson-ales*, and doth sigh and groane for the reformation, of these abuses’.⁹² Indeed, Peter Lake maintains that in his plays Jonson reversed the traditional position of Puritan preachers. Where Puritan ministers presented the Godly ‘as the only true human community available in this life’, for Jonson ‘it was precisely the godly who were unfit for society, denying the conventional markers of sociability . . . then finding spurious ‘moral’ reasons to indulge their own individual appetites before denouncing the sinfulness and corruption of everyone else’.⁹³ Moreover, Oliver Ormerod also maintained that Puritans were hypocritical in their religious professions for he termed them

a Scismaticall and indiscreete companie, that would seeme to crie out for discipline, their whole talk is of it, and yet they neither knowe it, nor wil be reformed by it: that they are full of pride, thinking

⁹² Perceval Wiburn, *A Checke or reproofe of M. Howlets vntimely shreeching in her Maiesties eares* (London: 1581), 15v; Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), Act I, Scene III and Act IV, Scene VI available online via Literature Online at:

<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk> (consulted 05.05.07). Yet here we should consider Michael Wigglesworth whom E.S. Morgan terms ‘a living embodiment of the [Puritan] caricature’. Wigglesworth frequently castigated his pupils at Harvard for their ‘stubbornness . . . after all the warnings given them’ and commented on their ‘obstinate untowardness . . . in refusing to read Hebrew’ and also spent three pages of his diary ‘much distressed in conscience seeing a stable dore of Mr Mitchels beat to and fro with the wind, whither, I should out of duty shut it or no’. He even notes further on that God ‘suffereth me to be sorely buffeted with the like temptation as formerly about seeing some dores blow to and fro with the wind in some danger to break, as I think; I cannot tel whether it were my duty to give them some hint that owe [sic] them. When I think ’tis a common thing, and that ’tis impossible but that the owners should have oft seen them in that case, and heard them blow to and fro, and that it is but a trivial matter, and that I have given a hint to one that dwels in the hous, and he maketh light of it’. All this shows Wigglesworth’s zeal in correcting others (though he was also quick to see his own faults), and he seems to come across as an interfering killjoy worrying about needless trivialities; the essence of the stereotypical Puritan. Yet surely such ‘interfering’ shows a clear concern for the welfare of the Godly community and this is a theme which we shall return to again and again in this thesis. See Michael Wigglesworth, *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth 1653-1657: The Conscience of a Puritan*, edited by E.S. Morgan, (New York: Harper, 1965), pp. ix, 69, 67, 69-71.

⁹³ P. Lake and M. Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 588.

*themselves to be full when they are empty: to have all knowledge, but they are ignorant, and had neede to bee catechized: that the poyson of Aspes is under their lippes.*⁹⁴

Although Puritans were often criticised for being zealous busybodies attempting to reform the lives of those around them, it must be remembered that Puritanism itself was very much an experimental (based on experience and practical evidence rather than being purely academic) form of piety. The most important consideration for a Puritan individual was his relationship with God and, indeed, this may be considered the very essence of Puritanism itself, for at its very core it was an experiential faith that required the believer to consciously search for signs of his own election (membership of God's elect community) in everyday events. This very fact secured the importance of Calvinist theological doctrines - such as predestination, assurance and perseverance - to the 'movement'. Moreover, the Christocentric nature of Puritanism also reinforced links with Calvin's own Christology which, Zachman informs us, was designed to depict 'Christ as the fountain of every good . . . [and] the sole foundation of our knowledge and assurance that God is our merciful Father', for Calvin averred that 'we can have no knowledge of our salvation unless we behold God in Christ'.⁹⁵

The same Christocentrism can clearly be seen in seventeenth-century Puritanism: for example, George Gifford wished new members of the Bedford Independent Church to agree that 'union with Christ is the foundation of all saintes' communion' and was adamant that 'if any come among you with any doctrine contrary to the doctrine of Christ, you must not treat with such an one as with a

⁹⁴ Oliver Ormerod, *The Picture of a Puritane: or, A relation of the opinions, qualities and practices of the Anabaptists in Germanie, and of the Puritanes in England* (London: Printed by E[dward] A[lld]e for Nathaniel Forsbroke, 1605), sig. C1r-v. The italics are Ormerod's.

⁹⁵ R.C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 173; Calvin, *Institutes*, (II.vi.4), p. 173. Indeed, Stephen Edmondson claims that Calvin's strict adherence to 'the Reformation platform of *sola Christi* commits him to a certain Christocentrism'. See S. Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology*, p.3.

brother or enter into dispute of the things of faith . . . but let such of the brethren who are fullest of the Spirit and Word of Christ, oppose such an one stedfastly'.⁹⁶ Also, in *The Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan noted that when Christian saw Christ suffering on the cross his burden (sin) immediately 'loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back'.⁹⁷

Puritans also believed that the Sabbath should be a day of rest when gaming and work were forbidden. Indeed, the strength of feeling amongst Puritans against Sabbath-breaking can easily be seen in several of the texts I have studied. For example, in *Grace Abounding* John Bunyan records that whilst playing a game of Cat on the Sabbath he feels Jesus 'looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these, and other my ungodly practices'; Vavasor Powell was reprimanded for watching sports on the Sabbath when a 'Godly grave Professour of Religion' asked him 'doth it become you Sir that are a Scholar and one that teacheth others, to break the Lord's Sabbath thus?' and Richard Baxter's father tried to stop people from dancing around a maypole outside his house after the sermon.⁹⁸

Despite the seemingly unifying features of Puritanism listed above, Henry Parker reminds us of the difficulties contemporaries faced in using the term when he states that

Puritans were at first ecclesiasticall only, so called because they did not like . . . ceremonious kinde of discipline in the Church like unto the Romish: but . . . by a new enlargement of the name [Puritan], the world is full of nothing else but Puritans, for besides the Puritan in Church policie, there are now added Puritans in religion, Puritans in State, and Puritans in morality.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Both quotations, George Gifford quoted in H.G. Tibbutt (ed.), *The Minutes of the First Independent Church (now Bunyan Meeting) at Bedford, 1656-1766*, (Luton: Bedfordshire Historical Record Society Publications, 55, 1976), p. 19.

⁹⁷ Bunyan, *PP*, p. 35.

⁹⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 10; Powell, *Life*, p. 2; Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ Henry Parker, *A Discourse Concerning Puritans*, p. 10.

Indeed, Parker avers that ‘Puritan’ came to be used in so many different ways that only ‘Papists, Prelates, and Courtiers’ avoided being labelled with the term.¹⁰⁰

The word ‘Puritan’ was originally used pejoratively to label those considered to be hypocritical, overly zealous busybodies by their neighbours, and uncooperative clerics by Church authorities. As a direct consequence of this those labelled ‘Puritan’ often found it loathsome. Richard Baxter considered ‘Puritan’ to be an ‘odious’ name and claimed that ‘when I [he] heard them [other villagers] call my father Puritan it did much to . . . alienate me from them’.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Owen Felltham (1602-1668) considered ‘Puritan’ to be ‘a *name of infamy*’, and admitted that ‘absolutely to define him [the Puritan], is a worke, I thinke, of *Difficultie*’ whilst Lucy Hutchinson (1620-1681) considered that the term was often applied ‘in scorn’ and had no fixed usage.¹⁰² Moreover, Thomas Fuller wished ‘the word *puritan* were banished [from] common discourse because so various in the acceptions thereof’, whilst John Yates desired that ‘this offensive name of a Puritan, wandring at large, might have some Statute passe upon it, both to define it, & punish it: for certainly Satan gains much by the free use of it’.¹⁰³

Indeed, so great was the contemporary usage of the word that Lucy Hutchinson commented that

if any were grieved at the dishonour of the kingdom, or the griping of the poor, or the unjust oppressions of the subject by a thousand ways . . . he was a Puritan. If any, out of mere morality and civil honesty, discountenanced the abominations of those days, he was a Puritan. If any showed favour to any godly honest person . . . he was a Puritan.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Henry Parker, *A Discourse Concerning Puritans*, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 6.

¹⁰² Owen Felltham, *Resolves a duple century, the VI Edition* (London: Printed [by E. Purslowe] for Henry Seile, 1636), pp. 10-11; Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, Charles I's Puritan Nemesis*, edited by N.H. Keeble (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 63.

¹⁰³ Thomas Fuller quoted in C.H. George, ‘Puritanism as History and Historiography’, p. 93; John Yates quoted in T. Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, p. 64.

She even suggested that every person who crossed the interest of courtiers, priests, or the nobility and 'was zealous for God's glory or worship, could not endure blasphemous oaths, . . . derision of the word of God, and the like, whoever could endure a sermon, . . . or anything that was good, all these were Puritans; and if Puritans, then enemies to the King and his government'.¹⁰⁵ Hutchinson clearly shows disdain for the term and resents its contemporary usage which, she seems to feel, encompasses all good, decent, people who care for their religion and their country and this certainly fits in with Felltham's observation that 'I Finde many that are called *Puritans*; yet few, or none that will own the *name*' since 'Puritan' was a term many claimed to 'Abhore & detest'.¹⁰⁶ Patrick Collinson considers the hatred for the term felt by those labelled 'Puritan' to be very revealing and this leads him to suggest, perhaps a little exaggeratedly, that Puritanism 'had no substantial existence beyond what was attributed to it by those enemies who first invented it as an abusive term'.¹⁰⁷ While this statement may be somewhat rash it is, nevertheless, true that Puritanism should not be viewed anachronistically, for Puritans were as much a product of the society in which they lived, as they were a product of their own shared beliefs and values.

Having discussed some of the features Puritans recognised in themselves and having briefly considered their relationship with their contemporaries we can see that the term 'Puritan' was generally used to denote those Protestants who were exceptionally zealous in their religious observances; adhered closely to the Scripture; sought to maintain a close relationship with God through prayer, meditation and

¹⁰⁵ Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ Owen Felltham, *Resolves a duple century*, p. 10; Morrice MSS, Vol. B, II quoted in J. Morgan, *Godly Learning*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ P. Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical Vitriol: Religious Satire in the 1590s and the Invention of Puritanism' in J. Guy (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court-Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 155.

introspection; considered preaching to be of almost pre-eminent importance; were identified by their ‘visible worthiness’ and felt an insistent desire to have their election divinely confirmed in this life. But was this always the case? Was a Puritan in Elizabethan times the same as a Puritan in Caroline or Restoration England?

The Changing Definition of Puritanism

That the term ‘Puritan’ mutated over time was clearly a notion of which contemporaries were well aware, for we see that in 1670 John Geree’s *Character of an Old English Puritan* was repackaged by an anonymous author as *The Character of an Old English Protestant; formerly called a puritan, now a non-conformist*.¹⁰⁸ To understand how and why the definition of the so-called ‘rigidest sort’ was not so rigid itself over time we need to consider how the events of the period could have shaped the definition. An exploration of the historical situation will not only help with our definition of Puritanism, it will also aid our discussions of seventeenth-century spiritual diaries and autobiographies, since, as Patricia Caldwell has noted, social and political turmoil produced ‘an equal and opposite reaction: the emergence of a counter-demand and a heartfelt longing for peace and safety, for comfort and, in a word assurance’.¹⁰⁹ Caldwell argues that such an earnest desire for assurance caused an outpouring of literary texts in which people claim to have received assurance of their own salvation.¹¹⁰ Surely, however, we could take Caldwell’s thesis a step further and suggest that the feelings of insecurity and loneliness brought on by the social, political and religious discontent of the period could certainly have played

¹⁰⁸ P. Collinson, *The Puritan Character*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ P. Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 21.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

a key role in an individual's decision to begin writing their own spiritual diary or autobiography.

Stephen Greenblatt observes that 'among the early Protestants we find almost no formal autobiography and remarkably little private testimony' yet Crawford Gribben notes that 'by the 1650s the literary temper of English-speaking Protestantism had changed dramatically . . . lay puritans had found their voice' and Paul Delany agrees that 'the great outburst of autobiographies among them [the sects] from about 1648 on formed part of an extraordinary welling-up of popular expression'.¹¹¹ But why was this? Could we suggest that the events of the seventeenth century had such a significant impact on the minds of many people that they caused them to write their own spiritual autobiographies and diaries? If so, were events the main cause of this outpouring of spiritual autobiographies or were they simply among several triggers? And, most importantly for our current discussion, what impact did the events of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century have on the popular usage of the term 'Puritan' as a label?

The *via media* created by the 1559 Elizabethan Settlement which united Catholic and Protestant ideas by combining Protestant doctrines with traditional Catholic ceremonies was not palatable to all parties. It came under attack from extreme minorities at both ends of the religious spectrum. During this time the extreme Protestant minority were disparagingly termed 'Puritans' because of their desire for further reformation within the Church in order to create a more pure faith based solely on Biblical teachings. This group of 'the hotter sort of protestants' were deeply frustrated by Elizabeth's opposition to further religious change as they

¹¹¹ S. Greenblatt quoted in C. Gribben, 'Lay Conversion and Calvinist Doctrine During the English Commonwealth' in D.W. Lovegrove (ed.), *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 40; P. Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 81.

disliked the current religious status quo enforced by the Settlement and consequently turned to their sympathizers in parliament for help.¹¹² Yet this was to no avail. In 1571 Elizabeth declared that no bills on religion were to be introduced to parliament without the express support of the bishops – therefore enabling her to maintain political control of the Church through the bishops, who were her appointees. Thus the challenge to the status quo presented by Puritanism was contained, but not extinguished, during Elizabeth's reign and so the desire for religious reform remained unabated.

Following the succession of James I in 1603 things initially looked promising for those desiring further reformation. James called the Hampton Court Conference (1604) to debate issues raised by the Puritan ministers' Millenary Petition (1603) and, as a result of this, initiated some reform in ecclesiastical affairs.¹¹³ This suggested that the new king was willing to respect the wishes of religious dissidents as long as they did not pose a threat to his authority and also indicates that at this stage 'Puritan' was still used to denote someone who ardently desired religious reformation. Though here we should also be aware that whilst James was prepared to accommodate moderate Puritans into his national church he was deeply distrustful of those who held more radical Puritan beliefs and considered that they posed as much of a threat to the kingdom as Catholics – in 1624 he declared 'I think it all one to lay down my crown to the pope as to a popular party of puritans' – which consequently

¹¹² Percival Wibun quoted in P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 27.

¹¹³ These reforms included minor revisions to the Prayer Book, a new translation of the Bible was commissioned and the bishops were urged to install a committed and educated minister in every parish.

led, as Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake note, to the isolation and exclusion of the radical element and the stigmatisation of those calling for further reform.¹¹⁴

When Charles I succeeded to the throne in 1625 many expected him to rule in a way very similar to his father. In his sermon at the opening of Charles's first parliament William Laud (then Bishop of St Davids) said 'we live to see a miracle, change without alteration: another king, but the same life-expression of all the royal and religious virtues of his father; and no sinews . . . shrinking in the State'.¹¹⁵ Yet this could not have been further from the truth, for not only did Charles's reign see the instigation of an authoritarian management of state affairs, it also saw a redefinition of what it meant to be 'Puritan'.

According to John Chamberlain, Charles was known to be 'very attentive and devout at prayers and sermons gracing the preachers and assembly with amiable and cheerful countenance'.¹¹⁶ Consequently, it was no surprise that he took a lively interest in ecclesiastical affairs from the outset, what surprised many, however, was his close partnership with William Laud who was known to possess beliefs akin to Arminianism, and therefore at odds with the Calvinist theology that had been at the very core of the Church of England since the Reformation.

Charles appointed Laud Bishop of London (1626) and then Archbishop of Canterbury (1633). This was an outrage to many since Laud did not accept double-decree predestination, one of the principal tenets of Calvinism and instead favoured the notions that God's grace was freely available to all and salvation could be attained by good works. He also placed greater emphasis on the sacraments than sermons and initiated new measures that he hoped would unify the Church and

¹¹⁴ James I quoted in K. Fincham and P. Lake, 'The Ecclesiastical Policy of James I', *Journal of British Studies*, 24:2 (1985), pp. 169-207. Quotation on p. 171.

¹¹⁵ William Laud quoted in B. Quintrell, *Charles I 1625-1640* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 1.

¹¹⁶ John Chamberlain quoted in J. Spurr, *The Post-Reformation: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain, 1603-1714* (London: Longman, 2006), p. 72.

establish clerical conformity.¹¹⁷ Most of the populace deeply resented Laud's influence and came to believe that his aims and theological beliefs were at odds with those held by most English Protestants; Ralph Josselin termed Laud 'that grand enemy of the power of godlynes, that great stickler for all outward pompe in the service of god'.¹¹⁸ It was also noted that '*Never were so many prodigious errors introduced into a Church, with so high a hand, and so little opposition, as these into ours*' and this caused immense fear for many deemed Arminianism a 'poyson' infecting the Church.¹¹⁹ Many feared that Laud's actions could even represent an attempt to reinstate Catholicism into England – the Root and Branch Petition (1640) saw 'the turning of the Communion Table altar-wise, setting images, crucifixes and conceits over them . . . [as] a plain device to usher in the Mass' whilst William Prynne claimed that it was easy to discern Laud's 'Popish Spirit, together with his Activity, and Jesuiticall Practices to undermine our established Religion, introduce Popery among us by degrees, and reduce us back to our ancient Vassallage to Rome'.¹²⁰

Under Laud's governance 'Puritan' became the label applied to any person who opposed the 'Arminian style' changes he had instigated in the church during the 1630s, not simply those who yearned for further reformation. Indeed, Patrick Collinson avers that after 1626 the ascendancy of the Laudian-Arminian party in the Church of England 'represented a drastic U-turn, accompanied by the denigration of

¹¹⁷ For example, Laud ordered altars and communion tables to be moved to the east end of churches and railed off from the laity, considered the authority of bishops to be based on divine right and also discouraged preaching.

¹¹⁸ Ralph Josselin, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616-1683*, edited by A. Macfarlane (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1976), p. 31.

¹¹⁹ John Owen, *Theomachia autexousiastike: or A Display of Arminianisme* (London: Printed by I.L. for Phil. Stephens, 1643), sig. A3r; *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁰ Root and Branch petition quoted in J.P. Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution 1603-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 156; William Prynne, *Canterburies doome, or, The first part of a compleat history of the commitment, charge, tryall, condemnation, execution of William Laud, late Arch-bishop of Canterbury* (London: Printed by John Macock for Michael Spark, Senior, 1646), 'To the Christian Reader', sig. B4r.

Calvinists . . . as Puritans’, so here we see that in Caroline England the term ‘Puritan’ could be taken to mean any Calvinist who opposed the Arminian leanings of Archbishop Laud for it became the word Arminians and Catholics used to describe Protestants.¹²¹ The fact that caused Henry Parker to comment that ‘scarce any civill honest Protestant which is hearty and true to his Religion can avoid the aspersion of it [Puritanism]’.¹²²

The next major change in the definition of Puritanism came with the English Civil Wars. Many Royalists believed that ‘the real origin of the Civil War lay in the hypocritical and subversive religion of the Parliamentary leaders’ and Clarendon forcefully maintained that it was the Puritan clergy who drove ‘all learned and orthodox men from the pulpits . . . [and had], under the notion of reformation and extirpation of popery, infused seditious inclinations into the hearts of men against the present government of the church’.¹²³ Jacqueline Eales also asserts that ‘the puritan involvement in the parliamentary cause was so central that it is still entirely legitimate to describe the English Civil War as a ‘Puritan Revolution’’.¹²⁴ So at this stage, ‘Puritans’ appear to be those who opposed the king in the Civil War and fought to overthrow Laud’s ecclesiastical reforming measures.

It is also possible to argue that the 1640s was when Puritanism began to split into two broadly defined movements – the separatist (i.e. the churches) and the moderate (i.e. Presbyterians). The separatist churches were self-governing, chose their own members and placed great emphasis on personal experience; prior to admittance to the congregation, potential members were required to give a brief

¹²¹ P. Collinson, *The Puritan Character*, p. 13.

¹²² Henry Parker, *A Discourse Concerning Puritans*, p. 9.

¹²³ R.C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 22; Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 35.

¹²⁴ J. Eales, ‘The Continuity of Puritanism, 1559-1642’ in C. Durston and J. Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism*, p. 185.

testimony of the workings of grace on their own soul for members were deemed ‘saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing . . . their obedience unto that call of Christ, who being further known to each other by their confession of the faith wrought in them by the power of God, declared by themselves’.¹²⁵ The moderate strand (Presbyterians, or, those such as Ralph Josselin who decided to stay within the Church of England) disliked sectarianism, called for a fully reformed Church and an educated, resident, clergy whilst allowing all who appeared outwardly pious into their congregations (no admission narrative was required).

Shortly after the regicide (1649) England was declared ‘a Commonwealth and Free State’ governed by ‘the representatives of the people in Parliament . . . without any King or House of Lords’ and in December 1653 Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan, was made Protector.¹²⁶ In a speech to his first Protectorate Parliament on 12 September 1654 Cromwell asked ‘Is not liberty of conscience in religion a fundamental?’ and quickly concluded that ‘Liberty of conscience is a natural right’, thus condemning the pre-war Church for being intolerant in denying such intrinsic liberties.¹²⁷ Cromwell even noted that one of the ‘two greatest concernments that God has in the world . . . is that of religion and the preservation of the professors thereof, to give them all due and just liberty’.¹²⁸ Indeed, he also maintained that matters of religion were the main reason for the outbreak of Civil War when he stated that

religion was not the thing at the first contested for, but God brought it to that issue at last . . . and at last it proved that which was most dear to us. And wherein consisted this, more than in obtaining that liberty

¹²⁵ The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order (1658) quoted in J. Spurr, ‘From Puritanism to Dissent, 1660-1700’ in C. Durston and J. Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism*, p. 238.

¹²⁶ J. Spurr, *Post-Reformation*, p. 119.

¹²⁷ I. Roots (ed.), *Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (London: Everyman, 2002), p. 51.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

from the tyranny of the bishops to all species of Protestants, to worship God according to their own light and consciences?¹²⁹

This meant that, in the words of John Coffey, during the Interregnum the English church ceased to be ‘a compulsory, monopolistic “church” and became a voluntary “denomination”’ where virtually all forms of religious worship were tolerated.¹³⁰ It does not seem that Cromwell was simply fighting for a cause that would gain the support of others, despite the diplomat Giovanni Sagredo’s sceptical opinion that ‘he makes a great show of his zeal . . . and even goes to preach to the soldiers and exhort them to live after the Divine law. He does this with fervour, even to tears, which he has ready at a moment’s notice, and this way he stimulates his troops into action’.¹³¹

Cromwell himself appears to have been a genuinely deeply religious man whose letters and speeches are littered with references to God and God’s will. He also seems to have believed himself to be an instrument of God and states that ‘truly my comfort in all my life hath been, that the burdens that have lain heavy upon me, they have been laid upon me by the hand of God’.¹³² Similarly, upon refusing the crown in 1657 he maintained that ‘God has seemed providentially not only to strike at the family [Stuart] but at the name [king] and . . . he hath blasted the title . . . I would not seek to set up that that providence hath destroyed and laid in the dust’ – thus indicating that his actions and decisions were divinely led.¹³³

It may appear that ‘Puritans’ during the Interregnum were exceptionally devout Protestants who believed that God had sanctioned the downfall of Charles and who cried out for freedom of worship; indeed, with Cromwell as Protector this

¹²⁹ I. Roots (ed.), *Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 67.

¹³⁰ J. Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England 1558-1698* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 160. Coffey notes that Catholics and Anglicans were the only religious denominations not to be tolerated during the Interregnum – this was because both ‘were suspected of wanting to re-establish their own monopolies’ (p. 160).

¹³¹ Giovanni Sagredo (Venetian Ambassador), quoted in J.C. Davis, *Oliver Cromwell* (London: Arnold, 2001), p. 112.

¹³² I. Roots, *Speeches*, p. 114.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

form of ‘Puritanism’ became the backbone of the English Commonwealth. Yet this was not the case. Not all labelled ‘Puritan’ shared these beliefs, for those like John Bunyan, Thomas Edwards and Richard Baxter did not welcome such broad religious toleration. Bunyan preached against the ‘cursed principles’ of the Ranters and the ‘vile and abominable’ errors of the Quakers.¹³⁴ Thomas Edwards maintained that ‘This toleration will not onely breede Divisions and Schismes, disturbing the peace and quiet of Churches and Townes . . . but will undoubtedly cause much disturbance, discontent and divisions in the same families . . . The husband being of one Church, & the wife of another’ whilst *Gangraena* (1646), his most famous work, has been termed ‘a massive and notorious assault on religious liberty and the “Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies” thereby generated’.¹³⁵ Richard Baxter also detested sectarianism, wished for peace and concord within the Church and consequently ‘prayed and pleaded and worked for a single, united, broadly comprehensive Church that should be at once united and truly catholic [i.e. universal]’.¹³⁶ Indeed, Baxter ardently believed that ‘liberty in all matters of Worship and of Faith, is the open and apparent way to set up Popery in the land’; many so-called ‘Puritans’ would have surely agreed with him.¹³⁷ However, here we come to a further hindrance to our definition of ‘Puritanism’ for during the 1650s the ‘moderate strand’ of Puritanism was frequently termed Presbyterianism; it was even noted that by 1660 ‘any man that was for a spiritual, serious way of worship (though he were for moderate Episcopacy and liturgy) and that lived according to his profession, was commonly called a

¹³⁴ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 16, 36. Bunyan’s first published tract, *Some Gospel-Truths Opened* (1656) was directed at the ‘errors’ of Quakerism.

¹³⁵ A. Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 39, 55

¹³⁶ J.M. Lloyd Thomas, ‘Introductory Essay’ in Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. x.

¹³⁷ Richard Baxter, *A Holy Commonwealth*, edited by W. Lamont (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 30.

Presbyterian, as formerly he was called a Puritan'.¹³⁸ Thus we see that two of the main concerns for religious policy during the 1640s and 1650s were defining the nature and extent of the English Church – how the Church should be structured and how much religious toleration should be allowed were hotly debated issues and the meaning of 'Puritan' changed once again becoming even more amorphous.

However, this state-sponsored 'religious freedom' was short-lived. In 1660 the monarchy was restored and England had a new king, Charles II. Religion was still an immensely important issue at this stage and, at first, the new king appeared to sympathise with the nonconformist stance for in the Declaration of Breda (1660) he declared 'a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called into question for differences of opinion in matters of religion which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom'.¹³⁹ However, many Royalists believed that a lack of control in religious affairs had been the cause of the Civil Wars and so the Clarendon Code was established to enforce conformity and restrict the activity and influence of nonconformists.¹⁴⁰

What it meant to be 'Puritan' was redefined, once again, following the Restoration. The imposition of the Clarendon Code ensured that Puritans found themselves persecuted for their beliefs and placed firmly outside the Church of England, for they were viewed as a threat to the stability of the nation by Charles II and his government. Thus in one fair swoop the initial impetus of the movement had been extinguished, for no longer could Puritans push for the further reformation of a Church from which they were forcibly excluded – perhaps we could suggest that

¹³⁸ Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 154.

¹³⁹ Charles II, 'Declaration of Breda' quoted in N.H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ The Clarendon Code consisted of four acts passed by the Cavalier parliament. These were: 1. The Corporation Act (1661); 2. The Act of Uniformity (1662); 3. The First and Second Conventicle Acts (1664 and 1670); 5. The Five Mile Act (1665).

self-reformation was the only option left for these men and women, thus giving rise to an extraordinary outpouring of feeling in the form of spiritual diaries and autobiographies.¹⁴¹

Following the Declaration of Uniformity many Puritans received new epithets, for clergy who refused to swear that they would accept everything contained and prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer were deprived of their livings and forbidden to preach thus becoming ‘nonconformists’, ‘dissenters’ and ‘silenced’ or ‘ejected’ ministers’. Yet not every ‘Puritan’ refused to accept the Act. Ralph Josselin, for example, subscribed in 1662 and continued to be the vicar of Earls Colne until his death in 1683 despite the fact that he did not fully conform to the Act - he refused to wear a surplice and used the Prayer Book intermittently. Indeed, Josselin hoped that the king would suspend the Act for he joyously declared it ‘a good day’ when there were hopes that ‘the King would respitt the penalties on the act of uniformity . . . for a time’ and was desperately sorry to discover that this would not be the case – upon hearing the news Josselin prayed that God would ‘provide for our [his congregation and his own] security’.¹⁴² Josselin’s case clearly shows that following the Restoration there were Puritans inside the Church of England.

Whilst the English Civil War and Cromwell’s desire for religious liberty had seen those previously termed ‘Puritan’ (i.e. the opponents of Laud’s religious changes) divided into many sects such as the Quakers, Muggletonians, Independents, Ranters and Baptists, the Restoration simplified matters for it saw society divided between those who conformed to the Act of Uniformity and those who refused to do so – non-subscribers were lumped together under the umbrella term ‘dissenters’. Moreover, those ministers who refused to accept the terms stipulated by the Act of

¹⁴¹ The spiritual diaries and autobiographies of Hannah Allen, Isaac Archer, John Bunyan and George Trosse are among those which cover this period.

¹⁴² Ralph Josselin, *Diary*, pp. 490, 492.

Uniformity, found themselves in an unenviable position. No longer were they permitted to hold benefices, come within five miles of the parish where they had previously worked as a minister, or hold any religious meetings that did not conform with standard Church of England practice.

The years following the Restoration were also marked by a powerful fear of Catholicism. The establishment of the Treaty of Dover (1670) saw England move into an alliance with the despised French nation and declare war on the Protestant Dutch in return for French subsidies and, shortly after, Charles issued his second Declaration of Indulgence (1672) which suspended all penal laws against Catholics and nonconformists thus granting them freedom of worship. It was at this time that the king's brother and heir apparent, James Duke of York, proclaimed his unwavering belief in Catholicism and was forced to resign the post of Lord High Admiral when the 1673 Test Act (which debarred Catholics from holding office under the Crown) was passed.¹⁴³ Now the country was faced with the very real prospect of having an openly Catholic ruler on the throne for the first time in over a century and fear clasped the hearts of the Protestant nation.

Soon after, revelations of a 'hellish' 'Popish Plot' against England's religion, government and king surfaced thanks to the efforts of Titus Oates who claimed the ultimate intention was to depose Charles II in favour of his Catholic brother.¹⁴⁴ This plot dredged up such strong emotion and terror that Baxter noted 'all London [was] in such fear of them [Catholics] that they [were] fain to keep up private watches in all streets'.¹⁴⁵ During this time of great fear of the potential threat posed by Catholicism, 'Puritans' still found themselves labelled 'dissenters' and were severely

¹⁴³ Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, abridged by T. Stackhouse (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1991), p. 126.

¹⁴⁴ The Earl of Danby's speech to the Lord's in his own defence, 1678 quoted in A. Browning (ed.), *English Historical Documents; VIII 1660-1714* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953), p. 200.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 245.

persecuted since the Church feared their 'revolutionary potential' and popular belief held that 'the pope would come in on the puritan's back'.¹⁴⁶

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For the purpose of this study, I consider 'Puritan' to indicate those Protestants who followed the thought of John Calvin, placed their relationship with God above all else and felt an urgent need to gain assurance of their own salvation during their lifetime and, consequently, were exceptionally zealous in their religious observations.¹⁴⁷ The Bible was the principal authority in their lives and they desperately strove to keep all their thoughts focussed on the blessings awaiting them in the next life, rather than the trials and tribulations they faced in this. Their piety was deep and heartfelt which, they hoped, reflected their status as members of God's elect.

In order to explore the nature of Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies across the period this thesis is divided into two parts. The first part considers how a spiritual diary or autobiography was constructed and looks at the possible influences on its composition. Chapter one discusses the reasons authors of such texts gave for baring their souls whilst chapter two considers how the writing of an account of this nature could be influenced by the godly community - which could support and guide the author and even be an intended audience for the finished work in some cases; as Andrew Cambers notes, 'there is considerable evidence to suggest this literature was written to be read' for 'the style of writing in many memoirs is indicative of an audience beyond God'.¹⁴⁸ Thus the chapters in part I complement one another, for the first focuses on the seemingly insular figure of the author and his own personal

¹⁴⁶ J. Spurr, *Post-Reformation*, p. 165.

¹⁴⁷ For example, Rose Thurgood noted that 'none goe to heaven, but those that have their assurance and are Justified parsons in the sight of God and have gotten pardon of their synnes through the love, and merits of Jesus Christ'. See Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ A. Cambers, 'Reading, the Godly, and Self-Writing in England', pp. 804, 806.

motivation for undertaking the task of documenting his spiritual life, whilst the second chapter contextualises the author showing how he and his text fitted in with the notion of communal piety. To provide an in-depth consideration of how each author writes their spiritual diary or autobiography and how external factors (such as their surrounding community) influence this process I have decided to break each chapter into sections devoted to close analysis of a single author.

The second part of this thesis considers whether spiritual diaries and autobiographies may be said to follow a set pattern. Chapters three to seven analyse different 'stages' present within each text (namely, childhood and adolescent experiences; initial experiences of grace; experiences of temptation; conversion and post-conversion experiences) in order to see whether a significant degree of variation occurs between these documents. This thesis argues that spiritual diaries and autobiographies do not follow a fixed pattern. It suggests that modern historians and literary scholars have been too eager to bracket all such texts together and, consequently, have not paid enough attention to the differences. In order to emphasise these variations I have divided each of the chapters into thematic sections, rather than sections devoted to individual authors, since the variations become more apparent when authors' thoughts on the same theme are juxtaposed.

Sources

The large number of extant seventeenth-century Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies – Owen Watkins identified over one hundred - has meant that I have had to be selective when deciding which texts to use in this study. Consequently, I have decided to give as broad a range of sources as possible in order to highlight that the production of and variation within spiritual autobiographies was not limited to a

particular decade, social group or even gender. Thus texts from both halves of the seventeenth century have been chosen - the earliest text studied in depth is Nehemiah Wallington's *A Record of God's Mercies* which was written in the 1620s and the latest is Thomas Halyburton's *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Thomas Halyburton* which was completed c.1699. The writings of both male and female authors are discussed and so, for example, a consideration of Agnes Beaumont's *Narrative* may be found alongside an examination of John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* so that comparisons may be made. Works by authors of different classes and backgrounds have also been selected and so, for example, the work of a turner (Nehemiah Wallington), a lady of noble birth (Elizabeth Isham), and a nonconformist minister (George Trosse) are included. Yet variety was not the sole reason for my selection of specific texts. Accessibility has also been a main concern and so the majority of spiritual autobiographies and diaries I have chosen are either available in modern editions or through Early English Books Online (EEBO).

Whilst some of these authors, such as John Bunyan, have received considerable attention from historians and literary scholars others, such as Cicely Johnson and Rose Thurgood, are little known. Although readers will no doubt be familiar with the well-known texts discussed in this study, it is my hope that juxtaposing them with one another, as well as the lesser-known texts, and highlighting the variations between them will show these works in a different light – as more personal and individualised than previously thought.

Part I

The Construction of a Life:
Influences on the Writing of Puritan
Spiritual Diaries and Autobiographies

Introduction

Spiritual autobiography was a genre which flourished in the seventeenth century. Only a handful of such documents were written before 1600 yet by the end of the next century there were over a hundred in existence.¹ The diaries and autobiographies which make up this genre are primarily focussed on the religious development of the author and his relationship with God. Everyday matters and worldly concerns are generally only dealt with fleetingly and when they are included it is frequently to illustrate either God's merciful nature or the inherent sinfulness of the author. Indeed, Ollive Cooper claimed that the 'Temporal favours' (i.e. worldly concerns) of a person's life are 'but the dark side of gods goodness' and therefore only 'Spiritual favours' should be recorded.² Consequently, these accounts offer a unique insight into the author's religious beliefs highlighting the hopes and fears of seventeenth-century Puritans and showing how their faith developed over the course of many years. Yet they are not simple windows on to the past.

According to Dean Ebner in seventeenth-century England 'it was the theological systems and communities of worship which supplied the over one hundred men and women who gave birth to this genre [spiritual autobiography] . . . with a principle which governed the content and form of their self-examinations in prose'.³ Part I of this thesis lets the authors of such spiritual autobiographies and diaries speak for themselves. It reveals, firstly, their own personal motivation for writing the account – gleaned from the texts themselves - and, secondly, the extent

¹ See P. Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 27; D. Ebner, *Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century England: Theology and Self* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), p. 17. For two spiritual diaries written before 1600 see M.M. Knappen (ed.), *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward* (Chicago: American Society of Church History, 1933).

² Julia Palmer, *The Centuries of Julia Palmer* edited by V.E. Burke and E. Clarke, (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2002), p. xi.

³ D. Ebner, *Autobiography*, p. 11.

which the authors of such works were influenced by the surrounding ‘godly community’ (a broad term which I use to include family members, members of the same congregation, and neighbours) and the effect this had on the composition of their spiritual accounts.

Chapter 1

Puritans and the Writing of Spiritual Autobiographies

To keep a Journall or Diary by us, especially of all Gods gracious dealings with us, is a work for a Christian of singular use.

John Beadle, *The Journall or Diary of a Thankful Christian*.¹

In 1972 Owen Watkins' study of Puritan spiritual autobiographies, *The Puritan Experience*, identified over two hundred diaries and autobiographies written before 1725.² Yet, even this was not a comprehensive list as there were several notable omissions including the diaries of Nehemiah Wallington, Cicely Johnson and Samuel Rogers - all of which were completed before 1700. The existence of such a large number of diaries and journals is indicative of the popularity of this form of writing during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Yet how may this be accounted for? Why did seventeenth-century diarists and autobiographers consider their spiritual condition to be worth writing about? Could theological concerns provide the motivation behind many spiritual diaries and autobiographies? In an attempt to answer these questions I shall analyse *Grace Abounding*, John Bunyan's spiritual autobiography and Nehemiah Wallington's spiritual diary, *The Growth of a Christian* along with his *A Record of God's Mercies*, which contains autobiographical elements.³ Firstly, by way of introduction, it will be necessary to have a more general discussion of Puritan spiritual autobiographies and diaries and their relationship with Calvinism.

In recent decades both historians and literary scholars have shown a keen interest in the structure and composition of diaries and autobiographies from all historical periods. This interest has largely been born from a desire to understand

¹ John Beadle, *The Journall or Diary of a Thankful Christian* (London: Printed by E. Coates for Tho. Parkhurst, 1656), p. 10.

² O.C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 241-259.

³ Brief biographies of John Bunyan and Nehemiah Wallington may be found in appendix 1.

how self-identity is created and expressed through textual sources. Such research has subsequently given rise to a plenitude of academic studies concerning Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies, including the work of Owen C. Watkins in the early 1970s and Tom Webster, Michael Mascuch, Margo Todd and David Booy within the last fifteen years.⁴ It would appear that what these scholars have found most interesting has been the place of writing in the rise of individualism and the ‘shaping’ of the self, for, as Booy notes, ‘authors shape their material, actually constructing versions of their experiences and their selves as they compose their texts’.⁵ In other words, these scholars believe that the primary job of autobiographical writing is not to recreate the life of the author, but is rather to construct or fashion an identity for the author.

This notion of ‘self-fashioning’ has been a major preoccupation of current research into the area, yet it has not been the sole preoccupation for the past three decades have also seen interest blossom in early modern diaries and autobiographies as ‘egodocuments’. ‘Egodocuments’ was a term first coined by Jacques Presser in the early 1950s to denote ‘those historical documents in which the user is confronted with an ‘I’, or occasionally . . . a ‘he’, continuously present in the text as the writing and describing subject’; or, in other words, an umbrella term for writings (usually belonging to the lower classes or minority groups) discussing personal experiences,

⁴ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); T. Webster, ‘Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality’, *Historical Journal*, 39:1 (1996), pp. 33-56; M. Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997); M. Todd, ‘Puritan Self-Fashioning: The Diary of Samuel Ward’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 31:3 (1992), pp. 236-264; D. Booy, *Personal Disclosures: An Anthology of Self-Writings from the Seventeenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁵ Booy, *Personal Disclosures*, p. 4. Interestingly, whilst studying the emergence of the concept of privacy, Cecile Jagodzinski also recognised a new, previously unheard of, sense of individuality in the seventeenth century when she identified ‘a new “selfishness,” the creation of a self-identity, a self not defined by its relationship to God and society but a self forced to stand on its own’. See: C.M. Jagodzinski, *Privacy and Print: Reading and Writing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 165.

thoughts and actions.⁶ Work on this subject has largely been undertaken by Dutch historians such as Rudolf Dekker, yet recent years have seen interest in this subject develop in other countries including Britain and Germany.⁷ Where once such documents were considered to be too subjective to warrant thorough academic study their value is now recognised and consequently ‘egodocuments and other personal texts are no longer regarded as inferior to official sources’.⁸

Despite the renewed interest in spiritual diaries and autobiographies both as sites for the construction of the self and in their new categorisation as ‘egodocuments’, the diarists’ professed reasons for recording their own life stories has received only incidental attention, and what attention has been given has usually been a byproduct of the scholars’ urge to consider the diary and autobiographical writing ‘as a means by which the godly self was maintained, indeed constructed,

⁶ J. Presser quoted in R. Dekker (ed.), *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context Since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), p. 7.

⁷ Dekker claims that Peter Burke was probably the first English historian to make use of the term in his essay ‘Representations of the Self from Petrarch to Descartes’ in Roy Porter (ed), *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1996). Tom Webster adapts the term ‘egodocument’ in his article ‘Writing to Redundancy’ and claims the Puritan diary to be an ‘expression of ego-literature’ – which, according to Webster, includes diaries, autobiographies, conversion narratives and spiritual journals. Yet not all English historians agree with Webster’s classification. J.C. Davis has recently argued against the categorisation of spiritual journals as ‘ego-literatures’ because he denies the uniqueness of these documents, feels ‘personal autonomy, the agency of the self, is . . . hard to find’ and identifies a general trend towards ‘denial of self and . . . total reliance on a living and ever-active God’ in these works. Indeed, he claims that works of this type present ‘the deconstruction, rather than the configuration of the self’; this should be read alongside Elspeth Graham’s claim that ‘autobiography is . . . often, bound up with lack of selfhood’ and ‘a need to find meaning [in] experience’. In Germany one of the primary expounders of the notion of ‘egodocument’ has been Winfried Schulze in his book *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1998). See Dekker, *Egodocuments*, p. 8; Webster ‘Writing to Redundancy’, pp. 35-36; J.C. Davis, ‘Living with the living God: radical religion and the English Revolution’ in C. Durston and J. Maltby (eds.), *Religion in Revolutionary England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 32, 33, 35; E. Graham, ‘The Sufferings of the Self in Autobiographical Tradition’ in H. Dragstra, S. Ottway and H. Wilcox (eds.), *Betraying Ourselves: Forms of Self-Representation in Early Modern English Texts* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 198-199. Also important is A. Rutz, S. Elit and S. Kraft, ‘Egodocumenten: A Virtual Conversation with Rudolf M. Dekker’ in *Zeitenblicke: Online-journal für die Geschichtswissenschaften*, 1:2 (2002), available at: <http://www.zeitenblicke.de> (Consulted on 13.11.07).

⁸ R. Dekker, *Egodocuments*, p. 16.

through the action of writing'.⁹ There has been surprisingly little analysis of the motivation behind the Puritan impulse to keep meticulous accounts of their lives: indeed, on occasion, scholars have been rather dismissive of its importance. Owen Watkins, for example, has argued that the most impressive feature of spiritual autobiographies 'is not so much the host of reasons which the writers offer for publicizing such intimate details of their lives, as the evidence we get of the close relationship they enjoyed with their readers'.¹⁰ Here Watkins seems to be arguing for the existence of an unending dialogue between the author and reader that is unaffected by the passage of time, but is this what was originally intended by the diarists and autobiographers of the seventeenth century? Were all spiritual autobiographies intended to have a mass readership, we may ask?

In her recent study of Ralph Thoresby's diary, Elspeth Findlay points out that some diaries and autobiographies were clearly intended to be read by a wide audience and possibly even published. She states that 'in Thoresby's circle, many, if not all, diaries were written in the knowledge and expectation that they would be circulated after death, and perhaps before'.¹¹ Indeed, the value of reading as a part of 'family religion' (which was a form of daily domestic piety) has recently been emphasised by Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe who argue that 'the essence of family religion was reading in the household' - surely this could include the reading

⁹ Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy', p. 40. Studies of egodocuments have concentrated on, for example, how to define an 'egodocument', the nature of truth in such documents and, once again, self-fashioning. For studies of self-fashioning in this area see: G. Algazi, 'Food for Thought: Hieronymus Wolf grapples with the Scholarly Habitus' in R. Dekker, *Egodocuments* and H. Dragstra, S. Ottway and H. Wilcox (eds.), *Betraying Our Selves*.

¹⁰ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, p. 31.

¹¹ E. Findlay, 'Ralph Thoresby the Diarist: The Late Seventeenth-Century Pious Diary and its Demise', *The Seventeenth-Century*, 17:1 (2002), pp. 108-130. Quotation on p. 109. Ralph Thoresby (1658-1725) was an antiquary and topographer and the son of John Thoresby, a wool merchant. He began keeping a diary on his father's admonition in September 1677.

of spiritual diaries and autobiographies to a family audience.¹² Paradoxically, Tom Webster's analysis of spiritual journals reached the opposite conclusion, for he asserts that 'few people seem to have read the diaries of others' since 'diaries generally remained secret, often to be cast into the fire upon the author's death'.¹³

This was certainly true for some. Effie Botonaki mentions the case of the twenty-two-year-old son of the seventeenth-century diarist Sarah Savage. Savage's son contracted smallpox and fearing his imminent death, he shut himself in his closet and burnt some of the papers containing his personal writings and reflections on the condition of his soul.¹⁴ Whilst James Janeway tells us of his brother, John, who kept a diary recording 'the frame of his spirit . . . answers of prayer . . . and any wandrings of thoughts, [and] inordinancy in any passion' yet clearly wished it to remain private for he wrote it in code ('characters').¹⁵ Both these examples show that these men were keen to ensure their diaries remained private, even after their deaths, thus suggesting that what was recorded was considered highly personal and intended to be shared with no-one but God. Conversely, Nehemiah Wallington gives us a slightly different perspective on the matter. Despite pressure from some people 'earnestly importuning' him to print his books, Wallington avowed that 'none shall

¹² A. Cambers and M. Wolfe, 'Reading, Family Religion, and Evangelical Identity in Late Stuart England' in *Historical Journal*, 47:4 (2004), pp. 875-896. Quotation on p. 886.

¹³ Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy', pp. 55, 39.

¹⁴ E. Botonaki, *Seventeenth-Century English Women's Autobiographical Writings: Disclosing Enclosures* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p. 2.

¹⁵ James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities, demonstrated in the holy life and triumphant death of Mr. John Janeway* (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1690), pp. 59-60. The fact that John's diary is unreadable is deeply lamented by his brother who asserts that 'could this book [of his experiences, and register of his actions] have been read, it might have contributed much to the compleating of this discourse, and the quickning of some, and the comforting of others'. See *ibid.*, pp. 59-60. NB. Although I have taken 'characters' to mean code, 'character' could also mean shorthand – either way the result is the same, the writing was indecipherable to anyone except John Janeway. This may be contrasted with Nehemiah Wallington's assertion that he wrote the notebook *The Poor Widow's Mite* (1620) 'in Roman hand that others mite benifet by it as well as I'; thus suggesting that authors *consciously selected* whether to make their writings legible to others before they began writing. See Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 269.

be [published] while I live'.¹⁶ This was mainly because he had (or at least professed to have) a low opinion of his own work, which he considered to be 'weeke and unparfit broken', and believed that 'many workes continually come forth so excellent far surpassing my cappareness to doe'; though he did not rule out the possibility of their being published after his death.¹⁷

Thus we see a blatant dichotomy between the two viewpoints: Findlay claims that spiritual autobiographies were intended to be widely read, yet Webster concludes that such works were primarily intended to be secret. However, it may be possible to reconcile these views if we are able to accept that spiritual journals can be split into two broad categories - firstly, those specifically intended to be read, commented on by others and eventually published, and secondly, those of a more private nature, perhaps only intended to be read by the author and a limited number of intimates, such as immediate family members, trusted friends and possibly the local minister who would have been able to keep a close eye on the spiritual account and help ensure the author stayed on the correct path to salvation.¹⁸ Though I hasten to add that by asserting that there were two possible kinds of diary and autobiography, I do not intend to suggest that those who recorded their own lives habitually kept two types of record, one for their own private use and the other to be made public. As far as I am aware, there is very little evidence of this having been the case; whilst it is true that Cotton Mather kept two separate diaries 'one to be published, the other to be kept secret and destroyed upon his death', the practice does not appear to have been widespread.¹⁹ There is, however, another interesting

¹⁶ Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 264.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁸ Ralph Josselin, (1616-1683) the minister of Earls Colne in Essex, recorded in his diary that he had read and commented on a parishioner's journal: 'saw part of Mrs Mabel Ellistons diurnal of her life, full of spiritual observations and sweetnes'. Ralph Josselin, *Diary*, p. 396.

¹⁹ T. Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy', p. 40.

example of the practice. Samuel Clarke tells us that Richard Blackerby (a Puritan minister) kept ‘three Diaries of his Life, one in *Greek* another in *Latin*, a third in *English*’.²⁰ Although we are unsure whether all (or any) of these were meant for eventual publication, since they were destroyed in a fire that gutted Blackerby’s house shortly before his death, Clarke’s assertion that had these diaries survived ‘we had not been so barren of memorable instances of his Life, as now we are’ seems to take for granted that they would have been accessible for all to read. This might cause us to wonder whether it was generally assumed that all preachers who kept a diary would eventually publish it one day in order to assist in the spiritual edification of others.²¹

Yet if we do acknowledge that there were two very different categories of autobiographical writing, namely the public and the private, then it would follow that the reasons our diarists and autobiographers had for keeping their records may also fall into two distinct groups. We might say that some autobiographies are written with the intention of being didactic, hoping to make the reader aware of God’s just and merciful nature towards even the worst of sinners, whilst others are highly personal studies of the author’s private search for evidence of the workings of grace in his own soul and may be described as textual representations of the Puritan quest for assurance of salvation. But were matters really as clear-cut as this? Is it fair to say that Puritan diaries and autobiographies can be split into two distinct categories completely independent of each other? Was the early modern concept of ‘private’ and ‘public’ the same as our modern day perception of the terms?

²⁰ ‘The Life and Death of Richard Blackerby’ in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 63.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

According to David Cressy all life in early modern England ‘had public, social, or communal dimensions’.²² Erica Longfellow takes a similar line to Cressy and argues that there were ‘models of an interior private life’ – namely practices of meditation, silent reading and solitary prayer – present in the early seventeenth century but most people ‘did not always refer to these aspects of life as private or conceive of them as something wholly separate from their communal existence’.²³ Or, in other words, there were what we would recognise today as elements of private life, yet in the seventeenth century matters were not as straightforward as this and a definite dichotomy between public and private aspects of life was not readily apparent – as Longfellow notes, even the secluded experience of prayer ‘was viewed as part of the growth of the individual as a Christian fit for service in the community; individual prayer remained only one step removed from the community’.²⁴

Nehemiah Wallington, for example, appears to have shared this notion of the intersection of public and private life for he considered that God’s hand was as visible in public events as it was in his own private life. He saw the ‘finger of God’ at work when twelve bishops were imprisoned in the Tower for high treason and ‘endeavouring to subvert the fundamental Laws of this kingdom’ after petitioning the King in December 1641 and claimed ‘this is the Lords doings. And it is marvilous in our eyes’.²⁵ Following the battle of Edgehill (which Wallington considered to have been a victory for the parliamentary army) he joyfully exclaimed, ‘Oh I cannot relate the particulars of the grate marcy of God to us in this fight . . . his

²² David Cressy quoted in E. Longfellow, ‘Public, Private, and the Household in Early Seventeenth-Century England’ in *Journal of British Studies*, 45:2 (2006), pp. 313-334. Quotation on p. 313.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

²⁴ E. Longfellow, ‘Public, Private, and the Household’, p. 322.

²⁵ Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 134; ‘House of Commons Journal Volume 2: 30 December 1641’, *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 2: 1640-1643* (1802), pp. 362-364. The official minute book of the House of Commons is available online at: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk> (Consulted on 17/11/07).

excellency sayd That he never saw lesse of man in anything nor more of God'.²⁶ But how far does this hold true for the other texts under question? Do the motives these authors give for writing their texts show more concern for the personal gains involved in such a practice or are they more focussed on the eventual communal worth of the finished product? What was considered to be most beneficial for the soul – the actual act of composing the text or reading through it once it had been completed?

To begin this discussion it will be useful to consider: firstly, the relationship between Puritan introspection and personal writing - for introspective remarks appear to be a common feature of both published and private manuscripts; and, secondly, the relationship between Calvinist theology and Puritan 'self-writing'. These factors will be discussed together because I believe them to be inseparably linked: a Puritan cannot be separated from his belief in experimental Calvinism; he cannot be wrenched from his theological roots. Moreover, such a discussion will hopefully help place the personal motives of our writers in the context of seventeenth-century Puritan thought.

Calvinist Theology, Introspection and Puritan Self-Writing

Calvinism may be termed an 'experimental' form of faith. It required its believers to search for evidence of salvation in their own life experiences and urged them not to rest until they were confident that Christ had atoned for their own personal sins and accept that the faith they possessed was truly the effectual, or saving, faith of the elect. Indeed, the value of experience to the Puritan mind cannot be over emphasised,

²⁶ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 47v. It is Robert Devereux, commander-in-chief of the parliamentary army 1642-1645, that Wallington refers to as 'his excellency'.

for Samuel Petto (c.1624-1711) noted that ‘Christians know not what they loose [sic], by burying their experiences: they disable themselves for strengthening the weake hands, and confirming the feeble knees of others: and it is a great disadvantage to themselves’.²⁷ Consequently, for many Puritans the quest for assurance proved to be a lifelong task that must be tirelessly pursued (indeed, it will also be tirelessly pursued in this thesis for it will be a recurrent theme explored from several different angles). As Richard Sibbes observed, no Christian should rest until he was able to have complete faith and say ‘God is my God’ - thereby applying the divine promise of salvation (the covenant of grace) personally.²⁸ Moreover, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), the Puritan minister and author of *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness* (1651), reasserted the importance of assurance as a source of comfort that was distinct from faith. He proclaimed that ‘assurance comes in as a reward of faith, as a light superadded to faith . . . when a man [has] trusted God upon his bare word, and a secret hint of a promise . . . and bourn the stress of many overpowering doubts and temptations and yet [still] cleaves to Christ’.²⁹

Yet it was not enough for a Puritan simply to assume he possessed assurance of his elect status. Assurance of salvation was a sentiment which also had to be meticulously recorded - as John Bunyan noted ‘if thou miss but one letter in thy evidence, thou art gone’.³⁰ With this incitement in mind, it is easy to imagine how the Puritan tendency to be introspective developed, for Puritans were frequently urged by their ministers to search within themselves for evidence of the workings of

²⁷ Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit. Or, An essay towards a discoverie of the witnessings of the spirit* (London: Printed for Livewell Chapman, 1654), p. 182.

²⁸ Richard Sibbes quoted in J. von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), p. 156. It is noteworthy that in her *A Lecture of Repentance* Rose Thurgood exhorted her readers (‘mother, sisters & friends or whatsoever’) ‘to visit your owne soules, and try your owne hearts, whither they are of God or no’. See Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 19.

²⁹ Thomas Goodwin quoted in G. Davies, ‘Thomas Goodwin: His Life, Times and Quest for Assurance’ available at: <http://www.puritansermons.com> (Consulted on 21.10.05).

³⁰ John Bunyan, *The Resurrection of the Dead* in J. Sears McGee (ed), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan* (13 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), III, p. 276.

efficacious grace in their hearts. For example, in the preface to *Grace Abounding* (1666) Bunyan urged his readers to ‘look diligently, and leave no corner therein unsearched, for there is treasure hid, even the treasure of your first and second experience of the grace of God toward you’, whilst in 1657 John Eliot advised Richard Baxter to ‘bestow on[e] quarter of an hour in a day to write what passed . . . between the Lord and your spirit’; therefore highlighting the importance of reflecting on one’s spiritual status which was surely a process that could only be aided by diary-keeping.³¹ A reading of Nehemiah Wallington’s spiritual diary would certainly support this assertion. In May 1619, for example, Wallington decided to make a list of resolutions that, if kept, would help him reform his life and live in a more godly manner. Importantly, the last (seventieth) of these resolutions was that Wallington should ‘read these my artickels [rules] once in a weeke’ - showing how reflecting on one’s own personal spiritual condition could certainly be aided by diary-keeping.³²

We may even say that introspective tendencies *and* the desire to keep a spiritual diary or autobiography grew out of the theological beliefs shared by English Puritans. As we have already seen, Bunyan cautioned his readers to take note of every scrap of evidence suggesting their salvation lest their own ignorance should bring despair and damnation on their souls. This sentiment was echoed in Bunyan’s most famous allegorical work, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) when the protagonist, Christian, lost the scroll he had been given to enable him to enter the Celestial City. This scroll was symbolic of Christian’s assurance of salvation, and was intended to comfort him as he read through it on his journey. However, when Christian realised the scroll was missing he became possessed with fear and self-loathing because he perceived that his lack of due care and attention had cost him dearly - and Bunyan

³¹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5; John Eliot quoted in T. Webster, ‘Writing to Redundancy’, p. 39.

³² Wallington, *Record*, p. 42.

states, 'who can sufficiently set forth the sorrow of Christian's heart?' when he found himself in 'great distress' having lost 'that which used to relieve him'.³³

Also noteworthy in the *Pilgrim's Progress* is the episode where Christian and Hopeful are held captive in Doubting Castle by Giant Despair later on in the journey. After a short period of time Christian suddenly realises that the key to set them both free is stored *within him*, and is called promise.³⁴ This shows how useful introspection could be to the Puritan mind, for Bunyan's work clearly suggests that it had the ability to banish spiritual despair when performed correctly (i.e. not taken to extremes). It could also be argued that this episode may have served as a poignant reminder to would-be diarists and autobiographers of the necessity to search inside their hearts to see if they could trust in God's promise of redemption and use this trust as a key to unlock their own despair.

The warnings of the conscience were also a vital feature for those intent on discovering their inmost beliefs and following a righteous path in the world. In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan advised his readers to 'remember your terrors of conscience, and fears of death and hell' whilst in *The Holy War* (1682) he noted that Mr Conscience's entreaties against the sins of the city of Mansoul were 'the voice of God in him to them' - thereby intimating that God often spoke to man through the conscience.³⁵ Nehemiah Wallington's spiritual diary also supports this assertion for when Wallington asks why God hides from him he states that 'the Lord did answer me by my conscience'.³⁶ Moreover, in his *An Extract of the passages of my life* (1654) Wallington noted that 'my conscience cryes or chides or terrifyes me for sine: As first sometimes conscience calls or cryes out before committing or in a purposing

³³ Bunyan, *PP*, p. 40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5; John Bunyan, *The Holy War*, ed. Roger Sharrock and James F. Forrest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 20.

³⁶ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 100v.

to commit sinne saying Take heede or doe not such a thing which is to God's dishonour'.³⁷ Thus we see how important it was for a Puritan to diligently search his own heart and conscience to discover whether he was truly able to say 'God is my God' and accept the promise of salvation whilst also learning to decipher the messages God relayed to him through his own conscience.³⁸

Ignorance was regarded as 'the mother of error' by Arthur Dent and William Pemble (c.1592-1623) noted that 'God's people have perished from lack of knowledge'.³⁹ Thus it would appear vital for a Puritan to ensure he was not ignorant of his own thoughts and feelings towards God. To avoid perishing from lack of knowledge Puritans placed great value on the injunctions of Saints Peter and Paul to make their calling and election certain (II. Peter 1:10) and also to examine whether they were in the faith (II. Corinthians 13:5). Samuel Petto advised all Christians to 'be much in self-examination: it is the proper end of this duty to helpe a soule into a right understanding about its condition' and claimed that 'Satan seeketh to beare off so much [sic.] from this duty'.⁴⁰ Whilst Thomas Watson pleaded with Christians to 'take pains with themselves in this great work of examination' for he considered their salvation to depend on it. 'Without self-examination', Watson stated, 'we can never know how it is with us. If we should die presently, we cannot tell to what Coast we should sail; whether to Heaven or Hell' - further bolstering the importance

³⁷ Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 291.

³⁸ Richard Sibbes quoted in von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p. 156.

³⁹ Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Man's Path-Way to Heaven*, (1603) reprinted (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd., 1974), p. 358; William Pemble, *The Workes of that Learned Minister of God's Holy Word, Mr. William Pemble, Master of Art, and Late of Magdalen Hall in Oxford, Containing Sundry Treatises and Expositions, Before Extant in Severall Tracts, and Now Collected into One Intire Volume* (London: Printed by Tho. Cotes [and Miles Flesher], for John Bartlet, 1635), p. 558. In this section Pemble is referring to a lack of knowledge of God and how to worship Him, rather than a lack of formal academic qualifications.

⁴⁰ Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit*, p. 181.

of writing a diary or autobiography which could help with the process of self-examination.⁴¹

Recording the results of self-examination was one way in which spiritual ignorance could be avoided. Nehemiah Wallington, for example, was exhorted by his local minister, Hugh Peter (d. 1660), to 'be not unwise, but keep your day book; write down your sins on one side, and on the other side God's little mercies'.⁴² Indeed, he kept a notebook called *A Day Booke of my Sinnes and of Experinced Mercys* (begun in 1652) used for just this purpose which, he claimed, enabled him to gain 'so much souls good and profit' that he dare not consider stopping writing in it and it also ensured that he performed 'daily Examinations of my sinfull heart'.⁴³ John Janeway also kept a diary in which he 'took notice what incomes and profit he received; in his spiritual traffique' and his brother claims he received many benefits from doing so for it made him 'retain a grateful remembrance of mercy, and . . . brought him to a very intimate acquaintance with his own heart; this, kept his spirit low and fitted him for freer communication from God . . . [and helping] him to walk more humbly with God'.⁴⁴ Whilst John Bunyan further emphasises the value of recording experience in *Grace Abounding* where he notes that his heart was 'filled full of comfort and hope' because he could believe his sins would be forgiven.⁴⁵ Here Bunyan wished he had a pen and ink so that he could write it down before he went any further, but the absence of either of these meant that he was unable to record his feelings until much later and consequently began to feel insecure about his

⁴¹ Thomas Watson quoted in Watkins, *Puritan Experience.*, p. 10.

⁴² Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 98v.

⁴³ Wallington, *Notebooks*, pp. 296, 307.

⁴⁴ James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities*, p. 59.

⁴⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 28.

salvation and ‘question all again’ almost immediately - possibly, we might say, because the feeling of elation had become dulled by the passing of time.⁴⁶

Was an awareness that such feeling diminished with time unless it was recorded the sole reason for the Puritan insistence on the importance of recording experience? When discussing self-examination Richard Rogers was concerned that ‘delay of time should cause forgetfulness’ and exhorted his readers to keep a daily account of the state of their souls in order to ‘procure to ourselves thereby most sound safetie’- which clearly shows that forgetting God’s mercies was a very real worry for the Puritan mind. Indeed, on this point John Beadle asserted that ‘so far is God provoked by the sin of forgetfulness, that he takes special notice of it, so he reproves it very sharply’.⁴⁷ To understand this need to write more fully we must consider the text with the widest Puritan readership - the Bible.

Puritans shared an insatiable desire for reading the Bible and an immense respect for its authority. When Bunyan felt a ‘biblical incursion’ weigh heavily upon his soul one day, he was unable to rest until he found the exact location of the passage in the Bible, and consequently spent over a year searching for the correct scriptural phrase.⁴⁸ Ralph Josselin also regularly noted that he wished to acquire a ‘more perfect knowledge of the sense of Scripture’, whilst Samuel Ward (1572-1643) considered the Bible supremely important because it served ‘not only to

⁴⁶ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 28. However, here we must remember what Rose Thurgood writes towards the end of her *A Lecture of Repentance*, for she states that ‘now loving friends I have Related some part of my Experience, for if I should Relate all, this booke would not contayne it’. This clearly shows that Thurgood has *consciously selected* which experiences to include in her text and which to leave out and it is highly likely that the authors of other spiritual autobiographies did likewise. See: Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 23.

⁴⁷ Richard Rogers quoted in Webster, ‘Writing to Redundancy’, p. 38; John Beadle, *The Journall or Diary of a Thankful Christian* (London: Printed by E. Coates for Tho. Parkhurst, 1656), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 20-21.

confirm the truth and to teach, but also to rebuke error, not only in doctrine, but also in manners and men's persons'.⁴⁹

It is possible to say that Christianity is a form of faith based on recorded experience, for the Bible purports to record the revelations and experiences of the apostles concerning God's interaction with mankind and the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The pious mind did not consider the Bible to be anything but the 'word of God' and it was proclaimed that 'the authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the Testimony of any man, or Church, but wholly on God (who is truth itselfe) the Author thereof' - in the words of Paul and Peter, 'all scripture *is* given by inspiration of God' (II. Timothy, 3:16) for 'the holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (II. Peter, 1:21).⁵⁰ It was believed that the Bible had been written 'for the better preserving and propagating of the Truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the Flesh and the malice of Satan, and of the world' - God had *chosen* to set his will into writing.⁵¹ The scriptures show the amount of trust placed in written communication and its importance as a method of keeping faith alive - St Luke asserted that 'it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order . . . that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed' (Luke, 1:3-4); St Jude noted that 'it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints' (Jude, 3); St John was commanded to 'write the things which thou hast seen and the things which are, and the things which shall be

⁴⁹ Josselin, *Diary*, p. 25; Samuel Ward quoted in Margo Todd, 'Puritan Self-Fashioning' p. 251.

⁵⁰ Westminster Assembly of Divines, *The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisme First Agreed Upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (Amsterdam: Printed by Luice Elsever [i.e. Gideon Lithgow], for Andrew Wilson, 1649), p. 6.

⁵¹ Westminster Assembly of Divines, *Confession of Faith*, pp. 3-4.

hereafter' (Rev. 1:19); Moses was told to 'write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel' (Exodus, 34:27) whilst Isaiah was advised to 'write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever' (Isaiah, 30:8). It is also noteworthy that the Ten Commandments were 'the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God graven upon the tables' (Exodus, 32:16) - thus indicating that God deemed the written form to be the most favourable and long-lasting method of communication with his people.

Although the spiritual autobiographies and diaries I have read do not cite these precise passages, many Puritans read the Bible daily.⁵² The books of Isaiah, Luke and Peter and the Pauline epistles are frequently cited by Samuel Rogers, Elizabeth Isham, Nehemiah Wallington and John Bunyan – thus showing that our key authors were clearly very familiar with these sections of the Bible and, in all probability, read the precise texts which highlight the importance of writing. Moreover, the importance of writing and recording experience would also have been reiterated by many ministers; as we have seen, Nehemiah Wallington was advised to keep a record of his own sins and God's mercies.⁵³

The absence of references to these particular scriptural passages could be said to parallel Dean Ebner's argument concerning the lack of references to Calvin and his writings in spiritual autobiographies and diaries. Ebner holds that the dearth of references to Calvin and even whether the author's of such texts ever actually read Calvin's works is 'largely irrelevant' because 'the important fact is that they were acquainted with Calvinistic opinions through the mediation of early English Puritans

⁵² See above, 'Introduction', pp. 16-18.

⁵³ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 98v.

who had inherited them in turn from the Genevan exiles'.⁵⁴ Thus we might say that whether biblical texts referring to the importance of writing are actually cited by our authors is also of little significance because close reading of the Bible acquainted them with this opinion as did the entreaties of their ministers and fellow Puritans.⁵⁵

The multiple references to a polluted, ungrateful or cold heart that are to be found in Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies highlight the amount of introspection Puritans actually undertook. We have already seen that Puritans were urged to look within themselves to see if they could trust in God. However, it was also an accepted fact that the heart could be deceitful, for the Bible declared that 'he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool' (Prov. 28:26). Consequently Puritans accepted that they must be cautious when analysing their own feelings towards God. They were well aware that only those such as Ignorance from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* accepted the truth of their own salvation simply because 'my heart tells me so' without possessing any more concrete signs of assurance and deliberating whether the faith they possessed was the effectual faith of the elect or merely the temporary faith of the reprobate.⁵⁶

By re-reading diary entries and reflecting on their previous thoughts and feelings towards God, Puritans could check the constancy of their own hearts and perhaps even estimate the depths of their own faith - though, needless to say, they would have to be careful to avoid the sin of presumption whilst doing this. Indeed, Oliver Heywood (1629-1702) decided to write his own autobiography in order 'to compare my past and present state and observe my proficiency in christianity, to see

⁵⁴ D. Ebner, *Autobiography*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ For example, Ralph Thoresby began his diary because it was his 'dear fathers express order' and Isaac Archer began to write his diary because he was 'counselled therto by my good father' – see E. Findlay, 'Ralph Thoresby the Diarist', p. 112; Archer, *Diary*, p. 43.

⁵⁶ Bunyan, *PP*, p. 126.

whether I be better this year than the last'.⁵⁷ Moreover, when discussing his re-reading of *The Growth of a Christian* Nehemiah Wallington maintained that 'wherein I did then find much profit and comfort in writing of it [...] So also now in the reading of it (1654) I doe Examin myselfe how much better I am growen now then I was then, how much more in Christ in Faith and Obedience in Humility . . . now then I was at that time'.⁵⁸ He also claimed to find 'many a precious Jewel [jewel] in the dust and dungel [dunghill] of my workes' when he re-read other notebooks.⁵⁹ We may even say that if a Puritan recorded his spiritual experiences truthfully then the diary or autobiography could actually *become* a tangible sign of assurance when it was re-read, for the times he felt God by his side supporting him and the favourable providences towards him would reassure him of God's merciful and benevolent feelings towards him personally.

Ralph Josselin used a pointing hand (☞) to mark important parts of his diary. Presumably this was designed to help him find these parts quickly when he re-read his own work for he marked places that could bolster his spirit in times of despair such as when he wished God would 'continue . . . [his] sanctifying, prospering presence with us' and when he noted that 'God was good to mee in the word'.⁶⁰ Josselin also used this symbol to highlight events that reminded him of God's power and glory, thereby humbling his own heart, such as when he recorded the suicide of a member of the Congregational Church at Coggeshall and asked 'lord what is a man if you leave him, temptacions easily swallow him up'.⁶¹ In this case writing a diary or autobiography would have a cathartic effect for it would help purge feelings of

⁵⁷ Oliver Heywood quoted in N.H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Avon: Leicester University Press, 1987), p. 208.

⁵⁸ Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 288.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 297-298.

⁶⁰ Josselin, *Diary*, p. 434.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

damnation and despair and would help to instill ‘spiritual peace, [which] is the best peace’.⁶²

Reflecting on the positive passages in a diary could help alleviate feelings of insecurity, for at the times when believers felt they ‘should goe into heaven one while and another while I thought I should not’ they could re-read their ‘assured moments’ and regain some confidence in their spiritual status.⁶³ Hannah Allen, for example, noted that she would ‘read over my former experiences that I had writ down’ at times when she felt tempted by the Devil, whilst Edward Terrill, a church elder at Broadmead, claimed to have written about his religious experience because ‘the Lord hath, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spoken unto me, I thought it meet for his glory, *and the comfort of my own soul*, to record so much as he shall bring to my remembrance’.⁶⁴ Moreover, the importance of re-reading a diary was further reinforced by John Beadle who urged all those who kept a diary to ‘look often into this [their] journal and read it over’ because he was convinced that ‘such a course would very much help our faith’ for ‘the serious survey of such a Journall [will] abase the soul before the Lord . . . [and] every experiment of Gods former goodnesse is a strong prop for our faith in the future’.⁶⁵

Introspection and personal reflection were clearly not unique products of seventeenth-century religion. They had been encouraged by John Calvin, who asserted in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) that it was impossible to gain a true knowledge of God as creator and redeemer ‘unless the knowledge of

⁶² Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 92v.

⁶³ Wallington, *Record*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian Mrs. Hannah Allen* (London: Printed by John Wallis, 1683), p. 8; Edward Terrill, *Edward Terrill's Experience* printed in E. B. Underhill (ed.), *The Records of a Church of Christ, Meeting in Broadmead, Bristol, 1640-1687* (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1847), pp. 57-58. (The italics are my own).

⁶⁵ John Beadle, *Journall or Diary*, p. 102; John Beadle quoted in Webster, ‘Writing to Redundancy’, p. 48.

ourselves be added'.⁶⁶ Indeed, Calvin held that 'every person . . . on coming to the knowledge of himself, is not only urged to seek God, but is also led as by the hand to find him' - thereby suggesting that only those who knew themselves would be directed to a knowledge of the creator and enabled to take the first step towards leading a godly life.⁶⁷ The English theologian, William Perkins (1558-1602), repeated Calvin's sentiment in almost identical words when he wrote that 'blessed life ariseth from the knowledge of God and therefore it ariseth likewise from the knowledge of ourselves, because we know God by looking into ourselves' - thereby showing that, at least on this point, the English interpretation of Calvin's thought matched Calvin's exposition of his theology in the *Institutes*.⁶⁸

All too frequently, however, despair followed such self-examination either because signs of assurance were not readily discernable or because of the difficulty in distinguishing a member of God's elect from a reprobate with temporary faith. Calvin admitted that 'the reprobate are sometimes affected in a way so similar to the elect, that even in their own judgement there is no difference between them'.⁶⁹ But he claimed that such a close affinity between reprobates and members of the elect should not tempt mankind to question God's actions and divine plan for 'when puny man endeavours to penetrate to the hidden recesses of the divine wisdom . . . he plunges headlong into an immense abyss, involves himself in numberless inextricable snares, and buries himself in the thickest darkness'.⁷⁰

Whilst a man could not pry into God's secret plan for humanity to discover whether he was a member of the elect or merely a reprobate, he was permitted to look within himself in an attempt to see if God's favour had been bestowed on his

⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, (I.xv.1), p. 86.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, (I.i.1), p. 7.

⁶⁸ Perkins, *Work*, p. 177.

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, (III.ii.11), p. 289.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, (III.xxiv.4), pp. 515-516.

own heart - for how else was he to gain knowledge of himself? Unfortunately, there were also perils along this route. Even with the Puritan and Calvinist emphasis on introspection and *self*-examination, man was reminded that he should not rely on himself at all for salvation. According to Calvin, mankind was utterly depraved and thus 'if you contemplate yourself, that is sure damnation' for 'when the Christian looks at himself he can only have grounds for anxiety, indeed despair'.⁷¹ On first glance, it may appear that Calvin is insisting that self-examination should not be performed, though what I believe is actually meant here is that man should not consider himself worthy of salvation, for he is utterly depraved. What the Christian must come to realise is that if he is a member of the elect then he must look to Christ, who is 'the mirror wherein, we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election', for salvation.⁷²

It was believed that members of the elect became ingrafted into Christ and thus 'His righteousness covers your sins - his salvation extinguishes your condemnation; he interposes with his worthiness, and so prevents your unworthiness from coming into the view of God'.⁷³ This reasoning would account for why so many diarists consider themselves to be 'the chief of sinners' or 'the greatest sinner', for writers who use these terms appear keen to abase themselves, acknowledge their inherent degenerate state and place full reliance on Christ their saviour.⁷⁴ If the diary of such a writer is intended to be made public then we could say they may write to show how glorious God is for taking pity on a miserable sinner who, by rights, is undeserving of mercy. Yet if the diary is to remain private then writing in such a manner could help humble the writer's spirit which would be highly desirable for

⁷¹ John Calvin quoted in Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p. 26.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes*, (III.ii.24), p. 297.

⁷⁴ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 6; Thomas Shepard, *Journal* (1649) printed in Michael McGiffert (ed.), *God's Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. 195.

according to the Bible ‘the meek shall inherit the earth’ (Psalm 37:11) and Calvin specifically remarks on the ‘mean and humble style’ used by Matthew, Mark and Luke in the gospels maintaining that God ‘resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble’.⁷⁵

This notion of humility could also have repercussions on the form of language used by our authors. Roger Pooley has observed that many Puritans desired to write in as simple a manner as possible in order to emulate the style of the Bible, which Samuel How considered to be ‘simplicity itself’; indeed, Bunyan explicitly mentioned that he desired to be ‘*plain and simple*’ in his writing and this desire seems to be part of his sensitivity towards the dangers of pride, a theme that runs through his, and others’, writing.⁷⁶ We might also say that the Puritan impulse to speak plainly and simply could have sprung from the desire to humble oneself before God.

Since words are the building blocks of writing which enable an individual to leave behind a record of his thoughts, feelings and beliefs that is intelligible to any reader it will be interesting to analyse the vocabulary used by the authors of our spiritual autobiographies and diaries and consider whether they could have consciously selected specific words to affect their readers and make their accounts fit in with Calvinist theology. After all, Bunyan counselled his readers to follow a godly

⁷⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* (I.viii.11), p. 35; *ibid.*, (II.ii.10), p. 130.

⁷⁶ R. Pooley, ‘Plain and Simple: Bunyan and Style’ in N.H. Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus. Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 92; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5. Bunyan shows the dangers of pride and vanity in the *Pilgrim’s Progress* where he explains how Christian’s pride causes him to stumble and fall on his way out of the Valley of the Shadow of Death (p. 60) and Vanity-Fair is where Faithful is cruelly put to death (p. 86) by the irreligious population of the town. Moreover, Arthur Dent, author of *The Plaine Mans Path-Way to Heaven* also asserted that pride was an abomination to God, who ‘does detest and abhor proud men’ (p. 37), and he also maintained that when Satan ‘can no way prevail against some excellent servants of God, his last device is to blow them up with Pride, as it were with gunpowder’ (p. 40). Nehemiah Wallington also agreed with this, for he stated that ‘to humbel our selves it is the way to enter into heaven’ (Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 34r).

path in life and to ‘*remember, I say, the Word that first laid hold upon you*’.⁷⁷ He also urged them to remember every moment of their conversion even their ‘*terrors of conscience, and fear of death and hell*’ because, as we have seen, he believed that every aspect of a person’s spiritual journey was vitally important and should not be forgotten.⁷⁸ This shows the strict attention to detail that many Puritans paid to their spiritual lives and surely we could also argue that such a concern for the intricacies of their spiritual well-being would also influence the amount of attention paid to the actual mechanics of writing a spiritual autobiography or diary; possibly even extending to the existence of a specific form of language considered appropriate for religious discourse in the seventeenth century.

Thus we see that it is certainly possible to find a link between diary-keeping, introspection and Calvinist theology, for they appear to complement one another. Puritans continually found themselves searching for signs of their elect status, not only to provide psychological comfort, but also because close reading of the word convinced them that only those who had some inkling about their elect status during their lifetime would be saved. Such feeling was reinforced by belief in mankind’s inherent depravity and subsequent inability to influence its own salvation, for ‘it is neither in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that sheweth mercy’ (Romans 9:16). Consequently, a diary could turn into a log book monitoring one’s spiritual status, recording signs of assurance and providing comfort to the dispirited reader at times when damnation seemed inevitable. Having discussed general views on the relationship between seventeenth-century Calvinist theology and diary writing we will now consider the specific reasons our key characters gave for the writing of their diaries and autobiographies.

⁷⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5; John Bunyan, *The Resurrection of the Dead* in J.Sears McGee (ed), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan* (13 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), III, 276.

John Bunyan and his Reasons for Writing *Grace Abounding*

Bunyan records the majority of his reasons for writing his own spiritual autobiography in the preface to *Grace Abounding*. The first reason he provides us with is linked to the Puritan notion of divine calling. Bunyan claims to be writing *Grace Abounding* for the benefit of his own congregation at the Bedford Independent Church because his lengthy term of imprisonment has left him unable to ‘*perform that duty that from God doth lie upon me, to you-ward, for your further edifying and building up in Faith and Holiness*’.⁷⁹ Consequently, it would appear that he felt compelled to show that his ‘*Soul hath fatherly care and desire*’ after the congregation’s ‘*spiritual and everlasting welfare*’ by writing a spiritual autobiography that would help to bring comfort to those who read it because it showed how merciful God had been to Bunyan, the self-proclaimed ‘chief of sinners’.⁸⁰ It is interesting that Bunyan chooses to say he has *fatherly* concerns for his congregation as this suggests that he cares for those who attend his sermons or read his works in the same way that God cares for mankind; thus reflecting traditional pastoral language. It also suggests that he sees himself as being spiritually superior to his congregation and is therefore well-qualified to offer a helping hand to those in spiritual distress.

Such a desire to help others in their own personal quests for salvation is also consistent with Nehemiah Wallington’s assertion that ‘we must seeke to reform our selves and reforme others’.⁸¹ This indicates that Wallington considers the reformation of a Christian’s character to be an ongoing process, possibly even one which cannot be completed in this lifetime, whilst he also feels that the truly godly Christian should endeavour to help other members of his local community to leave

⁷⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 3. Unless otherwise stated the italics are Bunyan’s.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 6.

⁸¹ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 176r.

their sinful ways behind and teach them, by his own example, to walk a more righteous path. We may speculate that Bunyan considered it to be his duty as a minister to awaken as many people as possible to the perilous plight of their souls and the urgent need of a saviour to redeem them. *Grace Abounding* could then be seen as Bunyan's attempt to guide his flock in two ways: firstly, to help them keep up their religious observances and meetings whilst he was in prison and unable to preach regularly to them and secondly, his attempt to show the reader a possible route to salvation that could be emulated – Richard Baxter maintained that 'the Leaders of the Flock must be exemplary to the rest' and George Downname noted that the ideal parish minister was to act as a guide on the path to salvation for insofar as the 'true Christian hath attained grace, he hath obtained it by the help of the ministry'.⁸² Richard Greenham asserted that a truly godly minister must 'watch over the souls of his people, to be so careful over them, as that he will not suffer one through his negligence to perish' for should the minister be careless of any soul in his charge then he 'shall be called to a straight account, and shall answer for every soul that hath perished, and so become a devil in hell forever'.⁸³ This was a common theme. The seventeenth-century ministers Edward Vaughan and Robert Humston, for example, shared Greenham's sentiments on the matter. Vaughan wrote that 'the bloud of every Parishioner that dieth ignorantly in his sinne, shall be required of the Pastor', whilst Humston argued that ministers should be 'found faithfull, full of affections, pastoral care and zeale, eespecially towardses that people and flocke committed to their charge, whose bloud shall be required at their hands'.⁸⁴ Perhaps such thinking provided the initial impetus behind Bunyan's decision to write and

⁸² Richard Baxter, *Gildas Salvianus; The Reformed Pastor* (London: Printed by Robert White for, for Nevil Simmons, 1656), sig. A4v; George Downname quoted in N. Enssle 'Patterns of Godly Life', p.5.

⁸³ Richard Greenham quoted in Enssle, 'Patterns of Godly Life', pp. 5, 6.

⁸⁴ Edward Vaughan and Robert Hamston quoted in E.J. Carlson, 'The Boring of the Ear' in L. Taylor (ed.), *Preachers and People*, p. 269.

publish his spiritual autobiography, for he was clearly familiar with the Biblical notion that 'he that converteth a sinner from the error of his way, doth save a soul from death' (James, 5:20), as he quotes this verse in *Grace Abounding*.⁸⁵

Bunyan also notes that he was 'particularly called forth' to preach the Word and 'could not be content unless I was found in the exercise of my Gift'.⁸⁶ This would help account for his need to continue his ministerial work even during his imprisonment, for by doing so Bunyan would have ensured that he did not neglect his divinely granted calling. If Bunyan had neglected the duty that he was 'particularly called forth' to perform for any period of time, then this would have implied a lack of respect to God and a deeper interest in worldly affairs than the eternal spiritual condition of his own soul and the souls of his congregation. In allowing earthly confinement and misfortune to take precedence over 'that duty that from God doth lie upon me' Bunyan would have clearly been seen to allow worldly distractions to take precedence over spiritual concerns and this could not be permitted.⁸⁷ Bunyan considered himself to be 'God's instrument' and consequently he probably felt that a failure to act as such, even whilst he was imprisoned, was a reprehensible slight to divine authority.⁸⁸ His assertion that the Holy Ghost 'never intended that men who have Gifts and Abilities should bury them in the earth, but rather he did command and stir up such to the exercise of their gift, and also did commend those who were apt and ready to do so' has been interpreted by John Stachniewski and Anita Pacheco as meaning that Bunyan believed formal academic qualifications were not necessary for preachers, for the divinely granted Gift was all

⁸⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 80.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

that was needed.⁸⁹ Surely, however, given that Bunyan was imprisoned whilst he was writing *Grace Abounding*, it would also be possible to interpret this statement as meaning that Bunyan felt that inaction and disregard for his vocation during his imprisonment would cause affront to the Holy Ghost because he would seemingly be rejecting God's gift by 'burying' it for the period of his incarceration.

God's gift – Bunyan's effectual calling as a minister - was certainly not one to be rejected as 'none but those who are effectually called, inherit the Kingdom of Heaven' and 'those that must be glorified with Christ in another world must be called by Him here'.⁹⁰ Consequently, the written works penned during this period, which include the *Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Heavenly Footman*, and the fact that he occasionally preached from his cell, clearly indicate that Bunyan was doing everything within his power to keep his ministerial skills in action throughout his lengthy prison sentence - hence the need to write and publish his own spiritual autobiography, which could extend his ministerial influence beyond the confines of his cell.

The second reason Bunyan gives for his enterprise is that he hopes 'others may be put in remembrance of what He [God/Christ] hath done for their souls, by reading his work upon me'.⁹¹ Here we should bear in mind that the full title of Bunyan's spiritual autobiography is, *Grace Abounding to the chief of Sinners: Or, A*

⁸⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 76, 247.

⁹⁰ First quotation, Bunyan, *GA*, online edition available at:

http://www.ccel.org/b/bunyan/abounding/grace_abounding.txt (Section 72). This phrase does not appear in the Stachniewski/Pacheco edition of the text; second quotation: Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 22. Here would be an apt place to inform the reader that *Grace Abounding* was published in six editions during Bunyan's lifetime. The first was published by George Larkin in 1666 and the final, sixth, edition was published in 1688. In each edition Bunyan made changes to the text of the original (1666), with the most significant alterations and additions being made in the third and fifth editions. On the title page of the last (sixth) edition published before his death, Bunyan claimed that the text had been 'corrected, and much Enlarged now by the Author, for the Benefit of the Tempted and Dejected Christian'. The first phrase quoted does not appear in the first edition of *Grace Abounding* but is included in the fifth edition. The existence of several editions of the text, each slightly different from the other, is also a clear indication that Bunyan spent a great deal of time reading through *Grace Abounding*.

⁹¹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 4.

Brief Relation Of the exceeding mercy of God in Christ, to his poor Servant John Bunyan. As we have previously noted, claims to being the ‘chief’ or ‘greatest’ of sinners indicate that the writer, who by the time of writing considers himself to be a *penitent* sinner, is abasing himself before his omnipotent creator in an attempt to act with reverent humility. In typical Calvinist fashion, Bunyan recognises that he is utterly depraved and in need of a saviour to atone for his own personal sins, for he is aware that without a saviour there could only be damnation before him. As Arthur Dent, the author of *The Plaine Man’s Path-Way to Heaven*, notes, ‘when we looke downewards to our selves, we have doubttes and feares: but when we look upward to Christ, and the truth of his promises, we feele our selves cock-sure, and cease to doubt anymore’.⁹² Bunyan appears to share this feeling of despondency for he claims that ‘sin would damn me . . . unless I was found in Christ’, and is well aware that he was ‘lost if I had not Christ because I had been a sinner’.⁹³ Moreover, when he fears he has succumbed to the Devil’s wiles and ‘sold’ Christ, terror erupts within him and he feels ‘like a man bereft of life . . . past all recovery, and bound over to eternal punishment’ because ‘every time I thought of the Lord Jesus, of his Grace, Love, goodness, kindness . . . it went to my Soul like a Sword; . . . Oh! thought I, what have I lost! what have I parted with! what have I disinherited my poor Soul of!’ - proving that unless an individual considered himself to be engrafted into Christ, despair would soon follow.⁹⁴ Acting in this manner means that Bunyan can show how glorious and merciful God is to save even a sinner who believed himself to have rejected his own saviour, as well as showing the degree of humility required in a truly repentant Christian. Furthermore, *Grace Abounding* would also comfort its

⁹² Dent, *Plaine Man’s Path-Way*, p. 270.

⁹³ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 10, 25.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 51-52.

readers by reminding them that zealous Christians are to expect moments of despair and spiritual insecurity - they are not alone in experiencing such doubts and fears.

Possessing assurance was considered 'a rare blessing of a mature faith, experienced *after* many conflicts, doubts, and temptations'.⁹⁵ Dent asserted that even the 'most excellent servants of God fall into fits, and pangs of despair' and this is certainly to be expected for as 'an ague in a young man is a sign of health: so these burning fits of temptation in the elect . . . are signs of God's grace and favour: for if they were not of God, the devil would never be so busy with them'.⁹⁶ Whilst Richard Sibbes concluded that 'God suffer[s] questions oftentimes to arise for tryall of our love, and exercise of our parts, [yet] nothing is so certaine as that which is certaine after doubts'.⁹⁷ However, *Grace Abounding* shows that the possession of this knowledge did not, in itself, alleviate the suffering of a soul convinced of its own worthlessness and the imminence of eternal, inescapable, damnation. We are certain that Bunyan read Dent's *Plaine Man's Path-Way to Heaven* for he notes that this text was one of the two books his wife brought as her wedding dowry and records that 'in these two books I should sometimes read with her [Bunyan's wife]'.⁹⁸ Yet this does not prevent Bunyan from falling into despair concerning his own spiritual condition and becoming convinced that he has committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. When Bunyan falls into despair he does not treat his despairing feelings as a rite of passage that could indicate he is a member of the elect, instead he sees them as a clear indication of his damnation. Each time Bunyan doubts his salvation he is overwhelmed by despair and feels 'sorry that God had made me a man' and

⁹⁵ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, p. 11. (The emphasis is my own).

⁹⁶ Dent, *Plaine Man's Path-Way*, p. 270.

⁹⁷ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax some Sermons Contracted out of Matt 12, 20, at the Desire and for the Good of Weaker Christians* (Sixth Edition; London: Printed by J.G. for R. Dawlman, and to be sold by Henry Cripps, 1658), pp. 55-56.

⁹⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 9.

certain that ‘none but the Devil himself could equalize me for inward wickednes and pollution of minde’ because his sins are ‘bigger than the sins of a Countrey, of a Kingdom, or of the whole World’.⁹⁹ At all times Bunyan feels that he is completely alone and that no one has ever experienced what he is going through, possibly *Grace Abounding* could have helped assist those in a similar position to Bunyan. People who considered themselves without hope of salvation may have seen a reflection of their torments in Bunyan’s words and have been helped to accept that such feelings were transient in the elect.

When mentioning the benefit readers might gain from his text Bunyan also refers to the biblical tale of Samson and the lion to show that even seemingly impossible feats can be accomplished when God supports your endeavours – he states that the temptations he has experienced could be compared to the lion that threatened to attack Samson and that when one meets the same temptations again after they have already been overcome ‘we shall finde a Nest of Honey within them’.¹⁰⁰ Bunyan could also be suggesting that his spiritual autobiography was the product of his successful fight against temptation and could thus be described as the ‘honey’ Bunyan gained by overcoming temptation - he is offering it to his readers to help them beat their own spiritual troubles and gain the ‘honey’ that he has found. It could also be seen as Bunyan’s assertion that ministers have an integral role to play in the conversion of any godly individual, for in *Grace Abounding* Bunyan is setting an example for his readers to follow. As George Downname noted in a sermon published in 1608 ministers should ‘attend to themselves . . . that they may be precedents, and as the Holy Ghost speaketh, . . . patterns and samplers of godly life’, or as Nehemiah Wallington succinctly asserts ‘whosoever puts sin not a way in

⁹⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 27, 26, 47.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

himself will not nor cannot put a way sin in others', thus showing why ministers should lead a holy life.¹⁰¹ From this we may also judge that the use of vocabulary in the preface is also important because it gives the reader an insight into Bunyan's theological beliefs – in *The Holy War* Emmanuel states that 'without teachers and guides you will not be able to know or do the will of my Father'.¹⁰² When he specifically claims that he is going to produce a comprehensive record of his spiritual journey this suggests that Bunyan believes God to be aware of every aspect of his conversion and temptations and he therefore knows that he can hide nothing. It may also indicate that Bunyan considers every aspect of his spiritual life to have had an impact on his spiritual development and eventual conversion for, as we have seen, he was well aware of the perils of missing signs of assurance and was adamant that missing even a small indication of grace would bring damnation. Moreover, he could also have believed that there was a greater chance of his readers identifying with his experiences and being awakened to their own sinful state if he included all he could possibly remember about his own spiritual experiences.

Was it possible that Bunyan thought reading a text could have such a tremendous affect on a soul in peril? The simple answer to this question is that Bunyan's experiences of reading seem to have taught him that such a dramatic effect is certainly possible.¹⁰³ In early modern England reading and listening were not simply passive activities, they were interactive processes. As Stephen B. Dobranski notes, seventeenth-century authors 'established their authority by invoking readers who would participate directly in their texts' thus ensuring that writing and reading

¹⁰¹ George Downname quoted in N. Enssle, 'Patterns of Godly Life', p. 3; Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 52v.

¹⁰² Bunyan, *The Holy War* (Pennsylvania: Whitaker, 1985), p. 161.

¹⁰³ Here I refer to experiences such as Bunyan's first reading of Dent's *Plain Man's Path-Way to Heaven* and Bayly's *Practice of Piety* (*GA*, p. 9) and his discovery that Martin Luther's *Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (1574) 'profoundly handled' his own spiritual condition 'as if his Book had been written out of my heart' (*GA*, p. 38).

were collaborative affairs during this time as ‘authors and readers had to labor [sic] together consciously to produce meaning’.¹⁰⁴ Those involved were active participants in these tasks and frequently felt that the author or speaker was actually addressing them personally.

In Bunyan’s case we can clearly see the impact reading had on his spiritual life. Although a reading of Dent’s *Plaine Man’s Path-Way to Heaven* did not convince him that doubts were all part of the normal course of spiritual affairs, it did awaken some ‘desires to Religion’ within him, whilst later on a reading of *A Relation of the Fearfull Estate of Francis Spira, in the Yeare, 1548* terrified him for the book ‘was to my troubled Spirit, as Salt when rubbed into a fresh wound; every Sentence in that book, every groan of that man . . . was as Knives and Daggers in my Soul’.¹⁰⁵ These examples show, in the words of Isabel Rivers, that Bunyan ‘regarded reading as a kind of mirror providentially given him to reflect and reinforce his own experience’.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, hearing a sermon preached could have a similar effect. A sermon Bunyan heard concerning the correct treatment of the Sabbath day affected him so deeply that he ‘fell in my conscience under his Sermon, thinking and

¹⁰⁴ S.B. Dobranski, *Readers and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 22. A. Cambers and M. Wolfe’s article also suggests that reading may be considered an ‘active’ pursuit because communal reading (e.g. families reading catechisms and devotional books together) was at the core of ‘family religion’ and was thus an act of sociability and a marker of spiritual identity in the seventeenth century (pp. 891-894). They also suggest that reading godly books could help develop an individual’s sense of communal identity since Richard Baxter’s books nurtured John Rastrick’s ‘sense of belonging to a discrete community of evangelical readers’ (p. 893). See Cambers and Wolfe, ‘Reading, Family Religion, and Evangelical Identity’, pp. 891-894.

¹⁰⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 9, 45. In 1635 Wallington records that he kept copies of Nathaniel Bacon’s *A Relation of the Fearfull Estate of Francis Spira* and W. Griffith’s *The historie of the damnable life, and deserved death of doctor John Faustus* in his pocket to read. Paradoxically, he finds that they ‘did by Gods blessing somewhat ease and refresh my distempered minde’ since ‘the thoughts of these two sadd spectickles caused me to praise God that I was yet upon the earth having time and means of grace and that Heaven Gats were not shut against me, for yet I had some hope and some glances of the eye of Faith towards my God which others could not find any’ – thus showing that books did not always affect their readers in the same manner; where Bunyan found terror, Wallington found comfort. See Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 275.

¹⁰⁶ I. Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780* (2 vols, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), I, p. 112.

believing that he made that sermon on purpose to shew me my evil-doing'; thus showing that listening was also an interactive process in early modern England.¹⁰⁷

Thus we see the impact that reading godly books and hearing theological texts expounded could certainly have a major impact on seventeenth-century Puritans.¹⁰⁸ Reading the Bible often turned out to be an interactive process. Bunyan records that 'the third of Jeremiah, at the first, *was something to me*, and so was the consideration of the fifth verse of that chapter' and also following a reading of the four gospels he notes that he felt so involved with the life of Christ that 'me thought I was as if I had seen him born, as if I had seen him grow up, as if I had seen him walk thorow this world, from the Cradle to his Cross'.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps we may say that the Biblical incursions Bunyan experiences throughout *Grace Abounding* are created as much by this form of 'interactive reading' as by what Peter J. Carlton terms

¹⁰⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 10. Bunyan's experience here could be related to recent discussions on 'particular preaching' (sermons where sinners were condemned by name) by C. Haigh and E.J. Carlson. Haigh alleges that 'particularising' was a common practice in early modern England – see, for example, C. Haigh, 'The Taming of Reformation: Preachers, Pastors and Parishioners in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England', *History*, 85 (2000), pp. 572-588 and C. Haigh, *The Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven: Kinds of Christianity in Post-Reformation England, 1570-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 20-23. Alternatively, Carlson argues that this was not the case for it was generally a guilty conscience which made hearers believe general sermons were directed at them personally (as was the case with Bunyan) since, as the Devon minister Samuel Hieron explained 'it cutteth the Sabbath-breaker, to heare his profaneness still cryed out upon: It cutteth the adulterer, to heare his viciousnes continually found fault with: It cutteth the drunkard, to heare his excesse so often threatened' and thus, in the words of the godly minister Richard Bernard, preachers were 'said to name men in the Pulpit & gall some personally: when no man is named'. E.J. Carlson, 'Good Pastors or Careless Shepherds? Parish Ministers and the English Reformation', *History*, 88 (2003), pp. 423-436. Quotation on p. 424.

¹⁰⁸ Bunyan was not the only Puritan to remark on the spiritual profit he gained from reading texts by godly men. Isaac Archer, for example, notes that 'I read Dr Taylour of practicall repentance, and Dr Preston of faith, and found good by them'. A reading of Nicholas Byfield's *The Spiritual Touchstone: or, the Signes of a Godly Man* shows Archer that he possesses several of the signs present in a truly godly individual. Archer also identifies with Richard Baxter's experience of the workings of God in *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, for Archer records that 'I was reading the preface to Baxter's *Rest*, where he writes that we should mind our inheritance, and that because God tossed and tumbled us about in this world to make us weary of it. And this have I often experienced, that I meet with crosses, and can find no content from anything in this world, but an unsettlement in the midst of all my enjoyments'. The influence books could have on an individual is clearly shown by Archer's diary entry for August 26th 1666 where he notes that 'by reading of Bishop Usher's *Body of Divinity*, I was convinced of my sinning against the commandments of God in many cases, which before I had taken no notice of; as of Mr Dod's book I found I had failed in my duty to my father'.

See Archer, *Diary*, pp. 64, 133, 98, 113.

¹⁰⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 33, 35.

Bunyan's desire to present himself as 'a passive locus for the activity of alien agents, a battleground where God and the Devil enact their eternal warfare'.¹¹⁰

This form of 'interactive reading' may have meant that Bunyan perceived certain parts of the Bible to address his own personal spiritual condition and remembered these phrases at the times when he felt most distressed about the status of his soul; these Biblical incursions could then be seen to provide a way for Bunyan to interact with the Bible and attempt to establish a more personal relationship with God. It is likely that Bunyan wished the reader of *Grace Abounding* to identify with his own religious experiences as much as possible and be comforted that the godly path was not an easy one to follow. Indeed, it is likely that Bunyan would have wished his readers to identify with his experiences to the extent which he was able to identify with Martin Luther's *Comment on the Galatians* where he 'found my condition in his experience so largely and profoundly handled, as if his Book had been written out of my heart'.¹¹¹

But what of Bunyan's so-called 'passive' experiences? In *Grace Abounding* words 'dart from Heaven' into Bunyan's soul, he feels that they 'broke in upon my mind' and records that specific words and sentences 'fall' upon him.¹¹² The use of words such as these makes Bunyan seem passive in his own spiritual experience because he does not appear to have any control over when the words arrive; it seems that God is doing all the work and Bunyan is simply the fortunate recipient of His grace and mercy. Indeed, Bunyan's use of vocabulary might cause us to agree with Henri Talon's observation that his soul 'became a dwelling-ground where Biblical texts confronted each other', or, as Carlton puts it, Bunyan's descriptions of these

¹¹⁰ P.J. Carlton, 'Bunyan: Language, Convention, Authority' in *English Literary History*, 51:1 (1984), pp. 17-32. Quotation on p. 18.

¹¹¹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 38.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 22, 28.

biblical incursions suggest that he is ‘suffering something rather than doing something’.¹¹³ Interestingly, Scott Paul Morgan reinforces Carlton’s argument when he explains that the structure of ‘Protestant thought itself encourages actors to believe that they are not the source of what seem like “their” actions’ because in early modern England men desired ‘not “shaping power” over their identities and actions but to be shaped by another power’.¹¹⁴ Yet was Bunyan’s role in these experiences completely passive? Carlton also maintains that those who split from the established Church and developed their own form of spiritual/experiential religion felt ‘the loss of objective religious authority’ and therefore used biblical incursions to ‘transform their thoughts into authoritative utterances proceeding from God’ – they needed to compensate for the lack of ecclesiastical authority.¹¹⁵ He consequently argues that Bunyan is not completely passive when experiencing these incursions because he is actually attempting to fill the void left by his separation from the Church of England and expressing a need for direct communication with God. However, we could also say that Bunyan consciously chose to describe his experiences in this way in order to emphasise how powerless mankind is when alone and without God’s assistance - to show that mankind is utterly reliant on God and is unable to act without His help. In other words, it could be argued that Bunyan consciously selected the words he used to describe these moments in order to reflect his own religious beliefs and thus use *Grace Abounding* as a vehicle for advancing his own theological position.

But how far would Bunyan have gone to ensure that his readers were able to identify with his words? Bunyan claimed that one of his aims for writing *Grace*

¹¹³ P.J. Carlton, ‘Bunyan: Language, Convention and Authority’, pp. 17, 18.

¹¹⁴ S.P. Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature 1640-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 32, 23.

¹¹⁵ P.J. Carlton, ‘Bunyan: Language, Convention and Authority’, pp. 20, 22.

Abounding was to 'be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was'.¹¹⁶

Presumably he intended this phrase to indicate that he was keen to write about his religious experiences in an unadulterated fashion free from exaggeration and embellishment. Why was this, we may ask? Bunyan appears to have considered religious affairs to be far too serious to be interfered with for he states that 'God *did not play in convincing of me; the Devil did not play in tempting of me; neither did I play when I sank as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me: wherefore I may not play in my relating of them*'.¹¹⁷ This suggests that Bunyan was eager to show the sincerity of his own religious professions and experiences, or at least that he was eager to *portray* himself as sincere in his actions. However, if *Grace Abounding* was intended to be of didactic value, could it be possible that some events were 'staged' to teach his readers a lesson, in spite of Bunyan's assertions to the contrary? Could a desire to ensure that readers were able to identify with his spiritual account have an impact on the way in which Bunyan wrote his spiritual autobiography?

Let us first ascertain whether Bunyan did indeed seek to engage his readers in the manner I have suggested. If we consider Bunyan's preface to *Grace Abounding* then it is clear that he wished to address his readers in a friendly tone and treat them as fellow 'spiritual travellers' all seeking to praise God, live piously and ultimately gain admittance to heaven. He refers to the readers as his 'dear children' and offers them counsel on how best to remember God's mercies whilst also reminding them that no matter what spiritual troubles they are going through 'twas thus with your Father'.¹¹⁸ Bunyan reminds his readers that even though he is the pastor of the Bedford Independent Church he has been in their position - and that in many ways,

¹¹⁶ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

even at the end of his spiritual autobiography, he still considers himself to be in their position of spiritual insecurity for he maintains ‘I will leap off the Ladder even blindfold into Eternitie, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell; Lord Jesus if thou wilt catch me, do; I will venture for thy Name’.¹¹⁹ Thus we see that Bunyan certainly wished his readers to identify with his spiritual condition and not feel intimidated by his reputation for tremendous piety and his position as a popular preacher whose sermons were heard by hundreds of people.¹²⁰ But did this affect how *Grace Abounding* was written? For example, could Bunyan’s insistence that he is ‘the chief of sinners’ and ‘the ungodliest Fellow for swearing’ be explained by his desire to make those convinced of their inherent sinful nature read and take note of his book rather than his own personal belief in his extremely depraved state?¹²¹

We must not forget the possibility that *Grace Abounding* could actually be an artfully constructed work designed for the specific purpose of edifying and comforting the reader whilst all the events and descriptions of Bunyan’s innermost feelings that it records may have no necessary basis in reality - it could be fiction, in the sense of being ‘constructed’ or ‘artificial’, rather than autobiography.¹²² If this

¹¹⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 92.

¹²⁰ See Bunyan *GA*, p. 77 for details of Bunyan’s ministerial activities and success at preaching.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 12.

¹²² Contemporaries clearly feared that their accounts might not be taken seriously but be considered false and fictionalised works instead as at the end of his account discussing how he left his Quaker beliefs behind and realised he must look to Christ for salvation William Dimsdale notes: ‘after the viewing of this, many Censures do I expect: perhaps it may be said by most, I was no such Person as I have here expressed my self to be; which if it be, I matter not; God knoweth the things I have been led through, my Conscience also bearing me Witness to the things I have written, and therefore leave it to the Souls in Christ to judg’. Alternatively, in her essay ‘The Inevitability of Fiction’ Susanna Egan maintains that *all* autobiographical writing is fiction because it ‘ensnares reality from the beginning’. She states that ‘unable to lift *any thing* out of life and into art without transforming it, the autobiographer is faced with the task of finding comparisons with himself and with the events in his life that will convey a clear meaning to his readers. He creates, accordingly, a fictive self to narrate the events of his life and a fictive story to contain those events’. This should be contrasted with Peter Burke’s view of *Grace Abounding* where he argues that it would be ‘unwise to dismiss the text as nothing but fiction. It is more likely to be an account of genuine experiences perceived and ordered in terms of cultural schemata or stereotypes’. However, Part II of this thesis will consider how spiritual autobiographies are structured and argue that there is more variety present within them than many historians and literary scholars readily acknowledge – thus showing that in seventeenth-century England different forms of religious experience were both possible and acceptable. See: William

were the case our study of *Grace Abounding* could be likened to Natalie Zemon Davis' study of sixteenth-century French pardon tales where Davis' main concern is the 'crafting of a narrative' - the 'forming, shaping, and molding elements' of pardon tales.¹²³ She argues that pardon tales were 'shaped' from a bank of existing stories in order to be convincing enough to move the king to issue a royal letter of remission.¹²⁴ Since the majority of cases requiring a royal pardon were homicides, where a death sentence was possible, the author's life quite literally depended on his or her ability to persuade the king to pardon their actions. The same sense of urgency was also present in spiritual autobiographies. Salvation depended on God's grace and an individual's ability to accept his need for a saviour and look to Christ for redemption. Published spiritual autobiographies intended to be read by a wide audience could have aimed to 'kick-start' an individual's forays into religion and faith by helping them to see the perilous condition of their own soul; although here difficulties might arise because those most in need of spiritual awakening – the irreligious – would be unlikely to read a godly book of their own volition.

Consequently, we may say that *Grace Abounding* is highly emotive and engaging precisely because it is intended to be so. By capturing the reader's attention with an intriguing text, Bunyan would be able to get his message across simply and effectively - the message being that man should look to Christ for salvation, act with humility at all times and be aware of the dangers of spiritual ignorance. By convincing the reader of the reality of his own experiences and describing how he

Dimsdale, *The Quaker Converted; or the experimental knowledg of Jesus Christ crucified, in opposition to the principles of the Quakers, declared in a narrative of the conversion of one in Hartfordshire, who was for some years of their faith and principle, and inclined unto them* (London: Printed for J. Robinson, 1690), p. 15; S. Egan, *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp. 14, 66-67; P. Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 40.

¹²³ N.Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 3.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, *passim*; especially chapter 1.

supposedly overcame such tribulations he could hope to engineer the readers' responses to circumstances similar to those he described. The whole work could then be viewed almost as a manual addressing religious melancholy (brought on by a fear that one's soul could have been predestined to everlasting death and damnation) and suggesting ways of managing such religious despair should it arise.

Under these circumstances *Grace Abounding* could truly be seen as an edifying text taking the work of Bunyan, and his role as a preacher, one step further since its publication ensured that his thoughts were recorded for posterity and would reach a wide audience. His text could then be seen as a clear contribution to the pastoral care of the godly community as a whole, as well as one aimed at providing assistance to the members of his own congregation at a time when he was mainly confined to prison and could not perform his sermons or carry out his other ministerial duties with any regularity. *Grace Abounding* would then enable Bunyan to provide advice and support to despondent Christians who were aware of their sinful nature but were unsure how to progress from there, *through the text itself*. His example of a sinner's journey from the initial discovery of his sins, through many periods of despair and diabolical temptation to a stage where he has undergone a considerable godly reformation yet is still afflicted by sin, uncertainty and feelings of desperation may well have struck a chord with the experiences of many readers and could have seemed more poignant because it was portrayed as the authentic autobiography of a real man.

Bunyan's text could be seen as having the same effect as the advice of Evangelist in *The Pilgrim's Progress* who was the first to set Christian on the correct path to the Celestial City.¹²⁵ In this case, *Grace Abounding* could certainly be seen as

¹²⁵ Bunyan, *PP*, pp. 12-13.

an intentionally didactic tool attempting to show readers how the Devil may try to tempt them, how God could communicate with man and how man could attempt to understand God's messages and withstand the Devil's wiles without succumbing to despair. Roger Sharrock's assertion that *Grace Abounding* was 'an absolutely naked rendering of his [Bunyan's] spiritual history' free from literary embellishment would then be called into question, for Bunyan's work could be considered to have an agenda beyond what Sharrock has termed Bunyan's 'effort to describe with complete honesty his inner psychological terrors, and his subsequent triumph over them'.¹²⁶ Indeed, although Sharrock later asserted that 'the serious study of autobiography can begin only when it is realised that the idea of total honesty, the complete confession, is an illusion', he merely meant that an autobiography 'must always be a selection from the events and experiences in a life' - Sharrock does not appear to have doubted the authenticity of the experiences described by Bunyan.¹²⁷

However, if we accept that Bunyan could have exaggerated some of the experiences recorded in *Grace Abounding* in order to enhance the didactic value of his spiritual autobiography, we are still left wondering how Bunyan could have justified lying about his own spiritual condition. This question seems all the more prudent because the Bible asserts that 'lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight' (Prov. 12:22) and Arthur Dent considered lying to be one of the nine signs of damnation; consequently suggesting that lying was a heinous sin unbecoming those who chose to live a godly life.¹²⁸ In Dent's *Plaine Man's Path-Way to Heaven* the character Philagathus who, incidentally, is referred to as 'an honest man', maintains that

¹²⁶ Roger Sharrock, 'Introduction' in Bunyan, *PP*, p. x.

¹²⁷ R. Sharrock, 'Spiritual Autobiography: Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*' in A. Laurence, W.R. Owens and S. Sim (eds.), *John Bunyan and his England, 1628-88* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1990), p. 97.

¹²⁸ Dent, *Plaine Man's Path-Way*, p. 35.

it is hard to finde a man that will speake the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth from his heart, in simplicitie and plainnesse at all times, in all places, and amongst all persons, without all glozing or dissembling, either for feare, gaine, flattery, manpleasing, hiding of faults, or any sinister respect whatsoever.¹²⁹

This could be the key to understanding how Bunyan may have been able to write about embellished experiences without feeling that he was bringing damnation upon his soul by lying. We can unequivocally state that Bunyan's motivation for writing *Grace Abounding* was far from sinister - he wrote to teach his readers lessons about the ways of God and the Devil and probably, we may say, to help himself understand the same key elements of faith. Bunyan would also have been well aware that even if his expressed reasons for writing differed slightly from his truly heartfelt reasons, God, who was 'the knower of the heart, for nothing is hidden from that nature which is within all things and without all things', would surely comprehend his true motivation for writing and understand that he was a righteous Christian trying to help others.¹³⁰

A consideration of Bunyan's preface to *Grace Abounding* may prove useful to us at this point. The preface was clearly written after the main body of the spiritual autobiography was completed as Bunyan talks of his autobiography in the past tense throughout this section and says, for example, '*I could have enlarged much in this my discourse*'.¹³¹ Interestingly, the tone of the preface differs greatly from that of the majority of the text and the conclusion for it is written in a far more assured and matter-of-fact style that is concise and to the point thus making Bunyan seem somewhat detached from the events which follow. He focuses on the needs of his audience ('*my Soul hath fatherly care and desire after your spiritual welfare*') and explains what his work is about, but his description lacks the emotion and vivacity

¹²⁹ Dent, *Plaine Man's Path-Way*, pp. 1, 169. (My italics).

¹³⁰ Perkins, *Work*, p. 178.

¹³¹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5.

present in the main body of the text. When providing a synthesis of his autobiography Bunyan merely states that ‘*it is a Relation of the work of God upon my own Soul . . . wherein you may perceive my castings down, and raisings up: for he woundeth, and his hands make whole*’, which is certainly not as descriptive as the later account and conveys none of the desperation or elation present in the main body of *Grace Abounding*.¹³² This variation in tone could indicate that when Bunyan wrote the preface he was more confident about his spiritual state - though in my opinion this would assume that the preface was written a considerable amount of time after the main part of the autobiography had been completed because Bunyan’s conclusion suggests that he is still in the throes of spiritual unease as he is still afflicted by ‘seven abominations in his heart’ and still finds that there are hours when his spirit is ‘so filled with darkness’ that he feels beyond all consolation.¹³³ Alternatively, this change of tone could suggest that Bunyan really is detached from the experiences he describes in the autobiography possibly because they have been invented or added to – we know that there were six editions of *Grace Abounding* published during Bunyan’s lifetime and in each of these editions Bunyan made slight alterations and additions, which suggests that he was honing his work to create the image he desired and make it as edifying as possible for the reader.¹³⁴

¹³² Bunyan, *GA*, p. 3. In the main body of *Grace Abounding* Bunyan’s descriptions of the state of his soul are passionate and have an almost poetic quality. When Bunyan despairs of his eternal condition he says that his soul ‘did hang as in a pair of scales again, sometimes up, sometimes down, now in peace and anon again in terror’ (*GA*, p. 60) and when he fears he has ‘sold’ Christ Bunyan says ‘now was the battel won, and down fell I, as a Bird that is shot from the top of a Tree, into great guilt and fearful despair’ (*GA*, p. 40). Alternatively when Bunyan is elated and believes his sins to be forgiven he says ‘yea I was now so taken with the love and mercy of God, that I could not tell how to contain till I got home; I thought I could have spoken of his Love and told of his mercy to me, even to the very Crows that sat upon the plow’d lands before me’ (*GA*, p. 28). Finally, there are times when Bunyan is so overwhelmed by God’s dealings with him that he was ‘both once and twice ready to swoon as I sat, yet not with grief and trouble, but with sollid joy and peace’ (*GA*, p. 34). These examples highlight the vivid and highly descriptive nature of *Grace Abounding* as a whole and stand in contrast to the more reserved format of the preface which has an almost sermon-like style.

¹³³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 93.

¹³⁴ Bunyan was certainly not the only author to ‘hone’ his text. Matthew Storey tells us that an inscription in the front of Isaac Archer’s *Diary* dated 1665 ‘strongly suggests that the manuscript is a

However, it is also possible that *Grace Abounding* was a work primarily designed to help Bunyan and thus its publication may be considered more of an afterthought than the cause of its composition. Writing *Grace Abounding* may have helped Bunyan to keep track of his spiritual condition and record the signs of assurance he felt. Such an activity would have been essential for Bunyan's spiritual well-being for, as we have already seen, Bunyan thought that 'if thou miss but one letter in thy evidence, thou art gone'.¹³⁵ Recording God's providences and his own responses to the Bible and his saviour would have helped Bunyan gain an understanding of how well his own faith was developing. Talking about religious affairs was a common occurrence in early modern England. There are several reported instances of this in *Grace Abounding*: Bunyan overheard a group of pious women 'sitting at a door in the Sun, and talking about the things of God' and had a conversation with an 'Antient Christian' regarding his fear that he had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost.¹³⁶ It was part of the practice of Bunyan's church that at 'every monethly meeting, some of our brethren, viz. one at a time, to whom the Lord may have given a gift, be called forth and encouraged to speake a word in the Church for our mutuall edification', which indicates the great value placed on theological discussions in seventeenth-century England.¹³⁷

Communal piety (discourse within a community that concerns religion) was an important feature of seventeenth-century England and we know that many

later version of earlier drafts, made whilst he was at university, which were written up after he had embarked upon his ministry' – Storey believes it suggests this because in the text Archer claimed to have begun writing his diary in 1659. We may also speculate that Archer redrafted his diary because he intended it to be read by others and so wished to 'hone' certain aspects. The fact that Archer rarely mentions any of his parishioners by name and at one point claims to want 'to satisfy the world that my father's giving the estate from mee was for my conforming, and the consequences of it, and not at all in respect of my marriage, as he would have it thought' suggest that he intended it to be widely read. See Archer, *Diary*, pp. 7, 9, 179. The emphasis is my own.

¹³⁵ John Bunyan, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, p. 276.

¹³⁶ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 14, 51.

¹³⁷ H.G. Tibbutt (ed.), *The Minutes of The First Independent Church (now Bunyan Meeting) at Bedford 1656-1766* (Luton: Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, 55, 1976), p. 35.

congregations required prospective new members to provide a testimony of their faith before they were permitted to join. Indeed, *Grace Abounding* may have initially started life as one of these 'admission narratives' and then greatly expanded during Bunyan's time in gaol to form the published version we know today. Although the terms of Bunyan's imprisonment were somewhat laxer than we might imagine, as he was permitted to leave gaol, travel to London, write, and even occasionally preach in his prison cell, there would have been some restrictions on his ability to interact with the rest of his community and discuss spiritual affairs. Thus it is possible that writing *Grace Abounding* could have been a substitute for the pious interaction with other community members that Bunyan missed out on during his incarceration. It may have been that writing about the progress of his own faith had a positive effect on Bunyan and kept him focussed on his true goal which was to humble his heart and place total reliance on his saviour.

The imposition of the Clarendon Code in the early 1660s further restrained Puritan activities as the Conventicle Acts (1664 and 1670) banned all unauthorised religious meetings of more than five people and the Five Mile Act (1665) prohibited nonconformist clergy from coming within five miles of a parish they had previously worked in as a minister. This heightened persecution may have inspired many, including Bunyan, to keep a record of their spiritual state as they were well aware that those who 'will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' (II. Timothy 3:12) and this may have persuaded them to analyse their lifestyles and discover whether they truly did live in a godly manner. According to N.H. Keeble, 'the literature of Puritanism . . . was generated by the Restoration experience of

persecution and nonconformity'.¹³⁸ He maintains that the 'distinctive contribution' nonconformist writers made to English literature occurred 'because it was the product of a movement accommodating itself to the experience of defeat, repression and ridicule'.¹³⁹ Thus we see that, according to Keeble, the Puritan imagination was released because of the persecution suffered by nonconformists; the press proved to be a way of keeping Puritan thought alive in the face of defeat (when the Restoration ended 'godly rule' and 'liberty of conscience in religion').¹⁴⁰

Patterns of Piety: *Grace Abounding* and the Formation of Spiritual Autobiographies.

It has been suggested that the *Confessions* of St Augustine was 'the great archetype of spiritual autobiography'.¹⁴¹ It is therefore possible that Bunyan was motivated to write *Grace Abounding* because he felt that writing such a spiritual autobiography

¹³⁸ Keeble, *Literary Culture*, p. 22. The German Pietist, Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644-1724), also emphasised the value of suffering because of her own religious beliefs. Petersen explains that because she followed Christ's example she 'had to endure many and various libels and lies' yet 'was content and learned to be happy that I would be worthy to be derided because of his holy name' for she had discovered that 'what Paul says is a holy truth'. Interestingly, she was also writing after a time of great upheaval for she grew up shortly after the end of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), when large parts of Germany were still devastated, and began to write her autobiography in the 1680s. See: Johanna Eleonora Petersen, *Life*, pp. 61, 62.

¹³⁹ Keeble, *Literary Culture*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁰ Keeble's view should be contrasted with the work of Thomas H. Luxon. Luxon asserts that Puritans considered this world to be a shadow of the next and so they longed 'for the evaporation of history and the end of its constitutive element, time' but also wished to be saved from this evaporation. Indeed, Luxon argues that Puritans firmly believed that 'to live in this world's history is to live in the "City of Destruction" and not to know it; it is to be doomed forever to the status of an allegorical figure with no "independent meaning and validity," no real being'. Thus in order to become 'real' one must die and be reborn in the next world. In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* Luxon identifies 'an absolute distinction between this world and the next, a distinction under which all the things "on this side" are nothings and all unseen things of the next are exclusively real'. Thus while Keeble sees the historical situation nonconformists found themselves in as being the catalyst of their remarkable literary output Luxon, on the other hand, notes that Puritans sought to distance themselves from their external surroundings and focus on the 'real' world yet to come. See: T.H. Luxon, *Literary Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 54, 207.

Also relevant here is J.R. Knott's *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) argues that representations of persecution and martyrdom (especially John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*) shaped the ideal of Protestant heroism and stimulated the imagination of seventeenth-century nonconformists.

¹⁴¹ R. Bell, 'Metamorphoses of Spiritual Autobiography' in *English Literary History*, 44:1 (1977), pp. 108-126. Quotation on p. 109.

would mean he was following in the footsteps of St Augustine. Like Augustine, Bunyan wrote in the first-person singular, extended his narrative no further than the first thirty-two years of his life and sought to demonstrate humanity's readiness to sin and the astounding graciousness of God's mercy. Interestingly, the *Confessions* is also full of the type of introspection Bunyan records in *Grace Abounding*, as Augustine states that he has recalled 'in the bitterness of self-examination my wicked ways, that thou [God] mayest grow sweet to me'.¹⁴²

One of the major differences between Bunyan's narrative and the *Confessions* is that whilst Augustine experienced a single moment of divine revelation which led directly to his conversion (he experienced no back-tracking), Bunyan experiences several moments that convince him of his godly status and good intentions towards God but following each of these he falls back into doubt and despair. After his moment of conversion Augustine senses that 'there was something infused in my heart like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away', however, Bunyan sadly notes that his soul 'did hang as in a pair of Scales' and he seems destined to be forever poised between hope and despair.¹⁴³ The Augustinian mode of spiritual autobiography leads the protagonist from sin to a state of grace, which is necessarily separated from the material world - Augustine notes that he 'could not be satisfied with the life I [he] was living in the world'.¹⁴⁴ Bunyan, on the other hand, attempts to leave the physical world behind as he says he 'must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon my Self, my Wife, my Children . . . and all, as dead to me, &

¹⁴² St Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, ed. Albert Cook Outler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), p. 20.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 146; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁴ St Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 128.

my self as dead to them'.¹⁴⁵ However, Bunyan does not succeed for he later remarks that parting with his wife and children has been like 'the pulling my flesh from my bones'.¹⁴⁶ In spite of these differences, there are many similarities between the *Confessions* and *Grace Abounding* and so it will be useful for us to consider Augustine's motivation for writing his text. Augustine asks himself who he is narrating his *Confessions* to and concludes that it is not to God but

to that small part of the human race who may chance to come upon these writings. And to what end? That I and all who read them may understand what depths there are from which we cry unto thee. For what is more surely heard in thy ear than a confessing heart and a faithful life?¹⁴⁷

Bunyan's motivation for writing his spiritual autobiography may also have followed a similar train of thought.

Some critics, including Robert Bell and William Tindall, assert that Puritan spiritual autobiographies follow a set pattern which is dictated by Puritan doctrine. It is alleged that, ultimately, all Puritan spiritual autobiographies are modelled on the 'great patterns of Christian sainthood' - the lives of Christ and St Paul.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, it is true that Bunyan makes multiple references to the Pauline epistles, derives his title from the First epistle to Timothy (I. Tim. 1:14) and even hints that he is going to tell his tale in 'Paul's accustomed manner'.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, it may be more than mere coincidence that Bunyan's narrative only addresses the first thirty-two years of his

¹⁴⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁷ St Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁸ R. Bell, 'Metamorphoses of Spiritual Autobiography', p. 108. Though here we should contrast Bell's view that Puritan spiritual autobiographies were modelled on the lives of Christ and St Paul with J.S. McGee's view that although Puritans 'spoke a great deal of the importance of "possessing" Christ or having an "interest" or "portion" in him . . . they rarely suggested the use of Christ's actions as a model' for the 'puritan relationship with Christ was often intimate, but seldom imitative' - depraved mankind could never be like heavenly Christ. As Thomas Hooker noted 'two contrary extremes cannot meet together . . . That Christ and ourselves are two such contrary extremes is easy to see'. See: J.S. McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans and the Two Tables, 1620-1670* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 107, 108.

¹⁴⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 2.

life even though the text itself was edited and revised six times between 1666 and 1688. What Bunyan may have been trying to establish was a connection between his life story and that of Christ, who is said to have been in his early thirties when he was crucified. Bunyan's assertion that 'within less than *Forty Days* I began to question all again' may allude to the forty days and nights Christ spent in the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil - further bolstering the link between *Grace Abounding* and the life of Christ.¹⁵⁰

Grace Abounding has also been defined as 'a seventeenth-century version of the Pauline epistle' by Rebecca S. Beal and it is possible to make many comparisons between the Pauline epistles and Bunyan's work.¹⁵¹ For example, both parts of Bunyan's title allude to Paul's First epistle to Timothy ('Grace Abounding' - [I. Tim. 1:14]; 'chief of sinners' - [I. Tim. 1:15]), and refer to a belief in salvation by grace through faith alone which was a prominent theme of the Pauline epistles. Bunyan also uses an allegorical vision that is very similar to Paul's vision in *Galatians* 4:24-26 whilst the didacticism of the Pauline epistles is, as I have previously shown, reflected throughout *Grace Abounding*.¹⁵² The importance of the Pauline epistles to the Puritan mind appears difficult to overestimate and John Stachniewski avows that responsiveness to the epistles' 'doctrine of grace was a litmus test of an awakened state'.¹⁵³ In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan appears to assert that an understanding of the Pauline epistles made the difference between reformation in deeds alone ('outward reformation') and true spiritual awakening. At first Bunyan 'could not away with' (get to grips with) Paul's epistles and so deemed himself 'ignorant either of the corruptions of my nature, or of the want and worth of Jesus Christ to save me', yet

¹⁵⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 28.

¹⁵¹ R.S. Beal, 'Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners: John Bunyan's Pauline Epistle', *Studies in English Literature*, 21 (1981), pp. 147-160. Quotation on p. 148.

¹⁵² For Bunyan's dream see Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁵³ John Stachniewski in Bunyan, *GA*, p. 234.

later in the autobiography the epistles appear ‘sweet and pleasant’ to him and he finds himself able to ‘cry out to God, that I might know the truth, and way to heaven and glory’.¹⁵⁴

Nehemiah Wallington and his Reasons for Writing *The Growth of a Christian*

Wallington’s motivation for writing his spiritual diary is not as easy to discern as Bunyan’s reasons for writing *Grace Abounding*.¹⁵⁵ In *The Growth of a Christian* (1641) Wallington did not record his motives in a preface, as Bunyan did, instead he preferred to disperse his reasons almost haphazardly throughout the text. Consequently, *The Growth of a Christian* is a less systematic work, which is possibly because it was not intended for publication - it remains in manuscript form to this day.¹⁵⁶ What is immediately striking about the text is Wallington’s eagerness to abase himself and emphasise that he is not writing to exalt himself. He stresses his own worthlessness and his surprise that ‘the grate and glorious God should make me to be a means to take notice and set forth his praise’ - thus suggesting that one of his principal reasons for writing *The Growth of a Christian* was to eulogise God.¹⁵⁷

Wallington places great emphasis on his own deficiencies and weaknesses and exalts the superior nature of God. He records that he is a ‘sinfull polluted

¹⁵⁴ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 12, 17.

¹⁵⁵ *The Growth of a Christian* was actually referred to by Wallington as ‘the second book consarning the fruit and Bennifeet that (through the marcy of God) I gaine by the Sacrament, which I here take notice of it, that I and all others might be encouraged to go to it preparedly as often as occasion is offered’ on the title page (Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 4r), for it describes many of Wallington’s reflections concerning his preparations for the sacrament. However, the text is organised chronologically in diary fashion from January 1641 to December 1643 and includes a great deal of information concerning Wallington’s personal life. I shall consider it to be Wallington’s spiritual diary for this reason and also because in another of his notebooks Wallington says that he ‘kept a Diarry of my Life the comings & goings of the Spirit or the groth of a Christian’ (Wallington, *Record*, half-page in Wallington’s handwriting inserted and bound between pp. 44 and 45). Since this inserted page must have been written after Wallington had began *The Growth of a Christian* in 1641 and is included in a notebook written in 1630, this proves that Wallington re-read his own work.

¹⁵⁶ Excerpts from Wallington’s seven surviving notebooks have recently been published by David Booy as *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618-1654: A Selection* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). However, as yet, none of the manuscripts has been published in full.

¹⁵⁷ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 4r.

creature', has a 'poore soule', that his memory is 'bade to remember that which is good' and also that he is so ashamed of his sins that it almost prevented him from keeping a record as he 'was in mind to have burnt it in the fier and so destroyed it'.¹⁵⁸ Wallington also mentions that he is undeserving of the great mercies and deliverances that God has seen fit to bestow upon his soul because he feels that there is a 'vast distance and a greate gulfe . . . betwixt the grat God and I for he is an holy God even holynes it selfe and I am vnholly my imaginings of my hart being evill and that continually'.¹⁵⁹ His use of negative words to describe himself and his soul is striking. Indeed, his use of vocabulary here clearly links in with the notion of original sin – that all of mankind is tainted by the Fall and therefore inherently corrupt. The picture Wallington paints of his own corrupt and dissolute soul is offset by the way in which he describes God in the opening paragraphs of both texts (*The Growth of a Christian* and *A Record of God's Mercies* [c.1620]). Here Wallington repeatedly mentions how 'grate and glorious' he considers God to be thereby reinforcing the sense that God is vastly superior to mankind and reminding the reader that man is very fortunate that God is merciful enough to choose to save any member of the heinously sinful human race.

Wallington states that his main concern 'should be how and which way I might glorifie God' and it is here that his motivation differs slightly from Bunyan's. One of Bunyan's chief professed motives for writing *Grace Abounding* was that he might recall 'the merciful working of God upon my Soul' (a 'passive' expression), yet Wallington explicitly states that he considered it his duty 'not to take care what God doth to me: but to care what I doe or may doe to glorifie God' (an 'active'

¹⁵⁸ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 15r; Wallington, *Record*, fo. 1r, 11r.

¹⁵⁹ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 6v.

expression).¹⁶⁰ How may this slight discrepancy be accounted for? The fact that Bunyan's spiritual autobiography was intended for publication whilst Wallington desired his notebook to remain private (at least, during his lifetime) may certainly help explain this difference in outlook. Bunyan sought to edify his readers by his own example and thus it would be vital for him to show how grace had first been kindled in his heart and how God had dealt with him throughout the course of his life. Wallington, on the other hand, intended all his notebooks to be a legacy for his children, 'for the generation to come'.¹⁶¹ Perhaps the message Wallington wished to convey was that one of the most important elements of his piety was praising God, whilst Bunyan considered the didactic element to be the most important aspect of *Grace Abounding*. Yet Wallington would not have wished to suggest that this was the sole component of his faith and thus we see him maintain that he wishes future generations to 'see what God hath done that they may be put their trust in God and the children unborn may stand up & praise the Lord & talke of all his wondrous works'.¹⁶²

Here we see a marrying of the two principles previously discussed - Bunyan's desire to instruct and Wallington's impulse to praise God - which suggests that the motivation behind the two texts may not be so different after all, even though the intended audience is not the same. Indeed, it seems that there was also a didactic

¹⁶⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 6; Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 4v.

¹⁶¹ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 16r. Puritans, such as Wallington, were not alone in writing with the next generation in mind. The Anglican diarist, John Evelyn, also seemed to believe that his own family would be reading his account for in his *Diary* he told them that 'How this French Familie Ivelin of Eveliniere, their familie in Normandie, & of a very antient & noble house is grafted into our Pedegree' may be seen 'in your Collection, brought from Paris 1650'. See: John Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. G. de la Bédoyère (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p. 175.

¹⁶² Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 16r. Neither is he alone in asserting this for the minister William Kiffin (1616-1701) also maintained that he wrote his own autobiography because 'it was one of the charges which God gave his people of old, that those many great providences which they were made partakers of, might by them be left to their children, to the end that they might, from generation to generation, be the more engaged to cleave unto the Lord'. See: William Kiffin, *Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin*, ed. W. Orme (London: 1823), p. 1.

element to Wallington's diary for he wished to instruct his children, and immediate family, in matters of religion and teach them to love and respect God. We know that Wallington wished to leave his children 'such precepts . . . as myself have received of the Lord', for he records this in his will, and also that he spent three months reading through his *A Record of God's Mercies* with his son-in-law.¹⁶³ Wallington notes that at 'the begining of November 1647 my sonne [in-law] John Horthan and I did begine to read in this Booke every morning by our selves a lone [sic] and by Gods mercy we have read over this Booke January ye XXXI 1647' - thus showing that Wallington considered his text to be pertinent to the spiritual condition of other family members.¹⁶⁴ The fact that Wallington and his son-in-law read through the spiritual account is important because I have previously suggested that 'family religion' could include the reading of spiritual diaries and autobiographies with a family audience.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, Wallington may have wished to read his diary with his family because he believed that 'those yt you intertaine into your family you take not only a charge of their bodis but also their soules to' and such a belief may also account for the observation made by Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe that family religion 'encompassed the wider household, including visitors'.¹⁶⁶

The Growth of a Christian also suggests that Wallington thought his work might be read aloud, for he stated that one of his reasons for writing about his spiritual condition was so that 'none yt *heares* or reads this might not thinke one iote the better of me but to give all the praise and glory to God'.¹⁶⁷ It is also noteworthy that he gave his *Record of God's Mercies* to 'some poore disstressed soule' to help

¹⁶³ Wallington, *Record*, p. 507 (Wallington's will is appended to the main text of the notebook).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. Iv (verso of the first unnumbered page in the notebook; Wallington's 'To the Christian Reader' section of the manuscript is unpaginated).

¹⁶⁵ See above pp. 52-53.

¹⁶⁶ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 121v; Cambers and Wolfe, 'Reading, Family Religion, and Evangelical Identity', p. 887.

¹⁶⁷ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 5v. (My italics).



console them 'and it did comfort and revive them' - which shows that although Wallington's notebooks were not intended for publication, they were not kept completely private either as Wallington was not averse to helping those in spiritual crisis.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the very existence of a section headed 'to the Christian Reader' suggests that Wallington believed his notebook might be read by some outside his own family.

Thus we see that in typical Calvinist fashion Wallington is keen to abase himself before God and act with all due humility, for he is well aware that 'to humble our selves is the way to enter into heaven' because 'we cannot aspire to Him [God] in earnest until we have begun to be displeased with ourselves'.¹⁶⁹ He refers to himself as a 'sinfull polluted creature' and feels that 'the whole Church of God [is] far the worse for mee' because he is 'backward to everything that is good, not caring for to heere Gods word, praying very couldly and deadly and performing duties in a formarly manner through custome'.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, Wallington's spiritual diary could prove to be an outlet for his feelings and also help humble his spirit when he re-read his own words. It is evident that Wallington read through his spiritual diary as on the final folio of *The Growth of a Christian* is an index of topics covered in the main body of the text that was written by Wallington when he read through his book on 16 June 1658 - almost a full fifteen years after its completion. This is clearly a testament to the long-term value a spiritual diary could have and is also an indication that Puritan spiritual troubles were not quickly overcome; Wallington's re-reading of the diary after such a lengthy period of time suggests that the text was still able to play a pivotal role in his piety.

¹⁶⁸ Wallington, *Record*, fo.11r.

¹⁶⁹ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 34r; Calvin, *Institutes*, (I.i.1), p. 7.

¹⁷⁰ Wallington, *Growth*, fos. 15r, 6v.

Another reason that Wallington gave for writing his spiritual diary is that he was moved to do so by the Holy Spirit. He claimed that ‘the good Spirit’ moved him ‘to wright this for his glory so that others might see the free love of God to me a vile sinfull wrech [sic] whereby all the glory might be given unto God’.¹⁷¹ Although this claim might seem very similar to what has previously been discussed regarding Wallington’s keenness to humble himself before God, it is also a highly significant admission for Wallington because of the role played by the Holy Spirit.

In Calvinist theology it was acknowledged that without the inner illumination granted by the Holy Spirit, man would not hear God. Whilst God ‘would govern us by his Word, but as the voice alone, without the inward influence of the Spirit, does not reach down into the heart, the two [the preaching of the Word and the secret power of the Holy Spirit] must be brought together for the establishment of God’s kingdom’.¹⁷² Moreover, Wallington believed that the ‘man yt pleaseth God, the Lord puts his spirit in him first [and] he yt hath the spirit sees heavenly things with an heavenly mind’.¹⁷³ Consequently, Wallington’s declaration that the Holy Spirit moved him to write his diary suggests that he has pleased God and is also a member of the elect because he is able to see ‘heavenly things’. As a result of this realisation, Wallington also discovers his great ‘want of a saviour’ and is able to see his ‘weaknesse & unworthynesse and the [sic] God mite for the performance of my best actions throw me to hell for ever’.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Wallington also admitted that he compiled lists of his sins in *A Record of God’s Mercies* because he ‘saw how much I did rune in deate in Gods booke’ and hoped that in ‘spreading them before the Lord I mite breake my proud heart & so gete a humbel spirit and see the want of a saviour’ -

¹⁷¹ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 37r.

¹⁷² Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew 6:10* available online at: www.ccel.org

¹⁷³ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 66r.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 63v.

thus showing that writing about his own sins was intended to generate feelings of humility and an appreciation for Christ.¹⁷⁵

The fact that diary-keeping could aid self-examination was another key reason for Wallington's decision to write *The Growth of a Christian*. He notes that 'every one of vs should look into ourselves and find the cause [of his sins], we should se [sic] what is in our selves that vpholds them'.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, a knowledge of the heart is vital for Wallington because 'till a man knowes the sinne of his heart he will never come to admier & magnifie the goodnesse of God'.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, Wallington also claims that the way to obtain saving knowledge and understanding is 'to know our own sinnes and every one of vs to reforme and turn from his own evill way and strive to walk in the ways of God'.¹⁷⁸ All this is a slight variation on Calvin's insistence that if man is to gain knowledge of God he must first gain a knowledge of himself for 'every person, therefore on coming to the knowledge of himself, is not only urged to seek God, but is led as by the hand to find him'.¹⁷⁹ Wallington also found that his spiritual notebooks were able to help him remember God's mercies towards him, and he claimed to be writing about his positive spiritual experiences 'because my memory is so bade to remember that which is good and when that I reade of them my heart may be the more stirred up unto thankfulness and to walke more obedently to Gods holy will'.¹⁸⁰ This provides us with another clear indication that Wallington wrote his notebooks with the intention of re-reading them at times of need and shows that Wallington would certainly have agreed with

¹⁷⁵ Wallington, *Record*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁶ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 114r.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 117r.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 120r.

¹⁷⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, (I.i.1), p. 7.

¹⁸⁰ Wallington, *Record*, fo. Iv.

Richard Baxter's assertion that 'in a book we may read over and over till we remember it'.¹⁸¹

Wallington's notebooks also offer proof that writing about your spiritual condition could certainly be both cathartic and comforting. He states that a consideration of God's mercies and the fact that the Lord has delivered him from the Devil and many temptations 'made me that I could not rest nor sleepe well my mind was so unquiet, which did inforce me to make the Book called A Record of Gods Mercies to my soule and body'.¹⁸² Wallington's choice of the word 'inforce' is interesting because it suggests that he felt he had no option but to write his book, that he needed to vent his feelings about his spiritual development on the page before he was consumed by them. It may be that Wallington is suggesting that his feelings of love and gratitude for the good providences God has granted him are so strong that he can no longer contain them and he wants to show how glorious God is for saving him, after all he does mention that it 'is the chiefe intente of this my writing that if it were possible I may bring glory to God before I goe hence out of this life'.¹⁸³

Alternatively, Wallington may believe his soul to be filled with the Holy Spirit which is now directing all his actions. Calvin stated that the Holy Spirit 'is the internal teacher, by whose agency the promise of salvation, which would otherwise only strike the air or our ears, penetrates into our minds' thereby acknowledging that the Holy Spirit dwells *within* man when granting true faith and inspires him to perform pious duties.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, when describing the 'biblical incursions' he hears Wallington explains that the voices come from *within* him, for he states that 'so the next day . . . being the Lord's day I Awakening about halfe an ower past three a

¹⁸¹ Richard Baxter quoted in Cambers and Wolfe, 'Reading, Family Religion and Evangelical Identity', p. 888.

¹⁸² Wallington, *Record*, fo. 1r.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, fo. 11r.

¹⁸⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, (III.i.4), p. 280.

cloke I hard [sic] some thoughts speaking within me saying “A Rise, A Rise put on strength”¹⁸⁵ He also notes that he frequently hears ‘the whisperings of this good spirit of God within mee’, is bolstered by the ‘sweet whisperings of comfort I have had within mee my soule’ and, as we have previously seen, acknowledges that he was ‘moved’ by the Holy Spirit to write his spiritual diary.¹⁸⁶ So we see that the language Wallington uses to describe these experiences suggests that he feels God, or the Holy Spirit, is actually *inside* him and is not only trying to console him during times of crisis, but is actually directing his actions.

This provides us with an interesting contrast to Bunyan’s descriptions of his experiences, for whereas Bunyan ‘felt’ these words ‘drop’ and ‘fall’ upon his soul and body like raindrops from Heaven, Wallington feels they originate internally and so they seem to be almost part of him, reinforcing the link between God and his creation and between man and the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the Bible also suggests that the Holy Spirit can reside within man when Ezekiel maintains that ‘the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet and spake with me’ (Ezekiel 3:24) and ‘the holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit’ (II. Peter, 1:21).

We have seen that Wallington believed writing would help him to purge his mind and gain spiritual peace as well as bringing glory to God; he claims that it was his ‘unquiet’ mind which caused him to begin writing (though we are not sure whether his mind was unquiet because he was disturbed by Satan, or because the Holy Spirit was waking his conscience and disrupting his spiritual slumber). He also wished that his text would have the same effect on anyone who ‘mournes under the burden of their sinnes’ and that they may ‘resceve [sic] some comfort by it’.¹⁸⁷ This suggests that although writing was a solitary activity it frequently had the interests of

¹⁸⁵ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 18v.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, fos. 19r, 21v.

¹⁸⁷ Wallington, *Record*, fo. 11r.

the godly community at its heart. Some accounts, such as Bunyan's, expected a wide readership as they were explicitly intended to be published and edify their readers, others such as Wallington's had a narrower focus and were possibly only intended to help improve the author's immediate family and friends. Others still were meant solely for the eyes of the author - such as the diary of John Janeway - yet even these had the best interests of the community at heart for by improving his own soul the author was making himself a better member of the community and setting an example for others to follow. We have also seen that the reasons our diarists and autobiographers give for writing their accounts are closely interwoven with Calvinist theology and a desire to please God. These reasons may initially seem very similar, for each professes a desire to serve God in their work yet, nevertheless, subtle nuance is apparent. Our authors do not emphasise the same theological points; Bunyan places great emphasis on his own depravity and the need to edify others, but Wallington chooses to emphasise his desire to praise God and offer all his notebooks as a monument to God's graciousness.

Chapter 2

Puritans, Assurance and Communal Piety

It's a wonder to mee sometimes, to see how sensible
one Christian is of anothers sufferings.
Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*.¹

The quest for assurance of the eternal state of one's soul is often imagined to be a somewhat solitary pursuit fraught with a multitude of complications. Nevertheless, it was an integral part of seventeenth-century Puritan life and may even be considered the lynchpin of Puritan spirituality, for without a firm belief in the *possibility* of one's own salvation it was all too easy to see nothing but the mouth of hell gaping before your feet and face a life dominated by doubt and a sense of inherent damnation. Even a tenuous belief in the likelihood of one's own salvation could immensely strengthen an individual and initiate the growth of a deep-rooted sense of piety. Yet the very idea of a continuous, life-long, search for signs indicating elect or reprobate status is largely incomprehensible to many of us today. Consequently, questions regarding this search immediately spring to mind. Such as, how is it possible to gain absolute certainty of one's elect status? Assuming, of course, that such certitude is ever attainable. Was the quest for assurance really as solitary as it seems to the modern mind? And, finally, how much help did Puritans receive in their lengthy endeavours to attain salvation?

In the previous chapter we saw how keeping a spiritual diary or autobiography could help an individual in their search for assurance by providing a record of their spiritual experiences that could be re-read as and when necessary. Yet in many ways writing often seemed a solitary act for frequently the author would write in private or retire to his or her closet in order to record their latest musings.

¹ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter written by Mrs Sarah Wight, to a friend, expressing the joy is to be had in God in great, deep, long, and sore afflictions* (London: Printed by James Cottrel, for Ri. Moone, 1656), p. 21.

For example, Nehemiah Wallington noted that one day ‘after dutys performed in my family I went to Peackam [Peckham] to wright because I would not be interrupted’ and also claimed to have found ‘such sweetnes’ when meditating and writing alone that ‘sometimes I have a glance of the eye of my understanding of the spirit of God within mee (quite being unbottomed of myselfe)’; suggesting that in such solitude Wallington felt he was able to lose himself and become one with God, albeit only for a brief while.²

This chapter will examine the Puritan quest for assurance of salvation and assess the impact that family members and the surrounding community had on the development of Puritan spirituality by analysing several seventeenth-century Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies. As case studies, the experiences of John Bunyan, Agnes Beaumont, Isaac Archer and Samuel Rogers will be the main examples used.³

Our ultimate goal is to discover whether Puritans were able to rely on the spiritual support given to them by relatives, villagers and fellow members of the congregation. Moreover, leading on from this, we will ask whether such support and advice was considered to be a help or a hindrance by those receiving it and will question how the wider community fitted into the ‘Puritan perception’ of theology. We will also ask how Puritans were able to reconcile needing support, other than that given by God, with the notion of divine omnipotency and a belief in mankind’s depraved nature, without feeling as if they were anchoring themselves to the physical world in some way by paying heed to the advice and ideas of corrupt ‘creatures’,

² Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 187v, 17r. Lena Orlin has termed the early modern closet ‘a space in which privacy was habitually sought, and privacy was uniquely found’. See E. Longfellow, ‘Public, Private and the Household’, p. 317. It also appears to have been a private space recommended by Christ – see Matthew 6:6 ‘But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly’.

³ Brief biographies of Bunyan, Beaumont, Archer, and Rogers may be found in appendix 1.

who did not even claim to be instruments of God. Furthermore, we will consider if the ties of a close-knit family, friendship and trust could overcome the need to rely on God as the sole arbitrator of mankind's destiny. Thus what follows is not only a discussion of the relationship between Puritans and the communities in which they lived and worshipped, it is also, inevitably, an exploration of the Puritan concept of worldliness and relations between the godly and the material world.

Before we begin our survey of relations between the individual and the community in seventeenth-century England, it shall be necessary for us to define that somewhat elusive term 'community'. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'community' may be defined as 'a body of men living in the same locality' or 'life in association with others'. Yet these are both modern definitions of the term and so we are consequently forced to wonder whether the early modern notion of 'community' matches our own twenty-first century understanding of the word or whether the term had different connotations in the seventeenth century since, as Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington remind us, 'the dominant meaning of a term in one epoch may be different from the meaning in another'.⁴ Resultantly, it will be useful for us to try and discover what the notion of 'community' meant to the seventeenth-century mind, for subtle variations and nuances in meaning could make a great deal of difference to perceptions of the term and consequently have an impact on our study. Following this, we shall arrive at a definition of 'community' which will then be used for the rest of the chapter.

Writing about what the concept of 'community' in seventeenth-century political discourse Conal Condren observed that the term was diversely used and also had laudatory undertones. Condren stated that 'monarchs were justified in their

⁴ A. Shepard and P. Withington, 'Introduction' in A. Shepard and P. Withington (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 2.

existence for defending community; [whilst] Levellers, clubmen and Cavalier poets all evoked the word community, associating it with patriotism and even civilisation itself' - thereby highlighting the broad usage of a word, which was used to describe not only immediate neighbours and fellow members of a congregation, but also English society as a whole and humanity in general; the common factor being that each of these groups was controlled by some form of government and possessed an allegiance to a particular place or ruler.⁵

This was not the only conception of 'community' available in the seventeenth century. The term's broad usage is reinforced by the fact that many seventeenth-century dictionary definitions of 'community' do not seem to share the above mentioned politicised conception of the word. Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabetical* (1604), for example, pairs the word with 'communion' and defines it as fellowship, 'so implying that community and communion were the temporal and spiritual equivalents of the same conjoining process'.⁶ Yet, in 1616 John Bulloker defined community as 'fellowship in partaking together' and did not link the term with 'communion' anymore.⁷ From here on the emphasis of 'community' seems to be upon 'partaking' thereby suggesting that 'communities were formed through participation' since 'community was not a given entity, but was rather constructed through the recurrent decisions and actions of people'.⁸ This meant that the term began to gain an emotional dimension and phrases like 'mutual participation' and 'neer familiarity one with another' were used to define it.⁹ It would seem that the term was associated more with a group of people who shared similar interests and played an active role in each other's lives than with those merely living in the same

⁵ Conal Condren quoted in A. Shepard and P. Withington (eds.), *Communities*, p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

locality - shared interests seemed to form a stronger communal bond than that created by simply living in a particular location. The key to this definition seems to be social interaction. Those with whom an individual associated could be considered a member of that individual's personal 'communal sphere' whereas those who, for example, lived in the same village yet did not have personal contact with our hypothetical individual or share their beliefs may possibly be termed no more than nominal members of his own community - though these same 'inactive' inhabitants could still play a full part in another's 'communal sphere'. All this turns the concept of 'community' into a very personal notion and suggests that two people living in the same village would not necessarily possess the same conception of what constituted their own 'community', and for the purposes of this chapter we need to be more precise in our definition.

Ralph Josselin, the minister at Earls Colne in Essex, recorded who he considered his closest social bonds to exist between when he asked God to 'blesse the soule of those I call mine, wife, children, sisters[,] freinds, kindred, people'.¹⁰ The first few names in Josselin's list are self-explanatory, though we can only speculate as to whom he was referring by his vague terms 'kindred' and 'people'. We could possibly argue that his 'kindred' were either regular attendees at his sermons who shared his religious sentiments (perhaps even members of 'our society', Josselin's inner circle of believers) or more distant relatives, whilst 'people' may refer to those villagers who were seemingly interested in hearing him preach yet attended only sporadically and were thus considered by Josselin to be praising God and pursuing salvation in a half-hearted manner - his 'sleepy hearers'. It would seem that to Josselin his 'immediate community' consisted of the people he calls 'my

¹⁰ Ralph Josselin, *Diary*, p. 361.

own' (chiefly intimates who shared his beliefs) yet, taking a slightly different angle, we may say that *everyone* in the village, whether they shared Josselin's beliefs and religious enthusiasm or not, were members of his local community by virtue of their close proximity to him - some form of interaction, though perhaps what Josselin would consider superficial rather than 'meaningful', would have presumably been unavoidable.

Having briefly surveyed the differing conceptions of the term 'community' what is our working definition to be? We have seen that in the seventeenth century, the word 'community' was used in such a broad fashion that it could be used to denote, friends and family, the inhabitants of a village, the inhabitants of a nation or even civilisation in general. Yet one's 'community' was not necessarily restricted to a specific locality or geographical area, it could be used to indicate a link with people who shared similar beliefs and ideas or between those who shared strong emotional ties, such as friends and family members - as Josselin's diary suggests. Furthermore, the forms of address used in correspondence between congregations, such as those of the Bedford Independent church and the Baptist church at Braintree, also suggest that a form of fellowship existed between like-minded believers in different counties as the members of Bedford note they are 'fellow heires with you [Braintree] of the grace of life' - thus making geographical location appear less important than an overriding sense of godliness.¹¹ However, this is not to say that theological position and similar ideas were the sole factors in creating a cohesive community. As Bill Stevenson has shown in his survey of social integration in seventeenth-century parishes, sectaries (such as Quakers and Baptists) played an integral role in day-to-day parish life for they served their parishes as constables and overseers of the poor,

¹¹ H.G. Tibbutt (ed.), *Minutes of the First Independent Church*, p. 82.

witnessed and wrote the wills of non-sectaries; left money in their wills to the parish poor as well as to their poor brethren; . . . socialized with non-sectaries in alehouses, at fairs, and at weddings; were helped by non-sectaries when hounded by the authorities; [and] . . . received the respect of the conforming community at their funerals.¹²

Although religious sects formed close-knit communities of their own, they did not exclude themselves from the activities of their fellow townsfolk who either conformed or belonged to another sect.

Thus we may say that in the seventeenth century, much like today, 'community' was a multi-faceted term. People could belong to multiple 'communities' without feeling compromised. For example, membership of a congregation and subsequent attendance at religious meetings could be considered being part of one community, as could living in a particular village and interacting with the other residents on a day-to-day basis and even something as straightforward as partaking in everyday family life. Consequently, for this study we will consider the term 'community' to indicate interaction between family members and friends as well as members of the same congregation and fellow villagers. In this broader sense, we may even include the influence of texts read by each individual author/diarist in our study as these were written by members of what we may call a wider 'godly community' who shared our diarists' and autobiographers' interests in glorifying God and the salvation of souls.

John Bunyan and the Community of the Faithful

How, exactly, was Bunyan's religious development influenced by the words and deeds of those around him in *Grace Abounding*? It would appear that the first major influence on Bunyan's spiritual growth was his marriage to a pious lady in 1649.

¹² B. Stevenson, 'The Social Integration of Post-Restoration Dissenters' in M. Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 385-386.

This was a spiritual turning point for Bunyan because the influence of the devout lady and the religious books she brought as her dowry combined to create 'some desires to Religion' within him.¹³ This was Bunyan's first step towards leading a godly life. But a change from profanity to piety could never be instantaneous, as Bunyan's experiences clearly highlight, and shortly after having the first seeds of religion sown in his heart Bunyan returned to his blasphemous ways. Whilst standing cursing and swearing in front of a shop window he was greatly humbled and disgraced to find himself called '*the ungodliest Fellow for swearing that ever she heard in all her life*' by a neighbour whom he personally considered to be 'a very loose and ungodly Wretch'.¹⁴ This episode alerted Bunyan to his heinous spiritual condition and shocked him into action, even causing him to stop swearing completely. Following this Bunyan carried on in a state of outward reformation only and fell into company with a poor man who professed to be religious. Yet this man did not help Bunyan as he soon found himself emulating the man's insincere actions thus causing him to value the trappings of religion rather than its true substance and forget that he must humble himself before God.

Bunyan's most poignant and profound moment of 'spiritual interaction' with his local community occurred when he visited Bedford one day to practise his trade. Here he found a group of three or four godly women sitting outside their houses and discussing religious matters. Bunyan, however, did not recognise the vivid pictures of religion painted by these women, for in his mind religion had been confined to the pages of his Bible and his outward professions of piety - it had not been something he truly felt in his heart. The women he saw that day were able to give religion 'life' and express their beliefs in an almost tangible manner and it was this that made

¹³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12. The italics are Bunyan's unless otherwise stated.

Bunyan eager to share in the benefits of a truly devout life and keen to discuss religion in a similar manner. Shortly after this episode, Bunyan began an earnest search for signs indicating his own election, yet almost immediately, he experienced a bout of despair concerning his soul's state. Firstly, he feared he did not possess faith in Christ and was not a member of the elect. 'How can you tell you are Elected? and what if you should not? how then?' Bunyan bewailed, since he was all too aware that 'if indeed you should not be Elected and chosen of God, there is no talke of your being saved'.¹⁵ Secondly, he became distressed whilst fearing that there may be only a fixed number of elect and that those 'converted already, . . . were all that God would save in those parts'.¹⁶ Thirdly, Bunyan despaired that he had not got true faith. '*But how can you tell you have Faith?*' he mournfully asked and this was certainly a question that many Puritans would have seconded for some feared their faith to be no more than a trick of the Devil.¹⁷ Indeed, Hannah Allen, a contemporary Puritan, was adamant that her own faith 'was only a fancy' for she considered herself 'made to be damned' so that God could show the power of his justice.¹⁸

The fears that Bunyan and Allen expressed so vividly were magnified partly because of the difficulty Puritans found in discerning signs of assurance. Indeed, one of the most pertinent questions we could ask at this point is 'what constituted a 'sign of election' in the Puritan mind?' However, the answer to this is both complex and wide-ranging and will form a short, though exceedingly useful, digression for us, for in truth, 'signs of assurance' were often a matter of individual interpretation. To some people 'assurance' constituted no more than a feeling one had indicating God was by your side supporting you. It could also be a sense of peace, happiness and

¹⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁸ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings*, pp. 48, 60.

contentedness washing over you - accordingly, the New England minister Thomas Shepard (1605-1649) was deeply disheartened when he felt that the Lord gave him 'no more peace and assurance and joy; only he let me seek more sin, blindness, unbelief, etc.'.¹⁹ Thus orderliness and a sense of peace with the world were associated with assurance and the divine whilst their binary opposites, chaos and violence, were associated with the devil and reprobation.

However, such seemingly impalpable evidence was not the sole basis for a Puritan's belief in his own elect status for many Puritans believed they possessed far more concrete evidence of their salvation - enough to support a sustained belief in their status as members of the godly. Instances of divine providence showed God's favour and were believed to confirm elect status. Bunyan, for example, describes near fatalities that occurred during his youth and, in hindsight (for *Grace Abounding* was not written until the 1660s, some twenty years after the events it recounts), contends that the reason he survived was because God decreed it should be so - the Lord was watching over Bunyan even when he was unregenerate and heedless of religion.²⁰ Numerous examples of providential acts can be found in the testimonies of seventeenth-century Puritans, and in most cases these acts are assumed to signify elect status for they show God's favour towards the recipients. Isaac Archer was saved from drowning on several occasions and also fell from his horse yet remained unscathed; Ralph Josselin is only slightly injured by a fire that could have killed him and feels it is providential that he was able to catch his daughter and prevent her from falling down the stairs, he says 'the mercy of god was so great that she should fall and have no hurt, and I also there so opportunely to save her'.²¹

¹⁹ Shepard's *Journal* printed in M. McGiffert (ed.), *God's Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. 149.

²⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 8.

²¹ Archer, *Diary*, pp. 45-46; Ralph Josselin, *Diary*, pp. 1, 107.

Experiencing ‘biblical incursions’ (scriptural passages that Puritans heard spoken to them by a heavenly voice) was another source of assurance. Puritans believed that these quotations were spoken to them by God, however, in reality it is likely that they were no more than scriptural phrases recalled by Bunyan and others.²² ‘Biblical incursions’ take the edifying role of the Scriptures one step further and ensure the believer is able to feel that God is interested in him as an individual - thereby enabling him to apply the promise of salvation directly to himself. They also highlight the importance Puritans placed on Scriptural authority and it is significant that when a comforting voice is heard the Bible is the first place the Puritan looks at to try and make sense of the experience. In *Grace Abounding* the sentence ‘*Look at the generations of old, and see, did ever any trust in God and were confounded?*’ enters Bunyan’s mind one day.²³ He immediately begins to search for it in his Bible and is disheartened when he is unable to find it straight away, when he eventually finds it, after a full year of searching, he is disappointed to find that the phrase actually appears in the Apocrypha (Ecclesiasticus 2:10) - the part deemed uncanonical by most Protestants.²⁴ However, even this does not deter Bunyan completely for he notes that ‘this sentence was the sum and substance of many of the

²² Vavasor Powell noted that God brought a Scripture to his ‘remembrance’ which is an interesting choice of word because no other author I have studied openly suggests that the biblical incursions they experience are phrases from the Bible that they have personally remembered; instead, they believe they have actually heard heavenly voices. Here we should remember that ‘biblical incursions’ were not solely a Puritan phenomenon. They could be likened to the Quaker ‘voice within’ – John Crook (1616/17-1699) heard a voice saying ‘Fear not, O thou tossed, as with a Tempest . . . I will help thee . . . with everlasting loving Kindness will I visit thee’ and George Fox, (1624-1691) one of the founders of the movement, heard a voice which said ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition’ - and were also experienced by German Pietists such as Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen. See: Powell, *Life*, p. 15; John Crook, *A Short History of the Life of John Crook* (1706) reprinted in J. Stachniewski and A. Pacheco (eds.), *Grace Abounding with other spiritual autobiographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 163; M. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p.187; Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen, *Life*, pp. 72, 75.

²³ Bunyan, *GA*, p.20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

promises [biblical texts providing assurance of mercy and salvation]’ and thus he considered it his ‘duty to take the comfort of it’.²⁵

Thus we have seen how Bunyan sought to assure himself of his own soul’s status. However, there were times when he found it impossible to uncover and decipher signs of assurance by himself. At such moments the support and reassurance of the surrounding godly community - such as members of the Independent church at Bedford, neighbours and relatives - was essential. Indeed, such communal piety was a key aspect of Calvin’s theology, for as Elsie Anne McKee notes

spirituality for Calvin was . . . never individualistic. It was personal, without question, but it was personal in the context of the community of faith . . . thus, although there are clearly parts of his theological writing that address individuals, Calvin never sees any Christian apart from the Church, the body of Christ, the community of believers.²⁶

But even this support was not always able to buoy up Bunyan’s hopes and convince him of his own election. To illustrate this fact, I will refer to three separate episodes in *Grace Abounding*. The first episode is Bunyan’s first meeting with George Gifford (the pastor of Bedford Independent church) and a few members of the congregation. During this meeting they discussed God’s dealings with the soul and afterwards Bunyan felt that he had learned a great deal about the workings of God and His relationship with the godly. However, Bunyan also noted that he ‘received more conviction’ of his own sin and inherent wickedness and the meeting seems to have convinced him to be more deeply introspective and analyse his thoughts and desires in a stricter manner.²⁷ Resultantly, he finds that ‘lusts and corruptions would strongly put themselves forth within me’ and also ‘that whereas before my Soul was full of longings after God, now my heart began to hanker after every foolish vanity;

²⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 21.

²⁶ E.A. McKee (ed.), *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), p. 4.

²⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 24.

yea, my heart would not be moved to mind that that was good, it began to be careless, both of my Soul and Heaven'.²⁸ Instead of allaying Bunyan's fears the meeting had driven him to despair of his sinful ways and spiritual inadequacy for it has prompted him to believe that he was 'further from conversion than ever I was before'.²⁹ As a consequence of this he felt unworthy of God's, or the church's, interest - possibly because seeing experienced members of the church at worship caused him to doubt his own spiritual reformation and motivation for change, thereby making him feel inadequate and undeserving of mercy.

The second episode occurred a few days after the meeting previously mentioned, and is when Bunyan sought advice from 'the people of God' concerning the 'damnable' condition he found himself in. From Bunyan's relation of events it is clear that members of the congregation tried to reassure him, for he notes that they 'would pity me, and would tell me of the Promises [i.e. the covenants of grace and works]'.³⁰ However, reminding Bunyan that God had promised to save all who believed did not have the desired positive effect that was clearly intended, for following this discussion Bunyan states 'they had as good have told me that I must reach the Sun with my finger, as have bidden me receive or relie upon the Promise, and as soon I should have done it'.³¹ Therefore we see that whilst members of the church certainly try to assist Bunyan and remind him of God's promise of salvation their efforts meet with little success. Following discussions with them Bunyan remains despondent and on the verge of utter despair. This brings us to the third episode.

²⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

When he has carried on in this disconsolate state for a number of months, fearing that he is a reprobate all the while, Bunyan hears a sermon that raises his spirits considerably. The sermon discusses *The Song of Solomon* 4:1 and Bunyan finds this comforting because of the conclusions drawn by the minister following his explanation of the text. Particularly helpful is the minister's insistence that any soul 'assaulted and afflicted with temptation, and the hidings of Gods Face' should remember the words 'MY LOVE, still' for 'the saved Soul is Christs Love, when under temptation and dissertion'.³² These few words greatly bolster Bunyan's spiritual confidence and whilst he is mulling over them on the way home he experiences a biblical incursion repeating the words 'thou art my love' twenty times over which convinces him that all his sins will be forgiven.

What we have seen here is Bunyan's inherent desire to have scriptural confirmation of his own salvation. The comforting words of others are not enough in themselves to convince him of his status as a member of the elect, what Bunyan truly yearns for is that which is most difficult, if not impossible, to obtain - conformation of mercy and pardon directly from God himself. Whilst the words of the preacher open Bunyan's mind to the possibility that even his 'heinous' sins may be forgiven, it is only after he experiences a biblical incursion that he truly believes God is prepared to be merciful to him for only then is he able to say 'now was my heart filled full of comfort and hope, and now I could believe that my sins should be forgiven me'.³³

Thus far the godly community's influence on Bunyan has been portrayed in a largely negative manner and the solitary nature of Bunyan's faith has been emphasised. Indeed, *Grace Abounding* even shows us that when Bunyan took the

³² Bunyan, *GA*, p. 27. The emphasis is Bunyan's.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

opportunity to tell an ‘Antient Christian’ of his sins and the sorry state of his soul, instead of trying to reassure Bunyan and remind him of God’s goodness, the ‘Antient Christian’ responded by telling him that his soul was indeed damned - Bunyan states: ‘I told him [the ‘Antient Christian’] also, that I was afraid that I had sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost and he told me, *he thought so too*’.³⁴ From this episode, Bunyan records that he received ‘but cold comfort’ and this experience is certainly in accordance with Jane Turner, a seventeenth-century Baptist, who noted in her *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God* (1653) that ‘the greatest discouragements that I have met with have been from the Saints themselves’.³⁵ Conversely, the Puritan minister Ezekiel Rogers (1588-1660) found the assistance of the community to be invaluable for he advised Lady Joan Barrington to ‘seeke helpe by the communion of the saintes’ because he believed that they could aid her by ‘telling what God had done for their soules’.³⁶ It is clear that Rogers believes it is the *experience* gained by members of the community that is able to assist those in despair – John Turner would seemingly have agreed with this for when discussing his reasons for publishing his wife’s experiences he maintained that ‘it is no small mercy, nor low attainment, to be indeed an experienced Christian’.³⁷ This could then explain why Bunyan found his conversation with the Antient Christian to be so unprofitable for he notes that the man was ‘a stranger to much Combate with the

³⁴ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 51. Bunyan’s experience with the ‘Antient Christian’ can be directly contrasted with Bridget Cooke’s positive experience with her spiritual ‘mother’. Cooke’s biographer, R.P., notes that she ‘delighted in the society of all that were Godly . . . yet she had most intire spirituall communion with some special Christians & chiefly with one woman, who for her long standing in Christianity & eminency in grace she called her mother with whom she was linked (as she said) in ye bond of ye spirit where by they were intimately acquainted with the spirituall estate & condition of one another & moved to pray as with one another’. See: Dr Williams’s Library, London, MS 28.9[5] - R.P., *Some Passages of Mrs Bridget Cooke or a briefe record of her heavenly life and conversation*, fo. 9r.

³⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 51; Jane Turner, *Choice Experiences of the kind dealings of God before, in, and after conversion laid down in six general heads: together with some brief observations upon the same: whereunto is added a description of true experience* (London: Printed by H. Hills, 1653), p. 6.

³⁶ D. Willen, ‘“Communion of the Saints”: Spiritual Reciprocity and the Godly Community in Early Modern England’ in *Albion*, 27:1 (1995), pp. 19-41. Quotations on p. 19.

³⁷ Jane Turner, *Choice Experiences*, sig. A7v.

Devil' – and would therefore have been unable to draw upon his own experiences to help Bunyan overcome his crisis.³⁸

However, even with this negative experience of community involvement at the forefront of our minds, it is important that we remember the value Bunyan himself placed on the role of the community. It would seem he published his autobiography to support his own congregation - to '*perform that duty that from God doth lie upon me, to you-ward, for your further edifying and building up in Faith and Holiness*'; thus suggesting that although he, like Turner, did not always find the community useful he certainly believed it had the potential to help others, if the right attitude was used.³⁹ Jane Turner would have concurred with this for, as we have seen, she had found herself discouraged by her interaction with other Christians. Yet this inspired Turner to come up with a solution. Because she was acutely aware of the damage members of the community could cause to a soul in distress, Turner resolved to

take the more heed how I discourage others; and doubtless saints ought to take great heed lest by their giving just occasion of discouragement they quench the Spirit of God in them . . . we ought to endeavour for . . . such a carriage by which we may best draw forth the hearts of others in spiritual things.⁴⁰

In other words, Turner's advice was for would-be spiritual counsellors to take especial care when addressing another's spiritual condition and to be compassionate (something which Bunyan's 'Antient Christian' emphatically failed to do).

Consequently, we may say that Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* has shown us that the godly community frequently had a tripartite role in the development of an individual's piety, for it was paradoxically able to cause, deepen and resolve despair at different times. The fact that the community was able to play a discernable role in

³⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Jane Turner, *Choice Experiences*, p. 6.

the formation of Bunyan's piety certainly suggests that it could also be a highly significant factor in the development of the religious beliefs and spiritual motivation of other seventeenth-century Puritans, and this is something which we shall explore throughout the rest of this chapter.

Elizabeth Isham seems to share Bunyan's high opinion of the use of a text in comforting other members of the community. When reading the writings her mother had left behind she discovered that she was able to 'find many good instructions for the bettering of my owne life for me thinkes I enter in to her very soule'.⁴¹ Moreover, Isham also found that when she began to record her own experiences it changed her outlook because recalling her own sins and faults ensured she had a 'more charitable opinion of others knowing that I was in times past unwise, disobedient, deceived, hateful etc.'.⁴²

Congregational Piety and the Community: The Experiences of Bedford and Broadmead

It would seem that a vital part of life within Puritan congregations was devoted to helping fellow members overcome their spiritual anxieties, as the surviving minutes from the Bedford Independent Church and the Broadmead Baptist Church in Bristol clearly indicate. We have already acknowledged that such attempts were not always successful, as *Grace Abounding* has shown, nevertheless, it is still useful for us to examine the frequency of such support and the reasons behind its popularity amongst would-be well-wishers. If we consider the minutes for Bunyan's own church then the importance Puritans placed on 'religious despair' (desperation caused by religious issues) is clear - the fact that the despairing feelings of some members of the congregation are recorded in the minutes is certainly a testimony to their

⁴¹ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 89.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

significance. For example, it is recorded that a certain sister Chamberlaine ‘is in a very sad condition by reason of temptation’ and it is then decided that the best course of action would be for ‘our friends [fellow members] to seek the Lord for her in speciall, and to visit her as they may gaine opportunity’.⁴³ Shortly after this episode the minutes record that some members have been absent from meetings for a lengthy period of time and, in an attempt to remedy this, the church elders (governing members of the church) send a few loyal members to speak with the absentees about their withdrawal from the church and call them to ‘give an account to the Church of the frame of their spirits’.⁴⁴ Interestingly, Bunyan is one of the members sent to counsel those who have been absent for a long while.

The events concerning ‘community relations’ chronicled in the Broadmead minutes are similar to those recorded by the Bedford congregation, although they are recorded in much greater depth. For example, a major part of the deaconess’s role at Broadmead was devoted to visiting the sick, reporting ‘the physical and spiritual condition of such folk [i.e. the sick] to the elders, and to deal with the spiritual needs of those they visited’ for it is noted that ‘it is their duty alsoe to *speake* a word to their soules, as occasion requires, for support or consolation, to build them up in a spirituall lively faith in Jesus Christ’.⁴⁵ We later discover that the Broadmead congregation held ‘conferences’ among its members to discuss matters of doctrine and local affairs. These appear useful because it is reported that ‘many soules had their doubts resolved, especially concerning their Interest in Christ and their eternal state, when they heard ye doubts and experiences of others discovered’ and also, since all had the right to speak at such a meeting, ‘any Member may Propose a

⁴³ H.G. Tibbutt (ed.), *Minutes of the First Independent Church*, p. 33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ R. Hayden (ed.), *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640-1687* (Gateshead: Bristol Record Society, 27, 1974), pp.51, 209. The original minutes were recorded by Edward Terrill, a church elder.

Question from Scripture, and soe their doubts may be resolved'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, over two pages of the minutes were devoted to recording the experiences of a despairing member of the congregation, who feared his soul both 'Lost and Damned', and the church's subsequent attempts to reassure him and restore his peace of mind.⁴⁷

These themes of congregational help and community are the other side of the coin of reformation of manners and mutual surveillance. These themes have been much discussed by historians of Puritanism and by historians of early modern communities.⁴⁸ It would seem that churches had a twofold purpose in paying close attention to their members. Firstly, they undoubtedly aimed to perform their godly

⁴⁶ R. Hayden (ed.), *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol*, pp. 100, 138.

⁴⁷ For the experiences of the despairing member of the congregation see R. Hayden (ed.), *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol*, pp. 139-141. Quotation appears on p. 139.

⁴⁸ There is a vast literature on the Puritan 'reformation of manners'. Martin Ingram's 'Puritans and the Church Courts, 1560-1640' in C. Durston and J. Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996) explains that 'in this period ordinary people took for granted the regulation of many forms of personal behaviour, including religious beliefs and observances and sexual morality' (pp. 61-62) and argues that church courts were engaged in promoting the Gospel and combating irreligion and vice by enforcing codes of morality on the laity. Yet in his 'Reformation of manners in early modern England' in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996) Ingram argues that moral reform campaigns were not exclusive to the seventeenth century, declaring that 'legal regulation of personal morality . . . was a recurrent, indeed almost continuously persistent, feature of English social life over several centuries' (p. 55). Keith Wrightson and David Levine's *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) shows how new conceptions of order favoured by an increasingly educated elite were implemented in Terling where 'a popular culture of communal dancings, alehouse sociability, and the like had retreated before a more sober ideal of family prayer, neighborly fellowship, and introspective piety' (p. 171). A. Hughes, *Godly Reformation and its Opponents in Warwickshire, 1640-1662* (Stratford upon Avon: Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, 35, 1993) and *idem*, 'Religion and Society in Stratford upon Avon, 1619-1638', *Midland History*, 19 (1994), pp. 58-84 are good studies of the impact of the Puritan 'reformation of manners' at a local level.

Here it should also be made clear that some historians view the seventeenth-century 'reformation of manners' in terms of class (as a 'battle' between 'popular' and 'elite' culture - best exemplified in Burke's, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994) - as well as religion (a conflict between the pious and irreligious). Historians, such as Martin Ingram in his 1996 essay on the 'Reformation of Manners' (see above) and Margaret Spufford in her 'Puritanism and Social Control?' in A.J. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds.) *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), believe that social control was not a new concern and was not particular to the Puritan elite. Other historians, Ingram included, disagree with Peter Burke's division of society into only two tiers - the elite and the popular - believing that this oversimplifies the structure of early modern society (ignoring, for example, regional and gender differences and the importance of the 'middling sort'). For this viewpoint see: M. Ingram, 'Religion, communities and moral discipline in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth- century England: case studies' in K. von Greyerz (ed.) *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984); B. Reay, *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); T. Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

duty and assist their members by attempting to alleviate their soteriological worries and, secondly, ensuring a close involvement in the lives of their congregation enabled them to ‘sculpt’ (or at least attempt to ‘sculpt’) the community into their own ideals of perfection by exerting a form of social control over their own members. Such control was possible because churches required their members to behave in a particular manner - which they deemed the only true way of the godly - in order to stay in the church and were constantly on the lookout for members who deviated from this pattern. The records clearly show that a watchful eye was kept over the actions of all church members, and consequently we learn that one man was admonished by the church elders for being ‘observed to have drunck too much, soe that he did reele and was drunck more than twice, kept bad company, and proceeded to bad words in his drinke’.⁴⁹ A certain sister Symms also finds herself under the church’s admonition because her husband arrested sister Murray, another member of the congregation, for the non-payment of a debt she owed Symms. The church objected to the way the matter had been handled and ordered ‘her appearance before them ye next Lord’s day, to answer what shall be laid to her charge’ because she had ‘sinned openly; (that is), broken ye rules of Christ, to goe to Law with a member before ye’ church.⁵⁰

The Broadmead Baptist Church’s stance in these matters could be compared with Margo Todd’s argument that in Scotland ‘the individual’s sins in the early modern period *were* the community’s . . . it was simply not possible to separate an individual’s guilt from the communal responsibility for godliness’.⁵¹ In other words, in early modern society there was a blurred distinction between the individual and

⁴⁹ R. Hayden (ed.), *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol*, p. 187.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁵¹ M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 174.

community; an individual's sins could tarnish the entire parish if they were not dealt with in the correct manner (only properly performed repentance could remove its influence). Todd tells us that in 1588 the Perth elders noted that those engaging in illicit festivities did so 'to the great grief of conscience of the faithful and infamous slander of the whole congregation' and explains that in 1648, upon discovering a group of local soldiers had fought on the wrong side, the Innerwick elders demanded the public repentance of the soldiers and also declared a day of fasting and humiliation for the entire community.⁵²

To return our attention to individual English Puritans and their relationship with the surrounding community, we shall now consider how the piety of Agnes Beaumont, a member of the Bedford Independent Church's sister congregation at Gamlingay, was affected by her immediate community and relatives.

Agnes Beaumont and the Community

In a manuscript entitled *The Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont*, which remained unpublished until 1760, Beaumont recorded the traumatic events leading up to and following her father's sudden death in 1674. Throughout the *Narrative* we see that Beaumont feels a definite closeness between herself and Christ. At most times she appears very confident of her status as a member of the elect and feels that God is taking an especially keen interest in her life. Even after the death of her father

⁵² M. Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, p. 174. Todd's study also highlights that it was not only the elders or kirk officers who reported offences such as Sabbath-breaking – 'ordinary parishioners took up the campaign on their own'. Yet this was not always the case. David Underdown's study of seventeenth-century Dorchester drew a very different picture for he identified considerable opposition to the reforming zeal of the Oxford-trained divine, John White. Underdown shows that the Pouncey family were the main opponents to the new godly regime; their patriarch, Roger Pouncey the elder, was 'a sort of godfather to the unruly and unregenerate of Dorchester' who strove to undermine the efforts of the reformers at every turn. Underdown also emphasises that the Pouncey's were not alone in their opposition to godly reform and 'had counterparts in many parts of England'. See M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, p. 403; D. Underdown, *Fire From Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 165, 166.

and the eruption of scandalous rumours, Beaumont remains convinced that God is by her side and will continue supporting her through her time of great need. Many comforting ‘biblical incursions’ spring into her mind persuading her of her godly status such as ‘*the Eyes of the lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their Cryes*’, ‘*no weapon that is formed Against thee shall prosper*’ and ‘*rejoyce and be exceeding glad, for great is yor reward in heaven*’.⁵³

Initial appearances seem to suggest that Beaumont possessed a deeply solitary form of piety and felt, as previously noted, what appears to be an uncommonly close bond with God. Yet it could be contended that it was the hostile environment (towards Beaumont personally, yet also towards the religious beliefs she followed) and the circumstances in which she found herself that caused her piety to develop in this fashion and led her to feel that a close bond had been forged between herself and God. Indeed, perhaps we could say that her exceptionally close attachment to God and her assured spiritual development in general occurred as a reaction against the influence of her surrounding community - as the rumours of her own involvement in her father’s death escalated, Beaumont turned to God and prayed for strength to withstand the onslaught of criticism and rumour-mongering from local villagers. As she began to feel increasingly isolated from those around her who denied her the right to worship in peace (her father) and spread scandalous rumours about her (the local community) she found herself turning to God for help more often and experiencing more frequent and resonant biblical incursions.

Beaumont lived in an undeniably patriarchal society. She initially found herself having to beg her father for permission to attend the church meetings at Gamlingay, which he thoroughly disapproved of, and, secondly, following her return

⁵³ Beaumont, *Narrative*, pp. 205, 217, 223. The italics are Beaumont’s.

home after the meeting charted in the *Narrative* she found herself the object of her father's wrath and was resultantly locked out of her own home. In an attempt to solve these earthly dilemmas, Beaumont turned to God. Firstly, she prayed that her father would let her attend, for she says 'I found at last by Experience that the only way to prevail with my father to let me go to a meeting was to pray hard to god before hand to make him willing'; secondly, when faced with a closed door and a father who refused to listen to her pleas, Beaumont resolved to 'go, and cry to heaven for mercy for my soul, and for some new discoveries of the love of Christ'.⁵⁴ Here we see that, initially, her father's resentment and rejection drive Beaumont closer to God, her spiritual father. Though later on, when faced with the difficult choice between obeying her father's command by promising never to attend a meeting again or continuing her worship and therefore taking good care of her soul by attending such meetings, Beaumont reluctantly chooses to obey her father. This episode clearly shows the power of the parental influence, in particular the paternal influence, in seventeenth-century England and, indeed, if we extend the concept of 'community' to include relations between family members, then Beaumont's *Narrative* certainly provides us with some useful examples for our study.

When the choice between father (and by extension her own inheritance) and attending godly meetings is first placed before Beaumont, she is unequivocal in her response - '*Father, said I, my soul is of more worth then so, and if yow could stand in my steed before god to give an Account for me at the great day, then I would obay yow in this as well as other things*'.⁵⁵ However, after strongly resisting his will for a few days Beaumont finally succumbs to her father's wishes and says '*well father . . . I will promise yow that I will never go to a meeting; Again, as long as yow live,*

⁵⁴ Beaumont, *Narrative*, pp. 198, 199.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201. The italics are Beaumont's unless otherwise stated.

without your Consent'.⁵⁶ Almost immediately Beaumont regrets complying with his wishes and hears a disturbing 'biblical incursion' that brings fear to her heart for the words '*They that deny me before men, them will I deny before my father*' enter her mind.⁵⁷ At this point Beaumont could have fallen into complete and utter despair fearing, like Bunyan who thought he had 'sold' Christ, that she had committed the unpardonable sin (blaspheming against the Holy Ghost) and was therefore without hope of salvation. Yet this does not happen, although Beaumont despairs of her condition, cries bitterly and is severely reprimanded by her brother for succumbing to her father's wishes, it is not long before a comforting 'biblical incursion' lifts her spirits as the words '*their shall be a way for yow to Escape, that yow may bear it*' 'drop' into her mind.⁵⁸ These words offer fresh hope to Beaumont and convince her that there will be forgiveness for her sins.

Nevertheless, it is somewhat surprising that Beaumont does not lose control, fall into despair and blame herself for her father's sudden death. After all, she acknowledges that she has compromised her faith by promising her father not to attend another meeting against his wishes as long as he lives, yet, we may argue, it would appear that God has removed these self-imposed constraints by allowing, or perhaps we may say even consciously causing, her father's death - Beaumont is then free to attend any meeting she likes without fear of retribution from her father.

We may wonder why Beaumont did not think she had caused her father's death by promising to obey his wishes and resultantly 'forcing' God to free her from this overhasty oath. Yet here we are faced with a complex facet of Calvinist theology - the concept of 'free will' and God's role as ultimate arbitrator. According to Calvin, man had been created with 'the freedom of will, by which, if he chose he

⁵⁶ Beaumont, *Narrative*, pp. 206-207.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

was able to attain eternal life'.⁵⁹ Conversely, Calvin also maintained that man had revolted against God's authority at the Fall and had sinned of his own volition 'not only in allowing himself to be ensnared by the wiles of the devil, but also by despising the truth, and turning aside to lies'.⁶⁰ In short, Calvin believed that before the Fall man possessed free will which empowered him with the ability to do good, yet after the Fall, although free will still existed to distinguish man from beast, it had been tainted by sin and was thus only capable of performing evil acts. In Calvin's own words, since the time of the Fall, man 'has not been deprived of will, but of healthy will' for 'the will . . . did not perish, but was so enslaved by depraved lusts as to be incapable of one righteous desire' consequently ensuring that 'free will does not enable any man to perform good works unless he is assisted by grace'.⁶¹

How does this short exposition of Calvin's thought on free will relate to our discussion of Agnes Beaumont and the death of her father? We have already noted that Beaumont felt no personal guilt for her father's death, she did not even accept her own involvement in the matter, even though she had vowed not to attend the church meetings that angered her father whilst he lived - consequently paying more attention to ephemeral earthly concerns instead of the eternal state of her soul. However, the introspective nature of Puritan piety causes us to wonder why, upon reflection, Beaumont did not consider herself even slightly responsible for her father's death. I shall suggest two possible reasons for her reaction.

Firstly, Beaumont may have been stunned by the fact that many neighbours suspected her of patricide as soon as they heard of her father's death. The shock that local villagers could believe her guilty of such a foul act may have initially amazed

⁵⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 92 (I.xv.8).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119 (II.i.4).

⁶¹ John Calvin quoted in F. Wendel, *John Calvin* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 189; Calvin, *Institutes*, pp. 131-132 (II.ii.12), 128 (II.ii.6).

Beaumont and then emboldened her as she fought to disprove their allegations. Concentrating on external affairs, such as proving her innocence to the local community, could have caused Beaumont to delay, or even avoid, the introspection typical of Puritan piety. This would then explain her lack of guilty feelings, for the *Narrative* concludes with Beaumont boldly striding around Bigglesworth market proving she is not unsettled by the false allegations which have been made against her; Beaumont's external fight for justice is still going on and has possibly not had enough time to become introspective over events occurring so soon in the recent past.

Alternatively, we may say that Beaumont does not blame herself for her father's death because she possesses a Calvinist sense of the way God operates. Believing God to be in complete control of his creation, Beaumont would then consider the death of her father and the ensuing accusations from her neighbours to be part of God's inalterable 'master plan' for herself and the rest of humanity. Towards the end of the *Narrative* Beaumont hears the scripture '*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile yow, and say all manner of evil of yow falsely for my name sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is yor reward in heaven*' run through her mind.⁶² This provides us with a crucial insight into Beaumont's piety for it indicates that she believes the elect suffer in this life in return for eternal solace in the next - as the scriptures clearly assert, 'all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' (II. Timothy 3:12). Resultantly, we may say Beaumont is strong enough to stand up in her own defence and eventually overcome her troubles because she sees herself as a member of the elect - those 'disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious' (I. Peter 2:4) - and feels that such adversities have

⁶² Beaumont, *Narrative*, p. 223.

driven her nearer to Christ. This train of thought also clearly provides us with a reason for Beaumont's lack of guilt - since she is assured of her elect status and also acknowledges that the elect must suffer in this life, why would she consider her father's death to be anything other than a 'fiery trial' sent to test her strength and personal faith?

This chapter has previously suggested that Beaumont's sense of assurance developed so strongly because of the opposition to her faith and the malicious acts of other locals towards her. It could be argued that each separate, demoralising, incident caused by her own community, (such as her father's command not to attend meetings, the allegations of poisoning and the scandalous rumours) pushes Beaumont further and further away from the surrounding community and closer to Christ. Consequently, her own sense of election is greatly reinforced because the scriptures assert that the elect are 'disallowed of men' but chosen by God (I. Peter 2:4). Each time Beaumont is confronted by an act disruptive to her faith she turns to God for strength and assistance. For example, when her father locks her out of the house, Beaumont prays all night in the barn and just before she is ordered to appear before the coroner to answer the poisoning charge, she 'fly[s] to god for help' and hopes that 'he would please to appeer for me in this fiery tryal . . . [since] I see my life lye at stake and the name of god lye their too'.⁶³

In conclusion we may say that Agnes Beaumont gains spiritual confidence from distancing herself from those who revile her - the majority of her local community - and focussing her attention on Christ instead. In this case it would appear that the community's resolute attempts to exclude Beaumont and level false accusations at her actually help her dramatically, for they ensure that she grows in

⁶³ Beaumont, *Narrative*, pp. 200, 216.

faith and confidence throughout the course of the *Narrative* - thus proving that it is possible for negative actions (i.e. slander) to have a positive outcome (increased assurance on Beaumont's behalf). Thus the community certainly plays an important role in the *Narrative* for it manages to strengthen Beaumont's faith. The fact that this is accomplished through a constant barrage of destructive activities rather than in the usual way of providing support, a listening ear and advice is, in my opinion, irrelevant.

Isaac Archer and the Community

Isaac Archer's *Diary* records the events of his entire life (1641-1700), with particular importance placed on his spiritual development, and was begun in 1659 when Archer was eighteen years old.⁶⁴ It is striking that the most prominent relationship recorded in the *Diary* is that between Archer and his father. However, we must not forget that Archer also had a family of his own. He married Anne Peachy in November 1667 and they had nine children over the thirteen year period between 1669 and 1682. Tragically, only their second daughter, Anne, survived into adulthood and eventually outlived Archer. Although the diary's professed primary aim was to trace Archer's spiritual development and convey 'God's dealings both to bodye and soule, to his glory', it also provides us with a remarkable insight into the mechanics of family relationships in the seventeenth century - this is in stark contrast with Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* which, as we have seen, provided us with only a meagre amount of information on Bunyan's own family and friends.⁶⁵ Although it is the relationship between Archer and his father which is recorded in the most detail, the diary also

⁶⁴ Although Archer began keeping a diary at a young age he sorrowfully lamented his 'late' start and exclaimed 'Oh that I had begun sooner!' See Archer, *Diary*, p. 44. See Appendix 1 for a brief biography of Archer.

⁶⁵ Archer, *Diary*, p. 43.

provides us with a wealth of information on his relationship with his wife, children, friends and fellows at Cambridge and members of his own congregations. This will come in useful to us as we move on to discuss the effect that Archer's interactions with those around him had on the development of his piety and the way in which he expressed his own religious sensibilities.

Archer's relationship with his father, William Archer, could hardly be described as warm and loving; antagonistic would probably be closer to the mark. It is certainly clear that Archer respects his father immensely, for when he is young he tries his best to be the dutiful son and obey his father's every wish - albeit grudgingly on occasion. Yet Archer's father was strong-willed in the extreme, and possessed fixed beliefs regarding the nature of 'true religion' and filial obligation. Archer consequently found himself striving to live in the way his father dictated and was even willing to become a draper's apprentice, in accordance with his father's wishes, at the expense of abandoning his own desire to attend Cambridge and become a minister - Archer believed that at Cambridge he would be able to 'serve God more and better, having time and a study to my self, and no ill companions to hinder mee in minding my soule's good'.⁶⁶ This, however, was not his father's perception of matters. William Archer was initially unwilling to let Isaac attend Cambridge because he felt Archer's stammer made him unfit for the ministry and considered that learning a trade would be a more lucrative option. Consequently, Archer was apprenticed to a linen draper against his will, which highlights the power fathers were able to wield over their sons in seventeenth-century England. William Archer was eventually persuaded to allow Isaac to attend Trinity College, although

⁶⁶ Archer, *Diary*, p. 51.

this seems to have owed more to the power of an outside influence (namely Henry Dearsly), than his own son's entreaties.⁶⁷

Leaving home to attend university did not signify the end of Isaac's subservience to his father, for Archer initially relied on his father to provide for his maintenance during his studies - though William's contribution may at best be termed an extremely meagre stipend - and they also corresponded regularly throughout Archer's time at Cambridge. Archer first wrote to his father at a time when he was desperately unsure of the condition of his own soul and doubted whether he had experienced a 'true awakening'. He found himself falling into despair and consequently sought guidance and support from his father.

William Archer's responses appear to sense Isaac's need for reassurance for they aim to set his mind at rest and cause him to consider religion and his own feelings towards it very carefully. Shortly after arriving at the college, Isaac began to feel that 'all was not well with my soul'.⁶⁸ In an attempt to remedy this, he sought the advice of Mr Dearsly who referred him back to the scriptures and in particular James 1:5, yet this was not enough to satisfy Archer and help him understand his soul's condition so he resolved to 'acquaint my father, as a most experienced Christian, . . . and desire his directions what course to take in serving God, and working out my owne salvation'.⁶⁹ This was how the correspondence between father and son began. The first replies Isaac received filled him with hope for he referred to them as 'humbling and yet comfortable letters' that grounded him in practical

⁶⁷ Henry Dearsly was a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge (1649) and vicar of Enfield in Middlesex (1664-72). Dearsly was acquainted with Archer's father and managed to persuade him to allow Isaac to attend university (*Diary*, p. 52). Archer considered Dearsly a friend. He frequently confided in him during his time at the college (e.g. *Diary*, p. 73) and Dearsly helped Archer whenever possible, ensuring he could stay at the college without conforming to the Church of England and accepting the Book of Common Prayer (in 1661) and eventually helping him to secure a living at Chippenham (1662).

⁶⁸ Archer, *Diary*, p. 53.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

divinity and did 'so much and so apparent good' that he was greatly heartened.⁷⁰ A little over a year later Archer was once again caught by despairing feelings and tempted to stop serving God because he could see 'no difference betwixt godly and ungodly'.⁷¹ Once again, his father's advice helped considerably, for William Archer told Isaac to leave off prayer, reading and meditation if he dared and Isaac discovered that his conscience would not let him do so - thereby suggesting that a true bond, which resisted temptation, existed between Archer and God, for he was unable to turn away from truly pious duties.

When he went home and spoke face to face with his father about matters of religion Isaac received much reassurance from his words: 'in my darkest houers it was a great encouragement, and support to mee that my father, by my letters and by speaking with mee, judged well of my case'.⁷² Isaac respected William Archer, not only as his father but also as an older and more experienced Christian. He valued his advice and noted that he had 'some of his letters which refresh mee when ever I read them', which suggests that Archer frequently reviewed their correspondence at times of crisis to help regain his confidence in spiritual affairs.⁷³ Later in the diary Archer summarises the contents of all his father's letters thereby proving that he has kept them and testifying their immense value to him, for Archer maintains he is 'always acknowledging the good I have gotten by his savoury counsells'.⁷⁴

It would certainly seem that Archer appreciates his father's advice, but is not always immediately bolstered by it - their comforting effect often comes with

⁷⁰ Archer, *Diary*, pp. 54-55. Interestingly, it is noted that John Janeway 'sent up and down packets of divine letters, in which he did discourse so substantially and experimentally of the great things of God, that it would not at all have unbecome some gray head to have owned what he did write'; thus suggesting that Janeway's spiritual maturity vastly exceeds his years. See James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Archer, *Diary*, p. 55.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

hindsight alone. When Archer is concerned that he has not received sufficient assurance of his own election, his father tries to bring him consolation in two ways. Firstly, by reminding him of the case of Job Throckmorton (1545-1601) who sought assurance of his salvation for thirty-six years but only secured it within an hour of his death and, secondly, by reassuring Isaac that he ‘could not perish in the way which . . . [he] went in, and that God would manifest his love at the last’.⁷⁵ Yet Archer still considers himself to be lost without hope of God’s mercy.

The influence of a single member of the community alone is not always enough to turn another’s despair away - what is frequently needed to bring a more positive outlook is substantial effort on the part of the despairing individual *as well as* multiple and sustained influences from the surrounding community. For example, when Archer remains in a despondent frame of mind despite his father’s efforts to console him, it takes a multifaceted process to change his dispirited outlook involving: firstly, reading some godly books, such as John Wilkins, *A Discourse Concerning the Gift of Prayer* (1651) and John Preston, *The Breast-Plate of Faith and Love* (1643); secondly, hearing sermons by William Shelton, Richard Perrott and Thomas Seniour and thirdly, individual prayer and contemplation. It is whilst Isaac is at this low spiritual ebb that William Archer makes a rather interesting proposition, for he suggests that anxiety and despair over one’s eternal state may be considered precursors (or possibly even prerequisites) for gaining true grace and saving faith. In this light, despair may be a rite of passage to salvation for, as William Archer noted, after Isaac was troubled by despair he would then ‘make out for comfort and peace’.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Archer, *Diary*, p. 59. NB. William Archer’s description of Job Throckmorton is inaccurate. According to Patrick Collinson the story is apocryphal and arises from a confusion of identity. See: P. Collinson, ‘Throckmorton, Job’ in Oxford DNB.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

The letters between Archer and his father reveal that the spiritual advice given by William Archer was well meant and aimed at raising his son's hopes. Even during their long and bitter dispute concerning whether Isaac would conform and listen to common prayer in the college chapel or would avoid conformity at all costs (as his father wished), William Archer still provided his son with sound spiritual advice when asked.⁷⁷ Isaac regarded his father's letters at this time to contain 'good counsell' in religious affairs and noted that he was 'beholding to him [his father] for that good foundation [of religion], which, I hope, is laid in my soule'.⁷⁸ Later, William Archer's anger at his son for defending common prayer caused him to write a letter which made Isaac 'startled to thinke of what my father now thought of mee, in respect of my soule's case Godward'.⁷⁹ After reading this letter, Isaac thought deeply about what conformity involved and concluded that he 'never much loved any of those things, yet out of a spirit of contradiction, and crossegrained humour I would be defending of them' - it would appear that Isaac had rebelled against his father's desire to control him and he seems to have defended common prayer simply because he knew his father vehemently objected to it, which was not very helpful to his religious development.⁸⁰

In his letters at this time, Archer's father also found fault with his son and accused him of conceitedness, vanity, talking too much and possessing ill habits. He disliked the tone Isaac used when writing to him and ordered him to take note of the fifth commandment (honour thy father and thy mother, Exodus 20:12), for he believed that 'magistracy is founded upon family-government' and even threatened to disinherit Archer and stop his meagre allowance if he continued to stay at

⁷⁷ This argument occurred in 1661 when the restored Church of England imposed adherence to the Book of Common Prayer.

⁷⁸ Archer, *Diary*, p. 72.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Cambridge and conform.⁸¹ This threat had an immense impact on Archer's religious life, for shortly after (June 1662) he resolved to conform because he believed this was the only way he could subsist, as conforming would enable him to gain a benefice and provide for himself without having to rely on his father's 'arbitrary allowance' ever again.⁸²

Having described the outcome of the bitter dispute between father and son, it is well worth noting that even after the harsh words exchanged between the two, William Archer still offers advice on spiritual affairs to his son and Isaac gratefully accepts it. Following the argument, Isaac notes that his father sent him 'good directions which have done me some good since' and gave him a book of the sermons he had preached at Halstead which Isaac 'prized much'.⁸³ Evidently Archer valued this book immensely for he used his father's notes in it to help compile his own sermons. Moreover, his admiration for his father as a minister comes across clearly here for Isaac proudly states that the sermon book proves his father 'had an excellent method in dealing with soules' and he even notes that it is his ambition 'to imitate my father' making his 'zeale and fervency in preaching a patterne to my self'.⁸⁴ What is more, after reading through the sermons Isaac began to regret the argument with his father and instead exalted the goodness of 'so precious a man'.⁸⁵

We set out to evaluate the usefulness of the correspondence between Isaac Archer and his father in quelling Archer's fears of damnation. Hopefully it has been shown that, in the main, the letters had a positive effect on Archer's 'spiritual confidence' for they were frequently able to bolster him and force him to think more deeply about religious affairs and the workings of God. Occasionally, the letters

⁸¹ Archer, *Diary*, p. 82.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 93.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

alone were not enough to lift Archer out of despair, but when this was the case the influence of other aspects of his communal life (such as the influence of godly books and ministers) were able to raise his hopes and fix his aspirations heavenward once again. However, having described the positive effect the correspondence frequently had on Isaac's spiritual development, it must not be forgotten that William Archer also caused his son immense distress and discomfort by providing him with an insufficient allowance during his studies and then threatening to disinherit him. Not only does this show the negative side of the relationship between Archer and his father (which is certainly reminiscent of the relationship between Agnes Beaumont and her father), it also shows the wedge that could be driven between fathers and sons taking different sides when religious dissent was outlawed by the Act of Uniformity (1662).

In short, we may say that William Archer has an immense influence on the spiritual development of his son. Whilst he appears to have been very good at helping Isaac with spiritual matters - and Isaac expresses palpable admiration for his preaching and ministerial skills - his support is drastically inadequate, even miserly, what it comes to more 'worldly' matters such as making financial provisions for his son during his studies. This financial uncertainty also helped shape the development of Archer's piety, for Archer speaks of his conforming as beginning out of 'necessity' to maintain himself rather than for sound theological reasons - although he does admit that he found nothing sinful and contrary to God's word in the services he had attended.⁸⁶ Having discussed Archer's relationship with the key member of his community we will now consider how his spiritual growth was influenced by other members of his surrounding community.

⁸⁶ Archer, *Diary*, p. 80.

When Archer left home to study at Cambridge he became part of a whole new community - that of Trinity College. Consequently, members of the college had a direct effect on the development of his piety. The most important of these members, at least in Archer's eyes, was his tutor, Henry Dearsly. As we have seen, it was Dearsly's influence that first gained Archer entry to Cambridge and he continued to support Isaac throughout his time at the college - even acting as Archer's guardian when his father stopped his allowance. Moreover, Dearsly also used his influence to enable Archer to stay in the college after the Restoration without fully conforming. For example, early in 1661 Dearsly promised Archer that he 'should not have any damage if he went not to chappell'.⁸⁷ In August of the same year, Dearsly reiterated his promise and assured Archer he would do everything within his power to get him a dispensation from conforming and, accordingly, Archer notes that a few weeks later the master of the college granted him liberty to 'continue in the colledge without conforming in the least' at Dearsly's behest.⁸⁸ As a consequence, Archer notes that he has a 'very gratefull sense' of Dearsly's favours towards him and is clearly very fond of him, which is unsurprising, given that Dearsly supported Archer wholeheartedly and provided him with the opportunity to choose whether to conform or not whilst at the college, which certainly had an impact on the way in which Archer's piety was able to develop.⁸⁹ Isaac's gratitude to Dr Henry Ferne, the master of the college is also great, for in 1660 Dr Ferne allowed Archer to gain his BA without accepting the Act of Supremacy, the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer in full - he was the only non-subscriber to be admitted.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Archer, *Diary*, p. 72.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Archer did not regard the piety of his fellow students very highly. Whilst at Trinity he notes that the majority of his contemporaries are ‘civil but not so holy as I could have wished’, however, in 1660 he participated in a private religious meeting with a group of ‘pious lads’ (seemingly a ‘godly core’) from the college.⁹¹ Archer adamantly insisted that most members of the group were good and strict professors of religion, yet he notes that the group was derided and ‘scandalised by the profane lads of the colledge’.⁹² The opinion of what would appear to be the profane majority had an impact on Archer’s piety because it prevented him from actually joining the religious group in the college - he feared he would lose credit with the others if he was associated with the pious minority. However, in the hindsight afforded him by his diary, Archer acknowledged that it was he who was at fault, for he had let his pride get the better of him, and consequently he resolved to attend meetings regularly thereafter. Also noteworthy during Archer’s time at Cambridge is the amount of support he receives from listening to the sermons of university fellows/ministers, such as Roger Kenyon, William Shelton, Thomas Seniour and Edmund Hough and reading godly books like William Perkin’s *The Foundation of Christian Religion* (1642).

After Archer leaves Cambridge and becomes a minister he finds himself becoming a part of more new communities - those of the villages in which he preaches. As a minister, Archer was closely involved in the everyday lives of his congregation. For example, he instructs the people of Chippenham in faith and resolves that if any of his congregation should fall back in to sin he will ‘goe to them, and mind them of their solemne engagements’ in an attempt to restore them to

⁹¹ Archer, *Diary*, pp. 53, 64.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

the true path of faith.⁹³ He also visits the villagers' homes after each sermon in order to speak 'of what was preached and to countenance them in it' and begins to catechise the village youth during the week.⁹⁴

Although Archer did not experience any serious trouble with his congregation it is worth noting that life was not always plain sailing for seventeenth-century ministers. Donald A. Spaeth's study of lay-clerical relations in Wiltshire highlights the hostility ministers often faced. Spaeth tells us that the clergy's foes 'were legion and included nonconformity, anticlericalism and irreligion'.⁹⁵ He also informs us that although lay-clerical disputes were not everyday events, they did disturb 'the lives of many clergymen at one time or another' and records that two out of three Wiltshire parishes experienced at least one lay-clerical dispute between 1660 and 1740.⁹⁶

Attacks on the clergy often took the form of verbal or physical abuse – for example, there were rumours spread that John Bunyan was 'a Witch, a Jesuit, a High-way-man, and the like' and it was reported that he had mistresses and two wives at once; at Bridgnorth Richard Baxter found himself preaching to a 'dead-hearted and unprofitable people' whilst at Kidderminster he was confronted by an 'ignorant, rude and revelling' congregation who even tried to murder him in 1642 because they believed he had approved the removal of all statues and images of the holy trinity in their church.⁹⁷ Ralph Josselin also noted that 'not one person spoke to mee, coming out of the church' and believed this indicated that he was despised by

⁹³ Archer, *Diary*, p. 89.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90, 92.

⁹⁵ D.A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 14.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 22.

⁹⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 85; Baxter, *Autobiography*, pp. 18, 25, 38.

the congregation.⁹⁸ Donald A. Spaeth also tells us of the cases of Revd Richard Day of Dauntsey and Revd James Garth of Hilperton. Day was attacked on his induction into the rectory of Draycot Foliat in 1665 and Garth complained that his parishioners ‘used malicious invectives to blemish’ him and had ‘conspired . . . To eject mee out of my Living’.⁹⁹ Moreover, Spaeth notes that the clergy interpreted such malicious incidents ‘as assaults, not just on them as individuals, but upon the entire clerical profession’.¹⁰⁰ This is reminiscent of the clergy’s own attitude towards sin for, as we have seen, it was considered that an individual’s sin could taint the entire community thus ensuring that responsibility for godliness was communal in early modern society and it suggests that ministers were part of their own clerical community.

Ministers were often disliked by their parishioners because they appeared to be failing in their pastoral duty to the congregation.¹⁰¹ Yet Archer takes a personal

⁹⁸ Josselin, *Diary*, p. 561.

⁹⁹ D.A. Spaeth, *Church in an Age of Danger*, p. 14. Direct assaults – whether verbal or physical – were not the only problems faced by seventeenth century ministers for they also found themselves confronted by ignorance and indifference to religion. Josselin bemoaned the ‘deadnes, and drowsy unactiveness of the dayes wherin I live’ (p. 323) Arthur Dent maintained the godly should ‘be zealous and fervent in spirit, that we may through God’s grace put life into others: and rouse up this dead and cold age’ (Dent, *Plain Man’s Path-Way*, p. 364). According to ministers, such spiritual nescience and neglect was rife in the seventeenth century. See: K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 189-206; J.E.C. Hill, ‘Puritans and the “Dark Corners of the Land”’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13 (5th series, 1963), pp. 77-102.

¹⁰⁰ D.A. Spaeth, *Church in an Age of Danger*, p. 17.

¹⁰¹ Spaeth divides lay complaints against the clergy into four categories, all brought on by a minister who either: firstly, failed in his pastoral duty to the congregation; secondly, failed to conform to the Church of England following the Restoration; thirdly, took part in scandalous behaviour or, finally, possessed a quarrelsome nature (Spaeth, *Church in an Age of Danger*, p. 28). Yet Jana Pisani’s study of lay-clerical relations in early modern Cambridgeshire argues that such disputes often arose because of ‘the professionalization of the clergy, the role of the clergy as disciplinarians, religious developments in Puritanism and Arminianism, and perceptions of clerical immorality’ alienated parishioners from their ministers. See J. Pisani, ‘He must be despised’: Hostility to Ministers in Early Modern Cambridgeshire’, *World History Review*, 1:1 (2003), pp. 62-84. Quotation on p. 64. Available at: www.ecommons.txstate.edu/whr (consulted 12.02.08). Pisani’s research also uncovers many examples of lay-clerical disputes and, in this respect, echoes Margaret Spufford’s findings in her earlier study of village life in early modern Cambridgeshire which alleged that the county’s clerics ‘did not lead their sheep; they were frequently bitten by them’. See M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 316. Thus we see that lay-clerical debates were often fuelled by both sides for, as Edmund Calamy noted in 1641, ‘there is a great complaint in the Kingdom . . . the Ministers complain of their people, that they are factious, seditious, covetous, dis-respectful of the Ministry . . . The people complaine of their Ministers, that they are dumb dogs, greedy dogs which can never have enough, & that they are superstitious, more for pomp than substance’. See J.F. Maclear, ‘Popular

interest in the plights of some members of his congregation and tries as hard as he can to support these people and return them to godly ways. For example, whilst at Chippenham Archer comforts a despairing young girl who has recently gone blind and also attempts to reawaken the soul of a drunkard all in the course of his ministerial duties - 'the Lord grant that I may be faithful in admonishing all such as goe astray, if they may obtain mercy at God's hands' he says.¹⁰² Here we see that, as a minister, Archer plays a central role in the lives of his congregation yet, as shall be shown, this was certainly not a one-sided process, for during the period of Archer's ministries it seems true to say that his congregation supported him almost as much as he supported them. Archer gains assurance of his own godly status and skill as a minister from those who hear him preach, for he notes that 'an eminent Christian' was convinced he 'had a worke of grace upon my heart because I preach such

Anticlericalism in the Puritan Revolution', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 17:4 (1956), pp. 443-470. Quotation on pp. 443-444. Also relevant here is I.M. Green, 'The Persecution of "Scandalous" and "Malignant" Parish Clergy during the English Civil War', *English Historical Review*, 94:372 (1979), pp. 507-531 which considers the case of 'inadequate clergy' who lost their livings during the 1640s and 1650s because of the scandalous lives they led or their political or religious views and E.J. Carlson's, 'The Boring of the Ear' in L. Taylor (ed.), *Preachers and People* which discusses the difficulty ministers faced when they sought to rebuke the sins of their congregation for their sermons had to be tempered: harsh enough to alert the listener to their own sins, but not severe enough to cause despair (especially pp. 264-269).

Also important here, because they show how early modern ministers were perceived by the laity, are Christopher Haigh's article on godly preachers in late Elizabethan and early Stuart England - 'The Taming of Reformation' - and Eric Josef Carlson's essay on the post-reformation English clergy - 'Good Pastors or Careless Shepherds?'. Haigh claims that the laity commonly believed their godly ministers neglected them by setting impossibly high moral standards, preaching hell-fire sermons (centred on the doctrine of predestination) that caused despair and attempting to divide their congregations into the godly and the profane thus destroying a previously held sense of 'community'. He then argues that the laity took matters into their own hands and forced their ministers to preach a more palatable form of religion - 'the consumers, the men and women in the pews, helped determine the ecclesiastical product offered to them' (p. 488). Carlson vehemently disagrees with Haigh. He argues that early modern clerics did not neglect their pastoral duty; on the contrary, they were highly sensitive to the needs of their congregation and divisive and incompetent ministers were the exception rather than the rule. Carlson dismisses Haigh's claim that congregations rejected predestinarian preaching and forced ministers to preach a more comforting message by suggesting that 'when they were preaching judgment and calling to repentance, preachers worked very earnestly to be pastorally sensitive in order to prevent the backlash that Haigh describes. This sensitivity was integral to the image of the ideal preacher-pastor and was present from the start of the English Reformation - not forced on the clergy by dissatisfied parishioners' (p. 426). For the other side of the coin, Peter Lake's article on Richard Kilby shows how pressures to match up to the image of the 'ideal minister' could affect preachers. See P. Lake, 'Richard Kilby: A Study in Personal and Professional Failure' in W.J. Sheils and D. Wood (eds.), *The Ministry - Clerical and Lay*, Studies in Church History, 26, (1989).

¹⁰² For these incidents see Archer, *Diary*, pp. 103, 112. Quotation appears on p. 112.

experimentall things, and search their hearts so'; another who heard him preach claimed that he 'must needs have the Spirit of God or I couldn't preach so'.¹⁰³ Archer is also refreshed and comforted by his conversations with two pious Christians who came to live in his parish because their minister was 'violent against them'.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Archer's *Diary* also shows that ministers helped each other to overcome the religious melancholy that frequently threatened to overwhelm their souls, for Archer notes that he was greatly comforted by the advice of Samuel Fairclough, the rector of Kedington, Suffolk who told him that if he could find 'but one signe of grace in . . . [himself] they were all there'.¹⁰⁵

Overcoming melancholy is not the only area in which ministers were able to assist one another. As Francis J. Bremer notes, Puritanism was a case of 'friends helping friends' and following the Puritan migration to New England 'on both sides of the Atlantic Congregational friends continued to rely upon each other's assistance to sustain and nourish their faith'.¹⁰⁶ Such bonds between ministers had originally been created at university: as Bremer points out 'the spiritual communion of which they partook at the universities became the driving force that united them in a network of mutual support. From Cambridge and from Oxford as well, a band of friends came forth dedicated to the task of reforming the English church and

¹⁰³ Archer, *Diary*, pp. 101, 100.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Archer, *Diary*, p. 132. Samuel Fairclough (1594-1677) was rector of Kedington, Suffolk, from 1629-1662 when he was ejected for refusing to conform. He then went to live with his youngest son, Richard, who was a conforming minister at Kennett – a parish adjoining Chippenham – which is when he met Archer. See Clarke, *Lives*, pp. 153-192; Nathaniel Parkhurst, *The Redeemer's Friend, or, A Sermon on John II preached at the funeral of Mr. Samuel Fairclough* (London: Printed by J.D. for Nathanael Ranew, 1692); Barbara Donagan, 'Fairclough, Samuel', *Oxford DNB*.

¹⁰⁶ F.J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610-1692* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), pp. 234, 233. Here it should be emphasised that Puritans were not the only clerics to keep in close contact and support one another. John Spurr has observed the same practice among Anglican divines and explains that 'although geographically isolated from one another, [Henry] Hammond, John Bramhall, Jeremy Taylor, Robert Sanderson, Matthew Wren and other Anglican luminaries kept up a correspondence, sharing ideas and knowledge, swapping titbits of academic and royalist gossip, and encouraging each other in the service of "our distressed mother the church"', J. Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 10.

advancing the cause of international Protestantism'.¹⁰⁷ Rosemary O'Day also emphasises the importance of clerical marriage – which led to the creation of clerical dynasties and to marriage between clerical families – in the formation of clerical networks.¹⁰⁸

Ordinary members of Archer's congregation, as well as ministers, were able to assist in his spiritual development by assuring him of his own godly qualities and engaging in pious conversation with him. Furthermore, members were also encouraged to talk about their own experiences of grace and assurance of salvation and this made Archer reflect upon his own spiritual condition and development of faith, which was certainly a positive effect. However, hearing his own congregation talking of the work of grace on their souls also had a negative impact on Archer for it brought home some of his deep-rooted insecurities concerning his own election. After listening to some members of his congregation talking freely of feeling the grace of God in their hearts, Archer feared that he 'could not speake so experimentally as they', and this awakened deeper anxieties for he resolved not to 'discover my case to them for shame, because I look't upon it as such that I who was their minister, should be outgone by those whom I taught'.¹⁰⁹

This seems to have been a sentiment shared by many seventeenth-century Puritans and is certainly reminiscent of Nehemiah Wallington's experiences. Wallington recorded that he went to visit a 'genttel woman troubled in minde & to comfort her' yet soon discovered that she 'did goe farr beyond me in the servic [sic] of God' and that she 'spake so understandingly and heavenly in affections with

¹⁰⁷ F.J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁸ R. O'Day, *The English Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558-1642* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979), p. 161. For further discussion of clerical networks in the seventeenth century see: W. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, especially chapter 2 and T. Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, 1620-1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially part I.

¹⁰⁹ Archer, *Diary*, p. 93.

earnest desiers to please God that I could have wished my soule in her soules stead'.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Wallington also noted that he received considerable comfort from talking with this lady because he was able to identify with her experiences. When she talked of being unsure how to serve God in a way that truly showed how thankful she was for His mercies Wallington noted that this was a 'condition I felt by experience to be with my my [sic] selfe'.¹¹¹ Here in Wallington's experiences we see that in spiritual affairs roles could be reversed, for the comforter soon became the comforted.

Such role reversal is also present in the life of John Janeway although it takes on a slightly different form. We have already seen how Janeway possessed exceptional spiritual maturity for his age (he died when he was only twenty-three), such maturity could take precedence over the general family hierarchy.¹¹² One day John's father, William Janeway, was despairing over the condition of his soul and earnestly wishing that he had clear evidence from heaven of his own election. Seeing how despondent his father was John 'spent some time in wrestling with God on his Fathers account; earnestly begging of God that he would fill him with joy unspeakable in believing, and that he would speedily give him some token for good that he might joyfully and honourably leave this world to go to a better'.¹¹³ Shortly after this John's father did indeed receive the unshakeable evidence he sought, but importantly this episode shows that the roles of father and son could be reversed. We have seen how Isaac Archer received great comfort from his father who showed great concern for his son's spiritual welfare, yet with John Janeway it is the son who looks after his father's eternal condition.

¹¹⁰ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 172r.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 172r.

¹¹² Such precocious spiritual maturity will also be discussed later on in this thesis when we consider the childhood experiences of Sarah Wight. See chapters 3-7.

¹¹³ James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities*, p. 25.

Samuel Rogers and the Community

Rogers' most influential relative was undoubtedly his father, Daniel Rogers. As Tom Webster notes, Rogers' diary clearly suggests that his father's 'disapproval was the most feared and his approval the most valued'.¹¹⁴ Rogers admired his father and held his spiritual advice in the highest estimation. Indeed, he considered his father's words to hold such power, that he was clearly surprised when his father's correspondence failed to prevent him falling into devotional backsliding when he first arrived at Cambridge - Rogers notes that 'sophistry, credit, jollitye maugre [despite] all fathers letters, and former experience, did coole quondam zeale, fervencye, affections'.¹¹⁵ The daily forms of devotion encouraged at home by Daniel Rogers were also very productive in his son's eyes, for Rogers even records that on some days these devotional exercises were his only profitable activities of the day. For example, Rogers records that one Sabbath in March 1635 he feels 'eloofe of [far away] from heaven' after having listened to dull preaching all day, 'yet someth:[ing] done at home the last sentence of my father; conc:[erning] daily applying the heart to the promise of gods love'.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, after a day when 'my walking hath been drowsye' Rogers feels 'a litle warmed by familye dutye by my father'.¹¹⁷ Moreover, the admiration Rogers feels for his father is clearly expressed in his reaction to an argument they have. Immediately after Rogers terms the dispute a 'sad disaster' and records that it 'so distempered mee, that I knew not what to doe, till I fell downe

¹¹⁴ T. Webster, 'Introduction' in Rogers, *Diary*, p. xix.

¹¹⁵ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14. Other examples include Rogers' joy at a visit from his father. On such occasions he is extremely delighted and notes that 'God lightens my heart by my fathers coming; oh joyfull to see godly freinds; heavenly oh how joyfull!'; he also suggests that the very presence of his father could bring him spiritual and actual physical comfort when he attributes his recovery from a fever to be partly down to God and partly down to 'the joy of my father's presence'. See Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 70, 148.

upon my knees, where the lord melted mee and subdued my spirit graciouslye'.¹¹⁸ So traumatic was the experience that it continues to affect Rogers days after when thoughts of the dispute still 'run thorough wh[at] ever I doe; though saboth'.¹¹⁹ It is also likely that his utter respect of his father's wishes and desire not to upset him was one of the reasons which prevented Rogers from emigrating to New England, for his father abhorred the idea and preached against it, though Rogers continues to speak wistfully of New England throughout his diary. For example, he says 'N.[ew] E.[ngland] N.[ew] E.[ngland] is in my thoughts my heart rejoices to think of it' and claims to have 'no joy . . . in this hotch-potch [the heterogenous Church of England]; shall I one day see New England and the beautye of thy countenance in thy livelye and pure ordinances?'.¹²⁰

Moving on to consider Rogers' community at Emmanuel College, it is clear that he was appalled by the actions of the majority of the students - he thought the college was virtually over-run by the ungodly. Rogers notes that 'many companyes, and ocasions have perverted my affections that they are not so vivacious'; feels that whilst there his 'heartlesse companye, deads mee' and considers the college to be 'much declined, and vanishing into shadows, and formalitie'.¹²¹ He even recalls the terrible spiritual suffering he had at the college when the devil brought him 'to such a pitch as I was in my study . . . that I had almost said; I will renounce all my former wayes of god, I see no profit in them' and notes that one day he had 'run thorough divers ocasions . . ., and companyes, where I am almost drowned and lost; snared'.¹²²

Rogers' time at Cambridge was not completely bleak, for he was able to find some pious students whom he could meet with each week and discuss spiritual

¹¹⁸ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 70.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 19, 50.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 17.

affairs in a suitably sober manner and he also attended many ‘soul awakening’ sermons by ministers such as Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goad and Stephen Marshall which enabled him to see ‘a little more of the heavenly Canaan than I did’.¹²³ The influence of the pious core of students Rogers met with was immensely important for his spiritual development during his time at the college, for he notes he gained much ‘inlargement in prayer’ at such meetings and frequently God was pleased to ‘warmed my pore hearte in my company’.¹²⁴ Indeed, it is noteworthy that many members of Rogers’ company went on to lead lives renowned for their godliness, such as John Arthur, who became the rector of Clapham, Simeon Ashe, who was made chaplain to Robert Grenville, Lord Brooke, and Peter Sterry who went on to become a Cambridge Platonist and was influential in the later development of Puritan piety.¹²⁵

When Rogers first became a part of Lady Denny’s household as her chaplain, he was shocked by what he considered to be their profane behaviour. Rogers says he finds himself having to ‘live with a tumultuous companeye, of vaine loose, lascivious wretches’ and ‘a most barren rotten company’ and he even likened his time with the Denny household to the biblical tale of Joseph’s stay at Potiphar’s house.¹²⁶ Rogers believed that all Lady Denny’s household were ‘against mee as too strict’ in the professions of religion and he was reprimanded by Lady Denny herself on two separate occasions for making the daily religious exercises too long and he also

¹²³ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.

¹²⁵ See A. Hughes, ‘Ashe, Simeon’ and N. Matar, ‘Sterry, Peter’ in *Oxford DNB*. More on Ashe and Sterry may be found in A. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 73-74 and F.J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion*, p. 53. Also see Simeon Ashe’s funeral sermon where Edmund Calamy proclaims that ‘the ministerial excellencies of many ministers were collected and concentrated in one *Simeon Ashe*’ - Edmund Calamy, *The London-Ministers Legacy to their several congregations being a collection of farewell-sermons . . . To which is annexed, a sermon preached at the funeral of Mr. Simeon Ashe* (London: s.n., 1662), p. 21.

¹²⁶ Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 68, 52. For the Potiphar reference see *ibid.* p. 71 and also Genesis 39:1-23.

recalls her 'bitter tong against long praying'.¹²⁷ Despite Rogers' aforementioned problems with his chaplaincy at Bishop's Stortford, Rogers was able to find some good company capable of providing him with an outlet for his profound piety. Rogers found the company of Richard Harlakenden, the husband of Lady Denny's youngest daughter, to be completely refreshing and he noted 'what an happinesse it is to dwell under the same rooffe with a thorough Xian, I am much refreshed, quickened, heartened, incouraged by the company of this good man'.¹²⁸ Harlakenden also took Rogers to visit a Mr Archer and a Mr Wilson, two eminently godly local individuals. Rogers was particularly impressed by the piety of Mr Wilson and viewed his company in an exceptionally favourable light for he exclaimed 'oh how beautiful are the feet of such a mortified soul; I am much in love with him; and glad I have such an one that I an unworthy wretch may be acquainted withall'.¹²⁹ Moreover, Rogers also joined with a group of like-minded parishioners in Bishop's Stortford. He is greatly comforted by this group and notes how precious the company of 'the saints' is, indeed, after a godly meeting he states that 'I consider, and see sometimes, and now at this time; that my heart was never kept cleaner, nor have I walked more closely with god in any place, as since I have come to this barren familye' - thus emphasising the positive effect these meetings and the company his is in have on his own piety.¹³⁰

Rogers left the Denny family and moved to the household of Lady Vere in Hackney in December 1637 - 'I goe to my Lady Veres', the Lord helps mee in the

¹²⁷ Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 71, 109.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33. The Harlakenden family also played a vital part in the life of Ralph Josselin, minister at Earls Colne, Essex. Richard Harlakenden (senior; father of the Richard whom Rogers was acquainted with) was Lord of the Manor and owner of the living of Earls Colne he and his family formed a close friendship with Josselin and became active members of 'the society' - Josselin's select group of pious Christians. For further information see: Josselin, *Diary* and A. Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman. An Essay in Historical Anthropology* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970).

¹²⁹ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 29.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

ordinance and wee strike up the match' he says.¹³¹ This time Rogers' chaplaincy is indeed a truly godly match for him (and also a significant step up the social ladder), since Lady Vere's strict profession of religion and humble piety strike a chord with him and he begins to 'rejoice greatly' in her humble society and trust her enough to open his soul to her and allow her to 'strengthen and console him'.¹³² There is a stark contrast between Lady Denny and Rogers' new mistress, for in terms of piety the two are certainly poles apart in Rogers' estimation. Such disparity, however, is very pleasing to Rogers who rejoices at what he terms his 'happy change'.¹³³

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The surrounding community could have an immensely polarised effect on such pious Puritan individuals as those discussed in this study. However, whether negative or positive, it is noticeable that the community always had a discernible effect of some sort which could not be ignored. Although Puritans such as Bunyan, Archer and Rogers extol the virtues of living a life in complete isolation from the world around

¹³¹ Rogers, *Diary*, p.128. Lady Mary Vere (1581-1671) was the daughter of Sir Thomas Tracy. She married Horace Vere in 1607. The Veres were a very pious family – Richard Sibbes dedicated *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* to Horace and Mary Vere and termed them 'both exemplary in all religious courses, both in your places likewise having been employed in great services for the common good, so that not onely this, but forraign States are bound to bless *God* for you both' (see Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax*, 'Epistle Dedicatory', sig. A5r). Lady Vere became a patron of godly ministers and corresponded with William Ames, John Dod and John Preston, amongst others. According to Samuel Clarke, she 'knew and enjoyed so much of Heaven as made her stay here below, tedious unto her' (Clarke, *Lives*, p. 147). Through the marriages of her five daughters, Elizabeth, Mary, Catharine, Anne and Dorothy, and her niece, Brilliana Harley (née Conway), Lady Vere came into close contact with Puritan opposition to the crown and, importantly, became part of a 'Puritan network' which shared the same religious and moral outlook. J. Eales', *Puritans and Roundheads: The Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Glasgow: Hardinge Simpole, 1990) addresses the development of such Puritan social networks through the example of the Harley family. Eales records that the Harleys 'were drawn to those who shared their religious assumptions and they believed themselves to be part of a godly community that was not grounded in a particular time or place' (p. 43) and this was reflected in their wide circle of Puritan relatives and friends. The Harleys deemed the ability to recognise co-religionists so highly that they 'applied religious criteria to relationships with their own kindred, ignoring their Catholic relatives and maintaining a close friendship with the puritan Veres' (p. 60). For more on the life of Lady Vere see: Clarke, *Lives*, pp. 144-151; William Gurnall, *The Christians labour and reward, or, A sermon, part of which was preached at the funeral of the Right Honourable the Lady Mary Vere* (London: Printed by J.M. for Ralph Smith, 1672); J. Eales, 'Vere, Mary' in *Oxford DNB*.

¹³² Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 136-137, 142.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

them, they find it impossible to do so. Bunyan scorns those who openly grieve and despair at the loss of earthly possessions and haughtily comments that ‘what a doe is here about such little things as these? What seeking after carnal things for some, and what grief in others for the loss of them!’¹³⁴ Beaumont runs to the most isolated parts of the house to pray whilst Archer emphasises his desire for isolation by asserting that he longed to attend Cambridge so that he could ‘serve God more and better, *having time and a study to my selfe*, and no ill companions to hinder mee in minding my soule’s good’.¹³⁵ Rogers’ initial thinking on this matter closely follows Bunyan’s and Archer’s trains of thought. He longs for a time ‘when no secular affaires shall perturbe mee in worshipping the Lord’; claims that ‘the heart is soone lost in a crowd’; and frequently complains that his ‘heart is ready to lodge in the creature, I have need that the Lord rap my fingers off from it everydaye’.¹³⁶

With the possible exception of Agnes Beaumont, whose peculiar circumstances and the brevity of her tale seem to leave her more isolated than our other Puritan subjects, our key characters fail to manage to extricate themselves from their family and surrounding community. Indeed, the implications of our study suggest that the isolated life portrayed by the Puritan ideal of a godly Christian is neither possible nor desirable, for when troubled by serious doubts and religious melancholy it was the support of relatives, friends and fellow parishioners that frequently managed to keep the pious individual from drowning in his or her own despair.

As we have previously noted, the term ‘community’ may be used to describe people with varying degrees of social ties, encompassing a large number of people indeed. Parents and close relatives, for example, could be considered the ‘inner

¹³⁴ Bunyan, *PP*, p. 26.

¹³⁵ Archer, *Diary*, p. 51.

¹³⁶ Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 20, 24, 34.

circle' of one's 'communal sphere', whilst fellow members of one's congregation would not be far behind and those such as the pious women of Bedford that Bunyan overhears discussing matters of religion and villagers living on the other side of one's own town, with whom contact occurs only sporadically, could be placed on the periphery of such a 'communal sphere'. The piety of our main characters was influenced to varying degrees by *all* the different members of their 'communal sphere', though admittedly, the effect was not always a positive one - as the experiences of Agnes Beaumont attest, yet the experiences are usually didactic and edifying (Beaumont learns to place more trust in Christ and this strengthens her faith).

In conclusion, our study shows that whilst the Puritan ideal may suggest that the godly should isolate themselves from the world in an hermetically sealed environment of piety and prayer, this was not always the best option (the external world could provide vital challenges and even rewards) and in most cases, it was not even plausible. Support given by members of the community was valued by our key subjects - as Rogers proves by his complementary descriptions of Lady Vere - and clearly an intricate web of connections existed between the godly and their supporters (both witting and unwitting) in the community. We are left with the notion that the godly individual and his or her surrounding community were interdependent, thus confirming John Donne's aphorism that 'no man is an island, intire of itselfe; every man is a peece of the continent, a part of the maine' - each affects and is in turn unavoidably effected by the other.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ See John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), Meditation XVII, at: <http://www.luminarium.org>

Part II

Shared Experiences? The Composition of
Puritan Spiritual Diaries and
Autobiographies

Introduction

Recent scholarship analysing the composition of seventeenth-century spiritual diaries and autobiographies has been keen to emphasise the literary nature of these accounts and the similarities that exist between each text. Authors such as Elspeth Findlay and Hilary Hinds have explored how literary conventions shaped the way in which experience was recorded in these writings, whilst Dean Ebner has asserted that the authors of such works strove to experience ‘more a corporate than a unique personality’ because ‘the Calvinistic formula of conversion psychology gave both to them and to their autobiographies . . . a ready-made structure through which to find and express this personality’.¹ Yet to what extent is this true? Did Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies conform to a set pattern? Are there any key ‘ingredients’ common to the many examples of Puritan life-writing? And how far did the combination of Calvinist theological conventions and seventeenth-century religious expectations dictate the manner in which these works should be written? Margaret Bottrall states that John Bunyan ‘could only see the past through the lens of the theology he had adopted’ and so we shall also question how far this is true of Bunyan and our other writers.² This section uses a variety of seventeenth-century English spiritual diaries and autobiographies, including those of Hannah Allen, John Bunyan, Cicely Johnson, Samuel Rogers, Rose Thurgood, George Trosse and Nehemiah Wallington, to explore the composition of these works and attempt to determine the degree of individuality present in this form of writing.

¹ E. Graham, H. Hinds, E. Hobby and H. Wilcox (eds.), *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen* (London: Routledge, 1989), *passim*; H. Hinds, *God’s Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writers and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), *passim*. D. Ebner, *Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century England: Theology and Self* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), p. 48.

² M. Bottrall, *Every Man a Phoenix: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography* (London: John Murray, 1958), p. 102.

In 1983 Patricia Caldwell's study of early American conversion narratives set out to prove that Puritan spiritual autobiography was not identical on both sides of the Atlantic. Caldwell claimed that it was 'neither useful nor accurate to lump together English and American conversion narratives, despite the undisputed fact that a shared Calvinist theology undergirds them all'.³ She also asserted there were easily distinguishable differences in the composition and structure of Old and New England texts and that these distinctions should enable us to 'realize how inaccurate it is to treat Puritan spiritual autobiography (or any subgenre of it) as a monolithic, predictable body of expression'.⁴ Here, however, Caldwell was merely calling for the acknowledgement that a distinction existed between American and English texts - she declared that it was 'only when we look across the ocean at the New England counterparts of these [English] narratives that we begin to see complex, and even contradictory elements'.⁵ She did not assert that there was any considerable variation amongst the surviving English Puritan spiritual autobiographies, although she did note that there was a difference between the spiritual autobiographies of first and second generation American Puritans.

Here I hope to extend Caldwell's thesis and argue that the distinction within the existing corpus of seventeenth-century Puritan spiritual autobiographies is not simply an American-English dichotomy, as Caldwell suggests, since it is also possible for us to identify important variations *amongst* the English variant of this form of writing. However, I wish to make it clear that my thesis is solely concerned with English Puritanism and therefore a discussion of American Puritan spiritual autobiographies will be beyond the scope of this study.

³ P. Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

This will not be the first time that a claim has been made asserting the diversity of spiritual autobiographies produced in England. Daniel B. Shea, expressing the contrary view to Caldwell, notes that there are ‘sharp differences to be found in English spiritual autobiography’ though, alternatively, ‘in New England . . . a seventeenth-century autobiographer would produce a fairly predictable variety of the genre’.⁶ Whilst I agree with Shea’s premise that English spiritual autobiography (broadly defined to include the writings of Quakers, Presbyterians and the more radical sects as well as the subjects of this study, the Puritans) was a varied genre, I would also maintain that variety is present within the writings of each of these separate groups, and this is an issue that Shea does not address.

To arrive at his conclusion that there are ‘sharp differences’ in English spiritual autobiography Shea compares two texts which are, to my mind, incompatible in this context - John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* (1666) and Richard Baxter’s *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696). Shea terms both these texts spiritual autobiographies, and whilst I would agree that *Grace Abounding* certainly fits this category, I believe that the inclusion of Baxter’s *Reliquiae* is more problematic. The *Reliquiae* pays far more attention to the state of current affairs than the state of Baxter’s soul and his own personal relationship with God, indeed, in this respect it is far more akin to the diary of Ralph Josselin, an Essex clergyman, than *Grace Abounding*.⁷ In Baxter’s own words, apart from the information concerning his boyhood, he only includes a short section concerning the experiences of his soul ‘because it is soul-experiments which those that urge me to this kind of writing do

⁶ D.B. Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 89.

⁷ Ralph Josselin’s diary is an exceptionally detailed text covering the years 1616-1683. It includes information on a variety of subjects including farming, the weather, domestic life, family relationships and Josselin’s health as well as charting the development of his relationship with God and fight against sin. God is undoubtedly a major part of Josselin’s life and is viewed as a powerful and omniscient force, yet the diary is more about Josselin’s day-to-day life than a predominantly spiritual account charting his concerns about the state of his soul.

expect that I should especially communicate to others'; it is not out of a personal need or desire to record God's mercies and grace for his own comfort, or even as part of an admission narrative that Baxter includes these introspective elements, instead he does so grudgingly because he feels that this is what is expected of him.⁸

A.W. Brink, however, has described spiritual autobiography as a relation of 'the inner life' which either 'exposes conscience . . . or promulgates new-found religious truth', whilst John Stachniewski has added that it may usually be seen as a narration of spiritual experience, 'especially the process of conversion'.⁹ Anne Hunsaker Hawkins goes a step further and describes spiritual autobiography as 'the expression of what remains fundamentally inexpressible' since the aim is 'not so much to make meaningful or to comprehend an individual life as it is to believe in its ultimate meaningfulness, whether that can be understood or not'.¹⁰

John Beadle (1595-1667) declared that faith could only be enhanced by 'a rich treasure of experience; every experiment of God's favour being a good prop for our faith'.¹¹ He also advocated diary-keeping as a means of recording these experiences and was 'very confident that such Christians who walk much with God . . . may be provoked to this duty [diary-keeping], and reap much good thereby. For without doubt, this work here commended, is very useful, though the duty be seldom practised'.¹² Indeed, according to Beadle, 'to keep a Journall or Diary by us, especially of all Gods gracious dealings with us, is a work for a Christian of singular use'.¹³ Baxter, on the other hand, feels that recording experiences relating to his own soul is of little use to anyone. He claims that it is 'somewhat unsavoury to recite

⁸ Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 103.

⁹ A.W. Brink 'Introduction' in Trosse, *Life*, p. 2; John Stachniewski and Anita Pacheco 'Introduction' in Bunyan *GA*, p. xxvii.

¹⁰ A.H. Hawkins, *Archetypes of Conversion: The Autobiographies of Augustine, Bunyan and Merton* (Toronto: Bucknell University Press, 1985), p. 28.

¹¹ John Beadle, *The Journall or Diary*, 'Epistle Dedicatory', sig. [A8v].

¹² *Ibid.*, sig. [A2r].

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

them, seeing God's dealings are much what the same with all his servants in the main, and the points wherein he varieth are usually so small that I think not such fit to be repeated'.¹⁴

G.A. Starr, a modern literary scholar, concurs with Baxter's view on this matter and declares that 'there are universal and recurrent affairs, particularly in vicissitudes of the soul. History repeats itself not only in man's outward, group existence, but in the spiritual life of individuals'.¹⁵ Yet this notion is questioned by both Owen C. Watkins and Roger Sharrock who respectively note that God was considered 'consistent in his dealings with men throughout history, but since He called everyone individually, they each saw some aspect of His glory that was hidden from others' and whilst 'the general pattern was the same, the symptoms of grace in the soul might differ from one person to another; study and comparison were necessary'.¹⁶

Thus we have turned full circle. Caldwell emphasised the variation present in American spiritual autobiographies, but neglected to examine the English variant; Shea maintained the variety in English autobiographical works but did not make a clear distinction between specifically *spiritual* autobiographies and autobiographical works with a more general or political focus. The contemporary voice of Baxter, on the other hand, alleged that God treated all alike in affairs of the soul - in spite of his earlier assertion that 'God breaketh not all men's hearts alike' when describing his youthful doubts concerning his own salvation - whilst modern scholars disagree about the amount of repetition present in God's dealings.¹⁷

¹⁴ Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 103.

¹⁵ G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 13.

¹⁶ O.C. Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, p. 2; R. Sharrock, *John Bunyan* (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 55-56.

¹⁷ Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 11.

What is our next step in this investigation? Since it would appear that a significant number of historians and literary scholars believe that seventeenth-century Puritan spiritual autobiographies followed a common pattern, it will be useful to analyse our collection of spiritual autobiographies according to this suggested pattern and see how well they fit into each category.¹⁸ Yet here we encounter a serious problem, for a brief survey shows that there is considerable disagreement over the ‘common’ pattern spiritual autobiographies follow. Lilia Melani avers that a spiritual autobiography is made up of six stages: ‘the narrator sins, ignores God’s warnings, hardens his heart to God, repents as a result of God’s grace and mercy, experiences a soul-wrenching conversion, and achieves salvation’.¹⁹ Roger Sharrock sees five stages in a Puritan spiritual autobiography, namely: early providential mercies, unregenerate life, conversion, calling and account of the ministry.²⁰ L.D. Lerner agrees that there are five stages, however, the stages he identifies are slightly different to those seen by Sharrock, and these are: serious childhood, sinful youth, legal righteousness often preceded by a struggle, and final illumination.²¹ Naomi Baker once again identifies a five part division when she notes that Puritan conversion narratives ‘typically trace a journey from a sinful childhood through stages of ignorance, false assurance and reliance on good works

¹⁸ William York Tindall, for example, argues that ‘the details of Bunyan’s conversion could be supplied by a diligent anthologist from the autobiographies of other preachers’. See W.Y. Tindall, *John Bunyan: Mechanick Preacher* (New York: Columbia Press, 1933), pp. 33-34. Whilst Christopher Hill maintains that in the second half of the seventeenth century ‘a standard pattern for spiritual autobiographies soon took shape’, though he adds the proviso that we should not ‘assume either that the saints copied from one another, or that their feelings became wholly conventional’. See C. Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Fractious People: John Bunyan and his Church, 1628-1688* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 65.

¹⁹ See L. Melani, ‘Spiritual Autobiography’ available at: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18c/defoe/religion.html#autobiog (consulted on 18.02.06).

²⁰ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. R. Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), ‘Preface’, pp. xxvii-xxx.

²¹ L.D. Lerner, ‘Puritanism and the Spiritual Autobiography’, *The Hibbert Journal*, 55, (October 1956-July 1957), pp. 373-386. Quotation appears on p. 374.

to a genuine apprehension of God's grace'.²² Alternatively, Felicity A. Nussbaum recognises a tripartite division in what she terms the 'traditional pattern' of spiritual autobiography, and this is 'conviction of great sin, conversion through God's revelation and grace, and post-conversion trials and resolution'.²³

The comments of these scholars suggest that a theological pattern may be said to exist in the writing of spiritual autobiographies - namely that of the author's progress from a degenerate state to one of piety and reverence following conversion and regeneration; or, in other words, each work may be said to trace the 'life' of an elect soul. Indeed, W.R. Owens asserts that the typical pattern of spiritual autobiography was for the author to follow three major stages: 'a sinful pre-conversion state, sometimes including providential escapes from danger; a process of conversion which may be sudden or gradual; and post-conversion trials and resolution'.²⁴ Whilst the authors may well be assailed by innumerable diabolical temptations, no spiritual autobiography I have read appears to chart the soul's incontestable journey into damnation, as does *The Fearfull Estate of Francis Spira* (1638), for all appear to end either on an upbeat note concerning their spiritual state, or still caught up in fear and uncertainty over their eternal condition. But is this theological pattern significant enough for us to agree with G.A. Starr's assessment that 'there was a strong tendency for [these] . . . works to assume a regular, conventional shape'?²⁵ To divide a spiritual autobiography into three broad sections means that sweeping generalisations are made whilst many interesting, yet subtle, nuances within the text are ignored. To say that such a division clearly indicates a

²² N. Baker, *Scripture Women: Rose Thurgood, 'A Lecture of Repentance' & Cicely Johnson, 'Fanatical Reveries'*, (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2005), p. xix.

²³ F.A. Nussbaum, "'By These Words I was Sustained": Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*' in *English Literary History*, 49:1 (1982), pp. 18-34. Quotation appears on p. 18.

²⁴ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, edited and with an introduction by W.R. Owens (London: Penguin, 1987), p. xix.

²⁵ G.A. Starr, *Defoe*, p. 36.

common pattern that all spiritual autobiographies follow, is unfair. The stages mentioned are undoubtedly included in the vast majority of texts because they are fundamental elements of the Calvinist belief system and, as will be shown, Calvinist theology forms the backbone of the vast majority of these texts.²⁶

How is Calvin's theology linked to the tripartite structure of Puritan spiritual autobiography identified above? Calvin maintained that man should acknowledge 'the corruption and degradation of our nature in consequence of the fall'.²⁷ William Perkins, one of the founding fathers of English Puritan doctrine, also echoed Calvin's sentiment through his assertion that 'all men are wholly corrupted with sin through Adam's fall and so are become slaves of Satan and guilty of eternal damnation'; thus it is no surprise that our spiritual diarists and autobiographers emphasise their sinful nature prior to conversion.²⁸ Similarly, Calvin noted that to be assailed by the Devil's tricks and temptations was 'common to all the children of God' since the Lord turns 'the unclean spirits hither and thither at his pleasure, employs them in exercising believers by warring against them, assailing them with wiles, urging them with solicitations, pressing close upon them, disturbing, alarming, and occasionally wounding, but never conquering or oppressing them'.²⁹ He also claimed that such temptations were not confined to the period before conversion, but were rather something that 'believers labour on through the whole course of their lives' - which is clearly a notion expressed in the majority of Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies.³⁰

²⁶ Chapter 1 of this thesis, discussing the motivation Puritans had for writing their spiritual autobiographies, has already demonstrated that certain elements of the text were included because of the Calvinist beliefs held by their authors.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, (I.xv.1), p. 86.

²⁸ Perkins, *Work*, p. 146.

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, (I.xiv.18), p. 82.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, (I.xiv.18), p. 82.

William Perkins reiterated the need for temptation and maintained that God prepared men's hearts so that faith could be worked in them 'by bruising them, as if one would break a hard stone to powder'.³¹ On this point both Calvin and Perkins echo the biblical notion that for the wicked 'their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men' (Psalm 73:4-5) - the wicked do not face the trials and tribulations that confront the godly. Calvin also asserted that conversion can happen at any time in a man's life 'for the elect are brought by calling into the fold of Christ, not from the very womb, nor all at the same time, but according as God sees it meet to dispense his grace'.³² Prior to conversion, the elect 'in no respect differ from others, except that by the special mercy of God they are kept from rushing to final destruction'.³³ Moreover, Calvin also anticipated the doubt and despair that many believers would feel over their own salvation and he claimed that it occurred in the elect because of 'the distinction between flesh and spirit'; man alternates between hope and despair because 'we are never so well in the course of the present life as to be entirely cured of the disease of distrust, and completely replenished and engrossed by faith' - distrust 'cleaves to the remains of the flesh and rises up to assail the faith existing in our hearts'.³⁴

Thus a spiritual autobiography may be said to trace the development, or journey, of the soul from a state of degeneracy to one of regeneration. However, this is not the only theological pattern evident and it would be equally true if we said that each spiritual autobiography charts the establishment of the relationship between sinner and creator, or between sinner and saviour. Indeed, we may even say that the theological pattern of many spiritual autobiographies echoes the purpose of what

³¹ Perkins, *Work*, p. 156.

³² Calvin, *Institutes*, (III.xxiv.10), p. 520.

³³ *Ibid.*, (III.xxiv.10), p. 520.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, (III.ii.18), p. 294.

Calvin terms 'scriptural knowledge of God' whereby man is said to pass through four stages in his relationship with the creator as he initially fears God, then learns to trust Him and worship him truly, 'with perfect integrity of heart and unfeigned obedience', which then leads to the final stage where man becomes completely dependent on God.³⁵ This final stage of utter dependency on God and complete trust in Christ is probably best exemplified in *Grace Abounding* where Bunyan claims he would leap off the scaffold 'even blindfold into Eternitie, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell . . . I will venture for thy Name'.³⁶

Having briefly discussed three core theological elements of Calvinist belief that are clearly evident in Puritan spiritual autobiographies, we must now return to consider whether this is enough to indicate that there is a 'standard pattern' which these works follow. Here it will be helpful to remember the stages into which the spiritual autobiographies were divided by the previously mentioned historians and literary scholars. We must not forget that, although Sharrock, Baker, Lerner, Melani and Nussbaum all agreed on the basic sin-conversion-illumination and post-conversion trials pattern, there were appreciable differences in the categories these researchers used to identify the so-called 'conventional' pattern of spiritual autobiography since no two 'patterns' were identical in structure. In fact there was such a noticeable degree of variation in the categories used to identify each separate stage, that one wonders whether it is truly possible to say that a 'conventional' or 'traditional' pattern exists for this form of writing.

Each researcher appears to consider different facets of the spiritual autobiography worthy of emphasis; for some, conversion is the climax of the narrative, whilst others see it as simply another stage (albeit a very central one) in the

³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, (I.xi.2), pp. 41-42.

³⁶ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 92.

process of salvation and others still, such as Roger Pooley note that ‘the sense of imminent hell has more of an effect on their [the writers] imaginations than the rapture of conversion’ and thus ‘it is not so obvious that these Christians are writing their stories to a pattern with conversion as the central axis’.³⁷ Neither did contemporaries agree on the structure of spiritual autobiographies for James Fraser (1639-1699) divided his into eight sections:

- (1) What hath been the Lord’s carriage to me before I knew anything of God, or had so much as the form of religion.
- (2) Some steps of God’s providence while the Lord was drawing me to himself. . .
- (3) Some things concerning my conversion. . .
- (4) Of the sad and long decay that happened thereafter.
- (5) Relate some things touching my recovery out of that decay.
- (6) Some things that happened immediately after this recovery . . .
- (7) Some things related to my present condition . . .
- (8) Some particular mercies I have met with from the Lord.³⁸

Moreover, John Beadle, the author of *The Journall or Diary of a Thankfull Christian* (1654) - a manual discussing how to compose these texts - asserted that a diary could contain material that was ‘either Nationall, and more publick [or] personall, and more private’.³⁹ As for the ‘private’ contents, Beadle asserted that the pious Christian should 1. Keep a strict account of his calling; 2. Take special notice of all divine assistance; 3. Put into his Journal ‘all deliverances from dangers, vouchsafed to you or yours’; 4. Record ‘all the instruments, all the men and means that God hath in providence at any time used for [y]our good’; 5. ‘Mark what returns, what answers God gives to your prayers’.⁴⁰

Since we can find no absolute agreement on the precise ‘ingredients’ that make a spiritual autobiography, I suggest we analyse our texts according to five stages that combine the approaches of the previously discussed contemporary writers

³⁷ R. Pooley, ‘Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Autobiography’, (a paper delivered to the Christian Literary Studies Group Bunyan Day on 1 November 1986) available at: <http://www.freenetpages.co.uk/hp/clsg/html/pooley-bunyan.htm> (consulted on 25.02.06).

³⁸ James Fraser quoted in G.A. Starr, *Defoe*, p. 40.

³⁹ John Beadle, *Journall or Diary*, p. 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-62.

and modern-day scholars with my own conclusions.⁴¹ These stages are: 1. Childhood and adolescent experiences; 2. Initial experiences of grace; 3. Temptations and Experiences of Satan; 4. Conversion; 5. Post-conversion experiences. Each chapter in this section will cover one of these stages.

⁴¹ The disagreement over the constituent parts of a spiritual autobiography is reminiscent of the current debate over Calvin's theology. As Richard A. Muller observes, one can read that 'Calvin's theology rested on the divine decrees as a central principle; Calvin's theology rested on the principle of the sovereignty of God; Calvin's theology centred on the doctrine of the Trinity; Calvin's thought was Christocentric'. R.A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

Chapter 3

Childhood and Adolescent Experiences

But Jesus said, suffer little children, and forbid them not, to
come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven
Matthew 19:14

Almost without exception Puritan spiritual autobiographies depict the author as being an extremely devout and God-fearing individual – though, admittedly, perhaps not as devout and God-fearing as the author himself would ultimately wish to be. We often find that, by the time of writing, the author has reached a stage in his spiritual growth that enables him to look back on his past behaviour, and the behaviour of others, and pass judgement on it; perhaps we could say that the reason he has reached this reflective stage is, at least in part, due to the fact that writing about his life has caused him to be more contemplative. During the course of his life the author may well have suffered Satan’s most diabolical torments and acted irreverently, perhaps even blasphemously, towards God yet by the time he sets his spiritual life into writing he is decidedly pious and frequently wishes to assist others to gain the same level of faith and absolute trust in Christ as he himself has attained. The same is also partially true for Puritan spiritual diaries, for whilst their day-by-day format does not easily lend itself to the same type of reflective process engendered by autobiographical writing it does, nevertheless, encourage the author to adopt a more pensive attitude - for he must be selective and choose which events to record and which to ignore. Moreover, as we have already seen in chapter one, re-reading a spiritual diary could be just as beneficial for spiritual growth as reading a spiritual autobiography.¹ Thus we see that over time an author’s faith could mature and grow

¹ Nehemiah Wallington spent three months reading through *A Record of God’s Mercies, or A Thankful Remembrance* with his son-in-law- thus showing that Wallington considered his text to be pertinent to the spiritual condition of other family members as well as continuing to assist his own spiritual growth. See Wallington, *Record*, fo. Iv (verso of the first unnumbered page).

considerably, but what about our authors' younger selves? How confident in spiritual affairs did they feel in their childhood and adolescence? Was there a common type of early experience shared by our authors?

As we have already seen there is no agreement amongst historians and literary scholars on the course a godly individual's early experiences should take. L.D. Lerner maintained that a 'serious childhood' was what the godly should experience yet Naomi Baker and Lilia Melani identified a 'sinful childhood' as the starting point for many spiritual autobiographies.² But are matters really as clear cut as this? Is it true that spiritual diaries and autobiographies can be divided between those where the author's life begins with a sinful childhood and others where the author experiences the exact opposite and is a precociously religious child? Can there be no crossover between the two points of view? Could it be that there are elements of both viewpoints discernable in each spiritual autobiography or diary?

A Sinful Childhood and Divine Providence

In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan is keen to establish himself as a child favoured by God, seemingly elect from the start, despite his blatantly irreligious and ignorant ways – thereby reinforcing Baker and Melani's conclusions. We learn that Bunyan came from a poor, yet godly, family, though he notes that during his childhood he was 'without God in the world' and thus lived 'according to the course of this world . . . [and] it was my delight to be taken captive by the Devil *at his will*, being filled with

² See L.D. Lerner, 'Puritanism and the Spiritual Autobiography', *The Hibbert Journal*, 55, (October 1956-July 1957), pp. 373-386; N. Baker, 'Introduction' in *Scripture Women: Rose Thurgood, 'A Lecture of Repentance' & Cicely Johnson, 'Fanatical Reveries'*, (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2005) and L. Melani, 'Spiritual Autobiography' available at: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18c/defoe/religion.html#autobiog (consulted on 18.02.06).

all unrighteousness'.³ From an early age Bunyan experienced frightening visions of demons and hellfire, and considered himself to have 'but few equals . . . both for cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy Name of God'.⁴ These brief details of his early childhood show how incredibly keen Bunyan was to emphasise his inherent sinful nature and place all the blame for his heinous actions on himself. In typical Calvinist fashion he emphasises the depravity of human nature thereby showing how great is his need for a saviour; thus illustrating God's graciousness and mercy for saving an undeserving wretch, such as he, from damnation – indeed, Melani avers that 'the writer emphasizes his former sinfulness as a way of glorifying God; the deeper his sinfulness, the greater God's grace and mercy in electing to save him'.⁵ Moreover, because Bunyan is keen to show how wicked and shameful his actions were, even though they brought him much delight at the time, it is possible for us to identify a definite disparity between Bunyan, the narrator of *Grace Abounding*, and Bunyan the subject of the text; the older, more pious, Bunyan stands in judgement on his younger self, amazed at God's benevolence towards such an irreligious and undeserving child.

The details of Cicely Johnson's youth revealed in *Fanatical Reveries* (c.1636) are very similar to Bunyan's, for the notion of being the 'chief of sinners' is also apparent. Johnson begins the relation of her childhood by noting that in her young days she was 'refractory, stubborn, disobedient' and had a love of sports and frequenting plays '& not only so, but to practise & invent them, if others had not been so practicall in that business as I was'.⁶ She also claims that she was 'the chiefest' for girls' sports and 'many other evils, which corrupt nature bringeth

³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵ L. Melani, 'Spiritual Autobiography'.

⁶ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 29.

forth'.⁷ Importantly, the full title of Bunyan's spiritual autobiography is *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* indicating that he, like Johnson, saw, or at least presented, himself as being the most sinful and irreverent person imaginable. Thomas Halyburton (1674-1712), the Church of Scotland minister, echoes the sentiment of both Bunyan and Johnson for in his *Memoirs* (1715) he records that he 'came into the world not only under the guilt of that offence many, nay, all, were made sinners, and on the account whereof judgement is passed upon condemnation to all men . . . ; but, moreover, I brought with me a nature wholly corrupted – a heart wholly set in me to do evil'.⁸ Vavasor Powell also saw himself as a troublesome and sinful child. Powell states that for the first twenty years of his life he was 'not only ignorant of the knowledge of God, and of his son Jesus Christ, and of Regeneration . . . and of my own miserable state by Nature; but I was also very active and forward in the pursuit of pleasures and vanities of this wicked world'.⁹ Like Bunyan, Halyburton and Johnson, Powell claimed to be the most sinful of his group of friends and maintained that he was known as '*Dux omnium malorum*, Captain or Leader of or in all evil'.¹⁰ Powell 'had no esteem for the holy scriptures, nor cared at all to look into them', just as Bunyan claimed that 'when I have but seen some read in those books that concerned Christian piety, it would be as it were a prison to me'.¹¹

Here, in this form of spiritual one-upmanship where each individual appears to be competing to be viewed as the most sinful, we can see how important it was for Puritans to show how undeserving of God's mercy they were – thus making God seem all the more glorious and merciful because he had chosen to save them. This

⁷ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 29.

⁸ Thomas Halyburton, *Memoirs of the Life of Rev. Thomas Halyburton* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, c. 1847), p. 26. For a brief biography of Halyburton see appendix 1.

⁹ Powell, *Life*, p. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 8.

‘spiritual one-upmanship’ is perhaps best exemplified in a conversation between Sarah Wight and a mysterious ‘Mistress A’ which is recorded by Wight’s minister, Henry Jessey. Here the two women virtually compete to see who is the more despondent and unworthy – firstly, Sarah asks Mistress A how she is feeling and she then replies ‘In as sad a condition as ever was any’, Sarah responds with ‘*None is in a Condition like to mine*’ yet the conversation does not end here for, unwilling to be beaten, Mistress A declares that ‘The Lord knows, that knows all things, that I would rather than all the world, that I were in your condition’.¹² Not to be outdone by this Sarah answers that ‘*But if you knew, how desperate my condition is, you would be afraid to change place with me, for you know not my sad sorrowes. None in the world can compare with mine. Except you would desire to be in hell, you would not desire to be in my condition*’.¹³ Yet still the matter does not end, for Mistress A is adamant that she ‘must be damn’d’ and Sarah goes a step further asserting that she is ‘*damn’d already, from all eternitie, to all eternitie: its not to doe, but tis already done*’; moreover, when Mistress A claims to be a hypocrite, Sarah goes further still and claims to be ‘*an hypocrite, a revolter [and] a back-slider*’.¹⁴ Yet it is Mistress A who has the ultimate victory in this debate when, as a parting shot, she tells Sarah

¹² Sarah Wight and Mistress A quoted in Henry Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of grace advanced by the spirit of grace, in an empty nothing creature* (London: Printed by Matthew Simmons for Henry Overton, and Hannah Allen . . . , 1647), p. 43. Sarah Wight was born in London in 1631. She was the daughter of Thomas Wight (d. 1643), who was an official in the auditor’s and exchequer’s office, and his wife Mary. When Sarah was twelve years old (1643) she fell into deep despair and considered herself eternally damned. Such feelings lasted almost four years until April 1647 when she experienced some ‘soule-satisfying comforts’ (*Exceeding Riches*, p. 15) and began to slip into trances during which she expounded upon Scriptural texts. On March 27th 1647 Sarah stopped eating and, miraculously surviving on water alone, continued her fast for the next sixty-five days. Throughout this time she remained in bed and was visited by many men and women seeking spiritual advice and ministers who questioned her about key theological points. Wight asked the Baptist minister, Henry Jessey, to record and publish her experiences: she is reported to have said ‘*I would others might hear how gracious the Lord hath dealt with me, the chiefest of sinners, that none might DESPAIR and murmure, as I have done*’ (sig. A8r). Jessey did as he was requested and part of what was published as the *The Exceeding Riches of Grace* in 1647 claims to be a verbatim record of Wight’s words. Sarah went on to make a full recovery: however by 1656 she had lost her sense of assurance and had fallen into doubt once again.

¹³ Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of grace*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

that 'I think I shall perish ere I see you againe'.¹⁵ This was not an isolated incident for Hannah Allen records how her sins '*are so great, that if all the Sins of all the Devils and Damned in Hell, and all the Reprobates on Earth were comprehended in one man; mine are greater; There is no word comes so near the comprehension of the dreadfulness of my Condition; as that, I am the Monster of the Creation*'.¹⁶

We have seen how some Puritans glorified their own sinfulness because it made God appear all the more merciful and benevolent for saving them – but was this always the case? There is evidence suggesting that the young Bunyan was not entirely at ease with his sinful ways. He states that he was 'often much cast down and afflicted in my mind therewith' explaining how he often wished 'that there had been no Hell, or that I had been a Devil; . . . [that if] I indeed went thither, I might rather be a tormentor, than tormented myself'.¹⁷ This statement is important because it is an attempt to show exactly how far from God Bunyan is at this early stage in his life: yet, paradoxically, it also shows that he is so uncomfortable with his own sinful ways that they afflict his mind. He also tells us of his distress upon hearing 'one to swear that was reckoned for a religious man' and how it was 'so great a stroke upon my spirit, as it made my heart to ake'.¹⁸ Here Bunyan highlights how, even during his most irreligious phase, he could not stand hypocrisy, which prepares the reader for his revulsion at discerning himself to be no more than a 'poor painted hypocrite'.¹⁹

It would appear that during his early years Bunyan was a sinner with little space for God and religion in his life. In spite of this, there appear to be several signs suggesting his later progress to a state of piety as well as clear indications that God

¹⁵ Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of grace*, p. 44.

¹⁶ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings*, p. 43.

¹⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

looked favourably upon the young Bunyan. His sense of revulsion at his own sins as well as those of other supposedly godly individuals around him suggests that at the very core of his being there is something different about him, something that separates him from the mass of irredeemable reprobates – and it would seem that God’s grace is what makes this difference.

Throughout his adolescence Bunyan’s life stayed on a sinful course with him still ‘the very ringleader, of all the Youth that kept me company, into all manner of vice and ungodliness’.²⁰ It was not until his marriage in 1649 (at the age of twenty-one) that Bunyan attempted to put on some semblance of religion. Prior to this Bunyan noted how ‘the lusts and fruits of the flesh’ abounded in his soul and also hinted that he feared earthly punishment and disgrace more than divine retribution when he said ‘had not a miracle of precious grace prevented, I had not onely perished by the stroke of eternal Justice, *but also* laid myself open *even* to the stroke of those Laws, which bring some to disgrace and open shame before the face of the world’.²¹ Bunyan’s assertion that God’s ‘precious grace’ prevented him from falling into utter damnation is in line with Calvin’s declaration that, prior to conversion, the elect do not differ from the reprobate except that ‘by the special mercy of God they are kept from rushing to final destruction’.²² Further symptoms of this ‘special mercy of God’ that prevented Bunyan rushing to both his physical and spiritual doom are the divine providences he experienced in his youth. Bunyan recollects that he avoided drowning twice and safely removed the sting from an adder ‘which act had not God been mercifull to me, I might by my desperateness have brought my self to mine end’.²³ He also informs us that he had a miraculous escape from death during

²⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7. The italics are my own.

²² Calvin, *Institutes*, (III.xxiv.10), p. 520.

²³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 8.

his short period of service in the New Model Army when one of his fellow soldiers voluntarily decided to take his place on a dangerous expedition and was killed by a musket bullet.²⁴ Ralph Josselin also narrowly avoided disaster during his childhood when he fell into the fire and was stabbed in the head by his sister, yet escaped serious injury each time. These incidents caused him to declare that ‘in my infancy I had a gracious eye of providency watching over mee, preserving me from dangers’ – thus suggesting that God’s ‘special mercy’ extended to him.²⁵

However, we must remember that not all Puritans experienced divine providences, or ‘dispensations of providence’, during their youth. Powell lacks any providential signs suggesting God’s interest in his soul prior to conversion. The absence of these signs is striking because Puritanism strongly advocated the search for signs of assurance that indicated the believer’s elect status - providential mercies could be taken as just such a sign of assurance. Consequently the Puritan minister, Thomas Watson, pleaded with Christians to ‘take pains with themselves in this great work of examination’ for he considered their salvation to depend on it.²⁶ Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664) considered self-examination to be such a vital part of Puritan piety that he devoted an entire chapter of his *Media* to discussing precisely how a believer should examine his life.²⁷ Thus it is surprising that when he examined his soul and God’s actions towards him during his youth, Powell did not find any examples of divine providence, as many other Puritans did - Roger Sharrock even

²⁴ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 8.

²⁵ Ralph Josselin, *Diary*, p. 1.

²⁶ Thomas Watson quoted in O.C. Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, p. 10.

²⁷ Isaac Ambrose, *Media: The middle things, in reference to the first and last things: or, The means, duties, ordinances, both secret and publike, for continuance and increase of a godly life* (London: Printed by John Field, 1649), pp. 55-85.

considered early providential mercies to be the first stage of a Puritan spiritual autobiography.²⁸

Being preserved from serious danger and committing the damnable Unpardonable Sin did not mean that Puritans led a sheltered life. Suffering was an expected part of elect life. As J.R. Knott notes, there existed ‘a tradition of “suffering for truth’s sake” that for Bunyan and many others was at the heart of Protestant Christianity’.²⁹ Yet, if we recall, in *Grace Abounding* Bunyan claimed that he would ‘rather be a tormentor, than tormented myself’; thus showing that, at this time in his life, he would have done anything, even become a devil, to avoid pain and anguish.³⁰ Bunyan paints a picture of himself as ignorant and undisciplined in his childhood, his sole interest being in letting ‘loose the reins to my lusts’ and delighting ‘in all transgressions against God’.³¹ This in itself is interesting, for in Knott’s words ‘suffering . . . is discipline imposed by God, and a means to growth’ and so it is very fitting that during Bunyan’s disorderly and irreverent phase he sees suffering as something to be avoided (like religion) whilst at the same time he experiences a period of spiritual stasis.³² Thus we see Bunyan, at a time when he acknowledges that ‘thoughts of Religion was [sic] very grievous to me’, acting in a way that is

²⁸ For Sharrock’s division of a Puritan spiritual autobiography see above p. 164.

²⁹ J.R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, p. 1. It is also noteworthy that whilst playing cat several years later Bunyan heard a voice from heaven ask if he would continue his sinful ways. Fearing that ‘Heaven was gone already’ Bunyan chose to take the easy way out and resolved to go on in sin, for ‘if it must be so, I had as good be damned for many sins, as to be damned for few’ (Bunyan, *GA*, p. 11). Bunyan was not alone in believing this for his sentiment echoes Joan Drake’s melancholy belief that ‘the Decree of her rejection and damnation being past and irrevocable: And therefore, all her comfort and portion being in this life, shee was resolved to spend the remainder of her time in all jollity and merriment, denying herself of no worldly comforts’ (John Hart, *Trodden Downe Strength*, p. 24). The heinous nature of taking the easy way out of a situation instead of working hard to alter one’s sinful ways is attested in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* where Worldly-Wiseman attempts to persuade Christian to abandon his pilgrimage to the Celestial City and go to the village of Morality where ‘instead of those dangers, thou shalt meet with much safety, friendship, and content’. Further on the journey we also see Christian faced with the choice of climbing Hill Difficulty or taking one of two paths that supposedly traverse its base avoids the temptation of taking the easier paths and says ‘Better, though difficult, the right way to go, Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe’. See: Bunyan, *PP*, pp. 20, 39.

³⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³² J.R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, p. 184.

almost as far away from ‘elect behaviour’ as can be imagined; in fact, his behaviour is the exact opposite of what one would expect from a pious individual and therefore falls under the jurisdiction of this category’s antithesis - a reprobate state.³³ This is an example of the early modern desire to ‘see things in terms of binary oppositions’ which has been termed ‘one of the distinctive mental and cultural traits of the age’ - in this mode of thought reprobates and the elect may be seen as ‘binary opposites’, with positive vocabulary (e.g. disciplined, pious) being used to reflect elect status and negative vocabulary (e.g. wicked, terrible) used to reflect reprobate status.³⁴ Binary oppositions are often used by seventeenth century authors to reflect their state of mind, for example, some of Trosse’s actions whilst he was living impiously are a direct inversion of those expected from a good Christian, for he notes that if he ‘forbore the Practice of some Sin for a Time, I should *grieve* for that, and *diabolically repent* of it’.³⁵

We have seen how, despite being a very sinful child and adolescent, Bunyan experienced some remorse at the sin prevalent both in himself and in those close to him. He certainly was not alone in this, for George Trosse also shared this feeling. He claimed that for his first twenty five years he lead a miserable life devoid of all godliness because he was a ‘perfect Atheist’ who lived idly, drank to excess and possessed a distinct ‘Antipathy to Godliness and the Professors of it’, yet his actions do not always reflect this, thus suggesting that grace was at work in his soul.³⁶ Whilst he considered himself to behave ‘worse than the very heathens’ at times, for his sins against God were the daring and desperate sins of ‘a Devil and a raging

³³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 8.

³⁴ S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 35.

³⁵ George Trosse, *The Life of the Reverend Mr George Trosse*, A.W. Brink (ed.), (Montreal: McGill University Press), p. 70.

³⁶ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 60, 58.

Furie', he found himself 'very *unhappily* plac'd' when he was sent to live with an irreligious family.³⁷

Until the age of fourteen or fifteen Trosse was 'seemingly more Virtuous than others, not inclined to such extravagancies and Rudeness as other Lads of my Age were' and instead was 'modest, civil, and dutiful . . . to my parents . . . and industrious in Learning'.³⁸ Even though he was 'taught the Principles of Religion, call'd upon to read the Scriptures, forbidden to sport or play upon the Lord's-Day, made to frequent the Publick Assemblies for Worship on that Day, and to sit demurely there; and should be reprov'd and corrected, if in these Respects I transgress'd', Trosse was very critical of his family.³⁹ He is quick to tell us that this show of piety in his youth was merely superficial, for he often played on the Lord's Day and 'never car'd to understand, or to retain, what I heard in Publick [Assemblies]'.⁴⁰ Surprisingly, Trosse does not claim that his lack of attentiveness towards religion was a product of his depraved human nature - as Bunyan does - instead he puts a much more earthly cause to it and maintains that it happened because he was 'never . . . call'd to an account by my Parents, after the Sermon and Service was over; and so profited nothing by all that I heard'.⁴¹

Here Trosse is referring to the lack of what Philip Goodwin (d. 1667) and John Rastrick (1650-1727) termed 'family religion' which may be loosely defined as 'a range of daily domestic spiritual practices involving a minimum of two family

³⁷ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 73, 84, 57. Trosse was also very critical of the captain of the ship he travelled on to Portugal who, though a very religious and serious man given to prayer, did not take the trouble to ensure his crew and passengers practised some form of religion whilst aboard his ship. Trosse termed this 'a great Neglect: For he ought to have accounted us as his Family, and his own Charge, and so daily have perform'd these Religious Duties with us' (Trosse, *Life*, p. 60).

³⁸ Trosse, *Life*, p. 48.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

members'.⁴² Christopher Hill has observed that such 'domestic spiritual practices' included 'prayers twice daily, three times on Sundays, . . . Bible-reading, and children and servants were catechised'.⁴³ For example, Samuel Fairclough – the same minister who we previously saw Isaac Archer confide in – took great pains to

instruct his Family in the *narrow way of Life*, by causing them to read the Scriptures *frequently* every day, and to abound in the *knowledge* of them; *treasuring* them up in their *memories*; which he would often inquire into: and by Catechising of them, *first* by a shorter Catechism of his *own* composing, and then in larger ones.⁴⁴

This method proved so successful for Fairclough that all of his children and the majority of the servants in the household were not only able to 'answer every question in a very large Catechism, but could prove every answer by express *Scripture Texts*; for they answered not like *Parrots*, but as understanding the *sum and substance of Christian Religion*'.⁴⁵

So important was this aspect of worship that in 1646 the Westminster Assembly declared that those 'who neglected family prayers and family instruction were guilty of sin' and it consequently published the Shorter Catechism (1647) because 'masters of families may need help in catechizing'.⁴⁶ Moreover, Philip Goodwin's 1655 treatise *Religio domestica rediviva: or, Family-Religion Revived* also emphasised the significance of piety within the domestic environment and claimed that 'through the neglect of religious duties in private Families . . . the very life of Religion languish[es]' for it 'grows fat, being fed with the frequent performance of Family-duties, but famished and starved to death through such duties

⁴² A. Cambers and M. Wolfe, 'Reading, Family Religion, and Evangelical Identity', p. 885.

⁴³ C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 440.

⁴⁴ 'The Life and Death of Mr. Samuel Fairclough' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 178. See above, p. 148.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁶ Both quotations: C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 440.

withdrawn'.⁴⁷ We must also remember that the concept of 'family religion' was not limited to family members only, for as Nehemiah Wallington observed 'those yt you intertaine into your family you take not only a charg of their bodis but also their soules to'.⁴⁸ Indeed, this can be seen from the actions of Samuel Fairclough who not only included the servants in his form of 'family religion' but also engaged 'to Preach constantly on *the Lords-day* . . . and once or twice on the *week* days in the Family, whither some *Neighbours* also did repair . . . It was a most happy Family, and a very delightful Society'.⁴⁹

Thus we see that Trosse's *Life* echoed Puritan concerns about worship in the home by addressing an issue not broached in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. Trosse even reinforces the importance of this issue later in his *Life* by emphasising his disgust at being apprenticed to a merchant who was not very religious. He says 'here I was very *unhappily* plac'd: For in *that Family* there was *nothing* of *Religion* to be discern'd: No *Divine Service* perform'd either Morning or Evening; but *much* of the *Devil's Service* done both by Night and by Day'.⁵⁰

The way that our godly authors depict their families is illuminating. All we were told about Bunyan's family is that they belong to 'that rank that is meanest and most despised of all the families in the land'; when he describes his marriage he does not even mention his wife's name.⁵¹ Vavasor Powell shares Bunyan's reluctance to describe his own family, for in *The Life and Death of Mr. Vavasor Powell, that faithful minister and Confessor of Jesus Christ* (1671) he tells us nothing at all about his family. Samuel Rogers' *Diary* covers the period 1634-1638 but also contains a

⁴⁷ Philip Goodwin, *Religio domestica rediviva: or Family-religion revived. Or A treatise as to discover the good old way of serving God in private houses* (London: Printed by R. & W. Leybourn, for Andrew Kemb, 1655), 'The Epistle to the Christian Readers', a2v.

⁴⁸ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 121v.

⁴⁹ 'The Life and Death of Mr. Samuel Fairclough' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 176.

⁵⁰ Trosse, *Life*, p. 57.

⁵¹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 6.

brief summary of his childhood and adolescent years along with a small amount of information on his family and schooling. The first thing Rogers tells of us his life is that for the first thirteen years he ‘lived without any reflexe thoughts; though I could stand, and answer my father, like an hypocrite, when he posed me in religious matters’.⁵² However, Rogers goes into no further detail about his family life at this stage. Trosse, on the other hand, appears proud of his lineage from the outset of the *Life* and informs us that his parents were wealthy and honourable citizens - his father was a ‘Counsellor’ and his mother was the daughter of ‘one who had twice been Chief Magistrate of that City [Exeter]’.⁵³ This also appears to be in direct contrast to Paul Delany’s assertion that ‘religious autobiographers . . . tend to pass briefly over their family origins and concentrate on the instruction of their children’.⁵⁴ Trosse was educated at a grammar school where he learnt Latin and discovered that his academic progress was ‘far beyond my Contemporaries’ - remarkably different to Bunyan’s recollection that he learnt to read and write ‘according to the rate of other poor mens children’ but ‘did soon loose [sic] that little I learnt’.⁵⁵ However, Trosse goes even further in asserting his academic superiority over his contemporaries and claims that several years after he had left his school to become a merchant his old school master said Trosse was ‘one of the most forward and likely Boys he ever taught’ and that he thought ‘my Mother did me and himself an Injury, to translate me from the School to the Exchange, from being a Scholar to a Merchant’.⁵⁶

It seems unusual that a Calvinist spiritual autobiography written by a nonconformist minister should contain such proud and boastful statements about the author’s own prowess and in this respect it is the opposite of Bunyan’s account

⁵² Rogers, *Diary*, p.1.

⁵³ Trosse, *Life*, p. 47.

⁵⁴ P. Delany, *British Autobiography*, p. 76.

⁵⁵ Trosse, *Life*, p. 47; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Trosse, *Life*, p. 48.

which exudes humility and meekness wherever possible and frowns on any self-aggrandizing remarks made in his younger years. Indeed, humility was a virtue advocated by many Puritans. Arthur Dent claimed that pride was ‘the master-pock of the soul’ as well as a tool of the devil, for when Satan can in no way prevail against some excellent servants of God, his last device is to blow them up with pride, as it were with gun-powder’.⁵⁷ Moreover, in his commentary on *Acts* Calvin remarked that ‘God passeth over him that is the chiefest in the sight of men, that he may throw down all pride which is in man’ (1:26) and also that man ‘must first be tamed by many miseries, that we learn humility. For through great prosperity men do set up the horns of pride’ (Acts 2:19) whilst also explicitly noting that ‘God hateth pride’ (Acts 12:20).⁵⁸

First Impulses Towards Religion

Thus far we have talked only of those Puritans who were impious and irreverent in their youth and lacked a sense of heart-felt belief and trust in God and Christ. Yet, as we shall see, this was not the case with all Puritans. Following the game of cat where a heavenly voice asked Bunyan ‘wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to Heaven? Or have thy sins, and go to Hell?’ the young John decided to continue in sin; yet when Powell was reprimanded for watching games on the Lord’s Day he immediately decided to ‘never transgress in the like kind again’.⁵⁹ This suggests that, even in his supposedly ungodly youth, Powell was concerned about the state of his soul. Bunyan and Trosse, in contrast, both claimed in their spiritual autobiographies to only be truly interested in earthly affairs during their adolescence. Powell’s youthful interest in his

⁵⁷ Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Man’s Path-Way to Heaven* (1601) (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd., 1974), pp. 37, 40.

⁵⁸ All quotations, John Calvin, *Commentary on Acts*, Volume 1. Available at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom36.txt> (consulted on 02.03.06).

⁵⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, p.10; Powell, *Life*, p. 2.

own soul is evident in other ways. Almost a year after he had been reprimanded by the old man, Powell heard a sermon that made him fearful of his own eternal condition. Powell examined himself to see if he was ‘such a one as was singular, or did walk in that way wherein fewest walked’ and performed the four types of service ‘that they who would go to heaven must do’ yet to his horror and shame he found that ‘the more I examined my self, the more I was convinced I was not’.⁶⁰ However, shortly after this incident Powell maintained that reading Richard Sibbes’ *Bruised Reed* and hearing a sermon preached by his local minister caused him to take up ‘the profession of Godliness’ for the words of both entered into his heart.⁶¹

Samuel Rogers experienced a moment of divine revelation that significantly changed his days when he was around fourteen years of age. Rogers attended a sermon given by Thomas Weld, the vicar of Terling (1625-1631), who preached on Luke 14:7-24 and the notion that earthly pleasures keep men from heaven.⁶² The message of the sermon touched Rogers ‘to the quicke’ and sent him sobbing home because he felt the vicar’s words addressed his own condition perfectly, for he considered himself to have been kept from God by his own ‘play, and pleasure’.⁶³ Following the sermon he ‘cast of[f] any pleasures’ and determined to live piously and studiously.⁶⁴ Rogers claimed that, originally, he only chose to attend the sermon because he ‘desired noveltyes . . . that I might see a new towne; and hear a new man’ yet, on reflection, he saw the hand of God in sending him there so that he would be awakened.⁶⁵ Thus we see that Rogers’ youth was the exact opposite of L.D. Lerner’s

⁶⁰ Powell, *Life*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 3.

⁶² Thomas Weld was a zealous Puritan minister with a powerful personality who took considerable steps to discipline the religious and moral lives of his parishioners. For more about Weld’s time at Terling see: K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, pp. 137-139, 159-161 and M.P. Winship, ‘Weld, Thomas’ in *Oxford DNB*.

⁶³ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

notion of the typical pattern for spiritual autobiographers - instead of being a serious child but an irreligious adolescent, Rogers experienced the reverse and was hot-headed and ungodly in childhood (though he did not claim to be the 'chief of sinners' as Powell and Bunyan did), yet pious in adolescence.

Cicely Johnson claimed to be 'the chiefest for girls' sports and 'many other evils' yet she also maintained that these sins emerged from her 'corrupt nature'.⁶⁶ This is an important claim because not only does she maintain to be the chief of sinners but she also acknowledges that her sins are a product of her own depraved human nature instead of being partially brought on by overindulgence on the part of family and friends. Johnson notes that she had particularly godly parents who 'would not suffer mee full swinge in those evils' and often reprimanded and corrected her.⁶⁷ She was also well-educated and, unlike any of our previous autobiographers at this age, spent plenty of time reading the Scriptures and sermon books and it was this reading, Johnson notes, that 'brought mee to the knowledg of God & my selfe in time'.⁶⁸ Indeed, to emphasise the powerful effect reading the Bible had on her life, Johnson mentions how she 'did read it over & over in my yong daies . . . [and] by reading in the Scriptures so often & the Lord strengthening my memory, I came to know, that which blind nature could not teach mee'.⁶⁹

Before the age of ten Johnson became fascinated with the way in which the godly lived and quickly decided that this was the only suitable way of living; thus, more than anything, she desired to become a virtuous woman when she was older. So 'spiritually precocious' (when compared with our other spiritual autobiographers) was the young Johnson that by the age of twelve or thirteen she had begun 'to

⁶⁶ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 29.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

conceive of the mystery of the holy trinitie God the father, God the sonne, & God the holy Ghost' as well as beginning to 'understand & conceive of the two Sacraments . . . & the benefits that the soule partaketh of them'.⁷⁰ This precocity becomes even more apparent when we discover that, at the age of fifteen, Johnson began to 'reprove others, . . . [since she] had the scriptures at my command to censure others'.⁷¹ Johnson appears to have had the most godly childhood and adolescence of our five spiritual autobiographers, for she was not only outwardly pious but also seems to have possessed an understanding of some key theological concepts – she appears to have been 'religiously precocious'.

Age and Religious Experience

Such precocity does not seem to be unique. Elizabeth Isham explains in her *Booke of Rememnerance* [sic]. (c. 1640) that 'about this time being as I take it the eight yeare of my age, I came to a fuller knowledge of thee [God]; that whereas before I aprehended thee to be Glorious in thy selfe that thou art God (so by their Education which they gave me & their [her family's] good example) now I understood that thou wert able both to heare and help us'.⁷² Lady Elizabeth Langham possessed a similar demeanour in her childhood, for Samuel Clarke commented on 'how early the seeds of true Piety and Devotion put forth and showed themselves . . . insomuch that from a Child, such impression of the fear of God possess'd her heart, as made her a diligent performer of religious Duties, and a strict observer of the Lords dayes, even to a degree of exactness beyond most Persons'.⁷³ Moreover, as Henry Jessey notes, Sarah Wight was 'of a *tender* heart, and oft afflicted in Spirit' from her childhood

⁷⁰ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 31.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷² Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Rememnerance*, p. 6.

⁷³ 'The Life and Death of the Right Honourable, the Lady Elizabeth Langham, *who died*, Anno Christi, 1664' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 197.

and following a period of severe religious melancholy when she was around fifteen years old, Wight became a sort of ‘religious adviser’ to those suffering similar doubts and fears in her neighbourhood.⁷⁴ Many people would come and visit her bedside whilst she was recovering from her ordeal and they would converse with her about God’s dealings with them and other spiritual matters. Moreover, the advice she gave any who came to her in spiritual distress was clearly respected and appreciated; for example, a young lady Wight spoke with initially felt that she was ‘without God, [and] an enemy to him’ yet by the end of the conversation she is feeling much more upbeat and acknowledges that she ‘may have some hope that the Lord may deliver me’.⁷⁵ When fully recovered from her own sickness Wight even travelled around her neighbourhood trying to help those in despair, as Jessey notes, ‘her heart was drawn out to go to two women, that were in deep despaire, for refreshing them by the comforts shee had received, being greatly affected with their sad conditions: And the day following . . . shee so went, to another woman in like condition’.⁷⁶ During her lifetime Wight was celebrated ‘like a charismatic saint of old, for the performance of a miracle and her powers of healing’, yet Michael Mascuch notes that Jessey’s presentation of her in *The Exceeding Riches of Grace* also suggests that she may be viewed as a ‘child-“minister”’ for she is depicted as a fount of spiritual knowledge and advice with her own ‘bedside congregation’ also making ‘pastoral’ visits to those weighed down by despair.⁷⁷

Yet the existence of such ‘spiritual precocity’ amongst our autobiographers may also seem somewhat surprising considering that, as Keith Thomas notes, in

⁷⁴ Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 113.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁷⁷ M. Mascuch, ‘The Godly Child’s “Power and evidence” in the Word: Orality and Literacy in the Ministry of Sarah Wight’ in A. Immel and M. Witmore (eds.), *Childhood and Children’s Books in Early Modern Europe, 1550-1800* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 104, 109.

early modern England ‘the full Christian life was not for adolescents’ for the ‘prevailing ideal was gerontocratic: the young were to serve and the old were to rule’ – what Mascuch terms ‘religious adulthood’ (or perhaps we could say, ‘spiritual maturity’) was generally considered to come later on in life.⁷⁸ Indeed, Jessey even notes that some of his readers would ‘*hardly beleeve*’ that Wight’s words ‘*should flow from a childe, not sixteen yeers old*’, which surely indicates that a genuine, lasting, appreciation of, and possibly even mastery in, spiritual affairs whilst still at a young age was an uncommon occurrence.⁷⁹ During this period it was accepted that pre-pubescent children might be afforded flashes of divine insight and inspiration for many believed that ‘individuals who had not yet reached adolescence were capable of closer mystical communication than adults with God’ and so proving the truth of Psalm 8:2: ‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and avenger’.⁸⁰ Thus we see that Wight’s experiences are doubly unusual for her age as it was rare for a child to be so au fait with spiritual affairs yet, paradoxically, in terms of childhood many would have considered her too old to be receiving such direct communication with God.

What was also highly unusual was for a child or adolescent to advise their elders in matters of religion in the way that Sarah Wight did, not least because it was generally believed that the soul grew along with the body – as Thomas Fuller notes, ‘a new-born infant should have a smal soul, a weaned childe a soul somewhat greater, and so successively, that the souls of boyes, youths, striplings, men, should

⁷⁸ K. Thomas, ‘Age and Authority in Early Modern England’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 62 (1976), pp. 205-248. Quotations on pp. 225, 207; M. Mascuch, ‘The Godly Child’s “Power and evidence” in the Word’, p. 109.

⁷⁹ Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace*, fo. A6v.

⁸⁰ A. Walsham, “‘Out of the Mouths of Babes and Sucklings’: Prophecy, Puritanism, and Childhood in Elizabethan Suffolk’ in D. Wood (ed.), *The Church and Childhood*, Studies in Church History, 31, (Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1994), p. 295.

gradually exceed one another in greatness'.⁸¹ Yet Wight's experiences are a direct inversion of what was usually expected of a child and given that Jessey's account was extremely popular amongst contemporaries, becoming a veritable religious best-seller when it sold nine editions in twenty years, it is here that we see, once again, an example of what Clark has deemed the early modern fascination with binary oppositions.⁸² However, we must not forget Thomas' assertion that in early modern England there was 'a common . . . preference for precocious infants who rapidly assumed the externals of adult behaviour, revealing themselves to be pious or learned before their time'.⁸³

This earnest desire for children to be wise and pious beyond their years can be recognised in Ralph Josselin's diary for here he recounts the death of his eight year old daughter Mary who was 'a child of ten thousand, full of wisdom, woman-like gravity, knowledge, sweet expressions of god, apt in her learning,] tender hearted and loving, an [obed]ient child [to us.] it was free from [the rudeness of] little children'.⁸⁴ Edward Scarfield noted that his eleven year old daughter was so

⁸¹ Thomas Fuller, *The Infants Advocate* (London: Printed by R. Norton, for J. Williams, 1653), pp. 142-143.

⁸² See I. Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 416 and compare with the popularity of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* which sold ten editions in the sixty years between 1666 and 1726 (Green, *Print and Protestantism*, Appendix 1); S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 35.

⁸³ K. Thomas, 'Age and Authority', p. 210.

⁸⁴ Josselin, *Diary*, p. 203. Lengthy displays of grief at the death of a child were not directly in line with Puritan teachings because, as Richard Sibbes observed, 'God takes it unkindly if we weepe too much, and over-grieve for losse of wife, child, or friend . . . for it is a signe wee fetch not that comfort from him, which we should and may do'; thus Puritans were encouraged to 'pass a sentence of death upon eery thing that can properly be called a thing of this life' (Sibbes quoted in Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 27; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 89). The fact that authors were frequently unable to control their grief highlights the disparity between reality and the Puritan 'ideal' form of faith – even Bunyan admitted that being parted from his family during his time in jail was 'as the pulling the flesh from my bones' (Bunyan, *GA*, p. 89).

Nevertheless, such an open display of grief at the loss of a child was not solely a Puritan preserve. The Anglican diarist and writer, John Evelyn (1620-1706) recorded his sorrow at the death of his five year old son, Richard, in his diary. In his moving tribute to Richard, Evelyn described his son as 'the prettiest, and dearest Child, that ever parents had, being but 5 years [old] . . . but even at that tender age, a prodigee for Witt, & understanding; for beauty of body a very Angel, & for endowments of mind, of incredible & rare hopes'. He was also a child prodigy possessing skills 'far

pious that neither ‘a Lie, or an Oath hath ever come out of her mouth; neither would she have wronged any tothe [sic] value of a Pin’.⁸⁵ Whilst Lucy Hutchinson happily noted that ‘play among other children I despised, and when I was forced to entertain such as came to visit me, I tired them with more grave instructions than their mothers’ though she claims she was ‘very acceptable’ to elder company.⁸⁶ And it was said of John Lamont that ‘even in his younger years, he was never given to, nor delighted with those vain and sinful sports and pastimes to which youth ordinarily is too much addicted, and so hard to be weaned from’.⁸⁷

We could say that the proclaimed youthful piety of Cicely Johnson and George Trosse appears to fall into this category, yet the spirituality of Sarah Wight is something altogether different. Not only does Sarah seem to be precocious in her own piety, adults actually turn to her for advice on their spiritual dilemmas - thus suggesting that there is something unique about Sarah’s piety, something that most adults do not possess and are eager to learn from. Moreover, Wight’s form of spiritual precocity most closely resembles the piety of the young Jesus. According to the gospel of St Luke when Christ was only twelve years old he was found ‘in the

exceeding his age & experience’. See John Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. G. de la Bédoyère (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), pp. 106-107.

Evelyn also dedicated his translation of St John Chrysostom’s *Golden Book* (1659) to the memory of Richard. In the ‘epistle dedicatory’ Evelyn recorded how he was still oppressed by sorrow for ‘the loss of my Children, and especially of that *One*, so precious to me [Richard]’ because ‘of all the afflictions wch can touch the heart in this life, one of the most superlative is the loss of a hopeful child’. Evelyn then dedicates over three quarters of the ‘epistle dedicatory’ to describing the accomplishments of his precious child. See St John Chrysostom, *The Golden Booke of St John Chrysostom, Concerning the Education of Children*, trans. John Evelyn (London: Printed by D.M. for G. Bedel and T. Collins, at the Middle Temple Gate in Fleet Street, 1659), sigs. A4r-v, A5v. For Evelyn’s moving tribute to Richard see ‘Epistle Dedicatory’, *passim*.

⁸⁵ Henry Jessey and Abraham Cheare, *A Looking Glass for Children being a narrative of God’s gracious dealings with some little children* (London: Printed for Robert Boulter, 1673), p. 20.

⁸⁶ Lucy Hutchinson, *The Life of Mrs Lucy Hutchinson* (c.1664-1671) reprinted in N.H. Keeble (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 15.

⁸⁷ ‘The Life and Death of Sir John Lamont’ in Clarke, *Lives*, pp. 102-103. Yet we must not forget that not all who were pious in later life were serious and godly during their childhood as, for example, Bunyan and Trosse were far from godly children and so was Margaret Baxter (the wife of Richard Baxter) of whom it was said that ‘in her younger days, Pride, Vanity and Romances, and such like Company, were her delight’. See ‘The Life and Death of Margaret Baxter’ in Clarke *Lives*, p. 181.

temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers' (Luke 2:46-47) – thus showing that Jesus possessed an unusually developed awareness of religion for one so young. Consequently, it would seem that those diarists and autobiographers who explicitly record that they were exceptionally pious in their youth are attempting to emulate the experience of Christ himself by following a path to spiritual maturity at an unusually young age. Consequently, Wight's experiences defy the model exemplified in many didactic tracts of the period where 'docile Youth was taught by wise Old Age' and the insolence and impetuosity of youthfulness was berated by many – in *The Winter's Tale* the shepherd wished that there 'were no age between ten and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest, for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancients, stealing, fighting' (3:2).⁸⁸

Thus we see that childhood and adolescence were generally expected to be periods of spiritual inexperience. Was this the only way in which age influenced spiritual development? Keith Thomas has argued that a 'septenary numerology . . . made twenty-one, like seven (the end of innocence) and fourteen (the age of discretion), into a point of particular significance in a boy's life. (For girls the reckoning tended to be duodecimal: six, twelve, and eighteen)'.⁸⁹ These ages were legally and socially significant in a youth's gradual transition to adulthood, yet were they also spiritually significant? Did important changes in an individual's religious development also take place at these milestone years? Thomas does not consider

⁸⁸ K. Thomas, 'Age and Authority', p. 210.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

whether these ‘milestone years’ in a youth’s secular life were also important years in their religious development so we shall now briefly consider this point.⁹⁰

Twelve was certainly a key age in Sarah Wight’s spiritual development for, as Jessey records, ‘her Temptations were not so great, till shee was about *twelve* yeares old, since which, they have continued with more violence’.⁹¹ Cicely Johnson notes that she was around twelve or thirteen when she began to receive ‘common grace’ from God and so began ‘to conceive of the mystery of the holy trinitie God the father, God the sonne, & God the holy Ghost’ and she also developed a ‘kind of zeale’ that enabled her to fight her own natural evils.⁹² Between the age of twelve and fourteen Hannah Allen found that ‘it pleased God to work in me earnest breathings after the ways of God, but the enemy of my Soul striving to crush such hopeful beginnings in the bud, cast in horrible blasphemous thoughts and injections into my mind’.⁹³ Elizabeth Isham painfully recalls that when she was twelve years old her mother told her ‘that the godly should suffer punishment for there sinnes in this life’ and this made her weep despondently ‘fearing what I might undergoe for my sinnes . . . not calling to mind thy great mercie in suffering us to scapt with a temporall punishment’ – which could suggest that twelve was also an age when parents deemed their children old enough to learn some of the more painful truths of Christianity.⁹⁴ Moreover, Elizabeth Wilkinson records that she was about twelve years old when she was converted after reading Lewis Bayly’s *The Practice of Piety* which greatly affected her ensuring that from that time forth her ‘heart was wrought

⁹⁰ Regrettably, it is not always possible to tell how old authors of spiritual autobiographies are when key spiritual events occur in their lives as many do not record the date or their precise age throughout their work. Consequently I have been limited to considering only those authors who specifically mention their age, or those whose age I am able to discover because of textual references to specific events of the period.

⁹¹ Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace*, p. 6.

⁹² Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 31.

⁹³ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian Mrs. Hannah Allen*, (London: Printed by John Wallis, 1683), pp. 2-3.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 53.

over to walk in the wayes of God'.⁹⁵ Sarah Davy also found that her twelfth year was important in her spiritual development for it was then that God decided to send 'new allarums *to awaken my drowsie soul*, which was so willing to be lulled a sleep by Satan'.⁹⁶

Despite the fact that, according to the gospel of St Luke, Christ was twelve years old when he visited the temple 'to hear the teachers of our Law, and to propose what might improve My knowledge or their own', many seventeenth-century male spiritual diarists and autobiographers do experience significant changes in their piety in accordance with a septenary numerology.⁹⁷ When Thomas Halyburton was approximately thirteen or fourteen, he found that 'the Lord . . . enlightened my mind further in the notional knowledge of the law and gospel'.⁹⁸ He also discovered that his conscience became more active at this time and that the checks it made upon his actions were now 'more frequent, and sharp, and not so easily to be evaded'.⁹⁹ George Trosse notes that he was fourteen or fifteen when his really sinful behaviour began, because it was at this age that he chose to leave home and travel which caused him to be 'easily led into *great Sins* and *dangerous Snares*, and so laid . . . open to very *great Evils* of several Kinds'.¹⁰⁰ In his *Confessions* (1640) Richard Norwood avers that he was '12 or 14 years of age . . . the corruption of my heart did much more manifest it self actually then before, whereupon I doubted much of

⁹⁵ 'The Life and Death of Mrs. Elizabeth Wilkinson' in Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of Thirty-Two English Divines famous in their generations for learning and piety*, (London: Printed for William Birch, 1677), p. 420.

⁹⁶ Sarah Davy, *Heaven Realized, or, The Holy pleasure of daily intimate communion with God exemplified in a blessed soul* (London: s.n., 1670), p. 6.

⁹⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Regained* (1671) reprinted in E. Gosse (ed.), *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (London: Ward, Lock & Co. Ltd., c.1900), p. 221. See also Luke 2:46-47.

⁹⁸ Thomas Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 45.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ Trosse, *Life*, p. 49.

salvation if I should dy in that estate'.¹⁰¹ Samuel Rogers recalls that for 'the first 13. yeares of my life. I lived without any reflexe thoughts; though I could stand, and answer my father, like an hypocrite, when he posed mee in religious matters' – thus indicating that his fourteenth year saw a substantial change in his religious development and the depth of his piety. Indeed, when Rogers was fourteen he found that the prayers of his local minister were able to bring him to tears and he was 'touched to the quicke' by his sermon.¹⁰² Moreover, it is also interesting that Rogers chose to begin keeping his spiritual diary when he was twenty-one years old. He says 'I have long bene thinking of a general view of my life; and some hurrying thoughts, or other have caused mee to desist often: I am now this moneth (Novemb: 30. 1634.) of the age of 21 So many yeares I have; Bine; but I have Lived but few of them; Sure then now I am of age; what if I count my yeares? Lord, teach mee to number my yeares past, that I may apply my heart to wisdome, to holiness the few dayes, that are behind'.¹⁰³ It is also interesting that Nehemiah Wallington found himself severely tempted by the Devil when he was approximately twenty-one years of age and he consequently made several attempts to take his own life.¹⁰⁴

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We have seen that Puritan spiritual autobiographies and diaries were not carbon copies of each other – there were many subtle variations between each text. These variations give each autobiography a unique feel and suggest that it is impossible to simply say that Puritans sought to create 'more a corporate than a

¹⁰¹ Richard Norwood, *Confessions* (1640) reprinted in J. Stachniewski and A. Pacheco (eds.), *Grace Abounding with Other Spiritual Autobiographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 143. See appendix 1 for a brief biography of Norwood.

¹⁰² Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Wallington, *Record*, pp. 3-5.

unique personality' as Dean Ebner has claimed.¹⁰⁵ However, we have also seen that age was clearly an important factor in the religious development of seventeenth-century English Puritans and we also need to ask ourselves whether physical changes or the attainment of recognised social and legal milestones could also have caused individuals to reflect on their own spiritual condition. Yet, what we must remember is that even though our diarists and spiritual autobiographers do frequently experience important spiritual revelations at around seven, fourteen and twenty-one years for boys, and six, twelve and eighteen years for girls, what they experience is not identical, neither is the course their religious development takes in-between and after these key years.

¹⁰⁵ D. Ebner, *Autobiography*, p. 48.

Chapter 4

Initial Experiences of Grace

But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound
Romans 5:20

Divine grace was the core element of an individual's spiritual development, for without it there could be no salvation. Grace formed the basis of conversion and ensured that the believer would be re-born as a true Christian, no longer utterly depraved. As Bunyan noted, 'God saveth us by grace' and has ordained to do so because 'this is the way that is fastest, and best secureth the Soul' since 'to be saved by grace supposeth that God hath taken the salvation of our souls into his own hands'.¹

The insistence that grace played a pivotal role in Christian life is exemplified in Calvin's theology. As Guenther H. Haas has observed, in Calvin's theology 'reason is so blinded by the effects of sin that only the renewing work of the grace of God in the human heart, and the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit, enable the heart to accept, the mind to understand, and the will to pursue the ethical life that God requires'.² William Perkins shared this pessimistic view of human nature and also maintained the importance of grace when he claimed that it was 'a gift of God's Spirit whereby the corruption of sin is not only restrained, but also mortified, and the decayed image of God restored in righteousness and true holiness' – thereby indicating that grace was able to regenerate even the most heinously sinful heart.³ Indeed, Nehemiah Wallington avowed that any goodness within him came from the free grace he had been granted by Christ for he considered himself to be an

¹ John Bunyan, *Saved by Grace* (1676), reprinted in R.L. Greaves (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan* (13 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), VIII, pp. 210-211.

² G.H. Haas, 'Calvin's Ethics' in D.K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 93.

³ William Perkins, *A Grain of Mustard Seed* (1597) reprinted in Perkins, *Work*, p. 396.

‘altogether polluted and unrighteous creature being backward to everything that is good’.⁴ But what exactly was grace?

The Nature of Grace

According to Bunyan, grace may be defined as ‘God’s goodwill, “the goodwill of him that dwelt in the bush”’ for the word ‘grace’ ‘doth most properly set for the true cause of man’s happiness with God . . . so then when he saith, “By grace ye are saved,” it is all one as if he had said, By the goodwill, free mercy, loving-kindness of God ye are saved’.⁵ Bunyan was adamant that the giving of grace was a matter of divine prerogative for he maintained that ‘God doth this [save a sinner by applying grace] to whom and when he pleases’.⁶ Divine grace was a highly valuable gift that most Christians spent their lives striving to obtain.

Bridget Cooke exemplifies this desperate hunt for grace remarkably well.

R.P. records that

she was exceedingly thirsty after grace so yt she would in a manner complaine sometime to some of her ffrinds of her thirst & say she was so thirsty for grace that she knew not what to doe for thirst . . . yea she did so thirst after more grace yt though she had attained a great measure of grace, exceeding most other Christians in ye measure of it, yet she professed that she would not for a thousand pounds but get more grace.⁷

So great was Cooke’s desire for divine grace that she maintained she ‘knew not how to live with such a portion of grace as ordinary Christians had’.⁸ Her hankerings after grace show us that to simply possess it was not enough; what really mattered in many people’s eyes was the nature and extent of grace’s operation within them. Here

⁴ Wallington, *Growth*, fos. 12r, 6v.

⁵ Bunyan, *Saved by Grace*, pp. 183-184. ‘The goodwill of him that dwelt in the bush’ is a reference to Deuteronomy 33:16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁷ R.P., *Some Passages of Mrs Bridget Cooke or a briefe record of her heavenly life and conversation* (Dr Williams’s Library, London, MS 28.9(5)), fo. 4r.

⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 4r.

great problems arose, for how could a person assuredly know they possessed divine grace and, even, if they could identify the workings of such grace, how could they ever truly know the extent to which it had permeated their souls? In many ways both these questions were unanswerable – after all, Calvin averred that man should never attempt to delve into God’s plan, and surely the amount and extent of divine grace in one’s soul is a matter open to interpretation – yet, nevertheless, they greatly preoccupied the minds of seventeenth-century Puritans.⁹

Indications of Grace

I. Biblical Incursions

One of the very first things Bunyan advised readers of *Grace Abounding* to do was to ‘be often calling to mind the very beginnings of Grace with their souls’ for he considered this to be an activity most ‘profitable for Christians’.¹⁰ Even at the very end of his account the importance of grace is still readily apparent for he notes that ‘blessed is such an one! To whom the Lord gives grace, true grace, for that is a certain forerunner of glory’.¹¹ But what sort of signs did seventeenth-century Puritans receive suggesting God’s goodwill towards their souls?

Bunyan’s first indication of God’s benevolent feeling towards him came whilst he was playing a game of cat with his friends and a heavenly voice asked if he would leave his sins and go to Heaven or carry on in sin and go to Hell.¹² After hearing this voice Bunyan claimed that he saw ‘with the eyes of my understanding . . . the Lord Jesus looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me,

⁹ Calvin maintained that anyone who wished to uncover more of God’s secret plan asked ‘for something greater and more sublime than the will of God’ and would surely find himself ‘lost in a labyrinth from which the mind of man can in no way extricate itself’ for God’s will and actions were deemed beyond human understanding. See Calvin, *Institutes* (III.xxiii.2), p. 505 and W.J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 173.

¹⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these, and other my [sic] ungodly practices'.¹³ This certainly suggests that God is interested in Bunyan's soul because in Calvinist theology Christ is the mediator between God and man and it is his duty to save the elect. As Calvin notes whilst commenting about predestination, 'though Christ interposes as a Mediator, yet he claims the right of electing in common with the Father . . . We must indeed hold that when he affirms that he knows whom he has chosen, first, that some individuals of the human race are denoted; and secondly, that they are not distinguished by the qualities of their virtues, but by a heavenly decree'.¹⁴ Hence it is highly significant when Bunyan specifically mentions that it is Christ (as opposed to the 'whisperings' of the Holy Spirit or the voice of God) who intervenes in his life in an attempt to stop him living in such a sinful and frivolous manner, as this suggests that Bunyan is a member of the elect and Christ made him aware of his sins. Because, as Calvin insists, 'he knows whom he has chosen' and is consequently aware that Bunyan is one of the few to be saved. Thus we see that Bunyan's first experience of grace does not only show him that God cares for him - it also awakens him to his own sinful condition.

Previously, Bunyan appeared to have sinned unthinkingly. He appeared ignorant of the consequences of his actions and, I would argue, this was because he did not connect the punishment for sin (eternal perdition - for 'the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ' [Rom. 6:23]) with his own behaviour; before this experience he seemed to be remote from the spiritual sphere of events and consequently his heart and mind appeared firmly rooted in carnal affairs. Although Bunyan clearly knows of the existence of Hell and the fact that it could be his lot 'to be found at last among those Devils and Hellish Fiends,

¹³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 10.

¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* (III.xxii.8), p. 500.

who are . . . bound down with the chains and bonds of eternal darkness', he only experiences fleeting moments of awareness and comprehension of these facts, for he notes that he 'soon forgot' the troubling dreams and visions of devils and hellfire and went on to 'let loose the reins to my lusts, and delighted in all transgressions against the Law of God'.¹⁵ It would seem that Bunyan needed a catalyst to make him remember the perilous condition of his soul and realise that worldly affairs were merely a prelude to spiritual concerns. Thus when Jesus 'spoke' to Bunyan the fact that he had sinned against God was brought home to him, his spiritual life was forced to the forefront of his mind to take precedence over worldly matters and the abstract notion that sinners go to Hell could well have been replaced by the thought '*I am a sinner, therefore I am destined for damnation*'.

R.T. Kendall used the traditional term 'practical syllogism' to denote 'drawing a conclusion by reflecting upon oneself'.¹⁶ Yet perhaps, with reference to Bunyan's experiences, we can be more specific and identify the existence of a 'positive' practical syllogism – when a Christian reflects upon his own spiritual condition and beliefs, remembers the promises of God and realises that he will be saved – and a 'negative' practical syllogism where (as we have just seen with Bunyan) a Christian is prompted to look at his own sins and realise that, without God's grace and mercy, they mean nothing but damnation for him. Consequently, we could say Bunyan experiences a 'negative' practical syllogism that forces him to consider his own sins, yet this turns out to have a beneficial outcome for, with

¹⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 7.

¹⁶ R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p. 8. Kendall informs us that the term 'practical syllogism' may have been coined by the sixteenth century theologian and author of the Heidelberg Catechism, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583). It was also a term used by William Perkins, who saw the 'practical syllogism' as a way for a believer to gain 'experimentall certaintie of the truth of the Bible' and know that 'hee is in the number of the elect'. See Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p. 8.

hindsight, it can be seen as the first indication of grace and Christ's concern for his soul.

George Trosse, however, experiences things somewhat differently. Like Bunyan he finds himself faced with a 'negative' practical syllogism for his first intense spiritual experience - when he sees a shadow at the bottom of his bed and hears a disembodied voice ask '*who art thou?*' – and is forced to acknowledge that he is '*a very great Sinner*', yet all ends in disaster when a few minutes later the same voice tells him he has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost and so can never be redeemed; thus beginning a lengthy period of religious melancholy.¹⁷ What is apparent in both these episodes is that a sinner must first be made aware of the depth of his own sinfulness and consequent need for a saviour before salvation can run its course – Bunyan would second this, for in his *Instructions for the Ignorant* he claims that 'it is God's ordinary way to convince men of this their sad Condition before he revealeth to them the righteousness of Faith, or work Faith in them to lay hold of that Righteousness'.¹⁸ Initial experiences of grace appear to begin this reflective process, where the sinner is made to take a close look at himself and declare that he is heinously sinful and in desperate need of a saviour.

The very first experience of grace may not always be successful in making a sinner feel culpable for his own sins and thus deeply reliant on Christ - divine grace needs time and reapplication in order to work - but, without fail, it will undoubtedly make the sinner more receptive to religion and possibly even outwardly pious. *Grace Abounding* shows this to be the case when, after hearing Christ personally address him, Bunyan resolves to continue in his sinful ways though finds himself ashamed at being overheard swearing as he suddenly felt as if he was caught doing so 'before

¹⁷ Trosse, *Life*, p. 86.

¹⁸ John Bunyan, *Instruction for the Ignorant* (1675) reprinted in R.L. Greaves (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan* (13 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), VIII, p. 31.

the God of Heaven' – something which certainly did not trouble him before when he 'could my self sin with greatest delight and ease'.¹⁹

Samuel Rogers also heard heavenly voices speaking to him, yet in his account these voices have a different function; instead of exhorting him to repentance, what Rogers hears is the voice of God encouraging and comforting him in times of despair and loneliness. He found that God 'comforted mee with many secret ejaculations, and kept up my wofull flagging heart' and this made him certain that 'the lord faileth me never'.²⁰ By continually recording the succour that God provides him with, Rogers appears to have a closer relationship with his divine creator. However, it is also the nature of diary writing that makes the relationship between God and Rogers seem so close. With Rogers making daily entries at times, his writing seems to be much more focussed on his spiritual development and relationship with God than the authors of spiritual autobiographies (like Bunyan and Trosse) who occasionally relate the happenings of a period of several months, or even years, in a matter of words. Almost inevitably, an account charting day-to-day progress in spiritual affairs is going to seem more connected and have more of a 'flowing' feel to it than one which leaps through time only stopping at what the author considers to be key moments in his spiritual development.

As well as hearing 'heavenly voices' Rogers also frequently makes observations that suggest he is a member of the elect and indicate the presence of divine grace in his soul. For example, he notes that 'the Lord hath bine pleased sweetely to refresh my pore fainting, my lapsing heart' and that this feeling of reinvigoration lasts until the next day when he observes that 'the Lord gratuslye hath continued the life, he breathed into me yesterday so that this day I have not

¹⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 12, 8.

²⁰ Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 4, 5.

walked so carelessly, as sometimes'; thereby indicating God's continued support.²¹ This relationship is reflected in Rogers' frequent descriptions of the Lord's intervention in his life. He notes that God 'who ment mee [for] better things' prevented him from renouncing his pious ways when he was tempted to do so by Satan; that 'the lord hath banished evell in some measure; melted my heart, made it to stoope to him; fetched downe deadnes over which he hath given mee a victorye'; that the lord 'raised mee up marvailouslye and added some more power'; that 'the Lord hath enlivened, enlarged my hearte, and given sweetnes in calling upon his name'; that 'the Lord caryes me thorough still, by grace I am upheld' and 'the L[or]d caryes mee on through the day and gives mee strength he humbles my soule, and brings mee to stoop'.²² Such expressions suggest that Rogers' believes God actively intervenes in his life to give him strength and ensure he continues to live in a godly manner. As a consequence of this divine assistance the tone of Rogers' *Diary* appears to be much more upbeat. However, the frequency of references to God's support make Rogers seem like a puppet in the Lord's hands for he repeatedly shows that he is completely dependent on God. He continually records how powerless he feels when God's presence seems far away and maintains that he is 'not able to stand, by my selfe' for 'if thou [God] withdrawest thy hand, I am nothing'.²³

Such feelings of helplessness were common in seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographies where the author experienced biblical incursions or detected God's daily presence in his or her life. In the first few sentences of her spiritual autobiography Cicely Johnson shows the same utter dependence on God, for she

²¹ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 8.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 12, 16, 37, 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 20. Towards the end of the *Diary* Rogers reiterates his own sense of helplessness and states that 'if God disinherits me a little, I am nothing' (p. 133).

claims that ‘without the help of my God I can doe nothing’.²⁴ Nehemiah Wallington noted that if he ‘had not a God that accepts true desiers & poore indeavors & a saviour to make full satisfaction I wake then a lost and an undon man’, whilst Agnes Beaumont, who felt God was her only ally when she was accused of patricide, emphatically maintained that ‘had not the lord stood by me, and strengthened me, I had certainly sanck down under gods hand that night. But he was faithful, who did not suffer me to be tempted and afflicted above what I was able’.²⁵ Such emotion can also be seen across the Atlantic in New England for Thomas Shepard, noted that ‘I could plead nothing in myself in regard of any worthiness or grace or anything in regard of God[’s] providence or promise, but only his good pleasure. I saw it was not if I willed but if he will, then I should see and believe and live’.²⁶ Voicing this feeling of utter helplessness and despair in such a direct and unambiguous manner suggests that these authors have an open and emotive relationship with God for their very beings appear to ache when God does not communicate directly with them. These feelings are comparable with Bunyan’s fear that he has ‘sold’ Christ and therefore lost all hope of salvation, which makes him feel ‘like a man bereft of all life, and as now past all recovery, and bound over to eternal punishment’.²⁷

II. The Awakening of the Conscience

Thus far we have seen how hearing heavenly voices could be an indication that grace was at work in a person’s heart. Yet divine grace was certainly not experienced in a

²⁴ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 29.

²⁵ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 63v; Beaumont, *Narrative*, p. 210. However, we should be aware that when Wallington actually felt the iciness of God’s displeasure he simply said ‘my God hiding his face and I am troubled yeet minding the Lords day that then I will steick close to the Lord in holy duties’ which seems to articulate a sense of discomfort, but not utter despair and despondency. See Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 49v.

²⁶ Thomas Shepard’s *Journal* printed in M. McGiffert (ed.), *God’s Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. 94.

²⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 40.

universal fashion by all its recipients. Cicely Johnson, George Trosse and Thomas Halyburton all find that their own consciences begin to alert them to the perilous condition of their souls, rather than being awakened to their state by a heavenly voice. Johnson informs us that she was in possession of ‘a scrupeiling conscience’ during her youth, which enabled her to grieve for any sins she committed – even when she was only twelve years of age.²⁸ We can see why the ability to grieve and repent for sins committed is an indication of grace if we briefly consider an incident in *Grace Abounding*. One of Bunyan’s most distressing moments arose when he considered himself guilty of committing the Unpardonable Sin (blaspheming against the Holy Ghost). He was aware that a person who committed this sin would be unable to repent fully and therefore would be shown no divine forgiveness. Consequently, he found himself tormented by the lamentable case of Esau, who sold his own birthright and then found himself unable to repent. Bunyan likened his own condition to that of Esau and found the words ‘afterwards when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears’ to be incessantly echoing in his ears, reminding him of the importance of full and true repentance, which could only be divinely granted and therefore remained elusive to those reprobates in possession of temporary faith alone.²⁹ Consequently, the fact that Johnson claims to be able to sincerely grieve for her sins at such a young age is a clear indication of God’s good will towards her.

Trosse claimed that after spending a frivolous year in Pontive he returned to Morlaix ‘loaden with a great deal more Guilt than lay upon me, when before I had left it’ and he noted that when he reflected upon his present state he was ‘greatly asham’d, and displeas’d with my self’ and so vowed never to drink again; though

²⁸ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 33.

²⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 40.

Trosse was careful to explain that at this stage he disregarded the convictions of his conscience and forgot the vow almost immediately.³⁰ Indeed, even though Trosse's conscience had been pricked he still continued living his dissolute life for he 'liv'd without God, without Christ, without any sense of Religion, or any Thing of Concern for my Immortal Soul; I was well contented with my wretched Condition, never intending to alter it' even after guilt had begun to mount up in his mind.³¹ However, despite claiming to be content with his evil ways Trosse still found that he was disgusted with the company he was forced to keep, and noted that when he went to live with a family in London he was 'very unhappily placed' because 'in that Family there was nothing of Religion to be discern'd . . . but much of the Devil's Service done both by Night and by Day'.³² If Trosse was really as content with his ungodly ways as he claimed to be, one would suppose that living with this irreligious family would have been exactly what he desired, yet somehow Trosse's conscience seems to have taken control - without any prompting from earthly sources yet set in motion by God alone - and made him feel guilty and unpleasantly out of place.

This apparent dissatisfaction with the irreverent did not prevent Trosse from maintaining that he was actually the ungodliest character of them all for he claimed to be 'exceedingly irreligious; and as immoral as I was prophane' and he even maintained that he behaved 'worse than the very heathens' at times - thus contradicting his earlier complaints about the impious behaviour of those around him, for how could the most irreligious man of all be truly angered by the impiety of others?³³ After reading Trosse's account of his early religious experiences it is difficult to tell whether Trosse was genuinely irreligious or was simply trying to

³⁰ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 54, 55.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 73.

mask his own sense of piety in order to magnify God's glory - God would appear more merciful for converting and saving an unrepentant and blasphemous wretch, than for saving a man who appeared pious from the start. Indeed, the confusion present in Trosse's *Life* concerning this matter cannot simply be explained away by the fact that the older Trosse is passing judgement on the events he witnessed as a young man - if this were the case, why should Trosse claim he was 'unhappily plac'd' in the irreligious household? Surely if Trosse had been as irreligious as he claimed then he would have acknowledged that the impiety of those people suited him at the time, yet, in hindsight, it is something that he deeply regrets and regards with the deepest shame and humiliation.

Consequently, Trosse's early experiences of grace appear confusing and inconsistent to the modern reader; one moment Trosse seems godly and full of grace as he reproaches others for their irreligious behaviour yet the next he claims to despise God and all who hold religion close to their hearts. His experiences seem multi-layered. On one level he may be seen as a God-fearing youth who merely claimed to be impious to make his condition sound damnable and reinforce the fact that he was helpless in the matter of his own salvation since only the grace and mercy of God could secure his election, whilst on another level Trosse might be considered a hypocrite, for he rebukes some for their impiety and then behaves iniquitously himself. Alternatively, perhaps we could say that such confusion and dichotomy in thought would have been expected by contemporaries for, after all, the 'self' that Trosse the autobiographer is describing at this point in the *Life* was still unregenerate and thus liable to be both hypocritical and deceitful - therefore the confusion present in his account would indicate how fickle an unconverted soul

could be; shocked at impious behaviour one moment, yet sinning without a care for God the next.

Bunyan does not spend as much time describing the irreverent period of his life as Trosse does, and when he explains how, even at the height of his irreligious period, he felt shaken to hear a supposedly godly man swear and his spirit would tremble if he ever saw those who professed goodness behaving wickedly.³⁴ The fact that this behaviour disgusts Bunyan seems to be a clear indication that he is set apart from other irreligious youths by divine grace and his feelings may be viewed as a precursor to his own awakening to religious ways which happens shortly afterwards. We may say that Bunyan's hatred of seeing sins committed by the supposedly godly is very similar to Trosse's aversion to the irreligious household he found himself forced to live in, yet there is one vital difference - the length of time between these indications of grace and the author's own religious awakening. Having discussed how contemporaries might have viewed the confusion present in Trosse's account of his early years, it is also possible that it is the vast amount of detail in the description of his supposedly wicked and immoral years that causes the confusion previously mentioned. The length of this description means that there are long gaps between parts suggesting that divine grace has been bestowed on Trosse's soul and this detracts from the overall impression that God is guiding Trosse's life towards a favourable, religious, outcome because the long interlude between each of these signs makes it difficult to see the full picture of Trosse's spiritual development.

Thomas Halyburton shares a similar tale of the awakening of his conscience with us in his *Memoirs*, the contrast with Trosse's account is most interesting. We

³⁴ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 8; Bunyan's account of his irreligious period lasts for only three pages (*GA*, pp. 6-8) before we begin to see the emergence of clear hankerings after religion, whereas Trosse's account of his wickedness extends to just over thirty pages (*Life*, pp. 49-85) and is only interrupted intermittently with indications of the grace and religious devotion that would follow later on in his life.

learn that in May 1685 Halyburton's 'conscience, which had for all the bygone ten years, so far as I can now remember, been fast asleep, began to awaken. I was challenged for sin, terrified with the apprehensions of hell and death, and the wrath of God, which I had not thought about before I was brought to this distress'.³⁵ However, Halyburton maintains that the first pangs of guilt from his conscience were no more than 'a sad mixture of natural fear, and a selfish desire of preservation' for he claimed his heart was still 'unrenewed and corrupt' thus ensuring that he easily returned 'to former evils, and grew worse'.³⁶ Yet, following this initial outburst from his conscience he begins to experience what he terms 'frequent convictions' of grace and religion occasioned by hearing the Word preached and his own reading. Halyburton described these short periods of piety to be nothing more than 'the starts of a sleeping man, occasioned by some sudden noise – up he gets, but presently he is down, and faster asleep than before'.³⁷

After these fleeting periods of holiness that occurred during his short stay in Holland, Halyburton found himself sent back to Perth to live and it is here that his account provides a stark contrast with Trosse's *Life*.³⁸ Whilst in Perth he lives with

³⁵ Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 37.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 38.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁸ Halyburton's reliance on the whim of others – he is *sent* to Holland and then to Perth – is typical of adolescent life in the seventeenth century. It is also reminiscent of the troubled relations Isaac Archer and Agnes Beaumont had with their fathers, for both were highly dependent on their fathers' whim. However, we could also say that this lack of control, or personal agency, provides a psychological parallel with an individual's treatment by God. After all, in the early modern period it was believed that the life of any individual was divinely controlled. An individual could not influence whether they were a member of the elect or simply a reprobate, as can be seen in Thomas Shepard's assertion that 'I saw it was not if I willed but if he will, then I should see and believe and live'; thus showing the lack of agency he felt he had in his own life (Thomas Shepard's *Journal* printed in M. McGiffert (ed.), *God's Plot*, p. 94).

Keith Thomas' essay 'Age and Authority in Early Modern England' clearly shows that in early modern England young people were subservient to their wiser and more sedate elders for, as Thomas states, during this time 'the young were to serve and the old were to rule' (See pp. 207-214; quotation p. 207). Conversely, studies such as I.K. Ben-Amos', *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) and P. Griffiths', *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) demonstrate that early modern adolescence was more complex than the traditional picture expounded by Thomas. Ben-Amos emphasises the degree of independence young people were able to attain during this period, for

his aunt and her family and finds that here ‘I saw nothing of religion, though my aunt was a woman very moral . . . I saw little of the worship of God, and I easily complied, and turned remiss too’.³⁹ Halyburton does not feel incensed by the lack of piety and family religion in this household, as Trosse did, instead he finds that such irreligious circumstances rather suit him for he discovers that he has a ‘secret hankering’ for some of the sins he previously found abominable and dreads the day when his godly mother will come to collect him.⁴⁰

What can we learn from these fleeting experiences of grace? Such different reactions to similar circumstances could suggest that grace does not have a uniform effect on its recipients – what each person experiences is unique – neither is there a standard time which grace takes to blossom within an individual. It may also show us that the effect of pangs of conscience varies, possibly even growing stronger, more urgent and less easy to ignore with age, for at the time of his experiences Trosse was around sixteen years old, whilst Halyburton was only twelve during his. Alternatively, we could agree with Halyburton and say that the awakening of his conscience at this time was only a trivial matter of no great significance because at this time he remained ‘afraid and unwilling to die’ and did not wish to glorify God by behaving in a more pious manner, but only wished to save himself from the consequence of acting irreligiously - damnation.⁴¹ After all, when Bunyan experienced an outward reformation of character following his marriage, he was quick to note that the change in his life and manners did not indicate that he was a

youths learned to ‘manipulate and circumvent adult authority and rule’ (I.K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence*, p. 240). In a similar manner, Griffiths emphasises that early modern adolescents can not simply be split into godly and reprobate youths, since most fell into the middle ground between these two positions and suggested that ‘youth was rarely (if at all) a passive experience . . . young people actively contributed to their maturation, seeking formative experiences and peer association, and in so doing . . . they helped to make their own history’ (p. 392).

³⁹ Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

member of the elect since, at that stage in his life, Bunyan claimed, he ‘knew not Christ, nor Grace, nor Faith, nor Hope’ and thus would have been damned for all eternity if he had died at that precise moment; which is certainly reminiscent of Halyburton’s fear that he was in ‘danger of hell’.⁴² Yet surely the *genuine* awakening of a person’s conscience must be significant and an indication of grace, even if it is initially aroused by partially selfish motives.⁴³ Halyburton appears to have found himself greatly upset when his conscience was pricked - which suggests that it was sincerely felt - and this is not consistent with what Calvin avers happens when the conscience of a reprobate is awakened.

Calvin defined the conscience as being when men have ‘a sense of the divine judgement, as a witness not permitting them to hide their sins, but bringing them as criminals before the tribunal of the judge’.⁴⁴ He held that every man, be he sinner or saint, would feel the pangs of his conscience when tempted to commit sinful actions. However, he felt that Satan caused reprobates to impose a false image of evil on their consciences which would lead them to say ‘this is a trivial fault . . . Under the law of grace God is not so cruel. He has not formed us so as to be our own executioners. The frailty of nature excuses us’; thus the conscience of a reprobate may be said to be more lenient and malleable than it should be - something that Halyburton

⁴² Bunyan, *GA*, p. 13; Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 38.

⁴³ Possessing a genuinely awakened conscience was often a clear sign of godliness. The exemplarily pious Robert Hale ‘was a man of such a tender Conscience that, he gave over the practice of the Law, whereunto he had been bred, because of some things commonly practised by Lawyers, which seemed to him contrary to that exactness of Truth and Justice which became a Christian; whereupon he withdrew himself from the *Inns of Court*, to live on his Estate in the Country’. Samuel Clarke maintains that Hale’s actions show ‘what care he had of his Soul, which made him forsake so gainful a Profession, which might have enabled him to have raised his family much higher’. See ‘The Life and Death of Sir Matthew Hale, *Knight, Sometimes Lord Chief Justice of his Majesties Court of the Kings Bench, who Died, Anno Christi 1676*’ in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 125. This experience can be directly compared to the case of the infamous Venetian civil lawyer, Francis Spira, who was, by his own admission ‘*excessively covetous of money, and accordingly I applied my selfe to get by injustice, corrupting justice by deceit, inventing tricks to delude justice: good causes I either defended deceitfully, or sold them them [sic.] to the adversarie perfidiously; ill causes I maintained with all my might*’. See Nathaniel Bacon, *A Relation of the feareful estate of Francis Spira, in the year 1548* (London: Printed by I.L. for Phil. Stephens and Christoph. Meredith, 1638), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, (IV.x.3), p. 629.

definitely does not find with his own conscience, for he records that he was both terrified and distressed by its revelations.⁴⁵

Calvin also maintained that it was the job of the conscience to distinguish between good and evil so that it might 'hold before us the good we ought to do and the evil we ought to avoid' since 'when any man is tempted to do what is sinful, his conscience secretly asks him, What are you doing? And sin never advances so freely as not to feel this check'.⁴⁶ Thus the fact that Trosse's and Halyburton's consciences were very active during their sinful years is important for their spiritual development and indicative of the presence of grace. In Calvin's theology, Randall C. Zachman has observed, 'the awareness of sin that inevitably arises from the consequent judgement of conscience should lead us to descend within ourselves'.⁴⁷ And, as we have seen, to 'descend within oneself' is vital for salvation for, as we have already discovered, it is the sole way to gain self-knowledge and, ultimately, knowledge of God.

III. Unconscious Attraction Towards Religion

When analysing his own sinful actions Trosse rather matter-of-factly maintained that he 'liv'd idly, apply'd my self to nothing commendable . . . But my Time was spent in frequenting Taverns, where I gam'd much, and often drank to Excess, and still kept up and encreas'd my Antipathy to Godliness and the Professors of it'.⁴⁸ There is no emotion in Trosse's statement for he neither condemns nor exalts his behaviour in

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians* (Eph. 5:6) available at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom41.htm> Consulted on the 20.03.06 ; Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 37.

⁴⁶ John Calvin quoted in R.C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 117; John Calvin *Commentary on Isaiah* (Volume 1, 5:18) available at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom13.htm> Consulted on the 20.03.06

⁴⁷ R.C. Zachman, *Assurance of Faith*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ Trosse, *Life*, p. 58.

an energetic fashion. What he does, however, is contradict himself in a rather serious manner. Trosse makes a point of showing his outrage at the drunken antics of the London merchant he has been sent to live with and clearly detests the fact that the merchant often returned to his house late at night ‘scarce able to speak’.⁴⁹ He claims that the ungodly actions of the majority of the family caused him to become close to the family’s elder daughter who possessed ‘a winning Carriage, and . . . pretended to more Religion than was in all the rest’.⁵⁰ Trosse’s attraction to a religious lady may indicate that grace was beginning to work in his heart. Although it was sinful for him to be involved with a girl he knew to be betrothed to another man (which violated the seventh commandment against adultery), he was initially drawn to her because of her piety as she ‘bewail’d the enormous Wickedness of the Family, and the unchristian contentions of her parents’.⁵¹

To support the notion that Trosse’s infatuation with this pious young lady indicates godliness rather than reprobation we need only consider Bunyan’s *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* (1680). This story charts the life of Mr Badman, who is the personification of a reprobate. All of Badman’s actions are wicked and sinful and he has no thought for heavenly matters and the consequences of his heinous actions. Unlike Trosse, Badman possesses a deep hatred for religion and makes a point of avoiding godly people unless there is an opportunity for him to commit more wicked acts through his association with them. He is apprenticed to a religious master whose trade was ‘honest and commodious’ but ran away because ‘there was Godliness in the house . . . and that young Badman could not endure . . . He could not abide this

⁴⁹ Trosse, *Life*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

praying, this reading of Scriptures, and hearing, and repeating of Sermons: he could not abide to be told of his transgressions in a sober and Godly manner'.⁵²

Paradoxically, Badman later chose to get married to a deeply religious woman. Yet first appearances may be deceptive, for the motivation behind Badman's marriage was certainly not a newly awakened religious sensibility. As Mr. Wiseman observes 'the thing was this: A Wife he wanted, or rather Money; for as for a Woman he could have Whores enow at his whistle. But, as I said, he wanted Money, and that must be got by a Wife, or no way'.⁵³ Badman's reason for selecting this particular pious young lady to be his wife was more to do with greed than love.⁵⁴ In order to snare this young woman, he pretended to be religious for a short time to win her affections. He was aware of how sinful this was for, as Mr. Wiseman noted, his actions were 'premeditated evil, he knew he lyed, he knew he dissembled; yea, he knew that he made use of the name of God, of Religion, good Men, and good Books, but as a stalking-Horse, thereby the better to catch his game'.⁵⁵ Following the success of his ploy, Badman immediately returned to his irreligious ways and treated his wife badly.

This sequence of events is very different to Trosse's recollection of his younger days. Although Trosse claimed to be a wicked individual leading the life of a reprobate, his actions were simply not on the same scale as those of Mr. Badman. Trosse may claim that he led a miserable life devoid of all godliness because he was a 'perfect Atheist' yet his actions do not always reflect this; thus suggesting that

⁵² John Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr Badman: Presented to the World in a Familiar Dialogue Between Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive*, ed. J.F. Forrest and R. Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 38, 60.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

grace was at work in his soul.⁵⁶ We may even see that Trosse's infatuation with the family's eldest daughter did not run along similar lines to Mr. Badman's courtship. Trosse maintained that he was first attracted to the girl's pious demeanour, rather than her wealth or the fact that she was betrothed to another man (and therefore providing him with an easy opportunity to sin). Indeed, Trosse stated that his relationship with the girl 'prov'd a snare to us both' as they lusted after each other, though, even at this time, God watched over the pair and restrained them from committing 'grosser Enormities' – a clear sign that grace had been bestowed on Trosse's soul for God would not allow a member of the elect to sin irredeemably.⁵⁷

This incident also provides us with an interesting parallel with *Grace Abounding* for here we see that Trosse was attracted to the piety of this young lady and this also seems to have been the case with Bunyan for he specifically records that he and his wife came together 'as poor as poor might be'.⁵⁸ The religious books Bunyan's wife brings to the marriage help to unlock Bunyan's latent sense of piety and desire for religion and so it might be useful for us to consider the role women play in initial experiences of grace and an individual's first forays into religion – after all God's grace and benevolent feelings towards an individual could operate *through* the influence of those around them.

⁵⁶ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 60, 58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58. This sentiment links directly with the Calvinist doctrine of Perseverance for Calvin maintained that the Elect are bound to God by an 'indissoluble tie' and therefore 'those ingrafted into him never fail to obtain salvation'. And as the Westminster Assembly avowed, 'they whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally, nor finally, fall away from the state of Grace: but shall persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved'. This sentiment can also be found in Pietist writings. Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644-1724) wrote in her autobiography that 'there is no sin so great that we might not fall into it if we lack grace' thereby suggesting that those in possession of grace were restrained from committing unpardonable sins. See: Calvin, Institutes (III.xxi.7), p. 493; Westminster Assembly, *The Confession of Faith*, p. 26; Johanna Eleonora Petersen, *The Life of Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen, Written by Herself*. Translated and edited by Barbara Becker-Cantarino (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 63.

⁵⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 9. The books she brings are Arthur Dent's *Plaine Man's Path-Way* (1601) and Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety* (1612).

IV. Easily Awakened Piety

Bunyan believed that his chance overhearing of three or four poor Bedfordshire women discussing matters of God was a fortuitous moment brought about by the providence of God and thereby indicating the grace that would later be bestowed upon his soul.⁵⁹ These women opened up a whole new world for Bunyan and showed what joy genuine piety could bring. Long after he left them he found that ‘their talk and discourse went with me, also my heart would tarry with them, for I was greatly affected with their words’.⁶⁰ Thomas Halyburton’s mother played an important role in his spiritual development since she managed to keep his life on a religious course for most of his childhood. She was keen to ensure Halyburton was catechised, attended sermons and prayer meetings and he maintains she was also ‘careful to keep me to duty, was not wanting in advice, correction, prayer with and for me; she obliged me to read the Scriptures and other edifying books’.⁶¹

When Sarah Wight regained consciousness following a suicide attempt she was keen to speak and apologise to her mother for her actions. Yet Mary Wight simply ‘came to her, took her daughters hand, and put it on her own neck, where her daughter felt a skare that was there, through the enemy’ – thereby showing that she had faced similar temptations in her youth.⁶² Michael Mascuch believes this episode was so influential in Wight’s life that ‘the visitation of Christ that occurred two months after this exchange can be taken as a psychic re-enactment and confirmation of this decisive moment, in which a troubled girl received sympathy from the body best able to offer it’.⁶³ Bridget Cooke was particularly keen on talking with godly people, but she ‘had most intire spirituall comunion with some speciall Christians &

⁵⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶¹ Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 39.

⁶² Jessey, *Exceeding Riches of Grace*, p. 24.

⁶³ M. Mascuch, ‘The Godly Child’s “Power and evidence” in the Word’, p. 123.

chiefly with one woman, whom for her age long standing in Christianity & eminency in grace she called her mother' and felt linked 'in ye bond of ye spirit' with her – thus not only showing the power and influence women could have on the spiritual life of others, but also the value placed on age and experience during this period.⁶⁴

However, George Trosse's mother does not have such a positive effect. She clearly wanted Trosse to be an educated and pious man, yet in his recollections of her there is nothing but scorn for her since he blames her pampering for his descent into sin. The young Trosse developed a desire for riches and living luxuriously which caused him to become a merchant. Trosse claimed that this decision was the cause of his later calamities though, surprisingly, he does not blame it on the usual Puritan sources of evil - the Devil and depraved human nature. Instead Trosse appears to blame his choice on his own innocence, lack of experience and his over-indulgent mother who 'comply'd with my Inclinations'.⁶⁵ He says his calamities began from 'going abroad into a tempting World, with a blind Mind, a foolish Fancy, and a graceless Heart, without any considerable Experience of Human Affairs, I was easily led into great Sins and dangerous Snares'.⁶⁶

So it can be seen that women frequently had an influence on the way in which an individual's faith developed, whether for the better, or for the worse. Perhaps we could also include the 'guiding hand' they provided for those such as Bunyan, Halyburton and Cooke as being an additional sign of grace, for we could say that it was God, in his ultimate wisdom, who permitted (possibly even directed) these women to act as guides and mentors for their spiritual charges – albeit occasionally unwitting guides in the case of Bunyan's poor women of Bedford.

⁶⁴ R.P., *Some Passages of Mrs Bridget Cooke*, fo. 9r. Here we are reminded that Bunyan took great stock of the advice given to him by someone he termed an 'Antient Christian'. See: Bunyan, *GA*, p. 51.

⁶⁵ Trosse, *Life*, p. 49.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Women were not the sole repositories of such spiritual nurturing. Vavasor Powell was first awakened to his sinful nature by the promptings of a 'grave Professour of Religion' who reminded him that he should not spend the Lord's Day frolicking and being entertained by others playing games, for the scriptures maintained that on the Sabbath men should honour God by 'not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure' (Isaiah 58:13).⁶⁷ This episode is reminiscent of the time when Bunyan was rebuked for swearing, for in both instances each is reprimanded by a member of their community whom they do not seem to have encountered previously and they are also reminded of their status as role models to the local youth. Bunyan was told that he should be ashamed of his behaviour because through it he could 'spoil all the Youth in a whole Town, if they came but in my company'.⁶⁸ Powell, on the other hand, was made to feel embarrassed about his actions when he was asked 'doth it become you Sir that are a scholar and one that teacheth others, to break the Lords Sabbath thus?'.⁶⁹

There are no comparable reprimands in Trosse's *Life* - he does not appear to have been as interlinked with the communities he lived in as were Bunyan and Powell. Trosse appears to have been a more isolated and independent figure observing the actions of others with only a limited amount of interaction with them. After talking with a pious Christian, Powell experienced a very powerful moment of spiritual enlightenment. Powell considered this man to be a mortified Christian sent by God to humble him because he was currently 'like a Char-coal that had been in the fire, yet without light and life'.⁷⁰ The man discussed the process of conversion with him and explained how important this work was to depraved mankind. Powell

⁶⁷ Powell, *Life*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ Powell, *Life*, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

found himself enraptured by the man's words as 'they began to sink and to enter deep into my heart' and he notes that from that time forth he took up the profession of godliness - yet, in a similar manner to Bunyan's initial forays into religion, this 'godliness' was only ephemeral and not deeply felt.⁷¹

Grace and the Clergy

The clergy often seem to have paved the way for God's grace. The very first line of Johnson's *Fanatical Reveries* indicates that her heart has been divinely prepared to accept grace. Johnson believed it was hearing the sermons of her local minister that opened her heart to God thus allowing grace to enter. She maintained that it was 'the spirit of God & the word of God', from the mouth of her preacher, Mr. Knowles, which caused her to write her account.⁷² Her opening statement not only acknowledged the power of hearing the Word preached, but also recognised the influence that her local minister had on the development of her faith, an emphasis also to be found in Powell's autobiography and Rogers' diary.

Powell began to show a greater appreciation of religion following a sermon preached by his local minister and consequently he began to 'read the Bible, to pray often in private, and to hear the strictest Preachers, and to leave off my old Companions, and to chuse others who professed religion'.⁷³ Preaching had a similar effect on Rogers' spiritual life, for the preaching of Thomas Weld melted Rogers' heart and taught him that his irreligious ways had kept him from the correct path of God.⁷⁴ Moreover, later in his life Rogers also considered the preaching he heard to be both 'soule pricking' and 'thawing' and exuberantly claimed that 'oh what a

⁷¹ Powell, *Life*, p. 3.

⁷² Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 29.

⁷³ Powell, *Life*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 2.

heaven is it, to enjoy powerful, savoury preaching in a saboth; the life of the life'.⁷⁵ It thus becomes clear that it was not only important for Puritans to read the word; they were also acutely aware of the necessity of hearing it preached. Paul Seaver has noted that 'the Puritan layman . . . frequently ascribed his conversion to an efficacious sermon' and, as Patrick Collinson shows, in the early seventeenth century it was 'not uncommon for a preacher to be presented with a testimonial bearing the signatures of those who owned him for their spiritual father, "the proper means of their first conversion and their future salvation"'; this certainly rings true in the experiences of Powell and Rogers who, as we have seen, explicitly note the impact certain ministers had on their spiritual awakening.⁷⁶

The preaching and spiritual advice of John Gifford, the minister of the Bedford Independent Congregation, had an inspiring effect on Bunyan who noted that after discussing the dealings of God with Gifford he 'began to see something of the vanity and inward wretchedness of my [his] wicked heart'.⁷⁷ Bunyan greatly

⁷⁵ Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 72, 73.

⁷⁶ P.S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), p. 38; P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, p. 242. Moreover, E.J. Carlson's essay, 'The Boring of the Ear: Shaping the Pastoral Vision of Preaching in England, 1540-1640' in L. Taylor (ed.), *Preachers and People* considers the relationship between ministers and their audience and argues that ministers played a vital role in Elizabethan and Jacobean piety because hearing sermons preached was considered vital for salvation. Carlson claims that the minister's role 'was no less important than before the Reformation and they laboured to make that clear to congregations, not out of any revolutionary urge to retain power slipping away, but out of genuine concern for salvation' (p. 293). The minister John Downname (1571-1652) advised sinners that their 'eyes must be fastened upon the Preacher, as the eyes of our Saviour Christs hearers were upon him' whilst his elder brother, George Downname (d.1634), claimed that 'by the preaching of the worde, men are brought to salvation . . . without it ordinarily men cannot attaine to salvation' (pp. 276, 277).

Indeed, so important were sermons in seventeenth-century England that the godly were frequently willing to travel a long distance in order to hear an edifying preacher. As Patrick Collinson and Christopher Haigh show, 'sermon gadding' was central to Puritan piety in the seventeenth century. Hearers such as John Winthrop developed 'an insatiable thirst for the word of God' and were adamant that they 'could not miss a good sermon, though many miles off, especially of such as did search deep the conscience' (P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, pp. 242-243). Haigh notes that 'the godly didn't just want sermons, they wanted the right kind of sermons' for, after all, there were 'sermons that saved souls, and sermons that didn't' and he observes that those unhappy with the sermons of their local parish went gadding to where they could find edification and profitable ministers (C. Haigh, *The Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven: Kinds of Christianity in Post-Reformation England, 1570-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 210, 18).

⁷⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 24.

respected Gifford and maintained that the doctrine he preached was ‘much for my stability’.⁷⁸ The admiration Bunyan felt for Gifford is evident in his description of him where he asserts that

this man made it much his business to deliver the people of God from all those faults and unsound rests that, by nature, we are prone to take and make to our souls. He pressed us to take special heed that we took not up any truth upon trust . . . but to cry mightily to God that He would convince us of the reality thereof.⁷⁹

Bunyan considered his ability to preach to be a divinely granted gift and was humbled to hear members of his congregation refer to him as ‘God’s Instrument that shewed to them the Way of Salvation’ - thus reflecting the belief that preaching was a vital method of winning souls and preventing their backsliding.⁸⁰

Arthur Dent would certainly have concurred with Bunyan on this matter, for he firmly believed preaching to be ‘the chiefest and most principal means which God hath ordained and sanctified for the saving of men [since] . . . faith cometh by hearing the word preached . . . [and thus] no preaching, no faith: no faith, no Christ: no Christ, no eternal life’ - salvation appeared to *depend* upon hearing the word preached.⁸¹ The ideal seventeenth-century English minister was deeply involved in the lives of his congregation, had to learn how to denounce their sins without driving them to despair as well as attending ‘to a wide range of . . . moral and social needs within the parish community’ alongside the traditional role of caring for the spiritual health of their souls - hence he may be deemed counsellor as well as spiritual advisor.⁸² Thus we see that the references to the advice and support given to Johnson, Rogers and Bunyan by their local ministers, and the way in which they unquestioningly heeded such advice, is indicative of the high regard in which godly

⁷⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 34.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁸¹ Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Man’s Path-Way to Heaven*, pp. 371-2.

⁸² N. Enssle, ‘Patterns of Godly Life’, p. 4.

ministers were held by pious individuals and shows how divine grace could flow through a minister and into the hearts of his congregation.⁸³

Grace, Dreams and the Power of Reading

Initial experiences of grace were not limited to hearing heavenly voices and receiving the assistance of those around them – be they family, friends, strangers or clerics. Grace could also be seen in the granting of dreams and visions that lifted spirits and helped to show an individual how to walk the correct path to salvation. Bunyan experienced such a dream. He dreamt that he was separated from the godly women of Bedford by a wall; they were on the sunny side of a mountain, whilst he was left cold and shivering on the other side of the wall. Try as he might to get in, Bunyan could see no way around or over the wall until he spotted a gap and managed to struggle through and join the others in the sunshine. Bunyan interpreted the dream in *Grace Abounding* and claimed that the mountain represented the church of the living God, the sun was God's merciful face and the wall signified the Word whilst the gap in the wall was Christ, the only way to God and salvation. In Bunyan's eyes this episode showed the merciful and gracious nature of God because it provoked 'a vehement hunger, and desire to be one of that number that did sit in this Sun-shine' within him and also caused him to pray sincerely to God wherever he may be 'whether at home or abroad, in house or field'.⁸⁴

Bunyan's dream is vitally important for two reasons: firstly, the beliefs surrounding dreams in seventeenth-century England and, secondly, the fact that it

⁸³ For a more detailed discussion of the role of ministers in seventeenth-century England see above pp. 18-25.

⁸⁴ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 19.

enabled him to pray sincerely.⁸⁵ According to seventeenth-century thought there was a correlation between dreams and an individual's true spiritual condition. For example, Thomas Tryon asserted that 'unto the wise, and well-minded, they [dreams] may discover great *Secrets*, both of Time and Eternity' for 'there is scarce any thing that yields so true and great a figure, or similitude of the condition of the Soul after Death, or in the state of Separation, as *Dreams*'.⁸⁶ Tryon likens sleep to death, because they are both times when all external senses appear to have been suspended, and therefore he contends that 'what happens to the Soul in *Dreams*, . . . [bears] a notable Resemblance of that which attends it in its Separated estate, whether in the Good or in the Evil'.⁸⁷ Echoing this Philip Goodwin maintained that 'by the Knowledg of Dreames, much of mans rationall soul may be certainly known' since 'when the *body* is most still and lying at rest in the bed, the *soul* is most stirring and laborious in business'.⁸⁸ This information is important for our current study because Bunyan records that he had 'fearful dreams' during his childhood, before he came to know God, yet when his mind is being awakened to pious matters he finds his dreams to be informative and directed towards gaining salvation, therefore suggesting that all would turn out well and he would be redeemed.⁸⁹ Moreover, the fact that Bunyan was able to find solace in his dreams directly contradicts Darren Oldridge's assertion that 'the night was a time . . . when individuals were especially

⁸⁵ It is also important for us to consider Bunyan's dream in more depth because Peter Burke has argued for 'the possibility of a cultural history of dreaming' and maintains that historians should pay more attention to dreams because they may reveal something about the individual dreamer. Burke also reminds us that Bible reading was frequently reflected in dreams (e.g. reading the Apocalypse of St John could bring apocalyptic dreams; Ralph Josselin's wife dreamt the sky was filled with light and flames and immediately thought of Revelations 19:3 when she awoke) because 'in early modern Europe, many people had read the Bible so often that it had become part of them and its stories organized their perceptions, their memories and even their dreams'. See: P. Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History*, pp. 23, 24, 39, 50. Ralph Josselin, *Diary*, p. 334.

⁸⁶ Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Dreams & Visions* (London: s.n., 1689), p. 58.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 59.

⁸⁸ Philip Goodwin, *The Mystery of Dreames* (London: Printed by A.M. for Francis Tyton at the Three Daggers near St Dunstons Church in Fleet-street., 1658), sig. A9r (epistle dedicatory), p. 16.

⁸⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 7, 19, 39.

vulnerable to spiritual anxieties' – thereby reinforcing the notion that Bunyan may be considered a member of the elect.⁹⁰ Indeed, we can clearly see that Trosse values his dreams and considers them to be useful ways of gaining self-knowledge, improving his own spiritual good and discerning grace since he notes that he 'had several Times very distinct *Dreams*, and such as I could make a very religious and profitable Interpretation of' and took 'some Time to write them down together, with their *Meaning*, as I apprehended it to be'.⁹¹

Prayer was a vital part of Calvinist theology. Calvin himself held that 'the necessity and vitality of this exercise of prayer no words can sufficiently express' for 'to prayer . . . are we indebted for penetrating to those riches which are treasured up for us with our heavenly father'.⁹² William Perkins also maintained that prayer was a means of increasing faith and thus was highly profitable for a Christian's soul because 'God hath promised very bountifully unto them which pray in truth'.⁹³ Similarly, Bunyan agreed on the significance of prayer to true worship and claimed that those who find themselves unable to pray 'do not worship God, and he will destroy them'.⁹⁴ Thus the significance of this episode in *Grace Abounding* becomes apparent, for we may say that gaining the ability to pray sincerely was of almost pre-eminent importance to a pious Christian as it signified that the process of regeneration had begun in his soul. Indeed, in the preface to *Grace Abounding*

⁹⁰ D. Oldridge, *The Devil in Early Modern England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2000), p. 44.

⁹¹ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 116-117. Ralph Josselin also showed the importance of 'religious dreams' for he recorded some in his diary. For example, he records a dream in which himself and another minister were executed for religion (*Diary*, p. 419) as well as his daughter Jane's dream of Christ visiting their church and telling her that he would reign upon the earth for a thousand years (*Diary*, p. 237) and his son Tom's dreams of God (*Diary*, p. 339) and Christ (*Diary*, p. 335).

⁹² Calvin, *Institutes*, (III.xx.2), p. 452.

⁹³ William Perkins, *Foundation of Christian Religion*, p. 164; William Perkins, *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration Whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace* reprinted in Perkins, *Work*, p. 378.

⁹⁴ Bunyan, *Instruction for the Ignorant*, p. 35.

Bunyan urged his readers to remember all their prayers to God because he believed them to form part of a rich treasure of experience that would be useful in later life.⁹⁵

Having just seen how Bunyan's text could help its readers' spiritual life (by reminding them to remember their prayers), it will be unsurprising for us to learn that many people believed the reading of godly texts could help solve their spiritual worries. This may be seen as an indication of grace, for Puritans often believed that their reading was directed by God, who ensured they read works and specific passages that addressed their own spiritual condition and helped them overcome moments of doubt and despair.

Vavasor Powell, for example, found that 'a choice of providence' caused him to read Richard Sibbes' *The Bruised Reed* (1630) which taught him that there was hope for those who did not feel full of grace, for they should feel encouraged by any true longings after religion - no matter how small and insignificant these appeared to be.⁹⁶ Following this incident Powell developed toothache that lasted many days. At this time Powell began to read a book by William Perkins and providentially lighted on a remark pertaining to his current situation - 'if the pains of one little bone, or tooth, be so grievous for a few days, what then will the pains of the whole body and soul be in hell for evermore?'⁹⁷ This thought terrified Powell and hurt his conscience so badly that 'it made the other pain to seem somewhat more easie' and eventually the combination of physical and spiritual pain caused him to cry 'out to God with greater sense then before, and between fear and pain, a troubled muddy spirit of prayer began to spring up'.⁹⁸ Yet the effect of Perkins' words did not stop there, for Powell soon felt that he had God's help with his prayers and consequently his 'heart

⁹⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Powell, *Life*, p. 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

began to be enlarged by confessions, and my sins were brought into remembrance . . . and [I] lay in my own thoughts as a convicted and guilty person'.⁹⁹

Bunyan had a similar life-changing experience whilst reading Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*. He discovered that he was able to find 'my condition in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his Book had been written out of my heart'.¹⁰⁰ After he finished reading Luther's book Bunyan found he was able to love Christ and that his very 'Soul cleaved unto him' - a significant revelation given that Calvin considered Christ to be 'the mirror wherein, we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election'.¹⁰¹ However, it is noteworthy that we do not find a comparable moment in Trosse's *Life*, for Trosse does not make allusions to theological texts and their role in his spiritual development in the same way as Bunyan and Powell. Indeed, Trosse claims to have rejected the authority of the Bible because he 'did not regard it as the Word of God' during his period of religious melancholy.¹⁰² This is very similar to one of Bunyan's experiences of despair concerning his eternal condition when he admitted to having atheistic thoughts and began to question 'whether the holy Scriptures were not rather a Fable, and cunning Story, than the holy and pure Word of God'.¹⁰³

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Thus we see that grace could be experienced in many different ways. Some Puritans heard heavenly voices speaking to them, trying to set them on the correct path to salvation, others found that grace was often disguised within them in the form of their own conscience, whilst others still needed grace to be channelled into them through the influence of their family, friends, ministers, local community or possibly

⁹⁹ Powell, *Life*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 38.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., *GA*, p. 38; John Calvin quoted in Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p. 25.

¹⁰² Trosse, *Life*, p. 73.

¹⁰³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 29.

even religious books. What is clear, once again, is that there was no uniform way of experiencing grace. The Puritans described in this chapter did not try to mould their experiences so that they fitted a set pattern – there was no such set pattern. Instead, what we find is that certain ways of experiencing grace are successful (and so described at length) for some people, yet for others they do not get a mention – further emphasising the individuality present within this form of writing.

Chapter 5

Temptations and Experiences of Satan

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a
roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour
I Peter 5:8

In seventeenth-century England the Devil was the ultimate enemy. Richard Greenham (c.1540-1594) saw Satan as a ‘secret adversary and spiritual tempter’, the ‘adversarie . . . of god and his people’ who strove to ‘make us most unwilling unto that wherein the lord wil most use us to the good of his church’.¹ According to Elizabeth Isham he was ‘the destroyer & bane of us tempting us to evill because he hateth us’ whilst R.B. Willis (b. 1564) termed him the ‘arch-enemy of mankind, who is continually going about seeking whom he may betray and devoure’.²

These statements provide us with opinions across the ‘age-spectrum’ suggesting that Satan was universally feared, for both thirty year old Isham and seventy-five year old Willis present similar conceptions of the Devil as the conniving enemy of all that is good. Yet this is not all that we are able to glean from these descriptions. Unsurprisingly, Isham links the Devil with temptation and this is precisely what John Calvin did in his *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1545) when he defined ‘temptation’ as ‘the stratagems and deceits of Satan, by which he constantly attacks us, and would easily and quickly overwhelm us, unless we were helped by the assistance of God’.³ Willis’s statement, on the other hand, is more

¹ Richard Greenham quoted in K.L. Parker and E.J. Carlson, *Practical Divinity: The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 294, 102, 103.

² Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance* (c.1640), p. 50; R.B. Willis, *Mount Tabor. Or Private exercises of a penitent sinner Serving for a daily practice of the life of faith, reduced to speciall heads comprehending the chiefe comforts and refreshings of true Christians* (London: Printed by R[ichard] B[adger] for P. Stephens and C. Meredith, 1639), p. 94.

³ John Calvin, *The Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1545) reprinted in J.K.S. Reid (ed.), *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, The Library of Christian Classics, 22 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p.128.

striking for he appears to attribute the Devil with free will when he claims Satan is able to seek out and destroy whoever he wishes.

This issue touches on a lively debate in seventeenth-century thought – the question of the Devil’s power and influence. Was the Devil under God’s command? Did he act out God’s will - thus making him an instrument of divine retribution (‘Gods hang-man’ as James I termed him)?⁴ Did God simply *permit* his actions? Or, most frighteningly of all, was Satan able to act independently of God, being a free agent who tormented and deceived whomsoever he chose? After all, as Keith Thomas notes, it seemed to many ‘that God had given Satan a free run’.⁵ These were questions which puzzled and preoccupied the early modern mind, for when ‘*Hell* and *Sin*, and such like things . . . ran alwayes’ through your thoughts and you found yourself living ‘under a *desperate* fear’ of damnation, as was the case with John Rogers (b.1627), then it is little wonder that considerations of the Devil should frequently take centre stage.⁶

The Extent of the Devil’s Power

For John Milton there was no doubt over the extent of the Devil’s powers. In *Paradise Regained* (1671) Christ addresses Satan with the words ‘Do as thou find’st Permission from above; thou canst not more’ and then later reminds Satan that ‘it is written, “Tempt not the Lord thy God”’ upon which the tempter is ‘smitten with amazement’ and vanquished.⁷ Nehemiah Wallington also agreed with Milton’s conclusion for he noted that ‘men and Divels doe what they can yet they can doe no

⁴ James VI and I, *Daemonologie*, (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Walde-graue printer to the Kings Majestie, 1597), ‘To the Reader’, fo. 4r.

⁵ K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 562.

⁶ John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh A tabernacle for the sun, or, Irenicum evangelicum* (London: Printed for R.I. and G. and H. Eversden . . . , 1653), p. 420. In this work Rogers’ records the experiences of members of his Dublin congregation.

⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Regained* (1671) reprinted in E. Gosse (ed.), *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (London: Ward, Lock & Co. Ltd., c.1900), pp. 226, 256.

more than God will let them'.⁸ Consequently, we may wonder whether there is an ulterior motive behind Willis's precise choice of words since he clearly states that the Devil seeks 'whom he *may* betray and devour' – an allusion to I. Peter 5:8, 'the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour'. Is there any significance in Willis's use of 'may' instead of 'can'? 'Can' relates to what is ultimately *possible*, and would thus imply that the Devil could indeed destroy whoever he wished, yet 'may' applies to what is *permissible* and surely, this suggests that Willis's statement limits the Devil's power to devouring only those whom *God permits* him to devour.

This view of the Devil's 'freedom' is also found in Calvin. He avers that the Devil is most certainly under God's command because 'from the first chapter of Job we learn that Satan appears in the presence of God to receive his orders, just as do the angels who obey spontaneously. The manner and the end are different, but still the fact is, that he cannot attempt anything without the will of God'.⁹ Calvin then describes Satan's power to afflict the godly as 'only a bare permission' and maintains that 'whatever men or Satan himself devise, God holds the helm, and makes all their efforts contribute to the execution of his judgements'.¹⁰ Moreover, he believes that the fact the Devil and all evil spirits are instruments of God's plan should be a constant source of comfort to Christians, for when a believer realises that

the devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are, in all directions, held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor . . . move a single finger to perpetrate, unless in so far as he permits, nay, unless in so far as he commands; that they are not only bound by his fetters, but are even forced to do him service, - when the godly think of all these things they have ample sources of consolation.¹¹

⁸ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 136r.

⁹ Calvin, *Institutes* (I.xviii.1), p. 111.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, (I.xviii.1), p. 111.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, (I.xvii.11), p. 108.

The advice here seems perfectly clear; the elect need not fear the Devil, for God will ensure they persevere in their faith and arrive in Heaven - as Thomas Shepard noted it was 'God's main plot' for the elect to ascend to Heaven where they might 'make Christ very glorious and so beloved in heaven forever'.¹²

Yet, as we have seen in chapter 2, what remained unclear in the minds of many seventeenth-century Christians was how believers could discover, with absolute certainty, whether they were members of the elect. After all, although faith was generally the yardstick in such matters it was perfectly possible to be in possession of temporary faith alone, rather than the effectual faith of the elect – as was clearly shown in the case of the so-called 'English Spira', John Child (1638-1684), who had been 'in his Youthful days, a zealous Professor of Religion', growing up to become a nonconformist minister.¹³ However, in his later years Child lost his nonconformist beliefs, began to attend Church of England services and urged all Protestant dissenters to conform. He soon suffered pangs of guilt and remorse for

¹² Thomas Shepard's *Autobiography* (1649) reprinted in Michael McGiffert (ed.), *God's Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. 118.

¹³ Anon., *The English Spira being a fearful example of an apostate who had been a preacher many years and then apostatized from his religion, miserably hanged himself, October the 13th, 1684* (London: Printed for Tho. Fabian, 1693), 'To the reader', p. i. Interestingly, John Child was a member of the First Independent Church at Bedford and so was known to John Bunyan. Indeed, Bunyan, along with John Whiteman and John Fenne, was sent by the Church to see Child and discuss his wish to join another congregation in August 1659 (H.G. Tibbutt, *Minutes of the First Independent Church*, pp. 31-34).

For more on the tale of Francis Spira, to which the *English Spira* alludes, see M. MacDonald, 'The Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira: Narrative, Identity, and Emotion in Early Modern England' in *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 32-61 which considers the long-standing popularity of the Spira narrative and how readers were able to identify with Spira emotionally and use his narrative to understand their own experiences. The story was originally published in 1638 by Nathaniel Bacon as *A Relation of the feareful estate of Francis Spira, in the year 1548*. Following Bacon's publication of the Spira story other Spiras soon came to light. As well as the 'English Spira' mentioned above, further 'Spiras' were discovered by Richard Sault, Thomas Sewell and Thomas James. See: Richard Sault *The Second Spira being a fearfull example of an atheist who had apostatized from the Christian Religion* (London: Printed for John Dunton, 1693); Thomas James, *Spira's Despair Revived Being a narration of the horrour and despair of some late sinners under the apprehensions [sic] of death and judgement* (London: Printed for R. Baldwin, 1694); Thomas Sewell, *A True Second Spira: Or, a soul plung'd in his case, but yet recovered Being comfort for backsliders* (London: printed for, and sold by Will. Marshall, 1697). Such interest in the tale appears to have been because of its didactic value – Bunyan noted that '*Miseries as well as mercies, sharpen and make quick the apprehensions of the Soul*' (John Bunyan, *The Greatness of the Soul* (1683) reprinted in R.L. Greaves (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, (13 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), IX, p. 167.

his 'apostatizing' behaviour and, after becoming convinced that he was beyond salvation, committed suicide. Moreover, Nehemiah Wallington also recorded the case of a Mr Munke who felt so certain of his own damnation that he slit his throat and jumped into the Thames yet he was unsuccessful in his endeavours to kill himself and, as he was taken home, Wallington notes, that he 'did roore most hideously crying that he was damned and he had prayed often and God would not heer him'.¹⁴

Thus we see how the Devil could be viewed as a very serious threat indeed both for those who believed themselves to be members of the elect, for their faith might prove to be no more than the temporary faith of the reprobate, and those who were uncertain of their soul's status; all must be constantly on their guard against the Devil's onslaughts for even a momentary lapse of attention could prove costly. Thus extreme caution and adroitness were called for because the Devil was a trickster who delighted in perverting the works of God and tormenting mankind: 'Truth he assails with lies, light he obscures with darkness. The minds of men he involves in error . . . all in order that he may overthrow the kingdom of God, and drown men in eternal perdition'.¹⁵ Calvin explicitly acknowledged that Satan's onslaughts were 'common to all the children of God' and insisted that devils and unclean spirits were divinely employed 'in exercising believers by warring against them, assailing them with wiles, urging them with solicitations . . . disturbing, alarming, and occasionally wounding, but never conquering or oppressing them'; though he unhesitatingly

¹⁴ British Library, Sloane MS. 1457, Nehemiah Wallington, *God's Judgement on Sabbath Breakers, Drunkerds and Other Vile Livers*, fo. 7v. Further examples of those driven to despair, and possibly suicide, because they feared their own damnation may be found in: K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 574-575, 622; M. MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 200-202; A. Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 326-327.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* (I.xiv.15), p. 81.

maintained that Satan possessed complete dominion over the wicked and held them in thralldom for eternity.¹⁶

But what precisely did Satan do to disrupt an individual's spiritual growth? Did every godly individual suffer the exact same temptations and experience identical visitations from Satan? Were believers tempted for the duration of their lives, or was there a point at which the Devil's onslaughts ceased? Did Satan appear to all believers in the same guise? And did diabolical temptation follow a set pattern, or was it tailored to hit the weakest point of each individual believer and, therefore, amorphous? If there is truly a strict pattern which all spiritual autobiographies unquestioningly follow – if, as G.A. Starr holds, 'History repeats itself not only in man's outward, group existence, but in the spiritual life of individuals' – then we may expect Puritan experiences of the Devil to be virtually identical, even affecting each individual at the same period in their life.¹⁷ Indeed, Elizabeth Isham prayed that she might 'tred in the selfe same stepes towards heaven wherein my forefathers have walked for thou art Holy God & the God of my fathers' and Rose Thurgood told her mother and sisters that she had 'sett you a patterne, how you may get the love of God'.¹⁸ We will now consider whether these nonconformists actually wished to share a common spiritual heritage, thus harbouring a desire for their own spiritual experiences to conform with those of their fellow 'Puritans'.

Invisible Realities: Intangible Encounters with the Devil

From an early age Bunyan found himself tormented by fearful dreams and visions of demons and hellfire. Whilst only nine or ten years old he became convinced that hellish fiends deliberately laboured to ensnare his soul and imprison him in eternal

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, (I.xiv.18), p. 82.

¹⁷ G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, p. 13.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 35; Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 16.

darkness. These episodes were Bunyan's first experiences of the methods Satan used to instil terror and doubt (both of their own salvation and God's ability to overthrow the Devil) into the hearts of men and they left a lasting impression on his mind - he initially feared his soul to have been vanquished by the Devil's early onslaughts. But Bunyan's experiences of the Devil here were not unique. In the seventeenth century it was not uncommon for men and women to be visited by harrowing dreams and visions of Satan, as Bunyan did, and experience attacks (both physical and mental) by Satan and his minions. Indeed, Stuart Clark notes that 'the devil was a master of the virtual and its paradoxes. This extended, without question, to his manipulation of dreams'.¹⁹

Elizabeth Isham records that as a child she often had 'fearfull dreames of fighting with the Devil'; Richard Norwood (b.1590) notes that he had many terrifying nightmares in which he was tempted to believe 'that God was not just and faithful in his word that he was hard and unmerciful, etc. and that he had now certainly given me over to Satan and that I was now become a companion of the divel and his angels, and that I did hate God and did rage against him as the damned spirits do'.²⁰ John Machin (d.1664) was 'disturbed and tormented . . . dreadfully' by Satan in his dreams 'so that he hath often, immediately upon his waking, run in his Wastcoat into his Study, and betaken himself to his earnest and fervent Prayers against that subtile and mischievous Fiend'.²¹ Moreover, Machin also felt 'as if he were cut in pieces with Knives, or the like' during his nightmares 'and he was in as real Agonies, and distress as if he had felt the pain of such Torments indeed' and they caused him to 'leap out of his Bed in the Night, and to betake himself to Prayer

¹⁹ S. Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 310.

²⁰ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 7; Richard Norwood, *Confessions*, p. 149.

²¹ 'The Life and Death of Mr. John Machin' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 83.

for ease and delivery'.²² These incidents are very reminiscent of Milton's *Paradise Regained* where he noted that as Jesus slept in the wilderness 'at His head The Tempter watched, and soon with ugly dreams Disturbed His sleep'; thus suggesting that when our authors relate their experiences of demonic disturbances to their dreams they are emulating an episode in their saviour's life and so following in Christ's footsteps.²³

Interestingly, when believers are alone in their bedrooms at night or in the early hours of the morning is frequently when Satan's onslaughts are at their most terrifying. Early one morning as George Trosse was lying in bed he heard a peculiar rushing noise and saw 'something at the *Bed's-Foot* like a *Shadow*' which he thought was an evil spirit of some sort.²⁴ This incident made Trosse tremble with fear and shortly after whilst he was praying he heard a voice repeatedly telling him to become '*Yet more humble*' and seemingly requiring him to bow lower and remove his clothes.²⁵ At first Trosse concluded that this voice was God, yet upon reflection he reasoned that the voice actually belonged to Satan who was trying to humble him '*as low as Hell*'.²⁶

There were many other similar incidents in spiritual autobiographies. When Hannah Allen feared she was a reprobate, Satan visited her house one night and she

²² 'The Life and Death of Mr. John Machin' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 91. Here we should not forget that dreams could also be divinely influenced and thus have a beneficial effect on the believer – Clark maintains that 'according to the universally adopted early modern categories, dreams were either sent by God for a good purpose or sent by the devil for an evil one, or produced by morally neutral, . . . natural causes' (See S. Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, p. 308). A good example of a divinely instigated dream belongs to Dorothy Emet who noted that 'in my *sleep* one night came to me a *voyce*, (I thought) that said, *I am the Fountain of living water*: and when I *awaked*, I was much refreshed, for I had *great thirstings after Christ*'. See 'The Experience of Dorothy Emet' in John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh A tabernacle for the sun, or, Irenicum evangelicum* (London: Printed for R.I. and G. and H. Eversden . . . , 1653), p. 1. [misnumbered as p. 1 – pages 1-12 are inserted between p. 412 and p. 413].

²³ John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, p. 253.

²⁴ Trosse, *Life*, p. 85.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

heard 'like the hand of a Gyant, knock four times together on the Chamber door'.²⁷

Elizabeth Isham records that she was tempted the most whilst still lying in bed and half-asleep for during these times she found herself 'tempted against thee my God with vile thoughts which if I did not resist at the first I should be troubled so thicke that I was not able to overcome them'.²⁸ Richard Norwood recorded that when he was in bed one night he felt something 'pressing sometimes creeping to and fro, sometimes ready to take away my breath, sometimes lifting up the bed, sometimes the pillow; sometimes as it were flashing in my head and all my body, sometimes working a strange and stirring fear and amazednes'.²⁹

A few nights after this fearful experience Norwood had another bad dream and, upon waking in fright from the nightmare, found his

feeling smelling and relishing being annoyed as it were with some loathsome thing, there being a kind of noise and the bed rising up in sundry places, and in several places the cloathes being pressed down heavy, with being removed or I removing them from that the place became very chill; so was my whole body after I awaked, also the ayre seemed to strike here and there, sometimes upon me, sometimes upon the bed.³⁰

Upon returning from a sermon one evening Norwood entered his bedroom and began to feel 'as if one had handled myne arm; sometimes as if they had leaned on my back, and being at praire I was much more troubled, having a feeling as if I were sometimes peirced through the back, . . . sometimes the side, and feeling as it were the motion of the ayre round about me'.³¹

Norwood's experience here is very similar to incidents related by E.C. and Vavator Powell. E.C. records that whilst in bed preparing to pray to God

²⁷ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings*, p. 30.

²⁸ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 51.

²⁹ Richard Norwood, *Confessions*, p. 148.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

I had strange temptations upon me, to put God out of my mind, and I could not speake a word, nor scarce think of God . . . And Satan then appeared to mee in a most ugly shape, laughing and jeering at me, which did much affright me, and then I feared that I had played the hypocrite with God.³²

Similarly, Powell notes that when he was praying in his bedroom late at night he ‘heard one walk about me trampling on the chamber floor, as if it had been some heavie big man’.³³

Why were believers assaulted by the Devil in this particular place? It is notable that when each of these incidents occurred the individual involved was *alone* in his or her room. Perhaps we could say that when they were isolated from other members of their family or community was the time they were most vulnerable and they were also likely to be more open to diabolical suggestion in the darkness (evil being associated with the dark and goodness with the light suggesting, once again, the importance of binary oppositions to the early modern mind). Thomas Gataker (1574-1654), a Puritan divine, maintained that a man was ‘more prone to be assailed with evill suggestions and motions, when he is alone by himselfe, then when he is in company with others that be religiously affected’.³⁴ Jane Turner noted that Satan especially tempted her when she was ‘by my self’ and Thomas Halyburton claimed that he ‘found when I was alone, when I was in prayer and most serious, hellish oaths, and grievous blasphemous suggestions cast forcibly into my mind, which made me tremble’.³⁵

³² ‘Experiences of E.C.’ in Vavasor Powell, *Spirituell Experiences of Sundry Beleevers* (London: Printed by Robert Ibbitson, 1653), p. 82.

³³ Powell, *Life*, 8.

³⁴ Thomas Gataker, *The spirituell watch, or Christ’s generall watch-word A meditation on Mark 13.17* (London: Printed by Edward Griffin for Wallace Bladen, 1619), p. 53.

³⁵ Jane Turner, *Choice Experiences of the kind dealings of God before, in, and after conversion laid down in six general heads: together with some brief observations upon the same: whereunto is added a description of true experience* (London: Printed by H. Hills, 1653), p. 25; Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 82.

Halyburton also raises another key point here - believers were often tempted when they were trying to worship God, for the Devil was keen to distract them from their holy duties and any pious thoughts; indeed, Nathan Johnstone suggests that in early modern England it was believed that ‘Satan’s intrusion into the body commonly effected a profound disruption of the victim’s spiritual equilibrium, distracting him from religious observance and encouraging the conviction of damnation’.³⁶ From her reading of the Scriptures Rose Thurgood sees that one does not have to say long prayers in order to be heard by God, but the Devil says in her heart ‘Oh but they were deare Children of God, and thou art an Hypocrite by thine owne Confession, for thou wouldest doe that in the sight of God, that thou wouldest not doe in the sight of men, therefore God heareth none of thy prayers’ – thereby greatly upsetting her so that she ‘could not pray at all’.³⁷

Nehemiah Wallington records how, when he lived with his father, he ‘usee [sic] everyday to goe up alone into the heye garret and praye’ and the Devil regularly tempted him to committed suicide by ‘leape[ing] out of the garret window in to the scalding Hall’ below.³⁸ He also notes how he was tempted to forsake all his godly duties for one day ‘it came in my mind what neede I goe to Church for thou maiest read as good & as sweet matter at home. And what praise and Glory can such a polluted vile creture . . . ade to so all glorious God’.³⁹ Moreover, Wallington also found himself tempted by the Devil to burn all his notebooks – which he had penned ‘for Gods glory and the good of souls’ - yet found the strength to resist and tell Satan

³⁶ N. Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 103.

³⁷ Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 5.

³⁸ Wallington, *Record*, pp. 1, 3.

³⁹ Wallington, *Growth*, fos. 48r-48v.

‘that would not helpe mee, thou art myemie and a lying spirit I will not yeeld neither harken unto thee’.⁴⁰

For several weeks Bunyan had been thinking about the nature of true faith and how a Christian individual might discover whether he was elected, and therefore in possession of effectual faith, or merely a reprobate with temporary faith, yet was finding it immensely difficult to resolve this dilemma. Bunyan then found himself confronted by the Devil who tried to convince him that he was not a member of the elect and should thus ‘leave off, and strive no further’ in matters of God.⁴¹ This brought Bunyan close to despair for, as the Devil incessantly reminded him, ‘if indeed you should not be Elected and chosen of God, there is no talke of your being saved’.⁴² Thus we see that in this encounter the Devil appeared keen to play on Bunyan’s insecurities concerning his own chances of salvation and consequently, according to Bunyan’s perception of events at least, the Devil manipulated his mind so that it was able to discern only the most pessimistic outlook. Interestingly, in this encounter the Devil did not take on a tangible form in order to assail Bunyan, instead the attack took the form of a verbal assault with the Devil placing unpleasant suggestions into Bunyan’s mind.

Around a year later as Bunyan was walking in the country musing on the day of Grace, he found doubt entering his mind concerning the number of people whom God would eventually convert and redeem. Bunyan felt the Devil suggest that the poor, yet godly, women of Bedford whom he had met the previous year, were the only people God would save in the area – thus leaving him with no hope of redemption. This time he merely felt that ‘the Tempter presented to my mind’ that the good people of Bedford would be the only ones saved – in other words, this time

⁴⁰ Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 264.

⁴¹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

he simply found that the thought was pushed to the front of his mind, rather than taking part in a dialogue between himself and the Devil.⁴³ Significantly, the Devil forced Vavasor Powell to believe that he ‘had no right to any promises . . . and that all my prayers were an abomination to God’; which is almost an exact replica of Bunyan’s temptation for Powell was also temporarily made to believe he was not a member of the elect and therefore could not hope to be redeemed.⁴⁴

The Devil and His Guises: Physical Manifestations of Satan

Yet the Devil did not only resort to shaking the confidence of believers by placing thoughts into their minds and tugging at them with invisible fingers – he was also able to physically manifest himself before incredulous believers, influence others to act on his behalf and even transform his shape and take on any appearance he desired. Edward Wayman dreamt that the Devil appeared before him in the form of ‘*a great black terrible dog, which seized upon me, and took hold on my ear fast*’.⁴⁵ John Rogers fell into the ‘*Black gulf of Despair*’ after he thought he saw devils ‘in severall *ugly shapes and formes* (according to my *fancies*) and sometimes with great *rolling flaming eyes* (like *sawcers*) having *sparkling* fire-brands in the one of their *hands*, and with the other *reaching* at me to *tear* me away to torments!’⁴⁶ Satan appeared before the despairing Joan Drake ‘*Proteus* like’ and ‘according unto the occasion changed shapes, to have overthrown this good Gentlewoman’.⁴⁷ Hannah Allen noted that the Devil had the ability to take on human form if necessary when she claimed that after she had succumbed to the Devil’s torments one night she

⁴³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Powell, *Life*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ ‘The Experience of Edward Wayman’ in John Rogers, *Ohel*, p. 409.

⁴⁶ John Rogers, *Ohel*, pp. 426-427.

⁴⁷ John Hart, *Trodden Downe Strength*, p. 3.

'heard like the voice of two Young Men singing in the Yard . . .; which I said were Devils in the likeness of Men, singing for joy that they had overcome me'.⁴⁸

Moreover, it was certainly not unusual for the Devil to appear in human form, as the case of Lydia Rogers clearly proves. It is reported that Rogers lived in dire poverty and one day 'the Devil appeared in the shape of a man . . . and brought her money'.⁴⁹ Also, an anonymous pamphlet reported the case of a gentlewoman who had been reduced to poverty and was thus desperate for money. This lady was astonished to find the Devil appearing before her in human form 'with a Bag of Money in one hand, and a Knife in the other, tempting her to Murther one of her Children'.⁵⁰ The Devil appearing in the guise of a man is also certainly reminiscent of Christ's temptation in the wilderness when, according to Milton, the Devil appeared before Jesus in the form of 'an aged man in rural weeds'.⁵¹

Subtle Forms of Deceit

Bunyan noted that the Devil tried to overthrow his ministry by stirring up 'the mindes of the ignorant, and malicious, to load me with slanders and reproaches' and ensuring that rumours claiming him to be 'a Witch, a Jesuit, a High-way-man, and the like' were spread around the country; which shows that the Devil was prepared to attack Bunyan indirectly and use other people as instruments in his mission to turn Bunyan away from thoughts of God and religion, albeit unsuccessfully.⁵² However, this temptation backfires, for in response to these rumours Bunyan *finds his own* manner of consolation, the text of Matthew 5:11 – 'blessed are ye, when men shall

⁴⁸ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings*, p. 22.

⁴⁹ Anon., *The Snare of the Devill Discovered* (London: Printed for Edward Thomas in Green Arbour, 1658), title page. This episode where the Devil offers money as a bribe to Rogers, who is in dire need of money to support her family, also reinforces the link between the Devil and worldly affairs.

⁵⁰ Anon., *A Strange and Wonderful Relation from Shadvvel, or The Devil Visible* (London: Printed for W. Smith, 1674), title page.

⁵¹ John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, p. 223.

⁵² Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 84-85.

revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake' - which is actually selected by Bunyan, and does not appear as a biblical incursion. Bunyan's choice of this text suggests that the Devil's persecution has turned him into a martyr for Christ and religion in his own eyes. Bunyan thus sees himself as dissociated from the world, waiting to be reunited with his saviour in death. Vavasor Powell also found that Satan was able to act through members of his community as he notes that after Satan had failed to convince him that God had forsaken him

he began to raise up Persecution against me; as one day going through the Town where I was born . . . I met with two Gentlemen kinsmen of mine (in their drunkenness) who called upon me to come to them, and without any the least provoking word, or carriage, they fell both upon me.⁵³

Thus we see that in seventeenth-century England the Devil was not only considered capable of inflicting mental and physical punishment on his victims, he was also deemed able to influence others to carry out his will and adopt a corporeal form in order to disguise himself - thereby making the assault less obvious.

But then subtlety was the Devil's strongpoint for by it he hoped to snatch those who little suspected his involvement. For example, Nehemiah Wallington noted that 'The Divil is a suttel adversary. For when I was hereing of Mr Carrell on Monday then did he put in my mind these thoughts. Why I might not as well benifet by hearing of Mr Robroh as by hearing of some others hee being a Minister of God and teaching the truth as well as others'.⁵⁴ Jane Turner discovered, to her horror, that the Church she attended after she moved to the country from London, preached a corrupt form of the true doctrines that managed to both confuse and beguile her

⁵³ Powell, *Life*, p. 9. This episode is also reminiscent of an incident recalled by Richard Baxter where he noted that 'Satan stirred up a little inconsiderable rage of wicked men against me' following his sermon on Original Sin. See Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ Wallington, *Growth*, fo.41v.

before she ‘was brought to discover Satan under these veiles, by harkening to the voice of the Tempter’.⁵⁵ Joan Drake also discovered to her detriment that Satan was able to change tack and tempt her in many different ways ‘so as scarcely could it be known at what ward to finde him long: so to shew his malice, did he change his posture and weapon’.⁵⁶ Whilst Trosse heard what he assumed to be God telling him to be ‘*Yet more humble*’, however, upon reflection he realised it was the Devil trying to humble him as low as hell.⁵⁷

Bunyan’s most harrowing experience of diabolical temptation began in a deceptively low-key manner, but the persistence of the Devil’s suggestions made it unendurable for him. The temptation began shortly after Bunyan had been introduced to the Bedford Independent Church, and their pastor, John Gifford, (c.1650) when he was about twenty-two years old. For several days previously Bunyan had been feeling elated and had begun ardently to believe that his soul and affections cleaved to Christ and that he ‘loved Christ dearly’.⁵⁸ However, Bunyan was soon to discover that the course of gaining true faith never runs smoothly, for Satan tempted him to exchange Christ for the things of this world (i.e. exchange his salvation for purely carnal concerns).

In itself this does not sound too difficult a temptation to overcome, yet it was the duration of the Devil’s torments that eventually wore Bunyan down until he could resist no longer. Bunyan explains that the Devil followed him incessantly for a year continually asking him to part with his saviour for worldly affairs so that he was ‘not rid of it one day in a month, no not sometimes one hour in many dayes together,

⁵⁵ Jane Turner, *Choice Experiences*, p. 111.

⁵⁶ John Hart, *Trodden Downe Strength*, p. 28.

⁵⁷ Trosse, *Life*, p. 86.

⁵⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 38.

unless I was asleep'.⁵⁹ He admits that he abhorred the thought of selling Christ and tried hard to resist it, but the Devil was relentless in his assault. Bunyan found that he could 'neither eat my food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast mine eye to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come, *sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that*'.⁶⁰ Bunyan even notes that sometimes the Devil would repeat the words 'sell him' over a hundred times in his mind yet each time he would stand strong and refuse. However, one morning the incessant repetition became too much for him to withstand and after answering that he would not sell Christ for thousands of worlds he was overwhelmed and felt 'this thought pass through my heart, *Let him go if he will!* and I thought also that I felt my heart consent thereto'.⁶¹ Having felt his heart acquiesce to the Devil's wiles Bunyan was immediately beset with feelings of utter despair and helplessness for he became convinced that he had committed the unpardonable sin (a conscious rejection of Christ) which could never be forgiven and would thus be irredeemably damned.

This temptation, although only 'verbal' (or, more accurately, 'audible') in nature, had been so strong that in Bunyan's eyes it almost crossed the boundary into being a physical torment, as he notes that 'in labouring to gainsay and resist this wickedness, my very Body also would be put into action or motion, by way of

⁵⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 39. Here we see the incessant nature of the diabolical temptation. However, the fact that Bunyan explicitly mentions he was free from temptation when he slept, i.e. in his dreams, may well be significant because, as we have seen in the previous chapter, according to seventeenth-century thought there was a correlation between dreams and an individual's true spiritual condition.

⁶⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 39.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40. William Perkins asserted that evil thoughts, such as Bunyan's acquiescence to 'sell Christ', may be placed in the mind 'by the suggestion of the devil'. See Perkins, *Work*, p. 151. However, Darren Oldridge notes that 'individuals were only responsible for those evil conceptions which arose from their own minds'. Oldridge, *Devil*, p. 46. Bunyan notes that sometimes 'the Tempter would make me believe I had consented to it, then should I be as tortured on a Rack for whole dayes together' (Bunyan, *GA*, p. 39) – here Bunyan could not be considered culpable, because he did not actually consent to selling Christ, he was just persuaded to believe that he had. However, although the idea to sell Christ for worldly concerns was implanted in Bunyan's mind by the Devil, Bunyan notes that he felt his heart consent to the matter – thereby making him blameworthy because it was a conscious action.

pushing or thrusting'.⁶² This is not the only time when the Devil's torments take on a distinctly tangible aspect. Bunyan notes that the Devil tried hard to distract and confuse him when he prayed. Moreover, these disruptions did not merely take the form of voices and whisperings audible to him alone, for Bunyan also maintained that there were times when he felt that he would actually see the Devil if he raised his head from prayer, because whilst his head had been bowed he had 'felt him behind me pull my cloaths'.⁶³

It is also interesting to note that when Bunyan fell into despair, because he feared that he was not a member of the elect, he was initially unsure of the cause of his despondent state of mind. Only with the benefit of hindsight was Bunyan able to discern the Devil's involvement for he 'little thought that Satan had thus assaulted me, but that rather it was my own prudence thus to start the question'.⁶⁴ Hannah Allen also experienced a similar moment of diabolical influence. Whilst travelling to London Allen found that at the sight of a Church it was 'presently suggested to me, that's a Hell-house'.⁶⁵ Initially, Allen thought the suggestion came 'from my self' and so did not speak of it until after her bout of religious melancholy was over and hindsight taught her that she had been deceived by Satan.⁶⁶

The fact that Bunyan and Allen had blasphemous thoughts and initially attributed them to their own minds but, upon reflection, discerned the hand of the Devil at work shows the subtle nature of the Devil's assault. This pattern also matches John Stachniewski's hypothesis that the Calvinist doctrine of reprobation fostered a sense of 'alienated individualism' within believers which could only be

⁶² Bunyan, *GA*, p. 39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20. This sentence was added in the fifth edition (1680) of *Grace Abounding*.

⁶⁵ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

countered by integrating oneself into the community.⁶⁷ Stachniewski also suggests that Bunyan's spiritual autobiography 'sharply defines the alienated individual' yet 'associates salvation with the ability to break out of isolation' and believes that writing the spiritual autobiography was Bunyan's attempt to release himself from the 'solitary confinement of despair'.⁶⁸

This progression from isolation to integration may be seen in Bunyan's encounter with the Devil. Bunyan originally saw himself as the cause of his own dejection. We could say that he felt alienated from God and considered himself to be the centre of his spiritual experience. However, the reflective process initiated by the writing of his spiritual autobiography appears to have caused Bunyan to reconsider all this and position himself in terms of the 'larger theological picture' - consequently reminding himself that he is merely a pawn in the unending war between God and Satan, but is certainly not alone in this, for it is the position all humanity inevitably finds itself in. This common predicament makes it possible for an individual to find comfort in discussing God's dealings with himself with other members of the religious community (e.g. fellow members of his congregation). It would appear that this form of 'integration' is precisely what happened in the admission narratives many congregations required from potential new members and, indeed, the whole of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* is addressed to 'those whom God hath counted him worthy to beget to Faith, by his Ministry in the Word' and whom he addresses as his 'Children'.⁶⁹ Moreover, this viewpoint is certainly a far cry from the interpretation of Puritan despair by scholars such as William James who put a psychoanalytical spin on matters and conclude that cases of religious melancholy, such as Bunyan's, were the product of 'the psychopathic temperament' which caused

⁶⁷ J. Stachniewski, *Persecutory Imagination*, p. 128.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135, 133.

⁶⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 3.

sufferers to be ‘sensitive of conscience to a diseased degree, beset by doubts, fears and insistent ideas, and a victim of verbal automatisms, both motor and sensory’.⁷⁰

George Trosse attributed most of his shortcomings in religious affairs and bad choices to his own wretched human nature and the lack of discipline imposed on him by his mother, at no point during his childhood and youth does he feel assaulted by the Devil. Indeed, Trosse even maintains that his inherent sinful nature made him far worse than the Devil for at times he felt his sinful actions ‘tempted the very Tempter’ for during his travels abroad he was mainly unconcerned with his spiritual condition.⁷¹ However, with the benefit of hindsight, Trosse claimed that his irreligious behaviour and lack of concern for matters of religion stemmed from the fact that his ‘*Ears were bor’d to the Devil’s Posts for a debasing Slavery. His cursed Work I lov’d and delighted in: He was my Master, as a Tempter to Sin, and a Promoter of it*’.⁷² Thus we see that Trosse proclaimed himself to be a willing servant

⁷⁰ W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longman, 1922), p. 157. There is currently immense scholarly interest in early modern melancholy. Such research considers the causes and effects of melancholy and the widespread nature of the ‘disease’. A. Gowland, ‘The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy’, *Past and Present*, 191:1 (2006), pp. 77-120, analyses why melancholy was considered to be such an ubiquitous ‘disease’ in early modern England and concludes that there was a problem of definition – ‘one doctor’s “melancholic” might be another’s “hypochondriac”’ (p. 82) - and that increased incidences of melancholy in the period are attributable to increased medical and theological interest (although Gowland terms the spiritual aspect ‘the single most important factor fuelling the expansion of the potential usage of the idea of melancholy’ [p. 103]) as well as the perception that post-Reformation Europe was spiralling down into chaos – a chaos which was reflected in psychological disorder. K. Hodgkin, ‘The Labyrinth and the Pit’, *History Workshop Journal*, 51 (2001), pp. 37-63 asserts that restlessness/wandering was the characteristic behaviour of the mad in seventeenth-century England as they sought to isolate themselves from the rest of society and retreat into a private world. When isolated with their own overpowering sense of sin the mad ‘plunge down into the pit of self-hatred and self-abasement; indeed, into the pit of hell, figured graphically as well as imaginatively as a place of depth’ (p. 54). K. Hodgkin, *Madness in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) considers how madness was identified and experienced by Dionys Fitzherbert, Hannah Allen and George Trosse. J. Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) suggests that melancholy was as much a disease of the soul as of the body and shows how medicine, religion and moral philosophy combined to create treatment for the melancholic individual. Schmidt argues that the care of the melancholic soul was approached ‘in the context of the whole of an individual’s beliefs, conduct, and social and familial relations; they wrote about melancholy as a condition bound up in all of these features of life and personality, not as simply one incidental, and thus its treatment involved all of these dimensions’ (p. 16) with the ultimate aim of such treatment being, not simply the cure of the melancholic disease, but the strengthening of the soul.

⁷¹ Trosse, *Life*, p. 65.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 83. (The italics and capitalisation are Trosse’s unless otherwise stated).

of the Devil in his youth who cared little for religious affairs – and all this despite having no direct contact with the Devil and the fact that his actions did not always support his claims to being ungodly (e.g. Trosse was disappointed with the household he was placed in because it was not godly enough).⁷³

In some ways this is similar to Bunyan's youthful experiences, for Bunyan also considered himself to be dissolute in his adolescence. However, he attributed this impiety to the corruption inherent in his own soul and did not see the hand of the Devil at work. Thus far, we see that the benefit of hindsight led Trosse to believe that the Devil was elaborately involved in his life, influencing his decisions from a very early age and ensnaring him in vices such as gambling and drinking, whereas Bunyan only discerned the Devil as a fearful presence in his childhood dreams and did not consider his thoughts to be manipulated by Satan until he was in his early twenties. In other words, Trosse maintained that the Devil had been at work *before* he had been truly awakened (the notable piety of his childhood appeared to be short-lived), whilst Bunyan only felt the full force of Satan's malice *after* he had developed an interest in religion. We may wonder whether this shows exactly how subtle the Devil's machinations were - with Bunyan not even realising the Devil was at work - or whether it suggests that the Devil needs to be viewed through a 'lens of piety' in order to be discerned at all (after all, although Trosse claims that the Devil was at work before his awakening, it is only the benefit of hindsight that allows him to make this observation).

⁷³ See Trosse, *Life*, pp. 57-58.

Blatant Deception and the Development of Religious Melancholy

When it seemed to be the most effective way to force a believer into desperation the Devil could also act in a blunt and open manner, not even attempting to disguise his onslaught. George Trosse experienced such an assault; and perhaps we could say that, to many early modern readers, it would have seemed that it was the shock following the undisguised nature of this attack that tipped Trosse, a man already susceptible to melancholy, into despair. It happened almost immediately after he heard a voice urging him to be yet more humble, for the Devil then persuaded him to believe that he had committed the Unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost. On this occasion, Trosse was persuaded to believe that his ‘careless and prophane Reading and Hearing the *Word of God*, and not endeavouring to *understand* the *Meaning* of it’ amounted to the sin against the Holy Ghost, because apprehending God’s word incorrectly perverted it to such a degree that it could no longer be considered the true Word of God.⁷⁴

The thought of having committed the Unpardonable Sin immediately filled Trosse ‘with grievous Horrour and Anguish, with great Anxiety and sinking Despair’ and at this point the Devil incessantly tried to tempt him to commit suicide and also terrified him with many disquieting visions and voices. At one stage Satan even managed to persuade Trosse not to open his eyes or his mouth in an attempt to starve him, and all the while Trosse unquestioningly obeyed these promptings because he had been deceived into believing that ‘the *Starving* of my *Body* was the Way to *save* my *Soul*’.⁷⁵ Trosse also believed that he saw a great claw on the wall of his room, which is markedly different to Norwood and Bunyan’s perception of the Devil, for whereas they *heard* or *felt* the Devil’s presence, it appears that Trosse actually *saw*

⁷⁴ Trosse, *Life*, p. 88.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

the Devil in shadow form. Trosse also appears to have had closer contact with the Devil than Bunyan had which makes the Devil an even more fearsome adversary in Trosse's account. Indeed, so far under the Devil's spell was Trosse that he was even persuaded that if he should move from his bed he would drop directly into Hell, he was also adamant that the Devil possessed him by going 'down my Throat with the *Liquor*' and later became convinced that he was actually in Hell surrounded by fiends.⁷⁶

Trosse's experiences with the Devil certainly appear to have taken on a demented and disturbing tone; he even admits that he was afflicted with '*desperate Madness*' and '*melancholy*' for it seemed to him that he 'carry'd, as it were, my *Hell within me*'.⁷⁷ The fact that Trosse was actually prepared to admit that he was suffering from a mental affliction is surprising because he does not claim that his crisis had a *completely* spiritual origin. Unlike Francis Spira who maintained that his sense of melancholy was a disease of the soul where '*it is onely Christ that must be the Physician, and the Gospell the sole Antidote*', Trosse's self-analysis was that he suffered from '*a disturb'd Brain influenc'd by a deceitful and lying Devil*'.⁷⁸ This makes his crisis completely different from Spira's and the anguish portrayed in *Grace Abounding* where Bunyan had been in no doubt that his torments were solely spiritual in origin and asserted that '*God did not play in convincing of me; the Devil did not play in tempting of me; neither did I play when I sunk as into a bottomless pit*'.⁷⁹

Dionys Fitzherbert experienced a similar period of doubt and despair to those suffered by Trosse and Bunyan yet her account is structured 'around an insistence

⁷⁶ Trosse, *Life.*, p. 93.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 114, 98.

⁷⁸ Nathaniel Bacon, *A Relation of the Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira*, p. 36; Trosse, *Life*, p. 100.

⁷⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5. The italics are Bunyan's.

that she did not suffer from madness or *melancholia*, but rather from an afflicted conscience'.⁸⁰ It seems that Fitzherbert emphatically maintained she did not suffer from madness or melancholy because she wished to demonstrate that her own doubts had a spiritual origin. Yet why would she wish to do this? After all, doing so seemingly implies that Fitzherbert could believe melancholy to be a shameful condition that originates in the mind of the believer and thus having a physical, rather than spiritual, cause. Indeed, Richard Greenham feared that there were those 'who are wounded more with the fear of shame, with the fear of being mad, or with the fear of running out of their wits, than with the conscience of sin'.⁸¹ However, this was not the case.

Mary Morrissey argues that Fitzherbert was convinced that she had been 'called', converted and justified, since she was fourteen' and therefore her experience of despair came as 'a profound shock to her, because she thinks it is inconsistent with the assurance granted the saints'; a preacher Fitzherbert had spoken to had told her that it was impossible for the elect to fall into despair since 'God would keepe his from such blasphemies'.⁸² If this were the case then Fitzherbert could only have been in possession of temporary faith since her youth and was in fact a reprobate. Her refusal to believe this led her to assert that she suffered from an afflicted conscience, which was sent by God to test her, rather than melancholy. Consequently, we see that Fitzherbert's refusal to admit she was suffering from melancholy did not stem from the belief that melancholy is a symptom of a physical ailment, rather than an illness of the soul, but was occasioned by the conviction that despair was a sure sign of damnation.

⁸⁰ M. Morrissey, 'Narrative Authority in Spiritual Life-writing: The Example of Dionys Fitzherbert (fl. 1608-1641)', *The Seventeenth Century*, 15:1 (2000), pp. 1-17. Quotation on p. 1.

⁸¹ Richard Greenham quoted in J. Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 56.

⁸² M. Morrissey, 'Narrative Authority in Spiritual Life Writing', pp. 2, 3.

Trosse's open admission to suffering from melancholy clearly shows that his religious beliefs differed slightly from Fitzherbert's. Having unequivocally admitted to suffering from melancholy, he could not possibly have believed that despair and madness were certain indications of reprobation – it seems that Trosse gained a full sense of assurance by the time he wrote his *Life*, for he notes that he is 'perswaded, that God hath given me *Repentance* as to *all my Sins*, and a *sincere Faith in Christ*, and so a *full Remission*'.⁸³ Instead, he must have considered his period of despair and insanity to have been sent as a trial by God.

In the seventeenth century melancholy was believed to have both natural and supernatural causes. 'A superabundance of bile in one's system' or 'any one of the four humors putrefying or being burnt through excessive heat' were deemed the natural causes of the affliction.⁸⁴ However, it was also agreed that madness and melancholy had a spiritual or supernatural cause since they were believed to be 'from God and His angels, or by God's permission from the devil and his ministers'.⁸⁵ It was possible for these two explanations - the natural and the supernatural - to be combined, and consequently many believed that 'the Devil exploited the weakness of reason and overpowerful imaginations of people sickened by melancholy and tempted them to despair of their salvation'.⁸⁶ Robert Burton, the author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) maintained that in people affected by melancholy 'all senses are troubled' and men 'think they see, hear, smell, and touch, that which they do not' - symptoms which could certainly be read into Trosse's

⁸³ Trosse, *Life*, p. 88.

⁸⁴ John F. Sena, 'Melancholic Madness and the Puritans', *Harvard Theological Review*, 66:3 (1973), pp. 293-309. Quotations on p. 296.

⁸⁵ Robert Burton quoted in M. MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 174.

⁸⁶ M. MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 223.

Life.⁸⁷ Thus we could say that the *Life* is a work discussing a ‘trial of faith’, which takes a different approach to Bunyan’s and Fitzherbert’s texts. However, because Trosse believes that the fault is partly in his own mind, as he blames it on a ‘*disturb’d Brain*’; it could also be said that the *Life* emphasises the frailty of mankind and its need to be utterly dependent on God who is all-powerful and gracious.

Whilst Trosse acknowledged that the cause of his crisis was partially physical, he also maintained that it was mainly God who cured him thus suggesting that God had complete control in physical as well as spiritual matters: Trosse said ‘but at length, thro’ the *Goodness of God*, and by His *Blessing* upon *Physick*, a *low Diet*, and *hard Keeping*, I began to be somewhat *quiet* and *compos’d* in my *Spirits*’.⁸⁸ Indeed, to support this contention we may say that in the *Life* God determined the length of Trosse’s illness, for he found himself sent to Glastonbury for treatment on three separate occasions, receiving the same treatment each time. Therefore, we might agree with Morrissey and say that ‘by drawing out the period of illness and confusion, the writer demonstrates that all human means to recovery were attempted and that all failed’, until God allowed them to succeed, of course.⁸⁹ Although Trosse acknowledged the important role of Mrs Gollop, the wife of the doctor he was taken to stay with, in helping him return to sanity, he maintained that it was God who must have the ultimate responsibility for his recovery as he said that ‘God was ples’d,

⁸⁷ Robert Burton quoted in Sena, ‘Melancholic Madness’, p. 297. According to Anne Dunan-Page, Bunyan’s ‘dreaming’ pose (his head rests on his left hand) on the frontispiece to *The Pilgrim’s Progress* echoes the pose traditionally associated with melancholy thus suggesting that contemporaries would have recognised Bunyan as a melancholic sleeper. A. Dunan-Page, ‘John Bunyan, Robert White and Nathaniel Ponder: images of the author in the late 1670s’; a paper given at the Bangor Conference on the Restoration: Politics, Religion and Culture in the 1670s (24-26 July 2007). See Appendix 2 for illustrations.

⁸⁸ Trosse, *Life*, p. 100.

⁸⁹ M. Morrissey, ‘Narrative Authority in Spiritual Life Writing’, p. 7.

after *all my repeated Provocations*, to restore me to *Peace* and *Serenity*, and the *regular Use of my Reason*'.⁹⁰

Diabolical Designs: Patterns of Temptation

Having seen the manner of many fiendish temptations and the way in which experiences of diabolical temptation were rife in seventeenth-century England, we will now quickly re-consider some of these diabolical experiences in order to see if any pattern may be clearly discerned.

It seems that the relationship between the strength of Bunyan's faith and the strength of the Devil's assaults is directly proportional - up to a crucial point. The more awakened and receptive to religious ideas Bunyan becomes, the more powerful and prolonged the Devil's attacks get until a 'saturation point' is reached and Bunyan is not troubled by the Devil to the same extent as before, even though he still views the Devil as a serious threat. For example, when Bunyan was a child he had few thoughts for religion and thus he was only tormented by the Devil occasionally in his dreams. After he was married and had developed an interest in religious affairs through the piety of his own wife, the Devil conversed with him and tried to persuade him that he was not a member of the Elect and would not be saved. Moreover, Bunyan's most distressing and prolonged temptation occurred shortly after he had met the godly women of Bedford and had experienced his vision suggesting that he had been integrated into the godly community. Here the Devil's taunts were incessant and proved too much for Bunyan to cope with, for the temptation eventually broke down his will to resist. Yet by the time Bunyan enters the ministry the Devil's onslaughts have dissipated somewhat and even when they

⁹⁰ Trosse, *Life*, p. 111.

do occur he is able to look at them stoically with an air of detachment and accept that 'blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:10) - thus indicating that his faith has grown sufficiently to place him beyond the Devil's reach; his body and mind might constantly suffer pain from the Devil's torments, yet his soul appears to have ascended to a higher plane which the Devil's onslaughts only occasionally reach.

A similar picture is presented by Cicely Johnson and Hannah Allen's experiences of Satan. Johnson discovered that when God began to

bring mee into feare & awe of his majesty more then ever I was before' the Devil perceived the change and 'hee like a roaring lion . . . vaunted upon mee, & did prevaile soe farr as God permitted him, the more stricter I was in performing the duty, that God requireth both in the first & second table, the more malicious hee was against mee with evil thoughtes.⁹¹

However, she explicitly denies that 'the m[or]e grace, & the stronger faith as a Christian attaineth unto, the more the Devil assayeth him with temptations' instead claiming that 'from the beginninge of my conversion untill I was converted, . . . the Devil assayed mee with temptations of divers sortes, but after I was converted & actually justified & had full assurance of the pardon of my synnes, the Devil ceased from his former temptations'.⁹² Allen discovered that when 'earnest breathings after the ways of God' were worked in her for the first time (she was twelve years old at this time), the Devil 'strove to crush such hopeful beginnings in the bud, [and] cast in horrible blasphemous thoughts and injections into my mind'.⁹³

Thomas Halyburton's experiences of the Devil do not follow the same lines as Bunyan, Allen and Johnson's experiences. Instead of finding that the Devil's temptations get stronger as his faith develops, Halyburton discovers that the Devil's

⁹¹ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 34. Johnson's description of the Devil as a 'roaring lion' is a reference to I Peter 5:8.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁹³ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings*, pp. 2-3.

onslaughts are at their strongest when true faith has just been awakened and he is unprepared for the 'battle' that must come. He notes that being 'not acquainted with the watchfulness, vigilance, and humble sobriety, that was necessary to prevent Satan's gaining any advantage . . . Hereon Satan, finding so fair an occasion slipt it not; for he goes about seeking such seasons (I Peter 5:8), and finding things thus, he improved it to my great disquietment'.⁹⁴ Richard Norwood also found that when faith was being re-kindled in his heart following a lengthy period of despair was one of the times when the Devil was most active and he felt that this was because Satan 'perceive me about to return [to God], and to lay hold upon the promises' and thus prepared to 'assail me with all his power and be ready to overwhelm me with utter despair'.⁹⁵

Whereas Bunyan, Johnson and Allen found themselves plagued by the Devil whilst their faith was still growing, Trosse suffered a severe bout of insanity whilst he was in his early twenties - *before* faith had begun to blossom within him - which provided the Devil with the opportunity to exacerbate the situation and play on his doubts and insecurities. It is impossible to distinguish between the events Trosse considered to be reality, diabolical disillusionment, or a product of his own insanity. Consequently we may say that the Devil certainly played an important role in the *Life* for he fuelled Trosse's insanity. Though this time the Devil's onslaughts do not appear to be linked to a growth in religious fervour, for the onset of Trosse's madness occurred at a time when he had been living impiously – perhaps by showing that his madness came at a time when he was irreligious, Trosse could be attempting to show the reader that 'God himself inflicted madness and despair on

⁹⁴ Halyburton, *Memoirs*, pp. 81-82.

⁹⁵ Richard Norwood, *Confessions*, p. 148.

notorious sinners' and so further reinforcing the idea that the Devil could be used by God as an instrument of His vengeance.⁹⁶

But were there any significant patterns to these onslaughts? At a crucial juncture in *Grace Abounding* (namely, the first prolonged period of temptation) Bunyan passed through three distinct phases of assurance/despair. Firstly, he fell into despair when he thought that he had been tempted into 'selling' his saviour, thereby damning his own soul; secondly, he found himself happily assured that he had not committed the Unpardonable Sin, only to have his hopes dashed almost immediately by the lingering doubt that Christ's mercy did not extend to so great a sinner as he; thirdly, after convincing himself that Christ was still his friend and saviour, Bunyan began to doubt that the blood of Christ was sufficient to redeem him.⁹⁷

It is highly significant that this key episode in Bunyan's spiritual development is tripartite. This is because, in its three-part state, the episode corresponds with the temptation of Christ in the wilderness (related in Matthew 4:1-12).⁹⁸ The Bible tells us that during his time in the wilderness Christ was tempted by Satan on three separate occasions, yet he overcame each onslaught with ease. In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan finds himself tempted by Satan and lost in doubt and despair on three occasions, yet it is only with great difficulty that he manages to survive each episode and emerge with a deeper understanding of spiritual affairs; the disparity in the way in which Christ and Bunyan handle their temptations may certainly be accounted for by the fact that Bunyan is merely a weak, depraved human

⁹⁶ M. MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 174.

⁹⁷ See Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 40-56.

⁹⁸ This is not the only time when Bunyan's temptations correspond with those experienced by Christ. Before he is tempted to sell Christ he is tempted to try and discover if he has true faith by attempting to perform a miracle. Here Bunyan tried to 'say to the puddles that were in the horse pads, *Be dry*; and to the dry places, *Be you the puddles*' (Bunyan, *GA*, p. 18) which could be likened to Christ's temptation in the wilderness to command a stone to turn into bread in order to prove that he is the Son of God (Luke 4:3).

being, prone to both temptation and despair, whereas Christ is the son of God and able to battle Satan.

George Trosse also experiences a tripartite temptation from Satan. The first time he notices Satan's direct intervention in his life he finds himself tempted to do three different things. Trosse hears a voice asking '*Who art thou?*' and assumes that it is God taking an interest in his soul and rebuking him for his sinful and unrepentant lifestyle - he knows it 'could be the Voice of *no Mortal*' and so automatically assumes it to be the voice of his creator yet, with the benefit of hindsight, Trosse avers that it belonged to Satan.⁹⁹ After hearing these words he began to pray earnestly for forgiveness yet the fiendish voice was dissatisfied with his efforts and repeatedly ordered him to be '*yet more humble*' (the first stage of this temptation) causing Trosse to remove most of his clothes and prostrate himself on the floor.¹⁰⁰ However, matters do not end here for Trosse is then ordered to cut off his hair by the voice and it is only the absence of a pair of scissors or knife that prevents him from complying – Trosse even feared that if he had done as requested the voice would have then ordered him to kill himself. Finally, when dressing Trosse finds himself '*directed by strange Kinds of Impulses what Garment first to put on, and so in Order; and then with what Leisure, and with what Awe and Reverence all was to be done*'.¹⁰¹ When Trosse pulled up one of his stockings he felt that he had offended the speaker who at this time he still believed to be God, and then heard the words '*Thou Wretch! Thou hast committed the Sin against the Holy-Ghost*' and consequently he fell into despair thinking himself irredeemably damned.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Trosse, *Life*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Thus we see that Bunyan experienced three separate periods of temptation whilst Trosse experienced a tripartite temptation; since both these works were intended for publication, it is possible that the authors divided their temptations into three segments for literary purposes in order to echo the pattern of Christ's temptation in the wilderness. If this were the case, perhaps we could say that our authors feel a desire to link their own lives with Christ's life and that this urge is so powerful and heartfelt that it is stronger than any desire to conform with the religious experiences of contemporary godly members of society.

A further interesting feature of reported bouts of diabolical assault is the vocabulary used to describe them. Whereas the heavenly voices expressing biblical incursions are said to have a gentle tone - Wallington repeatedly notes that he hears 'whisperings' and Bunyan notes that the voices are 'sweet': never do the voices shout or resound loudly and uncomfortably in their souls – the reverse is usually true for any sounds uttered by the Devil.¹⁰³ When discussing diabolical temptation the Devil is said to 'roar' as well as surreptitiously whisper in the ear – for example, when Margaret Gurr was possessed by the Devil there were the 'most ugly Shreiking noises'.¹⁰⁴

The fact that all this noise and disturbance is recorded when the Devil speaks or tempts reinforces the sense that the Devil is evil and unpleasant and also makes him seem unnatural as he is disrupting the lives of godly Christians and is certainly a force to be resisted (at least, 'unnatural' to the elect). It would also seem that the Devil frequently needs a specific point of entry in order to gain access to a Christian's soul – whispering in the ear, being ingested with drink (mouth) etc. – whereas heavenly voices simply appear to be absorbed into the soul and mind by a

¹⁰³ Wallington, *Growth*, fos. 19r, 21v.

¹⁰⁴ John Skinner, *A Strange and Wonderful Relation of Margaret Gurr*, p. 3.

special process of osmosis. For example, Trosse records that he felt the Devil go ‘down my Throat with the *Liquor*’ whilst a distressed lady who came to talk with Sarah Wight thought ‘the roome was full of smoake, and suddenly a fire went in at my mouth, and went downe hot into my belly, and there it went flutter, flutter’ and heard a voice within her telling her she was damned; thereby suggesting that it was the Devil who had entered her body and was now toiling to convince her to give up hope of salvation.¹⁰⁵

In *The Holy War*, Bunyan notes that the two gates into the town of Mansoul attacked by Diabolus are called Ear and Eye gate, yet he records that God is able to speak to the townsfolk through the voice of Mr Conscience, so God is able to access the town without using any of the entry gates.¹⁰⁶ Apart from showing that God is ever present, it also suggests that the Devil either has to force his way into the soul or use craft and guile to enter, while there is such a degree of harmony between God and his creation, that there is a direct link between the two – the link between God and man could be thought of like a dried-up river bed that is waiting for the ‘water’ of God’s love and mercy to flow through it.

*

So what have we discovered about the nature of Satan’s temptations as expressed in these Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies? We may certainly say that although there are definite similarities between the assaults our authors experience, no two are identical and it is impossible to predict the exact nature of a temptation one author will face by reading the account of another. Bunyan is tempted to ‘sell Christ’ and, by extension, his own hopes for salvation (he is too weak to withstand the Devil’s urges) whilst Trosse is tempted to believe that he has offended God, thus

¹⁰⁵ Trosse, *Life*, p. 93; Jessey, *Exceeding Riches*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁶ Bunyan, *Holy War*, pp. 101, 20-21.

forfeiting his own redemption (he was too strongly attached to his sinful lifestyle and ignorantly obeyed the Devil's commands), and Allen finds the Devil casting blasphemous thoughts into her mind and trying to convince her she is a hypocrite (she claims her proneness to melancholy led her to believe the Devil's lies).

Indeed, in each of our texts the Devil appears to find the author's Achilles heel and strike there. In these accounts the Devil may represent the author's most deeply seated fears or rather, as most contemporaries would have viewed it, the Devil was able to read their thoughts and force them to follow ungodly paths in life against their will. After all, when Hannah Allen found blasphemous thoughts entering her mind she questioned 'Whether if I had a Servant that I knew loved me, and desired in all things to please me, and yet was so forced against his will to do that which was contrary to my mind, whether I would think ever the worse of him, seeing I knew what he did was to his grief'.¹⁰⁷ Similarities occur because the most awful thought imaginable – God's rejection and the subsequent damnation of their souls – is shared by our authors. But differences are readily apparent because individuals differ and texts serve different purposes.

¹⁰⁷ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings*, p. 3.

Chapter 6

Experiences of Conversion

If indeed you should not be Elected and chosen of
God, there is no talke of your being saved
John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*¹

The moment a believer realised he had been converted was very special indeed. For many it was a moment of release for it felt as if a great weight had been lifted from their hearts and souls. Where previously they had felt trapped by sin and unworthy of salvation God had extended his mercy towards them and freed them from their desperate condition and they now felt jubilant yet humble. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* provides us with a perfect example of this for we see that before conversion Christian was in a sorry state and wept and trembled at his lamentable condition yet when he discovered that he was a member of the elect and his sins had been forgiven 'his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back' and he became 'glad and lightsome'.²

The same was true for many seventeenth-century Puritans. Nehemiah Wallington felt his soul was like a bird that a boy ties by the legs and pulls back to earth for 'it faires with my poor soule for three or foure dayes it flyes up to heaven to be transcended above with God in holy thoughts and divine meditations seeing things unutterable . . . but then I am pulled down againe with the vanity of ye world and foolishness of sinfull thoughts'.³ In other words, not only was it easy to fall into sinful ways, but once heavenly glory had been glimpsed it was impossible to forget and would be sought after forever more. Indeed, Bunyan's experiences also show heaven's intrinsic importance to a pious individual for after overhearing the women of Bedford talk of religious matters he records that his mind

¹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 20.

² Bunyan, *PP*, pp. 11, 35.

³ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 8r.

was now so turned, that it lay like a Horseleach at the vein, still crying out, *Give, give*; [Prov. 30.15] yea, it was so fixed on Eternity, and on the things about the Kingdome of Heaven . . . that neither pleasures nor profits, nor perswasions, nor threats, could loosen it, or make it let go its hold.⁴

It was almost as if glimpsing heaven awoke something within the pious individual's soul creating an unbreakable link between themselves and heaven. Considering this from a theological angle we may say that a true glimpse of heaven awoke and purified man's innate knowledge of God which had been 'stifled and corrupted' partly by ignorance and partly by wicked design arising from his depraved nature.⁵

When Wallington was ready to 'sinke in despaire' God drew aside 'the curtaine and then did I cast up my eyes unto the hiles from whence my salvation cometh: even to my sweet & onely deare saviour Jesus Christ' which then brought 'much joy to my heart with teeres in mine eyes'; a testimony to the relief and delight that could arise from a single glimpse of heaven.⁶ Yet the main difficulty was that for most pious individuals a single glimpse of heavenly delights was not enough. In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan despaired that his soul was 'dying' and 'damning' and unhappily maintained that if it was 'in a good condition, and were I but sure of it, ah, how rich should I esteem my self'.⁷ Here Bunyan hits on the crux of the matter for whilst conversion – and by extension, salvation – were the ultimate goals for any pious individual, it was also important to be able to discern whether one had indeed been converted in order to bolster spiritual confidence and overcome despair.

This chapter will argue that for seventeenth-century Puritans conversion was not always an easily identifiable process. An incredibly diverse range of experiences

⁴ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 15. The biblical reference in square brackets is Bunyan's and was added in the third edition of the text (c.1674).

⁵ See the 'Method and Arrangement, or Subject of the Whole Work' written by Caspar Olevianus - a student of Calvin's and probable co-author of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) – and reprinted in Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 5.

⁶ Wallington, *Growth*, fos. 30r-30v.

⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 26.

fitted comfortably under the umbrella term ‘conversion’ and this diversity was rarely questioned for it was accepted that ‘God breaketh not all men’s hearts alike’.⁸ Although two main methods of conversion exist – the ‘crisis’ (sudden) and ‘lysis’ (gradual) modes – this chapter will argue that the immense degree of variation present within these categories emphatically proves that descriptions of conversion do not follow a fixed pattern and so are more complex than some scholars are prepared to admit.⁹ As a consequence of this, the chapter will propose additional categories through which conversion experiences may be both viewed and analysed in order to highlight their multifarious character and further emphasise the diversity of seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographies. Above all it will dispute Dean Ebner’s claim that Puritans strove to create a corporate personality and that ‘the Calvinistic formula of conversion psychology gave both to them and to their autobiographies . . . a ready-made structure through which to find and express this personality’ and will do so by stressing the highly personal nature of these accounts.¹⁰

Definitions of Conversion

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) and Philip Nye (d.1672) claimed conversion to be ‘the foundation of all true *piety*’ whilst William Perkins (1558-1602) averred that the

⁸ Richard Baxter, *Autobiography*, p. 11.

⁹ Here I allude to Dean Ebner’s assertion that English Puritans developed a fixed ‘psychology of conversion’ (D. Ebner, *Autobiography*, p. 39); Edmund S. Morgan’s claim that the Puritan notion of conversion is ‘so plain as to give the experiences the appearances of a stereotype’ (E.S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963], p. 91) and D. Bruce Hindmarsh’s belief in the existence of ‘a pattern of conversion that became well-established among the Puritans’. See D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 51.

¹⁰ D. Ebner, *Autobiography*, p. 48.

inward motions of the heart brought about by conversion are ‘the seeds of faith’.¹¹ From this the importance of conversion is clear, for without it there could be no true piety, and therefore no redemption; or, in other words, conversion was the keystone of salvation. Given its significance, it might be assumed that in the seventeenth century there was a single, commonly accepted, definition of the term. But this was simply not the case.

For some seventeenth-century individuals, ‘conversion’ indicated when a person turned away from a sinful lifestyle and began to live piously; so in this definition we might say it marked the beginning of a godly life. Margaret Baxter, the wife of Richard Baxter, provides us with a good example. Prior to conversion she was known for her pride and vanity yet a sermon on Isaiah 27:11 ‘wrought much upon her, and the Doctrine of Conversion . . . was received on her heart, as a Seal on the wax. Whereupon she presently fell to self-judging, frequent Reading, and Prayer, and serious thoughts about her present and future estate’.¹² For others, however, ‘conversion’ actually signified the climax of the spiritual journey, rather than its start, for they considered it to describe the time when an individual became convinced of his own election and realised he would undoubtedly be saved; in this manner of thought ‘conversion’ referred to the moment of complete assurance. After leading a pious life for many years Cicely Johnson experienced a moment that convinced her that ‘my Saviour & my soul [were] united’ and doubted no more.¹³ Yet for others still ‘conversion’ could not be identified in a single moment for it was considered to be a cumulative process and therefore a life-long journey. George

¹¹ Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye quoted in D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 33; William Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian Religion* reprinted in Perkins, *Work*, p. 157.

¹² ‘The Life and Death of Mrs. Margaret Baxter’ in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 182.

¹³ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 42.

Trosse exemplifies this definition for he found that he could ‘tell neither the *Minister*, nor the *Sermon* whereby, nor the *very Time* wherein, I was *converted*’.¹⁴

Such a tripartite definition was not the only important issue. Occasionally there was also a discrepancy in the terms used to describe similar events. Written in the margins of each biography in Samuel Clarke’s *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons* (1683) are notes indicating when key events in the subject’s life took place; presumably to alert the reader to particularly edifying passages. We frequently see the word ‘conversion’ appearing in the margin and, significantly, it usually relates to the first of our three definitions – an individual’s initial hankerings after religion. For example, Clarke records how Samuel Winter was twelve years old when he was converted by the preaching of his local minister who awoke his conscience and made him ‘serious about the things which concerned his everlasting Salvation; As also to stir up in him earnest desires of doing good to the Souls of others’.¹⁵ He notes that Nathaniel Barnardiston was converted when ‘the Lord enabled *him* to *Remember his Creator in the days of his youth*, by casting in the seed of *Regeneration* when he was at School.’¹⁶ Yet perhaps the most illustrative example in the *Lives* is the biography of Charles Coot who, Clarke informs us, was converted whilst suffering from illness for during the time of his sickness God chose to ‘convince him of his sins, and of his need of a Saviour’; the first steps on the road to godliness.¹⁷

¹⁴ Trosse, *Life*, p. 112.

¹⁵ ‘The Life and Death of Dr. Samuel Winter, who died *An.Christi*, 1666’ in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 95.

¹⁶ ‘The Life and Death of Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston’ in *ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁷ ‘The Life and Death of Sir Charles Coot’ in *ibid.*, p. 98. Arthur Dent’s *The Plaine Man’s Path-Way to Heaven* (1603) clearly shows that recognition of one’s personal sins marks the beginning of spiritual growth. Asunetus remarks: ‘I am the better for you sir, I thank God. I never knew what sin meant till this day. It hath pleased God now to give me some sight and feeling thereof. I am greatly distressed in my conscience to think what I have been. The remembrance of my former sins doth strike horror into me, when I consider how ignorantly and profanely, and how far off from God I have lived all my life: it stings and gripes me at the heart. I do now see that which I never saw: and feel that which I never felt. I do plain see, that if I had died in that state wherein I have lived all my life, I should certainly have been condemned, and should have perished forever in my sin and ignorance’ (Dent, *Plaine Man’s Path-Way*, p. 410). Calvin also maintained that ‘salvation was not to be found anywhere but in the expiation which Christ alone completed’ (Calvin, *Institutes*, [II.vi.2], p.170) and

Paradoxically, when John Bunyan described a similar moment in *Grace Abounding* where he was helped to ‘see both the want and worth of Jesus Christ our Lord’ he termed it the moment of his awakening, rather than conversion.¹⁸ Are we to understand from Bunyan’s use of the term that this was the moment when he sincerely turned away from sin and sought a saviour? Was this the time when Bunyan came to believe that he was a member of the elect and that Christ’s redemptive sacrifice extended to him personally? Or are these moments one and the same and the terms ‘conversion’ and ‘awakening’ actually interchangeable? To discover this let us try and identify the precise moment Bunyan is referring to as his awakening. We are able to do so because Bunyan records that it was after he had been ‘five or six years awakened’ that he was asked to preach at the meetings of the Bedford Independent Church. Thanks to the Bedford church’s book of minutes we know that Bunyan began to preach in 1656, so this would date his awakening to 1650-1651.¹⁹ The most likely event within this timeframe is Bunyan’s encounter with the poor women of Bedford which occurred around 1650 and marked the moment he realised that he was truly ignorant in matters of religion. Before this meeting Bunyan noted that ‘the New birth did never enter into my mind, neither knew I the comfort of the Word and Promise, nor the deceitfulness and treachery of my own wicked heart’ yet following it he earnestly desired to learn more and made it his business ‘to be going again and again into the company of these poor people’.²⁰

the need to recognise Christ as a saviour was also shown in Theologus’ claim that ‘no Christ, no eternal life, for eternal life is only in him’ (Dent, *Plaine Man’s Path-Way*, p. 372). Moreover, Bunyan’s *Instruction for the Ignorant* informs us that to ‘know thyself’ is the first step towards the recovery of the soul for you must be ‘in thine own eyes, a loathsome, polluted, wretched, miserable sinner; and [realise] that nothing done by thee, can pacify God unto thee’. See Bunyan, *Instructions for the Ignorant* reprinted in R.L. Greaves (ed), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, (13 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), VIII, 21.

¹⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 75.

¹⁹ H.G. Tibbutt (ed.), *The Minutes of the First Independent Church*, p. 21.

²⁰ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 15. Bunyan’s acknowledgement that he was unaware of the new birth before this moment is especially important for Charles Cohen records that ‘the new birth was their [Puritans’]

This indicates that for Bunyan what he terms his 'awakening' was actually the very beginning of his spiritual journey, and so it is analogous with Clarke's use of 'conversion' in this sense.²¹ Yet it also had the added dimension of taking religious/spiritual knowledge into account, which is something Clarke's definition does not do. Indeed, Bunyan's use of the word 'awakening' seems to have more in common with the biblical sense of the word where it is also linked to a lack of spiritual knowledge and is used thus: 'awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak *this* to your shame' (I. Cor. 15:34). Moreover, the distinction between Clarke's definition of 'conversion' as a person's initial impulses after religion and Bunyan's definition of 'awakening' as a realisation that true spiritual knowledge is lacking can be seen in Bunyan's earlier remark that the pious books he read 'did not reach my heart to awaken it about my sad and sinful state, yet they did beget within me some desires to Religion'.²² The books Bunyan refers to here were designed to be spiritually edifying (Arthur Dent's *Plaine Man's Path-way* and Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety*) and so it is particularly important that Bunyan notes they had no effect on awakening him as this implies that spiritual knowledge was only forthcoming when God ordained it to be so.

Agnes Beaumont also used the word 'awakened' when referring to her spiritual development in the *Narrative*. She noted that since she was 'awakened' God had seen fit to test her with many difficult trials and tribulations and since the tone of *Narrative* is more upbeat than *Grace Abounding* - Beaumont does not fall into despair and fear damnation, instead, she places complete trust in God and stoically

initiation into potency . . . [since] the dynamism of Puritan activity and the cohesiveness of their community arose from the psychological foundation laid down by the Lord's mercy in regeneration'. C.L. Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 5.

²¹ That Bunyan considered 'conversion' to mean something different to 'awakening' can clearly be seen by the fact that after he had talked with the poor women of Bedford Bunyan noted that he would give anything for his soul to be 'in a converted state'. (Bunyan, *GA*, p. 23).

²² Bunyan, *GA*, p. 9.

accepts her life's lot - we may assume that her use of the word is more indicative of the second definition of conversion; namely when an individual realised they were a member of God's elect and would persevere until the end.

We have seen how seventeenth century definitions of 'conversion' and 'awakening' varied but have not considered how far Calvinist theology could have influenced the development of these thoughts. Joel R. Beeke maintains that 'for Calvin, the word *conversion* doesn't just mean the initial act of coming to faith; it also means daily renewal and growth in following Christ'; which appears to be more indicative of a life-long process, or spiritual journey, rather than a solitary experience.²³ Indeed, Calvin maintained that the course of true faith did not run smoothly and claimed that 'when we say that faith must be certain and secure, we certainly speak not of an assurance which is never affected by doubt, nor a security which anxiety never assails, we rather maintain that believers have a perpetual struggle with their own distrust, and are thus far from thinking that their consciences possess a placid quiet, uninterrupted by perturbation'; thus supporting the idea that conversion could also be a long and faltering process.²⁴

That Calvin claimed conversion to be a lengthy process might be somewhat surprising given the nature of his own conversion which, he claimed, happened almost instantaneously:

since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress

²³ J.R. Beeke, 'Calvin on Piety' in D.K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 134. Interestingly, William Perkins, the main synthesiser of Calvinist thought in England, also supported the notion of conversion as a gradual process for he asserted that 'the conversion of a sinner is not wrought all at one instant, but in continuance of time and that by certain measures and degrees'. (William Perkins, *A Grain of Mustard Seed* reprinted in Perkins, *Work*, p. 393).

²⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, (III.ii.17), p. 293.

therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.²⁵

According to Alexandre Ganoczy, however, Calvin emphasises the sudden nature of his conversion as a literary effect in order to echo the conversion experienced by St Paul who, whilst on the road to Damascus, turned from a life of sin to one of unconditional love and obedience to Christ. Ganoczy maintains that in reality Calvin's turn from sin to grace 'took place gradually over several years' and thus his claim to a sudden conversion should be viewed in a literary and theological context rather than being taken as autobiographical evidence.²⁶ Further caution is advised by T.H.L. Parker who warns that Calvin's intentions could have been misinterpreted for *subita*, the word Calvin used to describe his conversion, may be translated as either 'sudden' or 'unexpected'. Parker favours the use of 'unexpected' in this context and argues that Calvin meant his conversion came about unexpectedly because it was not the result of any hopes or prayers on his own part but happened completely upon God's behest.²⁷

Calvin's belief in both the lengthy process of conversion and its ability to be a fleetingly quick moment leads us to believe that two very different forms of conversion may be said to exist – the sudden and the gradual or, to use William James' terminology, crisis (sudden) and lysis (gradual) conversions.²⁸ Yet according to Anne Hawkins we should not stop at such a two-fold division of conversion, for she identifies an additional step in some seventeenth-century spiritual

²⁵ See John Calvin, 'Preface' in *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Volume 1), translated and collated by Reverend James Anderson and available at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom08.vi.html> (consulted on 05.09.06).

²⁶ See A. Ganoczy, 'Calvin's Life' in D.K. McKim (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, pp. 9-10.

²⁷ T.H.L. Parker, *John Calvin* (Tring: Lion, 1975), pp. 193-194.

²⁸ W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p 183.

autobiographies – the ‘double-conversion’.²⁹ What Hawkins means by this term is that in some godly spiritual autobiographies (and she includes *Grace Abounding* in this definition) it is possible to detect a ‘pattern of conversion, relapse, and reconversion’ – i.e. the sinner is made aware of his own sins and the impending wrath of God and then begins to walk a righteous path to salvation, however, he soon finds that he loses confidence in his spiritual state and succumbs to temptation; following this a second conversion is experienced.³⁰ Hawkins maintains that this form of gradual conversion was favoured by the godly community of the seventeenth century because it denied ‘the too-pleasurable release of a once-and-for-all climatic conversion experience’.³¹

This leads us to believe that the moment a sinner decided to leave behind sin and follow a godly path was not as important as the journey to salvation that he then found himself on – for turning away from sin was not the crux of conversion, it was merely the first step of a long and arduous journey that not all travellers were able to complete.³² Yet we must not let Hawkins’ research delude us into thinking that this was always the case with seventeenth-century conversions. Those who experienced a crisis conversion considered the exact moment of their conversion to be the climax of their life on earth and as proof of this we need only consider the examples from Clarke’s *Lives* previously mentioned. Moreover, as we shall see, the ‘conversion process’ (i.e. the initial emergence of faith, turning away from sin and the everyday toil to maintain faith and righteousness combined) was certainly not an identical

²⁹ Hawkins also considers Anna Trapnel’s *A Legacy for Saints, Being Several Experiences of the Dealings of God with Anna Trapnel, In and After her Conversion* (1654) and James Fraser’s *Memoirs* (1670) to fit into this pattern.

³⁰ A. Hawkins, ‘The Double-Conversion in Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*’ in *Philological Quarterly* (Volume 61, 1982, pp. 259-276). Quotation on p. 268.

³¹ A. Hawkins, ‘The Double-Conversion’, p. 260. This is a significant point given the Puritan emphasis on Bible reading for it is recorded that ‘He that loveth pleasure *shall be* a poor man’ (Prov. 21:17).

³² Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* clearly shows that a journey could be used to represent conversion.

experience for all Christians, for along the journey to salvation many different trials and tribulations were faced and these appear to occur in combinations unique to each believer. Consequently, the rest of this chapter will analyse each style of conversion (lysis and crisis) separately and will focus on emphasising the differences between the authors' experiences in order to prove that these accounts were actually lively and personal, not simply dreary and repetitious records that continually followed the same pattern.

Gradual (lysis) Conversion

The story of John Bunyan's conversion is tempestuous indeed. Never do we find a clearly defined moment of spiritual awakening indicating, beyond all doubt, the reality of his election. Instead, what *Grace Abounding* provides us with is an account of a spiritual life punctuated by moments of anxiety, doubt and despair as well as periods of intense elation, piety and certainty of salvation. Both states of mind exist side by side throughout the spiritual autobiography though neither appears to gain ascendancy for any considerable amount of time. We might expect Bunyan to be in a confident and bold spiritual state by the end of *Grace Abounding* yet even in the concluding section of his recollection Bunyan is far from jubilant and finds that what he terms 'several abominations' still exist in his heart including 'inclinations to unbelief' and 'wandrings and coldness in prayer'.³³

A brief overview of George Trosse's *Life* shows that, like Bunyan, he experienced a halting conversion. Trosse claimed that he could 'tell neither the *Minister*, nor the *Sermon* whereby, nor the *very Time* wherein, I was *converted*' and was frequently beset by doubt over the state of his soul.³⁴ There is, however, a very

³³ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 93-94.

³⁴ Trosse, *Life*, p. 112. Trosse was twenty five when he found his life was able to take a godlier path.

significant difference between the two texts. Whereas Bunyan seemed uncertain about his eternal condition - even at the very end of his spiritual autobiography - Trosse became convinced that he had noticed a change within himself and was positive that '*I am what I was not: I am quite contrary to what I was in the past Years of my Life, both in my Judgement, my Heart, and my Conversation*'.³⁵ From this statement it would appear that even though he could not identify the precise moment of his conversion Trosse did indeed believe himself to have been reborn and explicitly stated so in the *Life*.

This is a very interesting point. Not only did Trosse realise his conversion had taken place but he was also prepared to testify that it had happened and that he had changed, both inwardly and outwardly, as a result of it. After reading *Grace Abounding* where moments of this nature do not occur in the main body of the text, it is surprising that Trosse eagerly opens his heart in this manner telling all the good news of his conversion. Yet here we should not ignore the preface to *Grace Abounding* for this adds a further dimension to our perception of Bunyan's conversion.

Bunyan's tone in the preface is very assured and authoritative. It is reminiscent of the confident words spoken towards the end of the text where he feared that his period of imprisonment might end at the gallows yet was prepared to venture all his faith in Christ and 'leap off the Ladder even blindfold into Eternitie, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell; Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me, do; I will venture for thy Name', thereby showing immense courage and proving that he was able to trust his saviour completely - though the words '*if thou wilt catch me*' suggest that there is still an element of doubt concerning his soul's eternal status.³⁶ However,

³⁵ Trosse, *Life*, p. 112.

³⁶ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 92.

instead of ‘playing the part’ of the confused sinner who is desperately trying to find the correct path to heaven, yet finds himself foundering along the way, Bunyan takes on the role of teacher and experienced Christian in the preface. He portrays himself as someone who has already been through the trials and temptations that his congregation find themselves facing and is therefore living proof that it is possible to withstand the Devil’s onslaughts. His tone is consistently assured and strong – Bunyan maintains that his spiritual autobiography contains much ‘*of the Grace of God towards me*’ and attempts to comfort his readers by insisting that ‘*if you have sinned against the light, if you are tempted to blaspheme, if you are down in despair, if you think God fights against you, or if heaven is hid from your eyes; remember ’twas thus with your Father, but out of them all the Lord delivered me*’.³⁷ These are certainly more the words of a wise battle-hardened Christian who has faced many trials and has felt utter hopelessness and dejection, yet has prevailed thanks to God’s mercy and grace. Bunyan has overcome the main temptations he has encountered. ‘Out of them all the Lord delivered me’, he states in an echo of II. Timothy 3:2 which suggests that he has actually come to share Paul’s sense of assurance – thereby indicating that he considered himself to have been converted when he wrote the preface.³⁸

³⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 4-5.

³⁸ Although Bunyan apparently came to share St Paul’s sense of assurance and frequently made allusions to Paul both in the preface and the main body of *Grace Abounding* his conversion does not occur along Pauline lines. St Paul was converted suddenly whilst on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6) yet Bunyan is converted gradually over of many years. This is particularly interesting because, as we have already seen, according to Alexandre Ganoczy John Calvin’s description of his own conversion mirrors that of St Paul purely for literary effect; it is therefore significant that Bunyan chooses not to follow in Paul’s footsteps on this point. Did he do so for didactic reasons? It is possible that Bunyan felt such an immediate conversion was the preserve of the godly minority and so, ardently desiring to help as many individuals as possible, he chose to present his conversion in a way to which more people could relate.

Yet there is another possibility. Bunyan may have had a different understanding of the nature of Paul’s conversion. In his mind the salient point of Paul’s conversion might have been his transition from being a persecutor of God to an expounder of God’s word, rather than the timeframe of his conversion. If this were the case, then *Grace Abounding* does indeed mirror the conversion of St Paul because during the course of the text Bunyan changes from a blasphemer who takes pleasure in his

Why would Bunyan not have included such positive statements concerning his spiritual life in the main body of *Grace Abounding*? Bunyan intended *Grace Abounding* to be published and so the lack of confident phrases in the main body of the text could be for literary effect – although, alternatively, he could also be sincerely reflecting the insecure feelings he had at the time. Bunyan wanted to reach as many people as possible through his text and by taking a confident stance in the preface, which would be the first thing read by any reader, he established himself as a reliable guide to spiritual affairs comparable to Evangelist in *The Pilgrim's Progress* who told Christian how to gain access to the Celestial City. The confident tone portrays Bunyan as a man who has already suffered many trials and temptations yet, with God's assistance, has successfully negotiated them all – he is a man who knows what he is talking about and is to be trusted. As a consequence of the rapport built up between Bunyan and his audience at the start the reader is convinced to take Bunyan's experiences on face value and not question the authenticity of what his 'spiritual mentor' writes. Bunyan is then able to take the reader by the hand and guide them through his own spiritual experiences without being presumptuous and needing to strongly assert his belief in his own conversion in the text. Consequently, the tone of Bunyan's account is humble and does not take salvation for granted at any stage, but shows that complete faith must be placed in Christ – all vital lessons for the reader to learn.

Moreover, the didactic nature of Bunyan's account may also provide us with an insight into Trosse's decision to openly state his belief in his own conversion. The *Life* was intended for publication and so it is probable that Trosse, like Bunyan,

sinful lifestyle to a devout minister of the Word. Furthermore, this interpretation of Paul's conversion is supported by Trosse's *Life* where he noted that God had 'turn'd a raging *Persecutor* of the *Gospel* into a *Preacher* of it, as he did by *St. Paul*'. He even termed himself 'the *Crucifyer* of *Christ afresh*, and the *great Enemy* and *Persecutor* of his *Church*' (Trosse, *Life*, pp. 133, 108).

would have wished it to be spiritually edifying for his readers. Chapter 1 has shown us that Bunyan intended *Grace Abounding* to be a stopgap measure that replaced his preaching during his imprisonment – after his release he would then continue preaching and assisting those in spiritual difficulties, so there would be no real need for the text to come full-circle and end with Bunyan’s complete assurance of his conversion. Trosse, on the other hand, completed the *Life* in 1693 and made it known that he wished it to be published after his death (which occurred in 1713); in which case the *Life* would be his legacy to his readers and would need to come to some sort of resolution – either successful or otherwise – for he would never be able to add anything to his message. Consequently, we could agree with Margaret Ezell’s assertion that a posthumously published text could be seen ‘as an attempt to continue the “living” voice of the author’ beyond the grave for, by insisting on its publication, Trosse clearly showed that he believed his text to be worthwhile reading, possibly a source of spiritual succour, for other Christians.³⁹

Thus far we have seen that the spiritual autobiographies written by Bunyan and Trosse differ in the way that conversion is discussed. Bunyan did not explicitly note that he had gained assurance or had been converted without falling into doubt almost immediately. Conversely, when Trosse’s period of severe melancholy was over and he changed his lifestyle he did not experience any significant doubts again. Yet this is not the sole way in which these texts varied in their discussions of conversion. A further difference can be seen in the role played by members of the immediate family and local religious community in the conversions of both authors. Bunyan found his religious development spurred on by his encounters with, for example, the poor women of Bedford and the piety of his wife and her family,

³⁹ M.J.M. Ezell, ‘The Posthumous Publication of Women’s Manuscripts and the History of Authorship’ in G.L. Justice and N. Tinker (eds.), *Women’s Writing and the Circulation of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 128.

although he does not appear to have received any sustained support from anyone except John Gifford – most of the time Bunyan appears to be teaching himself about the correct way to develop religiously using the Bible as his main guide. So we see that whilst the community and his family often play an important role in helping Bunyan progress to the next level of his spiritual development, they do not appear to be constant companions in his spiritual pilgrimage; instead we must say that the Bible and Bunyan's own notions of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are all that accompany him along every step of the way.

Trosse, however, was rather different. Whilst the Bible and the Holy Trinity are undoubtedly vital parts of his life, it is immediately apparent that Trosse does not use scriptural quotations as frequently as Bunyan, nor does he experience biblical incursions (comforting scriptural quotations and voices) or refer to God and Christ as often as Bunyan does. In *Grace Abounding* scarcely a page passes without a scriptural reference, yet in Trosse's *Life* we are hard pressed to find a single one. Similarly, we can hardly find a page in *Grace Abounding* that does not mention either God or Christ, yet in Trosse's account the references are not so frequent and occasionally there are several pages without a mention of either; though it is certainly worth noting that as Trosse becomes more confident of his spiritual status the frequency of references to God and Christ increases. Why may this be? After Trosse leaves his melancholy behind and becomes more experienced in spiritual affairs he feels that he has become closer to God and is now on the correct pathway to heaven. At this stage he is keen to know all he can about his saviour and is very eager to please God and this seems to be why the references increase. Where previously Trosse 'never took God for my *King* and Sovereign; never resign'd my *Wil* to His Commands; nor subjected my self to *His* Authority' he later found that

‘the *infinite* and *matchless Goodness of God, such his incomparable and wonderful Grace, such the Riches of the Merits of Christ*’; he changed from a person who felt he had no need of God, to one who was utterly reliant on his maker and sought to glorify him at every opportunity.⁴⁰

The fact that there are fewer references to God and Christ during Trosse’s youth and period of severe religious melancholy may be accounted for by the fact that he felt estranged from both during this time. However, it may also be because Trosse received help for his depression from those around him – namely his mother, a physician and Mrs Gollop, the physician’s housekeeper. He claimed that Mrs Gollop was ‘more *eminently Instrumental* in my *Conversion* than another’ and thus, under God, ‘the prime Instrument both of the Health of my Body, and the Salvation of my Soul’ because she constantly tried to bring comfort and ease his dejected spirit.⁴¹

This accounts for the low frequency of references to God and Christ, but what of the fact that Trosse experienced no biblical incursions in the *Life*? Could this have affected his conversion? Let us first consider the case of Hannah Allen who, like Trosse, does not experience any biblical incursions. Rather, Allen experiences the exact reverse - diabolical incursions - for she records that ‘the enemy of my Soul striving to crush such hopeful beginnings in the bud, cast in horrible blasphemous thoughts and injections into my mind’.⁴² She also read the Bible to herself and found that there were many passages that she would ‘repeat with much terrour applying them to my self’, yet the key point here is that *she* would repeat them to *herself* -

⁴⁰ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 71, 112.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 113

⁴² Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings*, p. 3.

they are not words sent into her mind by God.⁴³ The only time Allen did claim to hear a scripture ‘suggested to me from Heaven’ she soon realised that it was a delusion.⁴⁴ Significantly, Allen also experienced a very lengthy period of religious melancholy which led her to believe she was ‘undone forever’ and ‘worse than *Cain* or *Judas*’.⁴⁵

Like Allen, Trosse hears the Devil’s words asking him ‘who art thou?’ and telling him to kill himself and he also experiences a lengthy case of religious melancholy.⁴⁶ Of all the spiritual autobiographies and diaries I have read Allen and Trosse suffer the most severe bouts of religious melancholy even requiring the help of physicians, family and friends to overcome their despair. Is this merely a coincidence or has the lack of ‘personal contact’ with God (i.e. through biblical incursions and heavenly voices) had a negative effect on them causing serious despair and prolonging the period of their conversion? The presence of biblical incursions in an author’s life is proof that God is playing close attention to their spiritual development and providing constant assistance. It would seem that without the guiding influence these incursions provide both Allen and Trosse become lost in their own despair and unable to function properly in both religious and secular affairs. To release them from this prison God’s attention and benevolence is required in order to reassure them that there is still hope of salvation. After all, Hannah Allen maintained that ‘want of the light of God’s Countenance’ was one great cause of her ‘time of great trouble and bitter Melancholy’ and Nehemiah Wallington reinforced how disconcerting a lack of close personal contact with God could be when he

⁴³ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings*, p. 24. For more on women and Bible reading see S. Wabuda, ‘The woman with the rock: the controversy on women and Bible reading’ in S. Wabuda and C. Litzengerger (eds.), *Belief and Practice in Reformation England*, pp. 40-59.

⁴⁴ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 86, 89, 107.

claimed that ‘the Lord knows . . . how weeke I am: for when he hids [sic] his face I am troubled’ whilst Samuel Rogers acknowledges that when the Lord was ‘sweetly neere to my soule’ he was able to recover from his ‘melancholye pangs’.⁴⁷ All these statements suggest that when God was absent from the lives of these believers they felt very alone and insecure, yet when he returned confidence was restored and recovery soon followed. For example, Bunyan was convinced he had committed the Unpardonable Sin, yet following a biblical incursion telling him his sin was ‘not unto death’, he became elated because he felt it signified that Christ ‘was still my friend’.⁴⁸

However, if God’s absence was prolonged, as was the case with Allen, Trosse and Bunyan when he feared he had ‘sold’ Christ (and so was mainly interacting with the Devil), then severe religious melancholy developed, their spiritual growth was temporarily hindered and conversion was prolonged. This may be said to have a theological basis because lack of personal contact with God could prevent an individual performing a ‘positive’ practical syllogism (i.e. when a person scrutinised himself to see if faith was present and realised that the promise of salvation applied to him personally) leaving them only able to perform the ‘negative’ practical syllogism where a Christian is prompted to look at his own sins and realise that, without God’s grace and mercy, they mean nothing but damnation for him – since God appears to be absent in their lives this then leads to religious melancholy.⁴⁹

If we move on to consider the conversion of Richard Norwood we see that during his youth he occasionally had some glances ‘towards heaven and heavenly

⁴⁷ Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings*, p. 13; Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 76r; Rogers, *Diary*, p. 54.

⁴⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 55.

⁴⁹ For further discussion of the practical syllogism see Chapter 5 (Initial Experiences of Grace), pp. 202-203.

things' and began to believe that 'the good things that belonged unto others, belonged also to me' (i.e. salvation), yet at other times he found himself 'carried away with a stream of corrupt affections into foul and enormous sins and so conceived my self to be going along in that highway that leadeth unto hell'.⁵⁰ Such disparity of emotion appears common to those experiencing a gradual conversion. There also appears to be a link between those undergoing a lengthy period of conversion and those experiencing religious melancholy – those who suffer the worst bouts of melancholy are often those undergoing a long drawn-out conversion and, as we have just seen, also those who find God absent from their lives for a prolonged period or those who do not have much personal contact with God.

Bunyan maintained that his 'soul did hang as in a pair of Scales . . . , sometimes up, and sometimes down, now in peace, and anon again in terror', experienced a prolonged period of religious melancholy when he believed himself to have 'sold' Christ and had no clearly defined moment of conversion.⁵¹ Hannah Allen noted that 'one hour my hope was firm, and the next hour ready to be overwhelmed'; she also came to suffer from severe religious melancholy and later noted that God convinced her of her own salvation and the Devil's deceit 'by degrees'.⁵² Norwood considered himself to have 'a heart wretchedly prone to cast away all hope and fall into utter despair'.⁵³ Even at the very end of the *Confessions* he was still uncertain about his own fate and lamented that he 'could not . . . find in my heart that filial fear and awful regard of God which is usually in his children'.⁵⁴ Wallington also felt this disparity of emotion at times for he noted that 'one while I did thinke I should goe into heaven and another while I thought I should not' and was also 'ready to sinke in

⁵⁰ Norwood, *Confessions*, p. 139. For a brief biography of Norwood see appendix 1.

⁵¹ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 60

⁵² Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings*, pp. 10, 72.

⁵³ Norwood, *Confessions*, p. 144.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

dispaire' at times.⁵⁵ At times Trosse felt utterly dejected for he believed that he was damned and was 'no longer *upon* Earth, but in the *Regions of Hell*', yet on other occasions he was certain of his own salvation for he felt that 'the *Blood of Christ* was apply'd to my *Soul*'.⁵⁶ Trosse also suffered from several bouts of melancholy and, as we have seen, admitted that he was unable to identify the exact moment of his conversion.

A vicious circle could be formed in the minds of some pious individuals when a perceived lack of 'personal contact' with God created despair and the onslaught of religious melancholy. This religious melancholy then prolonged the period of conversion creating more despair as individuals worried that they would never be saved. So intrinsically linked to gradual conversion is religious melancholy that we could even go so far as stating that despair is in fact an essential part of this form of conversion.⁵⁷ When a person falls into severe religious melancholy they feel lost and alone, yet it would also be true to say that such loneliness soon develops into a feeling of emptiness created by the absence of God in their lives – one of Samuel Rogers's diary entries is simply 'nothing, nothing, nothing; No hearte, No prayer, Noe life, No grace, No fruitfulness one way as other, can be discerned' – which would mean that they can later be filled with grace by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸

Thus far we have seen that our authors differ in the way they discuss conversion and the way they let family members and the local community influence their own conversions. Yet we have also seen that there are common factors linking the way in which gradual conversion is depicted in these accounts. For example, we

⁵⁵ Wallington, *Record*, p. 47; Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 30r.

⁵⁶ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 93, 101.

⁵⁷ In his article 'The Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira' Michael MacDonald uses literary sources, such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Woode's *The Conflict of Conscience* to argue that despair was an integral feature of Christian life (p. 45); yet he does not discuss the representation, or role, of despair in seventeenth-century life-writings.

⁵⁸ Rogers, *Diary*, p. 6.

have seen that lengthy periods of religious melancholy are a common feature of these accounts as is an earnest desire for personal communication with God and this suggests that there are both similarities and differences in the way gradual conversion is represented by these authors. However, we must not forget that those who experience a long and halting conversion occasionally find reassuring moments in their life that suggest they are on the correct pathway to heaven. What constitutes such a moment is certainly not fixed and varies from author to author. For example, John Bunyan found frequent reassurance in dreams and biblical incursions as well as through reading the Bible.⁵⁹ Samuel Rogers, on the other hand, found assurance when the Lord enabled him to pray earnestly and helped him in his religious duties, but also felt the Lord 'smiling graciously' on him at times.⁶⁰ Richard Norwood felt reassured that he was progressing along the right lines when he was able to profit from the sermons of his local minister and when he had 'sundry thoughts and motions inwardly of a full conversion to God, and newness of life'.⁶¹ Nehemiah Wallington sensed that God felt well-disposed to him when he was successful in his trading and when his prayers were answered.⁶²

Sudden (crisis) Conversion

We have seen how those experiencing gradual conversions were unable to identify a precise moment of conversion. Yet this was not always the case. Many Puritans experienced 'crisis' conversions and could pinpoint the exact moment of their religious awakening. Rose Thurgood experienced many moments of doubt and despair concerning her eternal status until she 'felt a sweet Flash coming over my

⁵⁹ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 18-19, 55, 21.

⁶⁰ See Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 7-8.

⁶¹ Norwood, *Confessions*, pp. 127, 136-137.

⁶² Wallington, *Growth*, fos. 29r, 45v, 149v.

heart' when she was lying ill in bed and heard the words 'Thy name is written in the booke of Life: Thou hast that white stone, & a new name' (which is a reference to Revelation 2:17) pronounced in her heart.⁶³ Following this moment Thurgood no longer doubted her salvation and felt that she had 'come out of darknes into a marvelous light' and been turned into a saint.⁶⁴ Cicely Johnson also experienced a moment of conversion when absolute assurance was granted. For her this occurred when she was receiving the sacrament at her local church and felt her 'soule lifted up into heaven unto the Lord my Redeemer' when she took the bread and wine for she felt as if she was taking it directly from the hand of God thereby proving to her that 'my Saviour & my soul [were] united'.⁶⁵ Following this moment there was no more doubting for Johnson since, like Dionys Fitzherbert who believed that it was impossible for the elect to fall into despair because 'God would keep his from such blasphemies', she firmly believed that there was no room for doubt when full assurance was granted and considered doubting to be 'a greater synne then some Christians will allow it'.⁶⁶

Bridget Cooke was of a similar opinion for her biographer, R.P., noted that she 'doubted not of her salvation but was as sure of it as if she were in heaven already . . . yet she was contented to live still though in many fold tribulations till her appointed time of departure'.⁶⁷ However, before Cooke reached such a complete level of assurance she experienced several periods of doubt which caused her to pray to God that she might receive 'such evidence of salvation that she might not be troubled wth such doubtings' and consequently gained 'such an evidence of salvation yt after yt she never did nor durst make doubt'; though the precise nature of

⁶³ Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 42.

⁶⁶ M. Morrissey, 'Narrative Authority in Spiritual Life Writing', p. 2; Johnson, *Reveries*, p. 51.

⁶⁷ R.P., *Some Passages of Mrs Bridget Cooke*, fos. 4v-5r.

this 'evidence' is only revealed to a few close friends and the reader is not let in on the secret.⁶⁸ This in itself is an interesting point. Why was Cooke reluctant to share her evidence of salvation with everyone? We know she was prepared to reveal her secret to a few close friends and so it seems that this evidence was so precious to her that she wished to keep it as private as possible. Yet this also raises an important question: how far could evidence of salvation be revealed in spiritual diaries and autobiographies? Did some people feel the need to keep their most treasured moments of assurance close to their hearts and so solely between themselves and God? This is certainly an interesting, little discussed, area and is an avenue which further research in this topic could explore.

Cooke, Johnson and Thurgood were not alone in obtaining clear, unshakable, convictions of their own salvation. Vavasor Powell could also pinpoint the precise moment of his conversion. After being unsuccessful in finding any indications of true faith in his soul he notes that 'upon a sudden, and unexpectedly, a mighty power, no less than that Spirit which raised up Christ Jesus from the dead . . . did enable me to believe, and witnessed effectually that I did believe'.⁶⁹ Raphael Swinfield was brought to an awareness of his sins by the sermons of ministers he heard during a short stay in England and, in a similar manner, Mary Burrill found that her local minister was able to make her heart more receptive to matters of religion thus making him the '*chief Instrument of doing my soule good*'.⁷⁰ However, the sermons were not enough to convert Swinfield, but a dream he experienced shortly after gave him 'a sure *comfort in Christ*' and convinced him that he was a member of the elect.⁷¹ John Cooper also found that his faith was confirmed in a

⁶⁸ R.P., *Some Passages of Mrs Bridget Cooke*, fo. 8r.

⁶⁹ Powell, *Life*, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Rogers, *Ohel*, p. 413.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

dream he had which affected him so deeply that he ‘was called home to God, taken off of *sinne*, and the *lusts* of the *world* . . . and was now desirous to please God, to *walke* in his way’.⁷² The wife of Hugh Leeson proved instrumental in his conversion by introducing him to religion through her constant reading of the scriptures and ensuring she provided him with good counsel.⁷³ Whilst Jeremy Heyward found that prayer opened the way to his conversion for he prayed earnestly, begging Christ to help him and have mercy on his soul, and the third time he knelt down in prayer he heard a voice say ‘*my grace is sufficient for thee*’ which convinced him of his own election.⁷⁴ The words Heyward hears are taken from 2 Corinthians 12:9 and are the same words heard by Bunyan in *Grace Abounding*. It is immensely interesting that the same words are able to have such different effects on believers - they bring complete conversion to Heyward, who notes that he was ‘much *satisfied* ere since, rowling [sic] my *self* on Christ, and *living* in him alone’, yet for Bunyan these words only bring refreshment and comfort to his heart for a period of several weeks and he then falls back into despair and his soul hangs ‘as in a pair of Scales again, sometimes up, and sometimes down, now in peace, and anon again in terror’.⁷⁵ Surely this suggests that conversion is a highly personal experience; what works to convert one person does not necessarily work to convert another.

From these brief examples it is easy to see that descriptions of sudden conversion are clearly not identical. Methods of conversion were often drastically different as, for example, hearing the sermons of an effective minister or close reading of the Bible converted some people, yet divinely inspired dreams and biblical incursions converted others. We have also seen how conversion can be

⁷² Rogers, *Ohel*, p. 402.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 10 (Pages 1-12 are inserted between p. 412 and p. 413).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 415; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 60.

divided into two main groups – gradual and sudden – yet these are not the only groupings we could use as categories of analysis. We could also, for example, look at the methods of conversion as some people were converted by purely divine means – such as hearing biblical incursions – whilst others were converted by ‘human means’, such as the preaching of their local minister or having the Bible read to them. We could also group these accounts according to the time of life when a person found they were converted (in the case of sudden conversions) or had the most assuring moments (for those experiencing gradual conversions) for some were converted in their youth yet others waited many years to receive even a small amount of reassurance. We could even group accounts of conversion according to when in an individual’s spiritual life conversion takes place. For example, does it occur at the moment the individual needs it the most as was the case with Bridget Cooke who seriously doubted her condition and earnestly prayed for evidence of conversion and got it and Rose Thurgood who was deeply despondent at the time of a serious illness and was converted when she feared the worst. Or, for example, does conversion occur when an individual is at the peak of their spiritual life as was the case with Cicely Johnson who had shown great care whilst performing religious duties and had amassed a vast amount of scriptural learning in her youth and had even been granted the ability to ‘cast off the love of every syn, that did hang soe fast on mee’.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 36.

Chapter 7

Post-Conversion Experiences

What communion hath light with darkness?
II. Corinthians 6:14

This chapter will argue that conversion was not necessarily the spiritual climax of every believer's life. By suggesting that post-conversion experiences were frequently important sources of spiritual edification it will show that these moments were pivotal in developing an individual's sense of assurance and helping him or her to become more competent and confident in religious affairs. Consequently, the chapter will take issue with historians and literary scholars who claim that conversion was the defining moment of a seventeenth-century Puritan spiritual autobiography or diary. These scholars include Anne Hawkins who claimed conversion had the ability to determine a text's 'religious meaning, [and] its formal structure' as well as seeing it as 'the crucial element' in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* and G.A. Starr who considered conversion 'the pivotal phase' of religious development and maintained that in most spiritual autobiographies events were seen to happen 'before, during, or after conversion' – everything revolved around conversion.¹

The post-conversion experiences we shall consider will be divided into three broad categories: firstly, those where diabolical involvement and manifold cases of temptation are clearly discernable; secondly, those where only God's grace and mercy are evident; and finally, those of individuals who did not experience a clear-cut conversion.

From this it should be apparent that the majority of post-conversion experiences discussed in this chapter will be those of believers who experienced a

¹ A. Hawkins, *Archetypes of Conversion*, pp.14, 13; G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, pp. 39, 40.

sudden (or ‘crisis’) conversion. If conversion occurs suddenly it draws a line of clear demarcation through a believer’s experiences making it possible to easily distinguish between pre- and post-conversion experiences, whereas with a gradual conversion it is difficult to decide what constitutes a post-conversion experience since there is no clear, incontestable, moment of awakening to guide us and, as we have seen, even the writer is not always able to tell when they were converted. Yet this is not my sole reason for approaching the subject in this manner. Paying close attention to sudden conversions in this chapter reverses the focus of the previous chapter where conversion was viewed primarily from the perspective of those who were converted gradually thereby redressing the theological balance and ensuring that both forms of conversion are given equal weight.

The Devil and Post-Conversion Experiences

In some spiritual autobiographies we find that even after conversion the Devil is present in the writer’s life often trying to draw them away from all that is good and tempting them to doubt their salvation. Yet, as Nathan Johnstone accurately notes, historians who investigate temptation have generally focussed on pre-conversion assaults and not their continuance after conversion.² In *Religion and the Decline of Magic* Keith Thomas uses a vast array of sources to discuss the influence of the Devil on the everyday life of believers, yet makes no distinction between pre- and post-conversion experiences of temptation and diabolical assaults. Thomas tells us that Satan was an ‘omnipresent force, ever ready to prey upon man’s weaker instincts and to tempt him away into paths of evil’ and that the war with Satan was a ‘perpetual combat in which the enemy always seemed to have the advantage’ thus

² N. Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England*, p. 120.

making encounters with Satan and his dominions ‘a literal reality for most devout Englishmen’.³ However, while he informs us that believers were in perpetual combat with the Devil he does not consider whether the strength of the Devil’s assaults varied over time depending on the level of an individual’s spiritual progress (e.g. whether they were new believers or long-standing Christians or whether an individual had been converted or not). The closest Thomas comes to linking an individual’s spiritual development with demonic assaults is when he tells us of the atheist, Richard White, who was only converted to a Christian life because the Devil appeared before him one night.⁴ However, Thomas deploys this example to show that belief in the Devil’s existence could be used as an argument to prove the existence of God – for it was claimed that if there was a Devil then there must be a God – and is not intended to suggest that the Devil’s onslaughts could vary in both strength and degree depending on an individual’s spiritual growth.

Thomas is not alone in making no distinction between pre- and post-conversion temptation and diabolic experiences. Whilst Darren Oldridge notes that ‘the determination of Satan to torment God’s people meant that he not only assailed them throughout their lives, but also visited them in the hours before they died’, he does not consider the impact that conversion may have had on these torments and whether, for example, people completely assured of their salvation during their lifetime also received a visit from the Devil shortly before their death.⁵ In his eagerness to show the relentless nature of the Devil’s onslaughts Oldridge neglects to look at how their frequency and tempo might have been affected when an individual gained complete assurance of their salvation – and whilst it might be argued that gaining complete, unwavering, assurance was not the norm in early modern England,

³ K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 559, 562.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 567.

⁵ D. Oldridge, *The Devil*, p. 52.

as we shall see it was certainly not unheard of and was a very highly regarded position to be in.

At first glance Frank Luttmer's essay on the matter appears to address the 'problem' of pre- and post-conversion temptations more directly. His acknowledgement that the notion of spiritual warfare was intended to 'describe the spiritual condition of regenerate Christians – those who had been "effectually called" and had received God's saving grace and spirit' appears to suggest that 'spiritual warfare' was more prevalent *after* conversion when the Holy Spirit had bestowed grace upon them and they had been reborn.⁶ Yet this is not the case. What we must remember here is that by 'regenerate Christians' Luttmer does not mean those who were fully aware their conversion had taken place, but rather those who strove to lead a 'Puritan lifestyle', were truly devout and possessed God's grace – though they need not be utterly convinced of their election. In short, 'the regenerate' could simply be those Christians who 'applied the words of the preachers to their lives and participated in the culture of the godly' yet still suffered from 'periodic doubts and lapses from the "precise" path' for they were still burdened by the 'flesh' (the corruption of nature inherited from Adam).⁷ Luttmer contends that Puritan ministers actively encouraged their congregations to believe that 'the very experience of spiritual struggle was a sign of God's saving grace' thus making temptation and doubt an integral part of the elect's journey through life and suggesting that the experience of these temptations was uniform and did not vary substantially in intensity since there is no mention of such fluctuation by Luttmer.⁸

⁶ F. Luttmer, 'Persecutors, Tempters and Vassals of the Devil: The Unregenerate in Puritan Practical Divinity' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51:1 (2000), pp. 37-68. Quotation on p. 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67. See pp. 44-45 for definitions of the 'world' and the 'flesh'.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

Following a similar line of thought to Luttmer, Nathan Johnstone argues that ‘even those who had gained assurance expected to be consistently tested by post-conversion temptation’.⁹ Yet this chapter will suggest otherwise. It will contend that the Devil was not always present as a tempter in the post-conversion experiences of godly individuals. The current section will show that even when the Devil was present after conversion it was certainly possible for an individual to turn their back on his subtle wiles and think of him no more. Moreover, those who did not experience diabolical temptation after conversion, but found assurance instead, were not considered to be in a bizarre and unenviable position that suggested false security and presumption. As shall be seen, those in contact with such an assured individual clearly believed them to be in very fortuitous circumstances and sought to learn as much as possible from one who appeared to be especially favoured by God.

Post-conversion temptation was not only able to teach remarkable lessons to those who experienced it, but those in the immediate vicinity could also benefit greatly. John Janeway, for example, found himself beset by many horrible temptations following his conversion – though we are not told the precise nature of these temptations – and at times his fight with Satan was so desperate that it ‘made his very Body sweat through the Agonies of his Spirit: and caused him to send up strong Cries with Tears for fresh supplies of Grace’.¹⁰ Whilst Janeway noted the ferocity of the temptations he faced, he was also able to discern considerable advantages when he eventually overcame them. After being buffeted by a ‘horrid’ temptation Janeway was able to offer his assistance to a fellow Christian who was suffering similar taunts from the Devil. He wrote a substantial letter to this man explaining how best to counter blasphemous thoughts, reminding him, above all, that

⁹ N. Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, p. 120.

¹⁰ ‘The Life and Death of Mr. John Janeway’ in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 70.

such thoughts were not of his own concoction but had been deliberately sent by Satan in order to create despair and turn him away from God.¹¹ So we see that following conversion Janeway was not only able to overcome the Devil's machinations against him thanks to his newly strengthened faith – which is something that Johnstone, Thomas and Luttmer do not discuss in their writings - he was also able to use his own experiences of temptation to help others.

This was not an unusual feature of seventeenth-century post-conversion spiritual experience. Prior to conversion Sarah Wight suffered severe religious melancholy and believed herself to be damned. During this time she was unable to focus on anything other than her own spiritual condition finding herself in 'grievous horrou day and night; concluding shee was a Cast-away, a Reprobate, walking daily in the midst of fire and brimstone'.¹² However, following conversion the tone of her experiences and her own demeanour changed dramatically. Where she had previously been under continual assault by diabolical temptations, after her conversion Wight only reported a single attack by the Devil and claimed to be receiving much grace and comfort from God – she maintained that she 'desired nothing but a crucified Christ and I have him' as well as believing that she was now 'risen to live with Jesus'.¹³

The diabolical attack Wight experienced is significant because it is different to the assaults she had previously faced. Before conversion she had been tempted to believe that God and Satan, Heaven and Hell were merely inventions of her own conscience and was also urged to take her own life, yet these temptations merely

¹¹ 'The Life and Death of Mr. John Janeway' in Clarke, *Lives*, p. 71.

¹² Henry Jessey, *Exceeding Riches*, pp. 8-9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 27. NB. This is the only instance of diabolical temptation experienced by Wight after conversion that is recorded in Jessey's account. However, there is another document written by Wight herself that explains what happened to her after the events recorded by Jessey and this shows she was seriously tempted at a later date. This document will be discussed later, starting on p. 316 of this chapter.

took the form of suggestions – they were subtle attacks – the Devil did not appear before her. Following conversion, however, the assault Wight experienced was very different, for this time she believed the Devil was actually standing in front of her – she suddenly announced that ‘*the Devil fights with me, as he did with Michael, and his Angels*’ and repeatedly cried ‘*Doe you not see him?*’ before lashing out with the back of her hand.¹⁴ Wight had been struck blind and deaf three days earlier and was still without sight when she announced that the Devil was standing before her; consequently suggesting that she has reached a higher level of spiritual awareness and no longer needs earthly sight to discern the Devil.¹⁵

Indeed, Wight’s reaction suggests that following conversion her senses had been heightened to such a degree that she could actually feel the Devil’s presence even when he was not actively tempting her in the manner she had been previously been accustomed to – losing her sight and hearing had cut Wight off from earthly affairs and caused her to become more in tune with spiritual matters as she became almost like an oracle or mouthpiece of God, uttering words expressing God’s magnificence in a semi-trancelike state.¹⁶ Moreover, it is possible to view this

¹⁴ Henry Jessey, *Exceeding Riches*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Wight’s blindness is highly significant. Not only does it reflect the conversion of Saul who was blinded for three days following his conversion (Acts 9:9), it also highlights the immense difference between *physical* blindness and *spiritual* blindness. Bunyan had prayed that the Lord would ‘*leave me not to my own blindness*’ (*GA*, p. 16), rebuked himself for being a ‘blind, ignorant, sordid, and ungodly Wretch’ (*GA*, p. 15) and claimed that ‘security, blindness, darkness, and error, is the very Kingdom and Habitation of the Wicked one’ (*GA*, p. 45) yet, paradoxically, the time when Wight is most able to see God and spiritual affairs clearly is when she is physically blinded – clearly showing that being ‘closed off’ from the world brings one closer to God.

¹⁶ The fact that Wight is able to ‘see’ the Devil without the benefit of earthly sight is reminiscent of two intensely spiritual moments in Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* where, firstly, Bunyan reports that following his game of Cat he ‘sees’ Jesus looking down upon him ‘with the eyes of my understanding’ and secondly he notes that he ‘sees’ Jesus sitting at the right hand of God ‘with the eyes of my Soul’. See Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 10, 65. Moreover, we are also reminded of Bunyan’s insistence in *Of the Resurrection of the Dead* that if a soul is filled with God ‘the senses are made more strong, and able, by reason of use to understand God, and to discern both good and evill’ (Bunyan takes this sentiment from Hebrews 5:13-14) and Wight herself later maintained that ‘When the Sun of righteousness arises in our dark hearts, we then immediately see the gross darkness in us; and are then able to discern aright between darkness and light, good and evil, truth and Error, by the Spirit of God’. Moreover, it was also said of John Janeway that on his deathbed it was ‘*as if with bodily eyes he saw the holy Angels standing before him, ready to receive and carry his precious Soul*

episode as the pivotal moment of Wight's narrative, for it may be said to dictate the course of the rest of her tale. How may this be? During this temptation Wight compares the diabolic attacks she experiences with those experienced by the archangel Michael. This then causes us to liken Wight herself to Michael, leader of the faithful angels, who battled with Satan and his dominions swiftly defeating them and driving them from Heaven (Rev. 12:7-9), and conclude that she will also be a leader of the faithful and will defeat the Devil – indeed we might even say that because the comparison with Michael is explicitly voiced by Wight there can be no doubt that she will be victorious in her battle with Satan. This is precisely what happens as with God's assistance Wight immediately defeats Satan's attack and is no longer troubled. Yet, vitally, the comparison does not end there. Michael Mascuch claimed Wight to be a 'child-“minister” . . . a fount of spiritual knowledge', yet surely she may also be said to turn into a leader of the faithful (like archangel Michael, who was the leader of the faithful *angels*) for the despairing Godly actually turn to her for advice on their own spiritual conditions and hang on her every word – she partially leads their spiritual development.¹⁷

Following conversion the despairing, self-obsessed, outlook that Wight previously had was replaced by an earnest desire to help those suffering from an afflicted conscience - she changed from looking out for her own spiritual welfare, to looking out for the spiritual welfare of those around her; the godly community. This new found spiritual altruism reflects the support Wight received from many

into his Fathers Glory'. See Bunyan, *Of the Resurrection of the Dead* in J.S. McGee (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, (13 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), III, p. 238; Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter written by Mrs Sarah Wight, to a friend, expressing the joy is to be had in God in great, deep, long, and sore afflictions* (London: Printed by James Cottrel, for Ri. Moone, 1656), p. 71; James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities, demonstrated in the holy life and triumphant death of Mr. John Janeway* (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1690), sig. B1r.

¹⁷ M. Mascuch, 'The Godly Child's "Power and evidence"', p. 109.

ministers and the other members of her Church when she was in deep despair and convinced of her own damnation. Wight was visited by these people who had become acquainted with her desperate condition and wished to console her yet, sadly, their endeavours had only a limited effect for Jessey notes that although Wight ‘gladly would have received comfort . . . it was then hid from her’ and even when she had some glimmers of hope from listening to the counsel of Mr John Browne ‘it was soon eclipsed againe; and shee remained in grievous horreur day and night’ – thus showing that she could only be released from her terror by God.¹⁸

Following her conversion Sarah had many lengthy conversations with any in spiritual anguish who wished to come and discuss their condition with her including a certain Mistress Palmer who was feeling deeply distressed because she was tempted to believe that God did not exist. Wight was consequently able to comfort this lady by telling her of her own experiences and saying ‘*I lay in unbeliefe, and could beleeve nothing, but that there was no God, and no Devill, and no Hell: till he made me beleeve in himselfe: and the same power that did it for me, the same will doe it for you*’.¹⁹ Moreover, because Sarah is helped by godly individuals when she is lost in despair before her conversion and then moves on to help those in a similar condition after her conversion it gives the narrative a cyclical feel as the sufferer becomes the comforter – thus emphasising how important it was for the godly community to work together because even though God alone could restore an individual’s faith, listening to the advice of fellow believers could provide some temporary solace. Wight’s experiences here also show that following conversion some writers were especially eager to assist others by reminding them of God’s undying love and urging them to wait patiently for God to bestow his grace on them.

¹⁸ Henry Jessey, *Exceeding Riches*, p. 8, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Moreover, it is also apparent that when an individual's faith had been strengthened it was possible for them to stand up to the Devil and even confront him head-on. John Bywater, for example, suffered from several 'very thick' temptations after his conversion, but with his newly strengthened faith he resolved to cling to Christ even if he was flung into Hell – thus showing how firmly set his faith was following conversion and suggesting that he no longer feared the Devil's tricks.²⁰

The same was also true for Wight since the power Satan had over her diminished considerably after conversion. Where previously she had been driven to despair by his torments, following conversion Wight swatted away the Devil, almost as one would swat away a fly, and was not troubled again. This suggests that Satan had lost his sting and no longer seemed as threatening to her and consequently reminds us of Vavasor Powell's adage that 'the Devil is like a Turkeycock, (or crocodile) if you turn upon him he will fly from you, but you fly from him, he will pursue you'.²¹ Indeed, we may even say that prior to conversion Satan had seemed more real than God to her for he appeared to have a great influence on her life, even tempting her to perform sinful actions almost daily at one stage, whilst God seemed a more remote figure who did not intervene to comfort and allay her fears with any regularity until the time of her conversion.

Bridget Cooke's experiences reflect Wight's in this matter for they also show how Satan's wiles could be confounded by a recently converted individual. Following conversion Cooke found herself often tempted by Satan to 'let goe her faith' yet her sense of assurance was so strong that she would not allow herself to be overcome by the Devil for she 'doubted not of her salvation but was as sure of it as if

²⁰ Rogers, *Ohel*, p. 395.

²¹ Powell, *Life*, p. 37 (misnumbered. Section on 'Some gracious Experimental and very choyce Sayings, and Sentences, collected out of his Papers' inserted after p. 50).

she were in heaven already'.²² Her ability to stand firm against all doubt and temptation following her conversion was greatly admired by all who knew her, many of whom felt that 'if there . . . [had] been any saints upon earth since ye primitive times . . . she was undoubtedly one of them'.²³ Consequently, Cooke's actions following her conversion proved to be a constant source of spiritual edification for all who met her. Even though she did not explicitly offer advice in the same manner as Janeway and Wight, she was 'greatly beloved and admired of godly Christians such as did discourse & see into her condition'.²⁴ Cooke's experiences following conversion clearly show the strength of faith it was possible to attain and by setting such a high standard (or rather, as Cooke would have understood it, by God making an example of her) she inadvertently encouraged others to emulate her spiritual performance and wish for the same amount of grace as she had. So we may say that an individual's conversion was not only beneficial for themselves, it was also highly beneficial for their local community who were able to gain useful insights into the nature of true faith.

Rose Thurgood also found complete assurance, for she suddenly realised that she was 'made a saint' and was thus 'come out of darknes into a marvelous light'.²⁵ Following conversion the Devil was still present in her life for she records how he would 'now & then have a snatch & snapp at mee still, & hee will question my heart whither I am sure of the pardon of my synnes or no, and shewe me my debt bill'.²⁶ Yet Thurgood notes that, try as hard as he might to destroy her, the Devil no longer had any power over her because a dramatic change had been wrought in her soul, a change that ensured she no longer feared man or Devil now that Christ was her

²² R.P., *Some Passages of Mrs Bridget Cooke*, fos.5r, 4v.

²³ *Ibid.*, fo. 3r.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 9r.

²⁵ Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

cornerstone and she had 'the whole armor of God to defend her'.²⁷ Thurgood also shows an earnest desire to help those in spiritual distress for her text is framed as an address to her mother, siblings and friends. But she appears to have had a wider audience than this in mind because she later addresses her 'loving mother, sisters & friends or whatsoever thou art' and urges them to search within themselves to discover 'whither they are of God or no' whilst reminding them that she has 'sett . . . a patterne, how you may get the love of God'.²⁸ Indeed, by making such statements Thurgood appears to establish a ministerial role for herself since she advocates self-examination like ministers such as Thomas Watson.²⁹ Moreover, she also claims to be setting a pattern for others to follow in the same way that Bunyan did in his preface to *Grace Abounding*.³⁰

We have seen how encounters with the Devil after conversion could serve to bolster an individual's faith - but this was not always the case. Elizabeth Isham was aware that she had been converted for she exclaimed 'what neede I doubt of thee my God, seeing thou hast granted me saving knowledge where is no where else to be found'.³¹ Yet in spite of this she still found the Devil's assaults difficult to overcome and soon felt her old sins well up inside once again when she had covetous thoughts whilst hoping for a 'worldly rewarde for things to please to please [sic] my owne sensuall delight or fancy & to satisfie my pride and ambition, as also envious thoughts thinking much that others should fare better or as well as my selfe'.³²

²⁷ Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 16.

²⁹ For example, Watson maintained that 'without self-examination we can never know how it is with us. If we should die presently, we cannot tell to what Coast we should sail; whether to Heaven or Hell' (Thomas Watson quoted in Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, p. 10).

³⁰ Here I refer to Bunyan's statement that '*If you have sinned against the light, if you are tempted to blaspheme, if you are down in despair, if you think God fights against you, or if heaven is hid from your eyes; remember 'twas thus with your Father, but out of them all the Lord delivered me*' (Bunyan, *GA*, p. 5).

³¹ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 81.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

However, Isham's troubles did not stop here. Satan also tried to distract her when she was attempting to pray, listening to a sermon or making any attempt to praise God. Moreover, his cunning in doing so was so great that Isham admits she was not fully aware of his diabolical interference until she read a book discussing 'the soul's conflict' given to her by her sister for she records that at this time Satan had tempted her 'under a show of good' – very different to the assaults she had previously experienced and the blatant, often aggressive, temptations experienced by Janeway and Wight.³³

Since it was the influence of a book that led Isham to believe her wandering mind was caused by the Devil's diabolical tricks, we are forced to wonder how far an individual's perception of the Devil was shaped by the literature they read and how much it was influenced by their own experiences and sensations.³⁴ It appears that it was only with the benefit of hindsight that Isham connected her disconcerting lapses of concentration with diabolical influence yet, I would argue this does not necessarily mean that she was trying to reconcile her own experiences with the 'accepted norm'. According to Nathan Johnstone 'one person's Devil was not the same as another's' and although the godly tended to 'measure their own experiences against the descriptions of temptation they read in devotional works, they found their own emphases, which enabled them to see the Devil, not as an inchoate

³³ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 83 (footnote 478; a transcription of Isham's marginal note). The precise identity of the book Isham read is uncertain, but it may be Richard Sibbes' *The Soules Conflict with it selfe, and Victory over Itself by Faith* (1635). Isham read the book in 1637 or 1638 (the reference to the book occurs on p. 83 and Isham explicitly notes the year as 1637 on p. 78 and 1638 on p. 86). Moreover, Ian Green's *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* tells us that Sibbes' book was 'based on sermons on Psalm 42:5: Souls troubled by Satan should look to God for assurance of salvation' (Appendix I) and pp. 14-17 of *The Soules Conflict* maintain that Satan envies the happiness of godly men and so subtly tries to disquiet their souls. This could then explain how Isham suddenly became aware that Satan was attacking her for she could have believed the Devil envied her when she was at her happiest (i.e. praising God or engaged in pious activities) and laboured to distract her from these duties with all his might.

³⁴ After all, in the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* Richard Baxter worried that he 'could not distinctly trace the workings of the Spirit upon my heart in that method which Mr Bolton, Mr Hooker, Mr Rogers and other divines describe' yet he later came to realise that 'God breaketh not all men's hearts alike' (Baxter, *Autobiography*, pp. 10, 11).

generalisation onto which to project their sins, but as a tangible force which they had really encountered'.³⁵ This certainly appears to be true of Isham as she only retrospectively attributes impious or inconsistent thoughts to the Devil's influence on this one occasion for at all other times she contemporaneously spots the Devil's involvement in tampering with her thoughts. Indeed, the method Isham occasionally uses to sense Satan's presence is not one that I have encountered in other spiritual autobiographies and diaries for Isham contends that she is sometimes able to perceive Satan's temptations because she feels them come upon her as 'a kinde of numnes in my soule or sences'.³⁶ This appears to be an unusual method of discerning Satan's involvement for whilst our other authors frequently refer to feeling 'cold' 'icy' and 'deadened' when praying or attempting to perform religious duties they do not consider this to be a prelude to or forewarning of Satanic attack, instead it shows where they have been unproductive in spiritual affairs or when they sense that God has turned away from them.³⁷ In other words we might say that for these autobiographers such feelings suggest spiritual stasis and general inactivity, yet for Isham they show the exact opposite because they ensure she is alert and ready for action – thus implying that her perception of the Devil could certainly be unique to her and not simply a carbon copy of the Satan met by other believers or a conglomerate of her own experiences and the descriptions given in godly books.

Yet the temptations previously discussed were not the only ones experienced by Isham. She also found herself tempted to scoff at God and think impure thoughts after her conversion yet was always able to resist these covert temptations. What is remarkable though is her interpretation of them. Whilst quick to note that she experienced fewer temptations after conversion than she had previously been

³⁵ N. Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, pp. 108, 110.

³⁶ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 61.

³⁷ For examples see Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 33, 72, 93 and Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 21, 51, 68.

accustomed to, Isham also maintained that her post-conversion temptations were sent to her as a punishment for the irreligious conduct of her earlier years and the ‘offences of our first conserning parents’.³⁸ In contrast, at this stage in their experience, Janeway and Wight were not buffeted by many temptations and generally attributed those they did experience to the Devil’s malice rather than their own inherent sinfulness. This difference of opinion may be attributed to Isham’s ardent belief that ‘none was so happy but have aflections [afflictions] in this life’ or ‘those which have had trialls in there lifetime have had peace at there death’ which suggests that Isham believed experiencing temptations for the entirety of one’s life was a necessary part of being a true Christian – something which Wight would certainly have disagreed with, for she believed that God would convert the elect and free them from their sins and temptation in his own time, which might be during life or after death since she believed that everything happened at its divinely allotted time.³⁹

Following conversion Vavasor Powell found himself repeatedly plagued by temptation yet he believed that God gave him the power to ‘resist Temptation and check corruption’.⁴⁰ After suddenly being granted ‘perfect peace’ by the Holy Spirit

³⁸ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 92. Isham states she had been tempted ‘many times . . . in these late yeeres’ but was ‘not in that great distresse with those armies of temptations as I have bine’ (p. 92).

³⁹ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, pp. 40, 44. See, for example, Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 6 – ‘Every condition is beautiful in its season’. Wight’s beliefs could be contrasted with Antinomian thinking for Antinomians such as William Erbery taught that the saints would be freed from the restraint of the moral law: ‘to a true believer the spirit of Christ is his ruler and conductor . . . and no law besides whatsoever’. See: J. Spurr, *English Puritanism*, p. 111).

⁴⁰ Powell, *Life*, p. 60. Powell’s belief that God strengthened him and enabled him to resist temptation can be linked with the Calvinist doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints - the belief that those chosen for salvation can never lose their elect status in the eyes of God. The Westminster Assembly recorded that, ‘true belevvers . . . can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation’ (*Confession of Faith; Larger Catechism*, p. 21). In other words, those who are ‘true’ Christians can never become irretrievably lost and damned - they are ‘never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God as keeps them sinking from utter despair’, or as Bunyan attests, God ‘chuses their [the elect’s] temptations and troubles for them, and . . . leaves them for a time to such sins only as might not destroy . . . [or] put them beyond,

Powell later found himself tempted to take up Antinomianism, was troubled with bad thoughts and assaulted by several 'strong' temptations.⁴¹ However, these temptations were only mild in comparison to what he had experienced before conversion. Then he was 'often times tempted by Satan to destroy my self' whilst the Devil frightened and terrified him 'not only by his secret workings in the conscience, but by visual representations, and outwardly real apparitions' even convincing him at one stage that his sins were 'in their number, and nature, to be such, and so many as that there was no pardon for them'.⁴²

Powell's post-conversion experiences also seem far more tempestuous than those of our other authors. Whereas Wight met with the Devil only once after her conversion and Cooke simply ignored the Devil's taunts and received little trouble from him, Powell notes that 'there is scarce one day wherein I have not some breathings from God and to God, and as sure buffetings from Satan' for he commonly has 'both Consolation and Affliction in the same day' and if he has 'comfort from the Lord . . . by Communion or communication or otherwise in the morning, I am sure to have some trouble that Night'.⁴³ Yet even these frequent temptations assisted Powell's spiritual growth for their relentless nature meant that he was continually forced to look to God for comfort and reassurance and found that God supported his endeavours. For example, he noted that one evening he was set upon by a temptation 'which in part prevailed and in part was resisted', so he only

but [rather] lay them in the way of the renewing of his mercie' (*Confession of Faith*, p. 2; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 44).

⁴¹ Powell, *Life*, pp. 13, 14, 63, 65, 66. In his 'Confession of Faith' (printed in the *Life*) Powell acknowledges that the 'chiefest and most undoubted evidence' of assurance of salvation is 'the *Spirit* itself' (*Life*, p. 32) and so we may certainly believe that Powell considered himself to be converted when 'upon a sudden, and unexpectedly, a mighty power, no less than that *Spirit* which raised up Christ Jesus from the dead, and which declared him to be the sonne of God, did enable me to believe, and witnessed effectually in me that I did believe . . . and thereupon I had perfect peace, my heart not at all condemning me' (*Life*, p. 14).

⁴² Powell, *Life*, pp. 12, 8, 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 56.

had partial success in escaping it, yet the next morning when he felt sinful thoughts enter his heart he notes that ‘God made them bitter and burdensome to me’.⁴⁴ This could have been an edifying experience for both Powell and his readers because it showed how much the ability to resist temptation depended on God’s will. This episode clearly shows that even after conversion Powell could not defeat Satan’s onslaughts without God’s assistance and I believe it would have shown that a believer must never be complacent and forget to praise his creator.

The desire to keep learning about God, religion and his own soul is a very prevalent feature of Powell’s *Life* following conversion. He notes that ‘this day was but a flat drowsie day to my Soul, nor great good gained, but sin and grace not discernably active’ and ‘I was troubled this day at my ignorance both in natural and spiritual things’.⁴⁵ Powell feels disappointed when he thinks that he has not learnt anything to advance his spiritual development during the day. Interestingly, Powell also quotes from the Bible more than any of the other spiritual autobiographers or diarists I have studied and this seems to be because he is constantly trying to learn lessons from it and improve the way he acts towards God – especially after conversion. Moreover, he also frequently records what he has learned and says, for example, ‘I observed the following lessons’ and ‘This day the Lord was pleased to set my thoughts on several Lessons, which Christians should be learning in this day’.⁴⁶

As we have seen, life was certainly not all plain sailing for Powell following conversion. Yet his encounters with Satan were not always the most distressing experiences he had to face. His own opinion of himself and his endeavours to serve God was also a sticking point for him as he believed that he did not always work

⁴⁴ Powell, *Life*, pp. 79, 80.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 70.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 70.

hard enough to please God 'I was convinced this day of four things I was too negligent in, viz. Studying the Scriptures, sending to the Christians (especially those to whom I relate), finishing somewhat I intended and begun, and improving my Talent in this place, more to the benefit of other poor Souls' and also records that he is 'too slothful'.⁴⁷ Moreover, Powell still feels that he does not take his sins seriously enough and sorrowfully reported that even when 'God abounded in kindness towards me, yet I was convinced that I was not guilty enough, or sensible enough of mine iniquities'.⁴⁸ However, this could be related to Powell's belief that 'real saints do fear the least sin more than the greatest sufferings, because sin is a worse evil than suffering'.⁴⁹

Grace and Post-Conversion Experiences

Post-conversion experiences were not always fraught with temptation and encounters with the Devil; following conversion many spiritual diarists and autobiographers found contentment and perfect assurance. Once Cicely Johnson was confident of her soul's status she experienced no further doubts, indeed, she even considered doubting to be 'a greater synne then some Christians will allow it for' and was not visited by the Devil or assaulted by temptation again.⁵⁰ Johnson was so adamant that the true convert would not experience doubt after conversion that she was horrified to hear some godly Christians claim the contrary and assert that 'the stronger faith as a Christian attaineth unto, the more the Devil assayeth him with temptations'.⁵¹ Moreover, when these people would not accept her point of view because she had no scriptural evidence to back up her beliefs, Johnson was so perturbed that she

⁴⁷ Powell, *Life*, pp. 82, 83.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 51.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

immediately went out of her way to prove she was right and swiftly found evidence in the Bible to support her position - 'we know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not' (I. John 5:18).

Thus we see that following conversion Johnson's spiritual life was largely peaceful and content for she was no longer afflicted by doubts or the Devil's attacks. Yet this does not mean that she was completely untroubled. Johnson was quick to note that although God had bolstered her against the Devil thus making her spiritual life less complicated, he saw fit to 'try my faith & pacience' in other ways and made her worldly affairs more arduous when, for instance, five of her children caught the pox, Johnson herself also became ill and weak and noted that 'one affliction followed another'.⁵² Yet even these trials had their value as they proved to be edifying and brought forth true patience and humility within her. Indeed, the new birth she experienced ensured that her heart was brought into a 'newe frame' and that she felt 'most sweete meditations & heavenly contemplations' as her 'heart & affections were taken off from the world & the things thereof & sett upon heaven & heavenly things'.⁵³ This change in focus affected the way Johnson went about her everyday life and ensured that she was ready to 'pass by many faultes both of my children & servants . . . [and] was quickly moved to pass by the greatest injury that could be done against mee'.⁵⁴ This suggests that following conversion Johnson actually became more self-centred as her spiritual life even took precedence over her own family - which is the opposite of what happened to many who experienced temptation and attacks from the Devil following conversion for, as the experiences of Sarah Wight and John Janeway have shown us, these people frequently became

⁵² Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 47.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

more involved in community life and sought to assist those in spiritual difficulties once they were assured of their own spiritual safety, rather than completely shutting themselves off from the world.

An infusion of grace from the Holy Spirit (or Christ) was a heady mix that could clearly affect people in different ways. The grace received by Wight and Janeway made them aware of their own privileged position and caused them to feel benevolent towards their fellow believers who still suffered and were in need of support. Yet on the other hand, the grace received by Johnson seems to have turned her into a more insular figure, for she notes that when her Saviour began to furnish her soul with ‘abilities of grace’ her heart was ‘bent to read the scriptures’, her meditations became ‘holy & heavenly very often’ and she was moved ‘to study how & when I might have opportunity to magnify him the Lord my God’ – all solitary pursuits which would have taken up a great deal of her time.⁵⁵ Johnson’s reluctance to interact with those around her might, in part, be explained by her belief that the Devil could get others to act on his behalf, since he no longer had the power to tempt her directly after conversion, and manipulate them into persecuting her and trying to shake her faith at every turn. Johnson records that as soon as she made her ‘new birth’ known to a group of people who appeared to be godly Christians ‘the Devill sett them to oppose mee & to speak against mee; & some that did but heare of mee what I had sayd made lies of mee’.⁵⁶ Indeed, she was reviled by a man she describes

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 43.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45. John Bunyan and Agnes Beaumont experienced similar taunts and slanderous remarks made about them after Bunyan allowed Beaumont to ride with him to a church meeting. Bunyan, like Johnson, attributes the hostile behaviour to the Devil and maintains that Satan ‘perceived that his . . . tempting and assaulting of me would not answer his design’ and so tried to ‘stir up the mindes of the ignorant, and malicious, to load me with slanders and reproaches’ (*GA*, p. 84). Agnes Beaumont, on the other hand, does not see the Devil’s hand in these matters and simply claims that a certain Mr Lane ‘did scandalise us after a base manner, and did raise a very wicked report of us, which was altogether false, blessed be God’ (Beaumont, *Narrative*, p. 198). At no point does Beaumont attribute this slander to the Devil’s machinations, instead she simply believes it is down to Mr Lane’s own malice – thus clearly showing that even the same event can be interpreted differently by two people

as 'a great professor' and found that the two or three 'honest men or women' she met with refused to believe that the Devil torments the converted less than the unconverted.⁵⁷

This is a thought-provoking situation because many devout Christians were of the opinion that the Devil's torments were directly proportional to the level of faith an individual had attained and would occur throughout their spiritual development, even after conversion. William Perkins, for example, claimed that 'one temptation is to be looked for after another; and then especially when our enemy, as though he had made truce with us, is at rest, for the devil never maketh an end of his malice' whilst John Bunyan maintained that 'the more Grace, . . . the greater Trials', Sarah Wight claimed 'the neerer a soul comes to God its haven of happiness, the more it meets with sad storms and tempests' and, as we saw earlier, Elizabeth Isham believed 'none was so happy but have afflections in this life' when speaking of her own temptations.⁵⁸ However, Johnson has a slightly different stance on this matter. Instead of believing that temptation and the Devil's assaults are an integral part of the converted Christian's life, Johnson believes that 'the higher the soule is carried by the winges of true devotion into heavenly meditation and divine contemplation . . . the deeper doth the heavenly comfortes sinke down to the soule' but that 'blessed are yee when men revile you & persecute you & say all manner of evill saying'

and highlighting the great opportunity for variety within spiritual autobiographies. Henry Jessey also attributed the disbelief expressed by many people when told that Sarah Wight had not eaten in twenty-four days and had only drunk four small cupfuls of water to the macinations of the Devil and maintained that 'By such injections, the Enemy would obscure and darken the Works of the Great God of Heaven' (Henry Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of grace advanced*, p. 55).

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, p. 46.

⁵⁸ William Perkins, *A Golden Chain or the Description of Theology* (1592) reprinted in Perkins, *Work*, p. 238; John Bunyan quoted in R.L. Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1969), p. 146; Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 38; Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrance*, p. 40.

against you.⁵⁹ In other words, she believes that comfort, rather than temptation, increases along with faith because it is impossible for the Devil to play a direct role in the elect's lives following conversion – as they are completely shielded from Satan by God – however, she acknowledges that Satan is able to attack the elect by manipulating others into carrying out his wishes. In some ways Johnson's beliefs on this matter are similar to those shared by many Puritans who considered the people of God to be 'a suffering people, a people subject to trouble for their faith and profession', yet her views differ when she claims there is no room for doubt or temptation following conversion, for many shared Arthur Dent's sentiment that 'burning fits of temptation in the elect . . . are signs of God's grace and favour: for if they were not of God, the devil would never be so busy with them'.⁶⁰ Rose Thurgood, for example, maintained that 'none goe to heaven with dry eyes for if on earth wee shedd none [tears], howe shall they be wiped away in heaven, and what shalt thou need of that eyesalve with which the Lord cleareth his saints eyes withall . . . for God saith: as many as I love, I chasten & rebuke'.⁶¹

However, Johnson's refusal to accept Satan's direct involvement in the lives of the elect after conversion is reminiscent of Dionys Fitzherbert's beliefs on post-conversion experiences. Fitzherbert believed herself to have been converted and

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Fanatical Reveries*, pp. 52, 46. In the second quotation Johnson is paraphrasing Matthew 5:11-12.

⁶⁰ John Bunyan, *Seasonable Counsel: or, Advice to Sufferers* (1684) reprinted in O.C. Watkins (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, (13 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), X, p. 95; Dent, *Plaine Man's Path-Way*, p. 270. Nehemiah Wallington appears to have shared the belief that the Elect would be troubled in this life for he notes that 'the wicked may prosper yet their condition is miserable and the blessed condition of the godly though here they be troubled and despised'. Could this belief partially account for the early modern fascination with binary oppositions? After all, in their spiritual lives someone who was rich or appeared to be devout could actually be damned, whilst a poor individual or someone who led an ungodly life could actually turn out to be a member of the Elect. In other words, according to Calvinist theology it was possible to equate success and piety with its binary opposite, sin and reprobation, if an individual possessed temporary faith alone, yet a life of spiritual indifference or poverty could paradoxically be equated with salvation if that person was actually a member of the Elect (they could experience a deathbed conversion thanks to their inherent effectual faith). See Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 282.

⁶¹ Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 25.

justified when she was fourteen years old, yet was shocked to find herself fall into despair and tempted to believe she had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost *after* she felt her conversion had taken place. As Mary Morrissey shows, Fitzherbert believed that she had ‘passed soe many tryalls, I thought with David I shall never be removed’ - thus indicating she considered herself to be elect - yet she was convinced that despair was ‘inconsistent with the assurance granted the saints’.⁶² So we see that Fitzherbert’s condition closely parallels Johnson’s, for both believed that conversion would mark a watershed in their lives initiating more peaceful and content times as well as a closer relationship with God, yet found that this was not necessarily the case and had to alter their way of thinking slightly to match their experiences – for example, Johnson was forced to acknowledge that the post-conversion period was not as peaceful as she had initially thought because God brought illness to her family and Satan caused others to vilify her, whilst Fitzherbert was made to reconsider her beliefs and conclude that it was indeed possible for the Elect to experience an afflicted conscience, but not melancholy, after conversion. Moreover, Johnson’s insistence that the Devil did not disturb the converted is also supported by Lewis Bayly’s contention that ‘a Christian reconciled to God in Christ’ finds himself ‘*freed from Satan’s bondage*’.⁶³ This could be taken to mean that once conversion has taken place, a true Christian will not be afflicted by the Devil’s torments.

⁶² M. Morrissey, ‘Narrative Authority in Spiritual Life-writing: The Example of Dionys Fitzherbert (fl. 1608-1641)’ in *The Seventeenth Century*, Volume XV, Issue 1, (2000), pp. 1-17. Both quotations on p. 3.

⁶³ Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian how to walk, that he may please God* (London: Printed for Philip Chetwinde, 1669), pp. 90-91.

Gradual Conversions

It is difficult to discuss the post-conversion experiences of those experiencing gradual conversions because since we cannot identify a single moment of conversion we cannot tell when the post-conversion period begins. However, it is possible to identify several important, life-changing, moments in texts written by authors experiencing gradual conversions. For the purpose of this chapter I will consider the events immediately after these moments to be ‘post-conversion experiences’ and will compare and contrast them in order to discover the degree of variation present in the experiences and beliefs of the authors.

Many historians and literary scholars have tried to find a definitive moment of conversion, or turning point, in Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*. Yet there is no consensus on the matter. Anne Hawkins has shown that there is ‘confusion as to precisely when this turning point occurred’ and highlights the contesting moments selected by Bunyan scholars and informs us that, for example, Richard Greaves considers the moment when Bunyan was scolded by an ungodly wretch to be pivotal, whilst Dean Ebner sees the battle between the two texts (Hebrews 12:17 and II Corinthians 12:9) as the zenith of Bunyan’s spiritual experience.⁶⁴ I have chosen two different moments that I believe are the most important turning points in Bunyan’s life: firstly, when Bunyan overhears the poor, but godly, women of Bedford talking about religion and feels that they have found a new world, causing Bunyan to yearn to be reborn and, secondly, when he thinks about what his last words on the scaffold might be and concludes that he would place his trust in Christ.⁶⁵ These moments are diametrically opposed. The first moment sees Bunyan listen to the women and realise that he needs to reach a whole new level of spiritual development as he comes

⁶⁴ A. Hawkins, ‘The Double-Conversion’, p. 263.

⁶⁵ For these events see Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 14-15, 91-92.

to understand the flaws in his own semblance of religion through a process of self-examination where he evaluates his own heart and finds himself wanting. In other words, we might say that this episode makes Bunyan focus on himself as an individual as he looks within his own soul to identify his current spiritual status and concentrate on where he eventually wants to be – at the same level of piety as the poor women. Yet the second moment has the reverse effect, for instead of making Bunyan see himself as an individual and worry about his own spiritual progress it makes him lose his sense of identity and become completely willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. This time Bunyan does not care about his own spiritual status; instead he is pleased to think that his last few minutes might offer him the opportunity to speak to the multitude of people who would come and see him die and so ‘if God would but convert one Soul by my very last words, I shall not count my life thrown away, nor lost’.⁶⁶ It seems that by this point Bunyan has come to realise that he is part of a godly community who must try with all their might to convert souls and praise the righteousness of their creator; he no longer sees himself as a soul in desperate need of salvation, but as a soul capable of bringing salvation to those converted by his words as he recognises that his own life can only be worthy if he succeeds in disseminating the word of God and realises he is insignificant without God’s assistance.

We have seen how these experiences differ and how they affect Bunyan’s perception of himself, but what happened immediately after each of these ‘turning points’ or ‘conversion experiences’? How did they shape his spiritual development? Following the first moment Bunyan found himself to be ‘greatly affected by their words’ and he began his search for signs of assurance in earnest because their words

⁶⁶ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 91-92.

had convinced him that the elect who possessed signs of assurance were in a 'happy and blessed condition'.⁶⁷ Shortly after he also experienced a dream or vision in which he saw himself separated from the godly people of Bedford by a wall and standing on the cold side of a mountain. Indeed, this could be interpreted as being the moment of Bunyan's rebirth because during the dream Bunyan finds that he is able to pass through the wall and join the godly people in the sunshine.⁶⁸ Following this Bunyan became convinced of his own inherent sinful nature, as well as the gravity of his own personal sins, and found that 'a vehement hunger, and desire to be one of that number that did sit in this Sun-shine [i.e. the elect]' was created within him. Bunyan began to pray at every possible opportunity.⁶⁹ So we see that following this moment a fervent desire for religion and the development of true piety was inaugurated in Bunyan's heart as well as a hankering to be part of a godly community – one of the people in the sunshine.

Things did not go so well for Bunyan immediately after the second moment, for he found that he felt no closer to God and the Devil still tempted him to doubt his own salvation. This state of affairs continued for many weeks until Bunyan suddenly realised that he must not trouble himself by worrying about whether he is elected or not, because the matter is out of his control – God has decided who reaches heaven and His decision is just and must be accepted, not questioned. And it is here that Bunyan really shows his faith in God for he maintains that he is prepared to give Christ complete control of his eternal estate for he would leap off the scaffold 'into Eternitie, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell; Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me, do; I will venture for thy Name'.⁷⁰ Thus we see that this moment has not only taught

⁶⁷ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Bunyan the value of self-sacrifice and that he is simply a piece in the divine puzzle, but it has also taught him how to fully relinquish control of his own spiritual destiny to God and accept that whatever happens to his soul after death will be for the best. Indeed, if Bunyan had ended on this note it would have brought a sense of closure to the text, for he would have been seen to proceed from sin and selfish concerns to a state of comfort where the boundaries between the individual and the godly community and between the individual and God are blurred.

Bunyan's self-denial in this episode is reminiscent of Sarah Wight's assertion that a 'Christian's happiness lies in being emptied of all self . . . and being filled with a full God' for man should be '*content to resign up all to God, all outward, and inward, things; all Relations, Ordinances, Gifts, Graces, Desires, Hopes, all that can be named or desired of Heaven and Earth; that nothing of self may Remain*' as well as Thomas Taylor's avowal that 'all selfe-respects, selfe seeking, self-aymes must be renounced, and the Christian wholly vanish into nothing, and all things in the world become *drosse and dounge* in comparison to Christ'.⁷¹ This reminds us that whilst it was vital for a pious individual to find assurance of their *own* salvation, perform *self*-examination on their *own* hearts, keep a record of their *own* sins (usually in the form of spiritual autobiography or diary) and ensure they could *personally* say that Christ died for *their* sins (i.e. what we might describe as self-centred acts), it was also necessary for them to be able to forget themselves and their own fate completely and remember that they are simply God's creatures and should therefore place full trust in their maker.

Here we must remember Tom Webster's argument that whilst spiritual autobiographies were often written in an attempt to help comfort the author and

⁷¹ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, pp. 5, 29; Thomas Taylor, *The principles of Christian practice* (London: Printed by R[obert] Y[oung and John Beale] for I. Bartlet, 1635), p. 18.

discover signs of assurance, paradoxically, many hoped they would never reach the final stage of gaining complete assurance for, as Webster notes, ‘the very security sought by the process of writing is in itself dangerous’ as the authentically godly should always be seen in ‘a state of becoming’ (i.e. always journeying, never arriving) because ‘too much assurance would suggest hypocritical security’.⁷² This suggests that not only was the ‘ideal’ form of spiritual life difficult to obtain, it was not always desirable to attain it. Yet Webster’s statement needs to be qualified. True and full, divinely granted, assurance must surely have been something that was yearned for by every pious individual – Sarah Wight maintained that ‘the true-divine soul . . . is never satisfied, till it’s as neer God as is attainable’ and claimed that ‘for the coming of this full enjoyment of all blessedness & happiness, longeth my poore waiting soule, in a daily expectation, upon the God of all our mercies, who is coming to fulfill our desires, to compleat our glory’.⁷³ Yet temporary assurance grounded on false hopes of security and misinterpreted signs of election must have been that which was desperately feared and dreaded; as Janeway noted ‘Conviction and Conversion are two things, and . . . many are somewhat affected by a warm exhortation, who quickly wear off those impressions, and return to their former trifling with God’.⁷⁴

Presumably Webster would say that the need to always be seen ‘in a state of becoming’ could account for Bunyan’s decision not to end the text on a moment of ‘synchronicity’ with Christ or an episode of complete closure bringing unshakeable assurance, but rather deciding to carry on in doubt and temptation until the end. Yet I

⁷² T. Webster, ‘Writing to Redundancy’, pp. 55, 54. James Janeway noted that his brother’s faith ‘got up to a full assurance’ and maintains that he records the level of his brother’s faith - who ‘did not question his state’ – in order ‘to let other Christian’s know what is attainable in this life; and what folly it is for us to take up with so little, when our Lord is pleased to make such noble provisions for us’. See James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities*, pp. 92, 97.

⁷³ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, pp. 5, 18.

⁷⁴ James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities*, p. 51.

disagree. If finding complete assurance was truly considered such a bad thing, then where do those authors who experienced sudden conversions fit in? As we have seen, these people were not generally ridiculed for their newly found assured status, instead their advice was frequently sought and they were held in high regard – as the experiences of Sarah Wight clearly attest, for at no time does Jessey record that Wight was visited by a minister who warned her about her ‘hypocritical security’; instead the opposite happened for ministers visited her to hear about her experiences and try to understand what had happened to her.⁷⁵ Indeed, Jessey himself was a Puritan minister and the fact that he recorded Wight’s tale and then published it for others to read clearly shows that he approved of her experiences and felt that others might gain spiritual edification and comfort from reading about them.

In Jessey’s epistle to the Christian reader at the start of the text he asks ‘How desirable is it to one, and to the friends of one, that is in *great extremity* of misery, bodily, or spirituall; to hear of another, that was just in the *same condition*, that now is *cured*? How much longed for is the safe *Harbour*, to a weather-beaten Ship, tossed and shattred with *Tempests*?’⁷⁶ William Janeway also earnestly desired to attain assurance for he maintained that ‘this passing upon eternity is a great thing, this dying is a solemn business and enough to make any ones heart ake, that hath not his pardon sealed, and his evidences for Heaven clear’ and was jubilant when shortly after this lamentation he found complete assurance and exclaimed ‘now it is come, it is come it is come. I bless God I can dye: The spirit of God hath witnessed with my spirit that I am his child: now I can look up to God as my dear Father, and Christ as

⁷⁵ We know that some people who had not met Wight believed her newly found comfort might be a delusion – Dr Cox mentions this when he visits Sarah - yet she convinced all who came to question her in person about her condition that the faith and comfort she felt were genuine and divinely granted. It is also certain that some ministers were among these bedside visitors as Jessey mentions the ‘many Godly Ministers and Gracious Saints, that know Mrs *Wight*, and the *Maid*, and this Daughter of *Abraham*, and have ground to judge’. See Jessey, *Exceeding Riches*, pp. 114, 55.

⁷⁶ Henry Jessey, *Exceeding Riches*, ‘To the Christian Reader’, sig. A2v.

my redeemer, I can now say this is my friend and this is my beloved'.⁷⁷ Moreover, James Janeway echoed his father's feelings when he declared 'how comfortable to have our calling and election made sure!'⁷⁸ This suggests to me that complete assurance was a highly valued commodity that many wished for, but was considered to be a rarity for such assurance could easily be confused with the temporary (or false) faith given to reprobates. Yet not only was it deemed a rarity, it was also considered a gift from God and this is the crux of the entire matter.

Divinely granted assurance was something to be treasured and was clearly what contemporaries thought Sarah Wight was experiencing, yet when they came and consulted with her they were not in awe of her personally; they were actually amazed at God's graciousness. As Jessey points out at the start of the text the reader should

*Consider; Admire the Lord in his surpassing Grace to ungodly ones. Doe not so commend the party, that is but an Earthen vessel, born in sin, as you are: but still, all along, exalt and commend the LORD, who alone is to be exalted . . . Who puts his treasure into an Earthen vessel of purpose, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of flesh.*⁷⁹

This shows how the object of the Lord's affections (in this case, Wight) must be ignored in favour of the source of the affection (God himself) and, indeed, Wight's exclamations of surprise at being chosen by God are ubiquitous throughout the text and this humility is reinforced by Jessey when he notes in the Epistle Dedicatory that Wight is unaware that her experiences will be published. Jessey writes: '*Neither (to my knowledge) doth shee as yet know to the day of the date hereof, that her words*

⁷⁷ James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities*, pp. 25-26.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. A3r. This is reminiscent of Wallington's desire that 'none yt heares or reads this might not thinke one jote the better of me but to give all the praise and glory to God' (Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 5v) and Wight's own assertion that she wrote her letter 'that you with me may bless the Lord for his precious loving kindness to his unworthy hand-maid' (Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 49).

were writ down: much lesse that there is any intent in publishing to the world, what thus was uttered to her own soul, or to others'.⁸⁰ Interestingly, Wight later refers to the publication of Jessey's text and says 'I was not then capable of the publishing of it: if I had, I could not be free, fearing how it might be with me afterwards'.⁸¹

This leads us to an immensely interesting, and unusual, point. It is rare for us to have two texts discussing the spiritual experience of a single author from different perspectives (i.e. from the perspective of an onlooker and then from the author themselves), yet that is precisely what we have for Sarah Wight. I have previously discussed Henry Jessey's relation of Wight's experiences - *The Exceeding Riches of grace advanced by the spirit of grace, in an empty nothing creature* which was published in 1647 - yet there is also a letter penned by Wight herself that was published as *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter written by Mrs Sarah Wight, to a friend, expressing the joy is to be had in God in great, deep, long, and sore afflictions* almost a decade later in 1656.⁸² In this letter Wight tells her friend of

⁸⁰ Henry Jessey, *Exceeding Riches*, 'Epistle Dedicatory', sig. A6r.

⁸¹ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 24. Interestingly, the letter Sarah Wight wrote to a friend was also published without her knowledge by a certain R.B who has been variously identified as Robert Bragg, the Independent rector of Allhallows, by Stevie Davies and as Robert Bacon, a religious radical, by Barbara Ritter Dailey. See S. Davies, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution, 1640-1660* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1998), p. 133; B.R. Dailey, 'The Visitation of Sarah Wight: Holy Carnival and the Revolution of the Saints in Civil War London' in *Church History*, Volume 55, Issue 4, (1986), pp. 438-455. Quotation on p. 453.

Before the letter begins there is a section headed 'Some apology to Mrs Sarah Wight, Touching the printing of her Letter without her *knowledge* or *consent*' (sig. A3r). In this section R.B. claims that he published Wight's work because '*having sundry times read over your Letter, and found in it what my heart longed after, and in God . . . I judged with others . . . the printing of it might be of exceeding use, especially now, to the many bewildernessed ones, to whom it might serve as a Witness . . . to lean upon*'. (sig. A3r). Moreover, R.B. maintains that he did not consult Wight about the publication of her letter because he feared '*a temptation perhaps of modesty in you [Wight]*' might have prevented it being published. (sig. A3v). This is also reminiscent of the publication of Jane Turner's *Choice Experiences of the kind dealings of God* for Turner notes that '*I did intend them [notes of her experiences] only for my own private use, as a remembrancer of the old loving kindness of the Lord towards me, & twas not in the least in my thoughts that ever it should have been presented to a publick view, but after I had written the greatest part of it, shewing it to my Husband, he had some thoughts to publish it, judging it might be profitable to some precious souls*'. (Turner, *Choice Experiences*, 'A Word from the Author to the Reader', sig. B7v).

⁸² Interestingly, Wight's *Letter* has not been analysed in any depth by most of the modern works I have read which discuss Jessey's *Exceeding Riches*. N. Smith's, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 394, T.

the lessons she has learned from her recent troubles, namely, the sudden death of her brother and her own doubts. What is remarkable is that the tone of the letter is very different to Jessey's earlier account. As we have seen, Jessey's account tells us the extraordinary tale of girl who moves from a state of utter despair to one of complete assurance and that is where it ends, yet the letter tells a very different tale for Wight reveals that after the events of Jessey's account she fell back into doubt and despair. Wight records that 'since then [the experiences Jessey records], I have had a sharp Winter-season, mourning for the loss of all that comfort: I have been stripp'd bare of seeming comfort since, that I cannot boast of that, nor of any comforts, *but of the God of comforts*; not of enjoyments, or experiences; not of any gifts or graces'.⁸³

There are two ways we could look at the disparity between both texts. Firstly, we could say that Wight's talk about her new found doubts and loss of comfort is a literary device because the crux of her letter is that everything has its season in a Christian's life – even doubt and despair – and 'as prosperity should not lift up, so adversity should not daunt a Christian . . . Every condition is beautiful in its season'.⁸⁴ We also know that she is in the habit of writing letters to those with an afflicted conscience as she says 'when I begin to write to a Christian friend in this kind, I am always much enlarged' thus indicating that this is not her first letter of this type and suggesting that she was still eager to help those suffering from religious

Webster's, 'Writing to Redundancy' and M. Mascuch's 'The Godly Child's "Power and evidence" in the Word' (pp. 113-114) only mention the *Letter* in passing, whilst the *Oxford DNB* entry on Sarah Wight claims that 'nothing further is known about Sarah Wight and her later life' beyond what is recorded in the *Exceeding Riches* without even mentioning the existence of her *Letter*. Within the last year, however, C. Gray's *Women Writers and Public Debate in Seventeenth Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) has offered a more detailed discussion of the *Letter* (pp. 92-98), although Gray's work concentrates more on Wight's agency and speculating why the *Letter* was published when it was than Wight's theological concerns.

⁸³ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 24. We do not know precisely when Wight fell back into doubt, but we can definitely say it was after 1650 because the 1652 edition of Jessey's text adds a postscript which tells us that 'About September 1650, a Christian Friend visiting Sarah Wight found her weak, her Bible open, where she had newly been reading, and said, she speaks still the same language that is in the Book'. See: Jessey, *Exceeding Riches of Grace*, p. 160.

⁸⁴ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 6.

melancholy.⁸⁵ Secondly, we could view it as a true account of her spiritual progress – she was assured during the period of Jessey’s account yet later experienced substantial doubts – which reinforced her sense of being a member of the elect since, as Wight maintains, ‘*many are the troubles of the Righteous*, and . . . the Righteous Lord supports sweetly under them all; and in his own best time graciously delivering them out of all’.⁸⁶ She also claims that the afflictions she experienced after the period covered by Jessey were ‘beyond all my former childish troubles; for my old life was not so much captivated, as my new one’ thus suggesting that she did indeed believe herself to have been converted during the period Jessey was writing about.⁸⁷ To reinforce this Wight writes ‘Blessed and forever praised be Jehovah, who hath so sweetly unbosomed himself, and unbowed his precious love to his unworthy handmaid; telling me, that all my creaturely mutability should not, nor could not alter his unchangeable love: for whom he loved once, he loved for ever’ – thus suggesting that her earlier experiences of comfort were not false; human nature had simply caused her to doubt her own election.⁸⁸

*

So what have we learnt from this journey through seventeenth-century post-conversion experiences? We have seen how conversion could bring peace to spiritual affairs in the cases of Johnson and Thurgood (and for Wight, albeit temporarily), yet we have also seen that the Devil could still be an active part the new convert’s life and, indeed, this was what many Puritans expected for the Bible stated that ‘all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution’ (II. Timothy 3:12). But in

⁸⁵ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 49. It also seems that she has written before to her friend as towards the end of the letter she says ‘Sir, your kind acceptance of my former lines, encouraged me to present these to your view at your leysure in spare hours’ (ibid., p. 81).

⁸⁶ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 49.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

general the overriding theme of this study is community spirit. Whether assaulted by manifold temptations after conversion or experiencing very few challenges to their faith our authors have generally felt an urgent desire to help ease the spiritual torment of fellow believers. Even those experiencing a gradual conversion, such as John Bunyan, found that they became less self-obsessed and more interested in the status of their brethren as their spiritual journey progressed - thus supporting John S. Coolidge's assertion that 'as the individual member of the body grows in the strength of his new life in Christ, he communicates that strength to others, while always taking care lest in his own assurance he frighten weaker consciences'.⁸⁹ Samuel Ainsworth maintained that 'a Saint may be known by his company, one Saint will delight to converse with another, as there is mutuall fellowship betweene . . . Saints'.⁹⁰ Sarah Wight echoed Ainsworth's thought on the matter when she exclaimed 'O what a mercy is it to be heartily affected with the afflicted!', thus showing her delight at being able to share another's distress and offer them comfort.⁹¹ However, she also held that such empathy was uncommon and could only be attained by the elect - as can be seen from Wight's contention that her friend's sympathising 'from a fellow-feeling of our affliction . . . plainly demonstrate[s] you to be a fellow-member of that mysticall body whereof Christ is the Head'.⁹² Indeed, Wight felt that this 'empathetic bond' between the elect was highly significant for it meant that although the Saints were 'scattered abroad in this wide, wilde world, and distinct in the flesh from one another' they were united in God and so able to 'love,

⁸⁹ J.S. Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 49-50.

⁹⁰ Samuel Ainsworth, *A sermon preached at the funerall of that religious gentle-woman Mrs Dorothy Hanbury, wife to Edward Hanbury, Esq., living at Kelmarsh in Northampton-shire who dyed the 12 day of June, and was buried at Navesby in Northampton-shire July 13, Anno Dom. 1642* (London: Printed by Richard Cotes for Stephen Bowtell, 1645), p. 17.

⁹¹ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, p. 20

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

sympathize, sorrow, and rejoyce together, as members in truth of Christs body'.⁹³ Indeed, such appears to have also been the case with John Janeway for Samuel Borset recorded that Janeway 'had a true sympathy with those that were bound Heaven-ward. Their pressures and conflicts, were his burdens . . . their refreshments, his revivings: and their spiritual proficiency, his joy' and said to a friend 'let us look upon one another not as brethren only, but as members of the same body whereof Christ is the head'.⁹⁴

Yet what has also been clearly discernable is the fact that post-conversion experiences were far from identical. Some writers, such as Vavasor Powell, found themselves attacked by Satan after conversion, whilst others were untroubled, as Johnson's *Fanatical Reveries* shows; some found themselves strongly assured of their elect status and confidently able to give advice to others, as was the case with Sarah Wight; whilst others found that they were more prone to focus on their own personal assurance and relationship with God after conversion, as shown by Johnson. Moreover, they each have different ways of coming to terms with their newly found elect status and do not necessarily use the same language to describe their experiences; for example, Isham claimed to feel 'numb' in the prelude to a satanic attack, yet other authors use 'numb' and 'chilly' to describe themselves when they are not performing as well as they could in their spiritual duties. Although it is true to say the majority of our authors found themselves inspired to help other godly individuals find their own spiritual niche following conversion – indeed, we might agree with Owen Watkins' assertion that 'mutual exhortation' was one of key factors in the 'Puritan way of life' at this point - the crux of the matter was that each individual must patiently tread their own path to spiritual contentment, for

⁹³ Sarah Wight, *A Wonderful pleasant and profitable letter*, pp. 21-22.

⁹⁴ James Janeway, *Invisibles, realities*, sig. A2v, p. 18.

everything would happen according to God's plan and no amount of 'spiritual counselling' could end torments unless God had ordained their cessation.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ O.C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*, p. 237.

Conclusion

Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) commented that he had ‘often taken up a book, and . . . talked to it, and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me’ and had become concerned when it remained silent.¹ Happily, the spiritual diaries and autobiographies I have studied have not been silent and unyielding like Equiano’s books. Rather, they have been bursting with variety, life and emotion as many provide moving accounts of the author’s personal spiritual journey and relationships with like-minded godly individuals.

The primary purpose of this thesis has been to show that Puritan spiritual diaries and autobiographies are more complex constructions than some historians and literary scholars are prepared to admit.² Part I contextualised the works by showing how theological concerns and the surrounding community influenced their composition. By doing so it highlighted that although these texts are inevitably of a highly personal nature - for they chart the development of an *individual’s* spirituality and his or her *specific* relationship with God - they cannot be written in a vacuum and are thus affected by the events, people and religious beliefs surrounding the author.

Consequently, the reasons many authors recorded for writing their texts were centred upon a deep concern for the spiritual wellbeing of others – whether their own family, friends or congregation. Authors of spiritual diaries and autobiographies frequently hoped that anyone reading their accounts would find in their words precisely what was required to quicken their own faith (which could be anything from the spiritual succour needed by a sufferer of religious melancholy or a reminder

¹ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (1789) reprinted in V. Carretta (ed.), *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 68.

² Here I allude to scholars such as Patricia Caldwell, Dean Ebner and Paul Delany.

of the importance of humility and repentance needed by an overly proud Christian). Cecile Jagodzinski identifies such an impulse in seventeenth-century conversion narratives and suggests that: ‘though conversion may begin as a private encounter between the self and God, or the self and the text, religion cannot, must not, remain a private concern’ because, ultimately, ‘the private person is to be subsumed into the body of believers’.³

Such ‘spiritual altruism’ appears to have been relatively common, as chapter 1 revealed. Nehemiah Wallington, for example, noted that he intended his spiritual autobiography to be ‘for the generation to come’ whilst John Bunyan declared that he wrote out of ‘*fatherly care and desire*’ for his congregation’s ‘*spiritual and everlasting welfare*’; thus showing the value both placed on the didactic potential of recorded experience.⁴ As Samuel Petto noted, ‘Christians know not what they loose [sic], by burying their experiences: they disable themselves for strengthening the weake hands, and confirming the feeble knees of others: and it is a great disadvantage to themselves’.⁵ Indeed, the value of shared experience to seventeenth-century Puritans and the intersection of the public (in the sense of community relations) and private (when considering the author’s seclusion when writing the text) spheres at this time are the central themes of this section. Paradoxically, it was when an individual seemed to be most isolated from the community – such as when they were praying, alone reading the Bible or recording their spiritual experiences – that they could actually be most useful to fellow Puritans for such solitary duties ensured, in Wallington’s words, ‘the growth of a Christian’ thereby transforming these pious characters into more valuable members of the community.

³ C.M., Jagodzinski, *Privacy and Print*, p. 53, 72.

⁴ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 16r; Bunyan, *GA*, p. 3.

⁵ Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit*, p. 182.

Part II took a markedly different approach. Instead of emphasising the influence of external factors on the process of writing these accounts it focussed directly on the make-up of the texts themselves and asked whether spiritual diaries and autobiographies followed a fixed pattern. Close analysis of these works enabled my research to show that a definite degree of individuality is present within each account. Even though common broad themes, such as the need for assurance and a belief in mankind's inherent depravity, may be found a more detailed consideration reveals subtle, yet important, variations which should not be ignored.

Consequently, a perusal of one spiritual autobiography certainly does not enable the reader to predict the precise form and structure of any other text in this genre for there are often considerable differences in the experiences related. For example, not all authors experience a sinful childhood and adolescence and then become pious as they enter adulthood (in fact, as chapter 3 has shown, the reverse is true for some), neither do they find that Satan attempts to disrupt their faith with identical temptations. Indeed, it would appear that just as Puritans acquired their own stereotypical image as interfering and hypocritical busybodies, their spiritual diaries and autobiographies have, all too frequently, fallen victim to the same impulse to generalise and conventionalise and have also developed their own stereotype yet, as my research has shown, it is their idiosyncratic nature that should be emphasised.

At the outset of his 1996 article Tom Webster noted that '*close reading of these texts* [Puritan diaries] *suggests a greater degree of complexity than is often admitted*', however, he concluded that because 'few people seem to have read the diaries of others . . . we might profitably ask how it is that they [the diaries] have so much in common'.⁶ My research has taken Webster's initial argument further and in

⁶ T. Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy', pp. 33, 55.

so doing has found that these texts also played a significant role in communal life and appear to have been read by more people than Webster suggests.

Many of the extant spiritual diaries and autobiographies were circulated amongst family, friends and, indeed, anyone whom the author believed could benefit from his or her work – Wallington lent his *Record of God's Mercy* to 'some poore disstressed soule', Thurgood addressed her *Lecture of Repentance* to her 'loving mother, sisters & friends or whatsoever thou art', whilst in the *Life* Powell noted that he desired to read over his 'little Diary' but, 'having lent it to a Christian friend that was far distant, could not'.⁷ Elaine McKay has recently suggested that 'people influenced one another to keep diaries'.⁸ Although McKay was not specifically referring to *spiritual* diaries in her essay, my work has shown that this was also true on many occasions for the authors of such accounts. Indeed, keeping a spiritual diary or autobiography could extend through families – Ralph Thoresby began his diary because it was his 'dear fathers express order' and Isaac Archer began to write his diary because he was 'couselled therto by my good father'.⁹ Ministers could also be highly influential in encouraging their congregations to keep such accounts - Nehemiah Wallington recalls his local minister urging his listeners to 'be not unwise, but keep your day book; write down your sins on one side, and on the other side

⁷ Wallington, *Record*, 'To the Christian Reader', fo.11r; Thurgood, *Lecture*, p. 19; Powell, *Life*, p. 12. Powell's 'little Diary' does not appear to be extant.

⁸ E. McKay, 'The Diary Network in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England', *Eras*, 2 (2001). Available at: <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/eras/edition2Index.htm>

⁹ E. Findlay, 'Ralph Thoresby the Diarist', p. 112; Archer, *Diary*, p. 43. Interestingly, John Evelyn also notes that he began to keep a diary because 'of what I had seene my Father do', thus showing that this was not solely a Puritan phenomenon.

The family of the nonconformist minister Philip Henry (1631-1696) provide a good example of diary-writing running through families. Henry kept an extensive diary that discussed spiritual matters as well as general news and his family; it occupied thirty-nine volumes by the time of his death. The practice was carried on by his daughter Sarah (who became Sarah Savage on her marriage) and his grandson who, as we saw in chapter 1 (p. 53), burnt his reflections on his soul's condition when he feared his own death was imminent. See: John Evelyn quoted in E. McKay, 'The Diary Network', *Eras*, 2 (2001). Available at: <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/eras/edition2Index.htm>; R.L. Greaves, 'Henry, Philip' in *Oxford DNB* and E. Bottonaki, *Seventeenth-Century English Women's Autobiographical Writings*, p. 2.

God's little mercies'.¹⁰ Both these aspects show what McKay terms the 'diary network' in action.

Although not an initial consideration of this study, female piety has emerged as an important aspect of my research. Many of the texts I have discussed were either written by women, such as the texts by Cicely Johnson, Rose Thurgood, Hannah Allen, Agnes Beaumont and Elizabeth Isham, or written about women, such as those concerning Bridget Cooke and Sarah Wight. This leads us to agree with Amanda Capern's belief that in a largely patriarchal society 'systemized Calvinism . . . empowered female subjectivity in the sense that women could write themselves into God's plan' when they related their own spiritual experiences since, as Effie Botonaki argues, 'the spiritual diary was probably the only form of writing that the early modern women could pursue without having to excuse themselves from doing so'.¹¹ Consequently, it will be important for future research to pay greater attention to gender and, in particular, the voice of female authors of spiritual diaries and autobiographies in order to discover whether masculine and feminine 'forms' of spiritual writing differ. Similarly, great rewards may also be reaped from a more in-depth analysis of the vocabulary used by the diarists and autobiographers and a consideration of whether the age at which an author began to write his or her account

¹⁰ Wallington, *Growth*, fo. 98v. Paul Seaver also suggests that Wallington may have originally begun journal-keeping because of the example set by his father. See: P.S. Seaver, *Wallington's World*, p. 11.

¹¹ A.L. Capern, 'Renaissance' in M. Spongberg, B. Caine, A. Curthoys (eds.), *Companion to Women's Historical Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 471; E. Botonaki, *Seventeenth-Century English Women's Autobiographical Writings*, p. 43. Here, however, we must also take into consideration the active role women played in sects which did not rely on systemized Calvinism, such as the Quakers (who, for example, rejected the clergy and the sacraments believing that the 'light within' would guide them). Catie Gill notes that whilst women did not generally take on leadership roles in the movement 'the fact that a substantial number of Quaker women took on roles as preachers, prophets and writers suggests that this religion should not be judged solely by the relative absence of women in leadership positions' because, outside the Quaker inner circle, 'women contributed significantly to the movement'. Moreover, David Booy has recently edited a collection of early Quaker women's autobiographical writings; thus showing that women clearly had a substantial voice in the Quaker community. See: C. Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community: A Literary Study of Political Identities, 1650-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 11; D. Booy, *Autobiographical Writings by Early Quaker Women* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

had a substantial effect on the tone of the work – for example, were older authors more likely to pen texts offering greater comfort and important lessons to the reader than those who had less life experience, or, was age largely irrelevant and degree of faith the key issue. At the end of this study we can agree with John Beadle and affirm that ‘of all Histories, the History of mens Lives is the most pleasant’.¹²

¹² John Beadle, *The Journall or Diary of a Thankful Christian*, p. 103.

Biographies

Isaac Archer (1641-1700)

Archer was born in 1641 in North Suffolk, probably in the parish of South Elmham St Margaret, and was the first-born child of William and Mary Archer. A few years after Isaac's birth the family moved to Halstead in Essex - the home of his paternal relatives and where his father was invited to be a lecturer.

The first great tragedy in Archer's life was the death of his mother in 1649 when Archer was only eight years old. Matthew Storey notes that 'this sad event threw him into full dependence upon his father, and partly explains why William Archer features so strongly in the diary'.¹ To make matters worse, only a few weeks after his mother's death his younger brother and sister, William and Elizabeth, died also, thereby compounding young Isaac's sense of loss and isolation. Barely three years later in 1653 Isaac was sent away to boarding school by his father, and this 'left a strong mark on Isaac's personal development, further confusing the emotional relationship with his father'.²

Whilst at Halstead school Archer's father provided only meagre financial support for his son, despite being in possession of a lectureship at Colchester worth £100 a year and having taken 'a rich, religious and a well-bred gentlewoman' for his second wife in 1650.³ Indeed, the pattern of spending as little money as possible on his only surviving son was one which William Archer continued throughout his lifetime, as will later be shown. Halstead school attempted to force Archer to think seriously about the state of his own soul, however, being a mischievous youth Archer resisted the strict disciplinary measures of both the school and his father and was frequently in trouble for small misdemeanours including petty theft. This proved

¹ Archer, *Diary*, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

to be highly significant, for in later years Archer looked back on his frivolous days at school and felt a profound sense of guilt for his reckless activities fearing they would bring God's wrath upon his soul on judgement day.

In an attempt to instil the importance of a godly frame of mind in to his high-spirited son, William Archer forced Isaac to read from the Bible and recite sermons whilst at home. These tasks were deeply detested by the young Isaac because a rather bad stammer prevented him from reading aloud with any degree of fluency. In spite of this fact, as Archer grew older he came to regret the nonchalant attitude towards salvation and religion he had shown in his school days. He attributed this volte-face to the fact that God worked 'a secret willingness in mee for the good of my soule' which caused him to listen to the good counsel of others and realise that it was his 'generall and particular calling to mind heavenly things'.⁴

Since his childhood Archer claims to have possessed a love of learning and had long dreamed of becoming a Cambridge scholar so that he could serve God better and enter the ministry. However, Archer's father strongly opposed his desire to gain a university education and work in the ministry on three grounds: firstly, that it would prove far too costly; secondly, that corrupt notions of religion could be surreptitiously infused into Archer's mind whilst at university and thirdly, that Archer's stammering made him unfit for any ministerial work. Isaac was consequently forced to obey his father's wishes and take up an apprenticeship with a linen draper. Fortunately for Archer, his new master was unhappy with him and complained that he was not strong enough to do the work required. The subsequent termination of the apprenticeship left Isaac free to attend Cambridge if his father could be persuaded to comply with his desires. It was at this stage that Henry

⁴ Archer, *Diary*, pp. 50, 52.

Dearsly, a friend of Archer's family, intervened and Archer considered this kind act to be his greatest piece of good fortune and a 'special providence of God'.⁵ Dearsly was a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge with whom Isaac had corresponded and articulated his earnest desire to become a scholar at the university, and it was Dearsly who eventually persuaded Archer's father to allow Isaac to attend Cambridge in spite of the cost involved. Resultantly, Archer was admitted to Trinity College on October 29th 1656 and placed under the tutelage of Mr John Temple - although he always considered Dearsly to be his true advocate and academic role model, and it was Dearsly who acted as his guardian when he was disowned by his father whilst only part-way through his studies.

Once at Cambridge, Archer was disappointed to find the company there to be 'civil but not so holy as I could have wished'.⁶ He had immense difficulty finding the truly devout company he yearned for and, after studying for a year, decided to 'shune the company of men' because it had been noted that he was 'not of so pensive a spirit as formerly, but by degrees came of from that morosenes, and severity which was observed in mee' - few at Cambridge were as diligent and desirous of religion as Archer.⁷ During his time at Cambridge Archer had the opportunity to explore religious ideas and opinions previously closed off to him by his father and school and also experienced a period of spiritual turmoil and despair where he feared for the condition of his soul and doubted the reality of his own conversion - in this time of spiritual anguish Archer wrote to his father asking for advice and guidance in spiritual affairs.

In spite of all this, Archer found his time at the college profitable as his religious beliefs matured and prospered during his stay. Indeed, the fellows of

⁵ Archer, *Diary*, p. 52.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Trinity College (especially Henry Dearsly) showed great sympathy towards Archer as he struggled to come to terms with the dramatic upheavals of the Restoration and church settlement and initially allowed him to remain in the college 'without conforming in the least'.⁸ After Archer was disowned by his father for his willingness to accept the Book of Common Prayer and attend Prayer Book services (Archer's father detested the Episcopalianism and liturgical formalism reintroduced by the Act of Uniformity in 1662) the fellows vowed to take Archer 'into their tuition . . . [and] provide for me when they heard that my father would not' and also ensured that he was ordained a deacon in 1662, despite being underage - Archer was twenty, the legal age for ordination was twenty-three.⁹ Despite these setbacks, Archer's purpose remained fixed and he stoically continued his pursuit to join the ministry. Archer was eventually greeted with success on this front when he obtained livings at Chippenham (1662), Great Wheltenham (1671) and Mildenhall (1688). Archer remained a conformist for the rest of his life, though his reasons may have been financial rather than theological, for he seems to have possessed an ambivalent attitude towards the Book of Common Prayer and other small aspects of Anglican worship though, this said, we should not ignore his claim to be 'more satisfied in the Church of England than ever'.¹⁰ Archer continued to preach until his death in 1700.

Archer began writing his diary in 1659 yet wrote retrospectively of his earlier years - thus the diary covers his entire life, 1641-1700, although he did not make daily entries and some years only receive a single entry.¹¹ It was first published in 1994 but there are indications that Archer considered his work might have a larger

⁸ Archer, *Diary*, p. 78.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81. See pp. 82-83 for Archer's ordination.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹¹ However, the surviving copy of Archer's manuscript in Cambridge University Library manuscript collection is dated 1665 - thus suggesting that there was at least one draft version of the text.

audience one day – for example, in his 1676 entry he states that he wishes ‘to satisfy the world’ that his father was not against his marriage to Anne Peachy.¹²

Agnes Beaumont (1652-1720)

Agnes Beaumont was the daughter of John Beaumont and his wife, Mary Pakes. She was born in Edworth, Bedfordshire and baptised in 1652. Her family were strongly nonconformist in their religious outlook and Agnes was initiated into the world of the Godly by the preaching and ministerial skills of John Bunyan. In 1672 she became a devout member of the Bedford church’s sister congregation at Gamlingay. However, Beaumont’s father disliked her attending the meetings of Bunyan’s congregation and, when he died unexpectedly after rebuking her for attending such a meeting, she was accused of patricide but was acquitted after a coroner’s inquest. In a manuscript entitled *The Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont*, which remained unpublished until 1760, she recorded the traumatic events leading up to and following her father’s sudden death in 1674.

The *Narrative* provides a vivid testimony of female piety in a largely patriarchal society whilst concurrently highlighting the value of faith during times of immense distress and despair. Also noteworthy is the malicious gossip that emerges surrounding a chance meeting between Bunyan and Beaumont recorded in the *Narrative*. The events are as follows: Beaumont was desperately keen to attend a church meeting at Gamlingay yet had no means of getting there without assistance. She had hoped that a certain Mr Wilson, an acquaintance of her brother, who was expected to stop by her brother’s house on the way to the meeting, would let her ride there with him, however, Wilson did not arrive and Beaumont was seemingly left stranded. Shortly after this disappointment, John Bunyan called at her brother’s

¹² Archer, *Diary*, p. 153.

house and, after a great deal of persuasion, was eventually convinced to let her ride with him to Gamlingay. Scandalous rumours soon followed this incident and Bunyan and Beaumont were soon the talk of the village. The pair were accused of sexual misconduct and plotting together to poison Beaumont's father whilst Bunyan was accused of persuading Beaumont to become his second wife - an allegation which is backed up by *Grace Abounding*.¹³

Beaumont married twice in later life, first to Thomas Warren in 1702 and then to Samuel Story in 1708 following Warren's death. She died on 28 November 1720 and was buried, at her own request, at the Tilehouse Street Baptist meeting in Hitchin near her friend, John Wilson, who had died four years previously and had been Tilehouse Street's first minister. Beaumont's *Narrative* was not published during her lifetime, but did appear as part of a collection of narratives by Samuel James titled *An Abstract of the Gracious Dealings of God with Several Eminent Christians in their Conversions and Sufferings* in 1760.

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

John Bunyan was born in Elstow, near Bedford, in 1628 and is recognised as one of the great figures of seventeenth-century Puritanism - Roger Sharrock has termed him 'the greatest representative of the common people to find a place in English Literature'.¹⁴ Bunyan was the eldest of the three children of Thomas Bunyan and his second wife, Margaret. As the son of a tinker, and a member of 'that rank that is meanest, and most despised of all the families in the land', Bunyan was expected to ply his father's trade and thus received only a rudimentary education.¹⁵ Much about his early years may be gleaned from *Grace Abounding*, his spiritual autobiography,

¹³ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 85.

¹⁴ R. Sharrock, *John Bunyan* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 9.

¹⁵ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 6.

which covers the time from his birth in 1628 until almost mid-way through his imprisonment in 1665 and was probably written during the time of his incarceration. This tells us that Bunyan considered himself to be a rowdy and impious youth who wanted much in matters of religion. Indeed the young John, having 'but few Equals . . . both for cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy Name of God', was frequently afflicted with terrifying nightmares and visions of devils and other evil spirits during his childhood and consequently deemed himself the 'chief of sinners'.¹⁶ However, thanks to divine intervention, the assistance of pious neighbours and much deliberation and desperation he was to become masterful in spiritual affairs in his later life.

There was no history of religious nonconformity in Bunyan's immediate family, as both his parents conformed to the Church of England, but during a short spell in the parliamentary army between 1644 and 1647 Bunyan encountered the religious radicalism and Puritan preaching which pervaded the ranks of the New Model Army - where it is likely that he heard sectaries such as William Erbery (1604-1654) and Paul Hobson (d. 1666) preach. It is even possible that Bunyan first learned Calvinist tenets at this time from Thomas Ford, the chaplain of Sir Samuel Luke, a parliamentarian army officer.¹⁷

In 1649 he married a devout, but poor, Protestant who brought with her Arthur Dent's *The Plaine Man's Path-Way to Heaven* (1601) and Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety* (1611) as her only dowry. These texts helped to open Bunyan's mind to spiritual affairs and thanks to the influence of his pious wife Bunyan outwardly reformed his character, began to attend Elstow parish church regularly and paid great attention to the sermons of its minister, Christopher Hall. However, *Grace*

¹⁶ Bunyan, *GA*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁷ R.L. Greaves, 'John Bunyan' *Oxford DNB* (2004). The article is available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3949>

Abounding shows us that, in hindsight at least, Bunyan recognised his reformation of character was outward only for he had not experienced the ‘new birth’ of a true Christian believer. Thus he counted himself ‘nothing but a poor painted Hypocrite’ because he was proud of his own supposed godliness and his acts of goodness were done ‘either to be seen of, or to be well spoken of by man’, for his true concerns at this stage were worldly rather than godly.¹⁸ Indeed, this short period of Anglican conformity alerted Bunyan’s mind to certain ‘superstitious’ and ‘idolatrous’ aspects of Anglican worship, such as the wearing of a surplice, which goaded him into searching for a more pure form of spiritual enlightenment based solely on scriptural authority.

A short while after overhearing the pious discussions of three or four poor Bedford women Bunyan became a member of the Independent church at Bedford (1655) where the moderate Baptist, John Gifford, was pastor. He began to preach publicly a year later and was considered ‘Gods Instrument that shewed to them the Way of Salvation’ by those who heard him preach.¹⁹ Moreover, Bunyan’s success as a preacher is also apparent for he records in *Grace Abounding* that ‘hundreds . . . from all parts’ attended his sermons.²⁰ At this time Bunyan also entered into public debate with the newly emerging Quaker movement. His first published tract, *Some Gospel-Truths Opened* (1654), was an attack on the ‘errors’ of the Quakers.

The restoration of the monarchy and Church of England changed the position of Puritans like Bunyan and in 1660 he was arrested for holding a conventicle (an unauthorised religious meeting) and sentenced to remain in prison until he agreed to conform. His refusal to recant meant that he technically remained a prisoner for the next twelve years, though the terms of his imprisonment were somewhat laxer than

¹⁸ Bunyan, *GA*, p. 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.77.

we might imagine as he was permitted to leave gaol, travel to London, write, and even preach in his prison cell.

Upon his release (1672) he was elected pastor of the Bedford congregation, yet was arrested once again in 1675 for failing to attend the services of his local parish church and was imprisoned for six months. Bunyan considered preaching to be his natural vocation and crowds of over a thousand attended his sermons in the late 1670s. His immense popularity as a preacher generated interest in his writings and between 1678 and 1686 he entered his most creative period and penned best-selling works such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* (1680) and *The Holy War* (1682). He died aged sixty in 1688 from a fever and was buried at Bunhill Fields, the dissenters's burial ground. As a firm indicator of the popularity of Bunyan's works amongst his contemporaries we should note that during his lifetime *Grace Abounding* was issued in six editions and, in the year of his death, *The Pilgrim's Progress* received its eleventh edition.

Thomas Halyburton (1674-1712)

Thomas Halyburton was born on December 25th 1674 at Dupplin, Perthshire. He was the son of George Halyburton, a Church of Scotland minister, and Margaret Playfair; and later described both as 'eminently religious'.²¹ The couple had eleven children, but only two survived childhood – Thomas and his elder sister, Janet (d. 1702).

Halyburton's father was licensed as a minister in November 1656 and worked alongside the ailing minister Andrew Playfair (whose daughter, Margaret, would later become his wife) at the parish of Aberdalgie, Perthshire. In 1662 he was ejected from his ministry for nonconformity yet remained in the parish, sheltered by one of the villagers, and 'never repented his faithfulness in adhering to the

²¹ Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 27.

covenanted work of the reformation, but rejoiced that he had been honoured to suffer on that account'.²² He was outlawed for keeping conventicles in 1676 and died in October 1682.

Following the death of his father the young Thomas and the rest of the family emigrated to Holland in May 1685. It was enroute to Rotterdam that Halyburton felt his conscience begin to awake and terrify him with 'apprehensions of hell and death, and the wrath of God'.²³ Barely a year-and-a-half later Thomas was sent back to live in Perth with his aunt whilst his mother and sister remained in Holland. Halyburton found that he was overindulged at his aunt's house. In his *Memoirs* (1715) he laments the lack of religion shown by the family during his stay, though does acknowledge that 'I got liberty, and took it. I saw little of the worship of God, and I easily complied, and turned remiss too'.²⁴ Halyburton briefly returned to Rotterdam in the spring of 1687 when forced to do so by his mother who feared for his spiritual welfare, and attended Erasmus' school. However, in August of that year - his mother moved back to Scotland and he went to school in Perth for the next three or four years.

In 1692 Halyburton entered Edinburgh University. Unlike Archer he was very pleased with the students he met there and soon fell in with 'sober comrades, . . . bookishly inclined'.²⁵ Unfortunately, during his time at Edinburgh Halyburton began to display the first signs of a debilitating illness – probably rheumatoid arthritis. He records that he had 'a trouble in my joints', though asserts that this had a positive outcome because his illness made him unable to join in the 'many follies

²² Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

which others ran into'.²⁶ Halyburton's illness also meant that he and his mother moved to the 'more wholesome' St Andrews early in 1693. He studied philosophy at the university there and graduated MA on 24 July 1696.²⁷ During his time here he was greatly influenced by the preaching of Thomas Forrester and began to contemplate joining the ministry.

After leaving university Halyburton became a private chaplain in the household of Margaret Wemyss, countess of Wemyss (1659-1705). Yet he soon found that life amongst the aristocracy did not suit him and he felt isolated – 'a stranger amongst strangers'.²⁸ He was also unprepared for the theological debates he found himself involved in on the truth of religion and the divinity of the Scriptures. He began to read deist writings in order to familiarise himself with arguments of the 'enemies of religion' yet when challenged to answer the arguments of the deists he found insufficient support in the reasonings of their opponents and fell into despair. Halyburton was saved from self-doubt and spiritual anguish in 1698 when he underwent conversion.

In 1699 Halyburton was appointed minister in the Fifeshire parish of Ceres. Two years later he married Janet Watson and they went on to have four daughters and two sons. He stayed at Ceres until 1710 when he was made Professor of Divinity at St Andrews. His inaugural lecture criticised the deistic writings of Archibald Pitcairne, especially his *Epistola Archimedis* (c. 1706). Halyburton died in September 1712. His *Memoirs* (1715) were probably written during his time at Ceres and cover the period up to his ordination in 1699; they were posthumously published by his widow, presumably, at Halyburton's request.

²⁶ Halyburton, *Memoirs*, p. 56.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Elizabeth Isham (1609-1654)

Elizabeth Isham was born in 1609. She was the eldest daughter of Sir John and Lady Judith Isham of Lamport Hall, Northamptonshire and also had a younger brother and sister. For most of her life she lived piously at Lamport Hall with her family and remained unmarried despite attempts at a match with John Dryden, cousin of the famous poet, in 1631. The minister, John Dod, was a frequent visitor to the household until the death of Isham's mother in 1625 and proved to be influential in the development of the young Elizabeth's piety. Isham died in 1654. Her *My Booke of Remembrance* was written c.1640 and covers the period from her childhood to c.1639. The manuscript has only recently been discovered in Princeton University Library and is currently only available in a 2007 online edition edited by Isaac Stephens; there is a research project entitled 'Constructing Elizabeth Isham' currently underway at Warwick University.

Cicely Johnson – see p. 20**Richard Norwood (1590-1675)**

Norwood was born in October 1590 in Stevenage. After abandoning the unprofitable family farm in 1600 he and his family moved to Berkhamstead in 1600, and then on to Shutlanger, Northamptonshire and finally to Stony Stratford in Buckinghamshire. When he was fifteen Norwood was apprenticed to a London fishmonger and here he became acquainted with sailors and became interested in sailing. Around 1605 he joined a coastal trading ship and studied mathematics and navigation, but returned to London a year later. Still keen to travel he visited the Netherlands in 1608 and spent eighteen months in continental travel eventually returning to London in 1610. He

travelled to Bermuda in 1613 and stayed there surveying and mapping the country until 1617. In 1622 Norwood married Rachel Boughton. He then became a mathematics teacher and author in London. He returned to Bermuda in 1638 to escape religious persecution and became a schoolmaster. Norwood died in Bermuda in 1675. The *Confessions* was written c.1640 but remained unpublished until 1945.

Vavasor Powell (1617-1670)

Powell was born at Cnwclas in Radnorshire and was the son of Richard Powell, a freeholder, and Penelope Powell. He probably worked as a schoolmaster near his hometown during the late 1630s and was also converted at this time having been deeply influenced by the preaching of Walter Craddock and the works of Richard Sibbes. In 1642 Powell married Joan Quarrell. Later that year he appeared at Presteigne great sessions charged with nonconformity but was found not guilty. Two years later he had moved to London where he preached in the parish of St Anne and St Agnes, Aldersgate. Sometime between 1643 and 1646 Powell left London and became vicar of Dartford, Kent. Here he was noticed by Thomas Edwards who called him ‘a great Sectary . . . [who] vented many erroneous things, and now does a great deal of hurt in those parts of *Kent*’.²⁹ In 1646 he resigned from his living at Dartford to join the forces of the New Model Army. He was injured at the siege of Beaumaris in 1648 and also heard a voice telling him he was chosen to preach the gospel.

Powell was named as an approver of the Act for the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales in 1650 and was granted the authority to remove or replace any clergy he considered unfit for their ministerial duties. During this time Powell

²⁹ Thomas Edwards, *The Third Part of Gangraena. Or, a new and higher discovery of the errors, heresies, blasphemies, and insolent proceedings of the sectaries of these times* (London: Printed for Ralph Smith, 1646), p. 97.

became known for his fervent preaching style and also began to embrace the ideas of the Fifth Monarchists. Although a wholehearted enthusiast for the Commonwealth Powell greatly disliked the Protectorate and termed Oliver Cromwell a 'vile person'.³⁰ In 1660 he refused to take the oath of supremacy and allegiance and was arrested. He was released in November 1667 and almost immediately began to preach again. He died in October 1670 and was buried at Bunhill Fields. The *Life and Death of Mr Vavasor Powell* (1671) contains Powell's spiritual autobiography and was collated by the Independent minister, Edward Bagshaw (1629/30-1671).

Samuel Rogers (1613-c.1643)

Rogers was born on the 30th November 1613. He was the eldest son of Daniel Rogers, the Lecturer of Wethersfield in Essex, and his wife Sarah - though he also had an older half-brother and three sisters. Rogers was born into a family with a reputation for impressive piety and godliness. As Tom Webster notes, Rogers was 'the third generation of what can, with little sense of overstatement, be called one of the dynasties of East Anglian Puritanism' which had been founded by Rogers' grandfather, the famous Puritan preacher and writer, Richard Rogers (1551-1618).³¹

For the first thirteen years of his life, Rogers lived with his family and their servants in the substantial family home at Wethersfield. He was instructed in matters of religion at home from an early age by his father, who provided him with catechising and question and answer sessions. Rogers, however, was very critical of his childhood self, and considers himself to have answered 'like an hypocrite, when hee posed me in religious matters' for he 'scarse knew practcallye, the right hand in

³⁰ Vavasor Powell quoted in S.K. Roberts, 'Powell, Vavasor', *Oxford DNB*.

³¹ Rogers, *Diary*, p. xv.

religion from the left'.³² Samuel's father was unhappy with the level of education his son was receiving at Wethersfield school, where there had been a rapid turnover of school masters to the detriment of Samuel's learning. Consequently, Samuel was sent to be educated at Felsted - 'an established centre for Puritans' - under the tuition of Martin Holbeach.³³ Whilst at Felsted Rogers notes that he 'got more good in 2. years. with the blessing of god . . . then I got in many twos before'.³⁴

In 1629, at the age of seventeen, Rogers was admitted to Emmanuel College, Cambridge as a sizar. Although Emmanuel College was founded in 1584 by Sir Walter Mildmay, a man with Puritan sympathies, as a godly training ground for Protestant preachers, Rogers was less than happy with the piety of the majority of its students and frequently criticised their ungodliness - as will later be shown. However, whilst at the college he did manage to strike up fruitful relationships with his tutor, Walter Frost, and a handful of fellow Emmanuel students - in his opinion, the college's 'godly elite' - and also had the benefit of hearing many good sermons preached by the likes of ministers such as Richard Sibbes. Whilst he was a student Rogers, like Archer, corresponded with his father asking for spiritual advice and guidance.

Rogers gained his first clerical post following the completion of his studies in 1635. During the autumn of the same year he was appointed household chaplain to Lady Margaret Denny of Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire. This position certainly advanced Rogers status, but the union was far from perfect spiritually as Rogers' and Lady Denny differed immensely in their views of what constituted a truly 'godly household'. Consequently, Rogers' relationship with the Denny family, especially Lady Denny herself, can hardly be described as harmonious - though he was able to

³² Rogers, *Diary*, p. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

come to a spiritual understanding with Denny's son-in-law, Richard Harlakenden and Mary Mountfort, a servant girl. Despite these differences Rogers reluctantly remained in Lady Denny's services until December 1637 when he took up a chaplaincy at Lady Vere's household in Hackney, London. This second post greatly delighted Rogers for Lady Vere was renowned for her humble piety and Rogers was pleased to be associated with such a devout household. His diary finishes at the end of 1638 and Rogers almost slips into historical oblivion after this date. However, the most likely chain of events is that he left Lady Vere's service in the early 1640s and became a lecturer at St Katherine Cree, London, for a short while, yet died between spring 1642 and autumn 1643.

Rogers' *Diary* covers the period between November 1634 and December 1638. It was first published in an edition edited by Tom Webster in 2004. It is likely that Rogers believed his diary might be read by others one day because parts of it are written in simple code – these are passages that could cause offence to others, such as when Rogers angrily criticises Lady Vere for complaining that he was too long at prayer one morning – and he repeatedly refers to individuals by their initials instead of their full name (such as a mysterious 'M.S.', whom Rogers appeared to be in love with, and using L.V. for 'Lady Vere').³⁵ This could indicate that Rogers was content to let people read his diary in order to help their own spiritual progress after his death (there is no indication that he allowed anyone to read through it whilst he was still writing it), but wished to keep certain information forever private.

Rose Thurgood (b.1600) – see p. 18

³⁵ Rogers, *Diary*, pp. 160, 13, 164.

George Trosse (1631-1713)

Trosse was born at Exeter in October 1631. He was the son of Henry Trosse, a Lawyer at Lincoln's Inn and Rebekah Burrow, the daughter of a prosperous merchant. Trosse went to school at Exeter Grammar School where he noted that he 'had a *quick Apprehension* . . . and made some considerable Progress'; he was even '*seemingly* more Virtuous than others' at the time.³⁶ However, after suddenly developing a desire to get rich and live luxuriously he left school at fifteen to travel and work in trade. This is where matters began to spiral out of control for Trosse. During the time he spent travelling and living abroad in Portugal he led an irreligious life and sought out people who were uninterested in God and performing religious duties as companions.

A problem with finances in 1649 meant that Trosse was forced to return to England. Yet his character was unrecognisable, for he was no longer even outwardly religious. Instead, Trosse was a drunkard and 'a *perfect Atheist*' who frequently refused to act civilly towards his mother.³⁷ Despite this, Trosse's downward spiral was not yet complete. After becoming drunk one night and sinning against God '*daringly* and *desperately*' Trosse awoke the next morning to hear a disembodied voice, 'the Voice of *no mortal*', urging him to take his own life and telling him he had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost.³⁸ This moment marked the beginning of Trosse's descent into insanity. He became convinced that he was possessed by the Devil and believed he was actually in Hell. Trosse's friends took him to a Glastonbury physician to try and cure him. After several weeks Trosse had recovered enough to be sent home, yet relapsed almost immediately and had to be sent back to Glastonbury once again. A further period of recovery was quickly

³⁶ Trosse, *Life*, pp. 47, 48.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 86.

followed by yet another relapse into insanity and a third trip to the Glastonbury physician. This time, however, he found that God enabled a full and complete recovery and Trosse found that 'there was a Period put to my *rebellious* and *ungodly Courses* tho' not to my *Life*!'

In 1658 Trosse enrolled at Pembroke College, Oxford. Here he heard many excellent sermons preached and enjoyed the company of four other pious young men who came to his room to repeat sermons and pray; Trosse felt that '*Religion* was in *it's Glory* in the *University*' at this time.³⁹ Yet all was to change with the Restoration. Such repetitions of sermons and private prayers were no longer permitted leaving Trosse to comment 'A *Reformation* this, which did not well deserve the Name!'⁴⁰ He also had serious reservations about conforming after the 1662 Act of Uniformity was imposed and became 'perswaded I should *sin* if I *conform'd*, and that I should *not sin* if I forebore it'.⁴¹ He also decided that 'the Constitution and the Manners' of the university 'no way suited a Person of *my Principles, Perswasion, and Inclinations*' and left the university around 1662 without graduating.⁴²

In 1666 Trosse was ordained as a Presbyterian minister and decided to conduct his ministry in his home town, Exeter. However, his refusal to conform meant that he had to preach in secret. He continued in this manner for the next twenty years yet even though he preached once a week 'in the very Heart of the City . . . to a very considerable Society, which filled Two Chambers' he was only fined for conventicling three times (during June-July 1673) and jailed once for six months

³⁹ Trosse, *Life*, p. 116.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

under the Five Mile Act in 1685.⁴³ In 1680 Trosse married Susanna White, the daughter of Richard White, a rich merchant and benefactor of the Presbyterians of Exeter. Even after James II's Declaration of Indulgence in 1687 Trosse refused to preach publicly as he was suspicious of the king's motives. Yet he regarded the accession of William III (1689) as 'a *Wonder of Providence*' for the Toleration Act 'granted us our Liberty' and enabled Trosse to preach openly.⁴⁴ In March 1689 Trosse became minister of the James' Meeting in Exeter and became active in the Exeter assembly of ministers – an organizing body for the 'United Brethren' of Devon and Cornwall Presbyterian and Congregational churches.

Trosse's spiritual autobiography covers the years from his early childhood until its completion in 1693. Shortly before his death Trosse made his wife promise to ensure the publication of his autobiography. Trosse died in January 1713, aged eighty-one and his autobiography, *The Life of the Reverend Mr. George Trosse* was published a year later.

Nehemiah Wallington (1598-1658)

Nehemiah Wallington was a London artisan and prolific writer who was born in the parish of St Leonard Eastcheap in May 1598. He was the tenth of twelve children born to John and Elizabeth Wallington and grew up in a godly household: 'from a childe I went to prayr and reading morning and evening . . . I performed privet prayr and reading with sheeding of teeres I went to chruch [sic] not only on the Sabbath day but also one [sic] the weekedays to the lecteres'.⁴⁵

In 1618 Wallington began to experience serious doubts about whether he would be saved and attempted to commit suicide on several occasions. He found that

⁴³ Trosse, *Life*, p. 124.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁵ Wallington, *Record*, p. 48.

he was 'in much horrowr and terror of conscience for my sins past, present and to come' and felt the weight of his sins so acutely that sins from his past came to his mind 'as if they were newly committed'.⁴⁶ Wallington was so distraught at his current condition that he noted 'the more I did purpose and strive to be better the worse I was', yet it was during this time of great anguish that he began to write and keep a record of his own sins and the mercies he had received from God.⁴⁷ It was not only Wallington's own conscience that caused him pain at this time, for he also found himself assaulted by Satan. The Devil tempted him to take his own life on eight separate occasions yet each time he was prevented from doing so by the thought that he would greatly upset his father by doing so – for it would be 'a meanes of his death allso' - as well as bringing disgrace upon the Puritan community – 'for thus would they say: Looke on theses peuritans: see Master Wallington sonn hath killed himselfe and so I should bring a slander upon our religion'.⁴⁸

After this period of doubt and despair Wallington followed his father and elder brother into the turner's trade. In May 1620 he was admitted to the Turners' Company by patrimony and set up shop shortly after; he also began writing his *A Record of God's Mercies, or, A thankful remembrance* at this time. Within a year he married Grace Rampaigne and the pair would go on to have five children by 1630, though four died before their fourth birthday. Grace was the sister of Livewell Rampaigne, a Lincolnshire minister. Wallington got on extremely well with his brother-in-law and Livewell sent Wallington letters to comfort him in times of spiritual distress. Following Livewell's death in 1635 his widow, Sarah, and children lived with the Wallingtons from 1635 until her death in 1654.

⁴⁶ Wallington, *Notebooks*, p. 268.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁴⁸ Wallington, *Record*, p. 5.

Kept busy by the pressures of work and family life and bolstered by the support of friends such as Henry Roborough, the minister at St Leonard Eastcheap, Wallington experienced no further bouts of despair until the death of his first born child, Elizabeth, in 1625. So deep was Wallington's grief at losing his young daughter, who was just short of her third birthday when she died, that he notes he 'forgoote myselfe so much that I deed offend God in it for I brooke all my porposes: promises and covenantes with my God: For I was much disstrackted in my mind, and could not be comforted'.⁴⁹ Unfortunately for Nehemiah and Grace, Elizabeth's death was only the first of many. Six months later their son John (b.1624) died, he was then followed by their second son, Nehemiah, three years later (1627) and, finally, their last born child, Samuel (b. 1630), in 1632. Their daughter, Sarah (b. 1627), was Wallington's only child to survive to maturity and in July 1647 she married the turner, John Houghton. Houghton and Wallington spent three months reading through his *Record of God's Mercies* shortly after the wedding and he later bequeathed all his notebooks to his son-in-law.

Despite working hard and praying for divine assistance Wallington was not highly successful in his trade, never becoming a master turner. Throughout his career he remained torn between his Christian duties and his working life. Even though he frequently rose at two or three o'clock in the morning to pray in his closet, write and then participate in public prayers with the household Wallington still believed himself guilty of neglecting his Christian duties and regularly berated himself for his backwardness and corrupt heart. Another bone of contention for him was his writing. Wallington was certainly a prolific writer. By his death in 1658 he had written fifty notebooks (regrettably, only seven are extant) ranging from his diary and spiritual

⁴⁹ Wallington, *Record*, p. 409.

autobiography to sermon notes, a volume of collected letters, compilations of political news and records of the mercies he had received. In spite of this, he felt uneasy about the amount of time he devoted to this pursuit: 'my conscience chids me for misspent of precious time' he says, fearing that 'although the matter be good that I have written . . . if my life and conversation be not answerabl O then what an heavy account have I to give at the grat and dreadfull day of Judgement'.⁵⁰ He also found himself charged with neglecting his calling and bringing himself 'to some want' financially because he devoted so much time to his love of writing.⁵¹ Wallington's own doubts and chidings caused him to stop writing for two years (1650-1652) so that he could 'strive to practis what I have Read and wretten'.⁵²

In 1638 Wallington was questioned by a Star Chamber official about reading and distributing seditious books. Even though he confessed to owning a copy of William Prynne's *News from Ipswich* he was quickly released without charge. In January 1641 he began writing *The Growth of a Christian*, his spiritual diary, which recorded his spiritual state and preparations for religious ordinances until December 1643. Wallington was also elected an elder of the Fourth Presbyterian Classis in the Province of London in 1646 thus highlighting the active role he played in the godly community. Indeed, he maintained that 'I love and delight in the fellowship and society of the Saints I love their brotherhood their company, their conference and Communion with [them]'.⁵³ In his final years Wallington still found himself troubled by doubt and in 1654 he wrote: 'I finde my ould sins staire me in my face as Infidelity and discontent O Nehemiah where is thy faith and confidence now'; though by the end of the year he decided that 'God hath given mee an heart to

⁵⁰ Wallington, *Notebooks*, pp. 292, 264.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

resolve to be for him and to walke close with him in holynesse of life . . . I will with Gods helpe . . . and by Faith sucke vertue from Jesus Christ'.⁵⁴

Despite being urged to publish his notebooks by those who knew him Wallington resolved that 'none shall be [printed] while I live'; indeed, David Booy's abridged edition of Wallington's seven surviving notebooks (2007) is the first time his writings have been in print.⁵⁵ However, Wallington had no qualms about letting 'some poore distressed soule' read his *Record of God's Mercy* and, as we have seen, was perfectly happy to let members of his own family, such as John Houghton, read his writings.⁵⁶ Weeks before his death Wallington read over each of his notebooks. He died in August 1658.

Sarah Wight (b. 1631) – see p. 175

⁵⁴ Wallington, *Notebooks*, pp. 337, 343.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁵⁶ Wallington, *Record*, 'To the Christian Reader', fo.IIr.



Figure 1: Frontispiece of the 1684 edition of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Image available on EEBO.

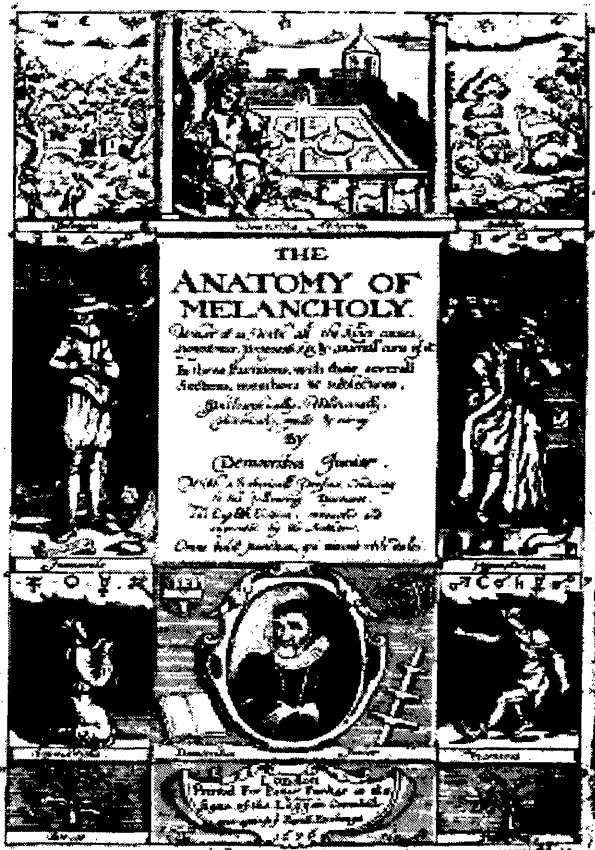


Figure 2: Frontispiece of the 1676 edition of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Image available on EEBO.



Figure 3: Detail from the frontispiece of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Here Bunyan can clearly be seen apparently sleeping with his head resting on his left hand. According to Anne Dunan-Page this 'dreaming' pose echoes that traditionally associated with melancholy thus suggesting that contemporaries would have recognised Bunyan as a melancholic sleeper.

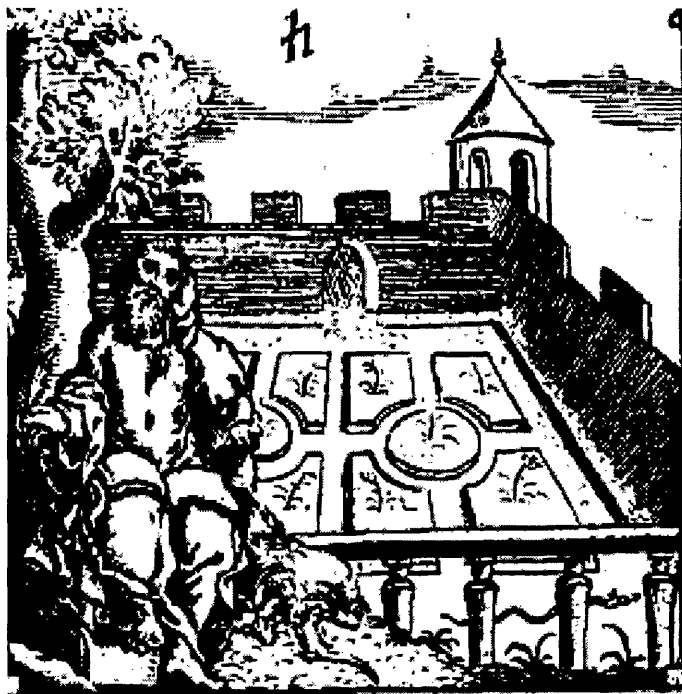


Figure 4: Detail from the frontispiece of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (the top centre illustration) clearly showing the melancholy man with his head resting on his left hand. Suggesting, according to Anne Dunan-Page, that those suffering from melancholy had a propensity to meditation, like dreamers. The similarity to the picture of Bunyan (above) is striking.

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