The Breakdown of Civility: Preaching in the Parish of Groton, England, 1627-1628

Larry Alexander Skillin

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/honors_theses

Recommended Citation
THE BREAKDOWN OF CIVILITY:
PREACHING IN THE PARISH OF GROTON, ENGLAND
1627-1628

2002

LARRY ALEXANDER SKILLIN
THE BREAKDOWN OF CIVILITY:
PREACHING IN THE PARISH OF GROTON, ENGLAND
1627-1628

A Thesis
Submitted to the History Department
And the Robert E. Cook Honors College
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Arts (Honors)

Larry Alexander Skillin
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
May 2002
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Department of History
Robert E. Cook Honors College

We hereby approve the thesis of

Larry Alexander Skillin

Candidate for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honors)

3 May 2002
Lynn Botelho, PhD
Associate Professor of History, Advisor

3 May 2002
Charles Cashdollar, PhD
Professor of History

3 May 2002
Wayne Bodle, PhD
Assistant Professor of History
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION............................1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO</td>
<td>PRACTICAL DIVINITY.......................13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE</td>
<td>EXPERIMENTAL PREDESTINATION..............33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOUR</td>
<td>COMFORT AND AFFLICTION..................44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIVE</td>
<td>ANTI-POPERY................................51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIX</td>
<td>THE BREAKDOWN OF CIVILITY...............58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVEN</td>
<td>CONCLUSION................................73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY.............................84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Introduction

The Winthrop family papers are a collection of documents which have been plumbed time and again for information relating to the early modern Atlantic world. Scholars use these manuscripts to provide evidence for a variety of religious, political and social topics in English and American history. The number of historians who have dipped into this pool of information is quite impressive. Yet a certain manuscript within the collection has been neglected over time. One possible reason for this oversight is the intense difficulty of deciphering its hastily written words. John Winthrop's handwriting was not great on the best of days, but these pages easily test the best detectives. The manuscript contains a collection of notes that Winthrop took as he listened to sermons in the parish church at Groton, England in 1627 and 1628. Francis Bremer, editing this manuscript for publication, wondered if its contents explained the hastily written words.

Scrambling to keep up with the sermons, Winthrop wrote in the dark and cramped
quarters of a church pew. Now that the materials are generally accessible through Dr.
Bremer's transcription, the sermon notebook can be accessed to penetrate, at the very
least, the experiences of a small parish in rural England in a crucial historical moment.

A sermon notebook arouses immediate interest among religious historians
because of the recognized centrality of preaching to puritan piety. Puritans revered the
sermon as the most central element of their worship service, equipping the believers with
the tools to live out their faith. The minister was expected to preach on an appropriate
scriptural passage and describe how God's Word related to the lives of those in the
congregation. It was the preacher's job to make the connections between scripture,
doctrine, and practical morality as understandable as possible so that all who heard the
message could be edified. Sermons were also thought to be the most appropriate media
through which to present the gospel in an attempt to secure conversions to the faith. Paul
Seaver points out that a large number of noted puritans, both clerical and lay, attributed
their salvation to a particularly moving sermon. As tensions mounted in the 1620s and
30s between puritans and their opponents in the Church of England, the status of
preaching within the divine service became a flashpoint for controversy. William Laud, a
vigorou opposition of puritans before and after his elevation to the archbishopric of
Canterbury in 1633, made his anti-sermon position clear by reminding his puritan foes

---

2 I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Bremer for making this manuscript available to me
before it is published by the Massachusetts Historical Society. His introduction to that edition provides
many insights into the nature of the manuscript.
3 Within Winthrop's sermon notebook, each sermon had certain sections set apart under a heading of
"uses." These were most commonly explanations of how certain scriptural passages related to the Christian
life.
that "the altar is the greatest place of God's residence upon earth, greater than the pulpit; for there 'tis Hoc est Corpus meum. This is my body; but in the other it is at most but Hoc est Verbum meum. this is my word." Popular ballads and poems pointed out the intense attachment the godly had to preaching by mocking the frequency with which they went "gadding" to sermons, sometimes traveling miles to hear a favorite teacher. In Sir John Harrington's "Precise Tayler": "He walked mannerly, and talked meekly / He heard three lectures and two sermons weekly." This refers to the practice of many puritans to have sermons both in the morning and afternoon on Sundays and to attend "lectures" throughout the week where local puritan ministers would take turns preaching, adding to the total amount of godly sermons available in a geographic area. While sermons were recognized as important throughout the Church of England, it is generally agreed that a deep sense of the centrality of a preaching ministry was one of the characteristics of that hotter sort of Protestant commonly called a puritan.

Given the great importance of preaching in puritan spirituality, it is not surprising to find sermon notebooks among the papers of known puritans. Many devotees made it a common practice to take notes during the sermon so that they could review the messages at a later time, within their households and among neighbors. It was also widely held

---

7 Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships,* p. 23.
8 Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist thought from Whitgift to Hooker,* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 124, 162. Lake pointed out that many conformists found it necessary to make a certain amount of public concession to the importance of preaching because the English public overwhelmingly clamored for preaching. Despite this, they still were clear on their insistence that the office of preaching should not take away from the dignity or importance of the administration of the sacraments.
that note taking could help maintain one's focus during the sermons. Sir Simonds D'Ewes took notes "so to become a rational hearer." Taking notes, then, was one way in which literate sermon goers could enhance the already edifying activity of hearing the word of God preached. It also follows that these notes would be maintained over time in the event that they were needed for reference. It was a practice that could be maintained, as John Winthrop did, alongside journals of spiritual experiences which were carefully kept for personal and family edification.

Sermon notes often took one of two different forms. In one, the note taker would only record the "heads" of ideas, general topics and scripture references given by the minister. These types of notes could effectively be used to test the memories of the sermon-goers as they attempted to recall the specific arguments given under the various "heads." At times, these headings would be recorded during the actual sermon and then later written out more fully. Using this method of recording only headings, there was more room for the "voice" of the note taker to be inserted or intertwined with that of the preacher. Different hearers could record different "heads" from a message based upon personal spiritual preferences. A second technique consisted of scrambling to record as much of the specific argumentation of the preacher as one could during the sermon itself. The results of this are much like what is seen in Winthrop's notebook. His handwriting is clearly strained, indicating hurried writing. These types of notebooks also contain both headings and the specific points given to defend them. Another characteristic of this second style, again evident in Winthrop's notebook, are sections in which it is clear that the note taker has fallen behind and skipped forward to catch up with the new line of argument. In this second style of note taking, there is much less room for the insertion of

---

10 Seaver, The Puritan Lectureships, p. 42.
the note taker’s voice or opinions. While criteria of selection still come into play and can be examined to discuss what was held important by the note taker, the rushed notes are much more likely to be closer to what the preacher actually said. There simply was not enough time to consciously alter the specifics of the argument.

Identifying this notebook as of the second type is central to this study, a probe of puritan preaching in Groton. This is not an elucidation of John Winthrop’s theological understanding. Instead, it is an examination of the central themes used by the preachers he heard in Suffolk. While Winthrop's notes are certainly not taken as precise transcriptions of the sermons, they are understood throughout this study to be accurate descriptions of the major ideas brought forward to the congregation. As such, the sermon notes are used as examples of what was being taught by the ministers. Such an examination becomes important, as Tom Webster points out, because most sermon studies are conducted on printed sermons, which could be very different than what was offered in regular parishes on a weekly basis. As a candid look at what was taught in the parish of Groton, Winthrop's notebook affords the opportunity to look at sermons that were not designed to sway opinions at the national or international level. Instead, they focus on the practical needs of the local congregation and are predominantly free of polemical and controversial theological material. National affairs do intrude upon the rural peace of Groton, however, but only in the latter portion of the notebook. It is by juxtaposing and analyzing the times of peaceful local concern with the more passionate later section of the notebook that this study is able to make its major contribution to scholarship. In the parish of Groton the coming of theological controversy had less to do

---

with the subtle arguments between Calvinists and Arminians, a concept that has occupied
so much of recent historiography, but was closely linked with the popular perception that
Roman Catholicism was on the ascendancy in the English church and threatened the very
existence of Protestantism.

This study explores the themes drawn from both the early, peaceful portions of
the notebook and the polemical fireworks found near the end of Winthrop’s notes.
Chapter two, “Practical Divinity,” examines the general role of useful, non-polemical
religious teachings and their prominence in the messages coming from Groton’s pulpit
throughout 1627 and the first half of 1628. The third chapter, “Experimental
Predestination,” delves into a particular practical teaching and shows how it was used to
both reinforce particular ideas about the nature of grace, but also preserve social order
within the community. Finally, rounding out the discussion of practical themes from the
pulpit, “Comfort and Affliction,” the fourth chapter, considers the ministers’ roles as
comforters to those who may have been troubled in conscience by their internal
reflections in light of experimental predestination. Those whose lives were gripped by
fear of eternal punishment were offered consolation through the message of the gospel.
A thematic bridge between the early and later sermons, anti-papery, is examined in
chapter six. The evidence of anti-Roman Catholic feeling found throughout the notebook
is offered as a clue to unlocking the root causes of the breakdown in peace described in
the sixth chapter. That chapter, “The Breakdown of Civility,” discusses the dramatic
change in the tone and content of preaching beginning in the summer of 1628. The
timing of this breakdown is examined and compared to the heightened tensions found in
the English church and state during that fateful summer. These chapters demonstrate that
the fear of popery, not debates about grace and free will, were at the heart of the conflict evident in Groton beginning in the summer of 1628.

A variety of crossroads in English religious and political history converge in the period covered by the sermon notebook, 1627-1628. While remaining cautious of being overly anachronistic and attributing later insights to those of an earlier period, we must recognize that the 1620s were years of flux in the English state and church. Politically, the accession of Charles I in 1625 led to a natural period of transitional unrest which was heightened by the legacies that were passed on from late in his father's reign. Charles came to power in the midst of high inflation and unemployment, a large governmental debt, looming wars on the continent, and a reliance on the Duke of Buckingham that was highly suspect among a majority of the Members of Parliament. 12 Within the church, matters were similarly unsettled. Beginning with the relaxation of anti-Catholic rhetoric that accompanied negotiations for the Spanish Match for Charles late in James' reign, religious controversialists began more public debates of theological differences. 13 Even moderate Calvinists came out on the short end of the stick in these exchanges and lost almost all of their major ecclesiastical appointments. 14 Hotter sorts of Protestants, then, were clearly outraged at this milder stance against Catholicism which they viewed as

---

being expanded in the reign of Charles I. Charles exacerbated the problems that he inherited by his blunt leadership style, driven by his elevated sense of royal prerogative. He quickly ran into trouble with parliaments and puritan churchmen as he passionately advanced controversial policies, such as his recourse to non-parliamentary modes of taxation within the state, such as the extension of Ship Money, and the attempts to eliminate nonconformity within the church. Winthrop’s sermon notebook provides new evidence of how these national storms were weathered by a specific rural community.

Early Stuart England has attracted the attention of many historians, creating a formidable historiography. Coming from different directions, English Reformation historians see the early seventeenth century as a continuation and extension of the movement begun under Henry VIII, while historians of the English Civil War view it as a period of build up to that great contest in the middle of the seventeenth century. The historiography that has been generated as a result can be quite overwhelming. For many years, there was a standard Whig interpretation of the English Civil War which saw the Reformation as being completed under the Elizabethan settlement, leading to a Puritan Revolution against the established Anglicans during the civil war. Unsatisfied with this depiction, revisionists began to call this Whig conception into question beginning in the latter part of the past century. Nicholas Tyacke is often credited with leading the charge against the standard Whig account. He argues that the puritans were not to be viewed as the revolutionaries in the lead up to the English Civil War. Instead, he pegs the

15 Kenneth Fincham, "Episcopal Government, 1603-1640," in Kenneth Fincham, ed., The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 71. Fincham argues that there were very distinctive differences in the leadership styles of James and Charles regarding the church. Charles did not see virtue in his father's policy of juggling churchmen of different kinds within the top levels of leadership. Charles backed Laud and divines of the Durham House group early on and made few concessions to moderate Calvinists, let alone to any known puritans.
revolutionary title upon a group of English divines that he has called anti-Calvinists. Tyacke contends that beginning in the latter Elizabethan and early Jacobean reigns, "the characteristic theology of English Protestant sainthood was Calvinism..." Peace existed within the church, Tyacke argues, because the major divines could agree upon their participation in this Calvinist consensus. Arminians, who were understood to counter Calvinist claims of predestination with a doctrine of free will, were the true revolutionaries in this new account as they assaulted the Calvinist consensus. These Arminian Anti-Calvinists began taking the upper hand in the English church by the late 1620s and solidifying their hold in the 1630s. Thus, according to Tyacke, the puritan backlash against these innovations is best understood as conservative, not radical, as they wished to return to the days when Calvinist theology stood at the heart of English church doctrine. This new argument generated quite a bit of discussion and led to the publication of many new studies in the revisionist mold. Importantly, though, the revisionists were far from coming to agreement about the nature of early Stuart England, except in their consensus that Whig accounts were mistaken. A virtual flood of materials followed and brought a large range of new questions to light. Peter White challenges the notion that there ever was a Calvinist consensus, while a host of other historians agree and question whether the issue of predestination rightfully stands at the

center of the debate. These are just the central issues, each one is further subdivided into a full spectrum of nuanced disagreements. Any historian who approaches the study of this period of English history must wade through this complex historiography.

The many recent studies of early Stuart England have had the effect of simultaneously clarifying and obscuring our understanding of the period. On the one hand, the highly detailed arguments and thorough scholarship of some recent monographs and articles have shed important light on the nature of specific ideas such as predestinarian thought. As Peter White forcefully argues, it is a misconception to think of Arminianism as antithetical to predestinarianism. He claims, "Arminianism was nothing if not a doctrine of Predestination," and goes on to describe the intricacies of Arminian arguments which show that they differed with Calvinists on specific points within the predestinarian frame of thought. R.T. Kendall convincingly demonstrates that English Calvinists were much more closely related to the predestinarian ideas of Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva, than they were to the author of the Institutes. Lori Anne Ferrell shows that English participation in the Synod of Dort, often taken to show England's commitment to Calvinism under the rule of James I, could be understood in a different light. She argues that Arminians in the Netherlands were identified with sub-cultural groups within the state who posed a threat to the established political order. Ironically, then, James I may have supported the Calvinists at Dort in order to cut off a sub-cultural threat to the establishment that was remarkably similar to

---

21 White, Predestination, Policy and Polemic, p. 13.
22 R.T. Kendall, Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). As with Peter White's argument, Kendall also points out "the surprising degree of reciprocity that exists between Westminster theology and the doctrine of faith in Jacobus Arminius" (pp. 3-4).
the threat he believed to exist from puritans, staunch Calvinists though they were, at
home. Order, then, rather than Calvinist orthodoxy, may have been the reason
England participated at Dort in the way they did. If that is the case, this argument calls
into question the way historians have been referring to that event for years. Examples of
well-researched revisionist scholarship could be multiplied. These highly detailed studies
have had very positive effects within the discipline of history. The ideological battles
have forced historians to carefully consider their arguments and delve more deeply into
the source materials of the period, creating a much more detailed and nuanced portrait of
this era.

Yet, there is a negative side to these careful examinations. There is a great danger
that the forest of societal motivations can be lost in the careful examination of the trees of
certain intellectual circles. Hair-splitting theological debates can, and did, drive wedges
between certain groups of intellectuals, but it seems legitimate to question whether or not
sweeping social movements can be principally driven by the fine pin heads of precise
scholastic argument. More important than the actual similarity between Calvinists and
Arminians in doctrine were the perceived differences between the groups as recognized at
the time. Beyond that, this essay posits that despite the very real perceptions that
predestination was truly at issue between the groups, something else, something which
struck deep chords within English men and women's souls, was truly at stake:
Catholicism.

This thesis moves beyond John Morrill's assessment of the importance of religion
in the coming of the English Civil War. He argues, "the localist and the legal-

---
23 Lori Anne Ferrell, Government by Polemic: James I, the King's Preachers, and the Rhetoric of
constitutionalist perceptions of misgovernment lacked the momentum, the passion, to bring about the kind of civil war which England experienced after 1642. It was the force of religion that drove minorities to fight and forced majorities to make reluctant choices."

Yet simply stating that religion must be seen as central is not enough. Further analysis is required. Early revisionist historians asked their readers to assume that the predestinarian debates between Arminians and Calvinists carried enough power to engulf the nation in a bloody civil war. Later revisionists properly called this into question by recognizing that English Arminianism was not only characterized by certain beliefs about the nature of free will, but also by an elevated perception of the nature and role of sacraments within the church. This added dimension makes it difficult to assess what was specifically being attacked when Calvinists railed against Arminians. Were they decrying heterodox Arminian ideas about the freedom of the human will to come to God for salvation or were they passionate about celebrating communion around a centrally placed table as opposed to what seemed to be an all too Catholic altar which was railed off at the east end of the church? Were both concerns wrapped into single attacks?

These types of questions cannot be answered with reference to a single case study. Yet, by examining the parish of Groton through the use of Winthrop’s sermon notes, important patterns emerge that offer clues into what types of ideas could stir passions within a given community. It is with this in mind that we turn to an examination of the messages coming from the pulpit in Groton in the years 1627-1628.

In most sermons recorded by Winthrop, the ministers were concerned with offering the congregation practical instruction in the fundamental points of Christianity. This matches up closely with Stephen Foster’s characterization of puritanism following the failure of the Presbyterian movement of the Elizabethan era. Foster writes, “If the achievements of the second stage of English Puritanism had to be summed up under a single heading, it would undoubtedly be ‘practical divinity.’”¹ This utilitarian focus is easily found within the sermon notebook by its focus on teachings set apart as the “uses” of scriptural passages or doctrines. This formulation of separating out practical instructions follows the advice offered by William Perkins, an influential godly divine, in his book *Arte of Prophecying*. John Morgan explains the thrust of Perkins’ message “as a crucial last step the minister was to turn to ‘use’; ‘if he have the gift,’ he was to attempt to apply the points of doctrine he had just enunciated ‘to the life and manners of men, in a

¹ Foster, The Long Argument, p. 68.
simple and plaine speech."² Groton's ministers conformed to this pattern throughout the notebook. They called attention to uses that would serve their parishioners in everyday life. Practical instruction from this pulpit in Suffolk can be roughly broken into two major sections. One was the presentation of the gospel message and an exhortation to accept and follow it. The other offered instructions on how the acceptance of the gospel should cause a change in a believer's manner of living, consequently the ministers offered instructions concerning the way to live a moral life. These two major types of useful instruction formed the backbone of the message taught in Groton and provide a backdrop against which to compare the polemics of the summer of 1628.

**Gospel Presentation**

The congregation at Groton was bombarded with opportunities to hear the gospel of Christ and commit their lives to it. At least that was the perspective of the minister on December 9, 1628, who was bewailing the fact that many of his hearers still remained outside of Christ's fold through rejection of the gospel. Winthrop recorded the minister groaning, "we have both preached to you & damned, &c, yet you have not come in: we have terrified you, & allured you to the pleasant wayes of God"³ Further examination of Winthrop's sermon notebook reveals that the minister was correct: the clergy resorted to a variety of means to present the gospel and bring about the desired conversion of all...

---
³ *Winthrop Papers: Religious Manuscripts: 1560s to 1637*, Francis J. Bremer, ed., (Massachusetts Historical Society, forthcoming), p. 113. Bremer points out his editorial decisions to maintain original spelling as much as possible as well as other specific conventions in his introduction (pp. 14-16). His editorial decisions have been retained throughout this study. All future references will be cited as Sermon Notebook.
hearers ranging from threats to promises. The ultimate goal of this strand of the preaching was to initiate as many people as possible upon the road to salvation.

The ministers typically began their presentation of the gospel by reminding their parishioners of how much God desired them to turn to him for strength and salvation. The minister at Groton on August 24, 1628, reminded his hearers that "we should take note that God is very desirous we should be saved." 4 This was essentially an echo of a pulpit pronouncement given one year earlier, in August 1627. The minister on that day pointed out the way "that God may sheue how he desires the Conversion of sinners." 5 From a theoretical perspective, this would seem to be the strongest argument that the ministers could have put forward. If something could be shown to be the desire of God, it would be foolish for anybody to attempt to resist it. By convincing their flock that turning to God was what was required of them, the ministers should have been able to move on to more specific notions of how this could be done. While this may have been a theoretically convincing model, it may not have been the most effective. Otherwise, preachers would not have needed to turn to other means of exhortation.

Quite often, a reminder that the eternal state of the soul hung in the balance emphasized the urgency of turning to God. In its simplest form, the preacher reminded the parish that "except a man be Converted, he cant be saved." 6 This put the situation bluntly. Whether God desires a person's conversion or not, that person cannot be saved (something that they presumably desire) unless he or she converts. The preacher on December 9, 1627, more explicitly linked the notion of conversion and salvation to the gospel, narrowing the bounds of what it meant to be converted. Winthrop noted, "The

---

4 Sermon Notebook, p. 196.
5 Sermon Notebook, p. 65.
Gospel brings men to salvation by way of conversion in faith. This passage established an order for the process of salvation. Salvation came as the result of a conversion of faith which was made possible by the gospel. In order for the process to begin the gospel had to be presented and then accepted.

For practical purposes, though, the reward was never left out of the equation. And if "salvation" was not a conceptually concrete enough carrot to dangle before the congregation, several preachers solved the problem by focusing on the idea of eternal life instead. On September 2, 1627, the preacher was recorded as saying, "Eternal life is the gifte of God, therefore gett Christ & thou hast the promise." In an earlier sermon, Winthrop noted that the day's message "should stirre up every man to go into Christ to believe in him & then thou shalt with him enjoy etemall life." Believing in the salvific power of Christ was seen as the heart of the gospel message and believing in Christ in this passage can be likened to the conversion in faith mentioned above. Once again, the logic was made clear: if one wanted to have eternal life in heaven, she or he must first accept the gospel of Christ. The motivation to act — and act now — was inherent in the discussion, for who wanted to suffer the alternative to life in heaven?

Not only was the importance of the gospel stressed, an additional motivational factor was added as the ministers reminded the congregation of how little time remained to present the good news to the world. The people of Groton were asked to act quickly, for time was of the essence. Mr. Mott preached, on June 8, 1628, that "the Spirit may call

---

6 Sermon Notebook, p. 187.
7 Sermon Notebook, p. 113.
8 Webster, Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England, p. 108. Webster identified what he called an "ordo salutis" which combined God's providential election and the need for a believer to recognize this and take up their vocation as a Christian. This path would then lead to sanctification, and finally, glorification in heaven. germane here is the need to take the first steps along the path.
9 Sermon Notebook, p. 87.
This sermon came at the beginning of what appeared to be a state of emergency among the congregation in Groton, and in puritan parishes across the kingdom, in which the preachers were unsure of how long the gospel would be able to be preached and heard in England. Soon after the accession of Charles, a discernible pattern of promotions within the church emerged and anti-puritans were clearly receiving preferment. This was accompanied by an increase in the efforts of bishops to ferret out the types of nonconformity that were typical of puritans, such as reluctance to wear the surplice, use the sign of the cross at baptism, or the neglect of prayer book services in favor of extended preaching. Fearing that their ministry was being attacked from within and outside of the Church of England, the ministers did not waste any opportunities. Even in a time of apparently greater calm earlier in the record of the notebook, Winthrop recorded a reminder, "to show the necessity of speedy turning to God." With the state of the soul and obedience to God's desires at stake, delay was to be avoided at all costs.

It is not surprising to find the ministers encouraging the aid of all Christians in spreading the gospel, given importance of the task and narrow time frame in which to operate. During the first recorded sermon delivered by Mr. Mott on June 8, 1628, Winthrop recorded the exhortation "for every one to labour to bring his Children &

---

10 Sermon Notebook, p. 40.
11 Sermon Notebook, p. 172.
12 Kenneth Fincham, "Clerical Conformity from Whitgift to Laud," in Peter Lake and Michael Questier, eds., Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560-1660, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000). Fincham demonstrates that conformity was more rigidly conceived in the visitation articles created and used by bishops beginning in the 1620s and continuing under the archbishopric of Laud.
13 By the summer of 1628, the anti-puritan trend within the Church of England was no longer deniable. See Chapter 6 below for a further explanation.
14 Sermon Notebook, p. 152.
friends thither." 15 This was a clear call to participate actively in the spread of the gospel as a part of the regular interactions between people in and around Groton. In another sermon, Winthrop noted more generalized advice. Introducing a conversion narrative, the minister reminded the congregation that "if we be careful to walk honestly in our Callinge, God may at some occassion use that as a means to bring him home..." 16 Here, the preacher was reminding the congregation of the ways in which the gospel can be spread even when it is not done through a conscious effort. The congregation was thus asked to aid in the expansion of the gospel in everything they did.

Once the need and importance of the gospel was established, the preachers did not leave their flocks without further instruction as to how one should respond. Accepting the good news was not presented as a passive process, but one in which the believer had to actively seek the benefits of faith and consciously decide to act. 17 One of the more powerful images used by a minister implored the people of Groton "to gett hungring & chasing after Christ & then God will provide we shall find him." 18 A related, and more common, theme was the need to labor in order to obtain the blessings of God. On one occasion the congregation was exhorted "to labour for that which will make us approved of God." 19 Another minister preached, "therefore let us labour to have a reall witnesse of Christ in our heartes." 20 Nowhere was there any hint that believers should quietly wait for God to find them. Instead, they were told to actively come before God and do what

15 Sermon Notebook, p. 169.
16 Sermon Notebook, p. 135.
17 Anthony Milton, Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600-1640, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 413. Milton noted "an increasingly delicate balance between on the one hand a rigid predestinarianism, and on the other the importance allotted to human efforts and good work."
18 Sermon Notebook, p. 141.
19 Sermon Notebook, p. 151.
20 Sermon Notebook, p. 126.
was necessary for salvation. In a relatively lengthy exhortation, the minister on July 15, 1627, discussed the need for people to reach out to accept God's gifts, which would not be delivered otherwise. Winthrop wrote, "to whom Christ is more fully revealed much labour is expected in seeking the kingdom it is freely given by God, but it must be laboured for by us therefore we should not be lazy, & dull, & more slack in seeking Grace than our forefathers, who had lesse light." Lethargic responses to the gospel were certainly not what the ministers were hoping to receive from their congregations.

Why – it might be wondered - were these puritan ministers encouraging acceptance of the gospel as being necessary for salvation? Was the very issue of works-righteousness not the one that provided passionate motivation for the early continental Reformers to emphasize the total depravity of humans and the need only to passively accept God's grace bought dearly through the cross? These ministers were advocating ideas that were, at best: Arminian, at worst: Pelagian. In either case, Calvinists supposedly considered them heresies. Anyone familiar with the preoccupations of the Continental Reformers might be surprised to learn that preachers in England, puritan ones no less, were encourageing their listeners to "strive by prayer, &c, to attain this Faith." This was not merely an abnormality among the preachers in Groton. Patrick Collinson recognizes that “puritan theology, especially in its application to the conscience as ‘practical divinity,’ emphasized increasingly the willing response of the individual within

---

21 Sermon Notebook, p. 36.
22 The Pelagian heresy had its foundations in the ancient church and was a doctrine that suggested that humans needed to “earn” their salvation through righteous deeds. Arminianism, was a doctrine that was condemned by the Calvinist Synod of Dort in 1618-19. Arminians held that salvation was the free gift of God, but humans were able to receive this gift through an act of acceptance through free will.
23 Sermon Notebook, p. 84.
the covenant of grace." The tension between faith and works comes clearly into focus during the twenty-third sermon recorded in Winthrop's notebook. Preached on September 2, 1627, the minister made a familiar exhortation that "it is every man's duty willingly to embrace the grace of God offered, & submit to his Call." Later, the same minister was recorded as preaching, "no man from the principles of his own nature can yield assent to the call of God's grace." 

Here we are faced with quite a paradox. Humans cannot do the one thing that is necessary for their salvation. This construction is very similar to what R.T. Kendall notices in the work of Richard Sibbes, a puritan divine who was a contemporary of the ministers in Groton. "While Sibbes believes only the Holy Spirit can create life, and that 'we cannot prepare ourselves,' he encounters men as if the act of faith is in themselves... Sibbes urges men to 'labour to get into Christ.'" The clever escape comes by recognizing that as Calvinists, these preachers can argue that God has predestined a certain number of people to be with him in heaven and infused them with supernatural gift which allowed them to accept the grace being offered and be saved. This, I suspect, is what the preachers might argue if asked specifically about the nature of salvation and predestination. While this can perhaps explain the presence of this paradox in the twenty-third sermon, it is not normally a problem within Winthrop's notebook because these preachers tend not to offer qualifications to their calls to actively accept the gospel of Christ. It seems very clearly to be offered as advice that is expected to be attempted, at the very least. As John Spurr describes, "The puritan clergy knew that in

---

25 Sermon Notebook, p. 89.
26 Sermon Notebook, p. 90.
practice they had to preach and teach as if human free will existed and mattered."²⁸ This was a very practical position to take. The inner workings of predestinarian theology were concepts that were hotly debated in the universities and had varieties of shadings and subtle implications. Laymen, thought incapable of understanding the ideas involved, might simplify the doctrine in such a way that would lead to antinomianism and anarchy.²⁹

In an effort to encourage people to respond actively to the gospel, the clergy reminded the people of Groton that they would be expected to submit themselves to the authority of God. The idea of submission recurs on several occasions, such as in the seventeenth sermon. The minister reminded the congregation of the need "for people to hold themselves willing to be taught."³⁰ In other sermons the focus shifted to obedience. The preacher on December 16, 1627 gave a warning of "howe inexcusable are they that will not hold obedience to the gospel."³¹ A later sermon presented similar ideas when Winthrop recorded an "Exhortation: to come & submit under his sacred government, & remain not rebelling."³² While all of these examples demanded obedience to God and His word, there were also hints that the teaching authority of the godly ministry and magistracy was also being bolstered. The preachers presented themselves as a ministry wholly committed to the Word of God and its application to the people, therefore they could easily argue that any breach of a command that they expounded from the pulpit could be viewed as an effort to spurn the authority of the Scriptures themselves. Even if

²⁷ Kendall, Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649, p. 105.
²⁹ See below, p. 35.
³⁰ Sermon Notebook, pp. 54, 93.
³¹ Sermon Notebook, p. 124.
³² Sermon Notebook, p. 138.
the teachings were not meant or taken in this light, they were designed, at the very least, to bring people humbly before God and to ensure that they would turn to His Word for instructions about how to live their lives.

Ultimately, a decision to accept the gospel was expected to be accompanied by improved behavior, showing the world a transformed life. Much like the discussion earlier of how God could use upright behavior to bring others to Christ, a moral life was seen as a testimony to the life-changing power of the gospel. 33 Winthrop wrote down the minister's advice from December 9, 1627, "Exhortation: to testify our Love to the gospel by departing from iniquity." 34 This transformation of life, however, was not simply something that was to be done in response to the gospel, but a component of the gospel itself. Earlier in the same December 9 sermon the preacher taught that "when the Gospell comes to any people to call them to Christ, it first drawes them from the Love of their Lusts... 1. it calls them from sinne 2. it calls into grace 3. to obedience, &c." 35 It was not thought possible for someone to have fully accepted the gospel and still live in a state of sinfulness. At a different time, Winthrop recorded, "how can he that lives in this sinne say that he hath heard the voyce of the gospell, &c., no, they lye in their hearts." 36 The mark of a true believer, according to the puritan ministers preaching in Groton, was a pure life lived in response to an acceptance of the gospel of Christ through faith.

The Moral Life

33 Seaver, The Puritan Lectureships, p. 44. Seaver argued that puritan sermons were designed to mold the believer into a useful instrument to be deployed in an effort to transform society.
34 Sermon Notebook, p. 115.
35 Sermon Notebook, p. 113.
Expecting true Christians to live transformed lives, the puritan ministry in Groton often provided practical advice on how to live a moral life. This instruction took both the negative form of categorizing sins to avoid and the positive form of providing principles to emulate. The sermon notebook contains a great deal of material that touches upon the matter of godly living, a testimony to its importance to the puritan way. \(^\text{37}\) Winthrop's manuscript shows an emphasis on eliminating sinfulness generally, especially in the forms of drunkenness and lust, as well as an attempt to instill righteousness by following the model of Christ's life.

The parishioners of Groton could hardly claim that they had never been advised to avoid sinful behavior. The ministers frequently provided warnings against sin as well as providing Scriptural tools designed to "arme us againstt the weaknesses of the flesh, &c." \(^\text{38}\) Because of humanity's weak flesh and its tendency to do wrong, the preachers often reminded the congregation of the need to be vigilant and active in avoiding evil. This heavy emphasis upon proper living contrasts with the expressed views of opponents of the godly such as William Laud, who claimed the fatalism of Calvinist theology neglected "the practice of piety and obedience." \(^\text{39}\) Instead of resigning oneself to fate, the preachers at Groton taught that, despite the difficulties, their hearers must "have no fellowship with the works of darkness, but reprove them rather." \(^\text{40}\) In order to aid in this process, the minister on August 19, 1627 asked his flock to look deep within the

---

\(^{36}\) Sermon Notebook, p. 114.


\(^{38}\) Sermon Notebook, p. 57.


\(^{40}\) Sermon Notebook, p. 116.
conscience to determine if they treated sin with proper seriousness. He asked, "what is the disposition of our hearts towards sine, are we ashamed of the evill we have doune[?]"

He went on to show how a proper respect for, and abhorrence of, sin should be easily seen. The godly could be recognized. "if we be ashamed of it when no man knowes it, yea before it runs into the Act...if we take no delight in speaking of sine...if we justifie God in his Judgments & in the reproof of his ministers & laye the fault upon our selves."

According to this minister, sin should not even be considered, let alone committed in reality, even if nobody was looking. Since God sees everything, even the depths of the heart, the ministers encouraged purity to extend to all of the regions of a person's consciousness. The minister also strengthened the authority of the ministry. He taught the parishioners to take criticism to heart rather than complain of the zeal of the church leaders in pointing out faults. Despite many warnings against sinfulness already given from the Groton pulpit, Mr. Leigh still felt the need to remind the congregation on July 20, 1628 that the day's lesson taught "against those that account sinne a small thinge...sine must needs be a great thinge, seeing so merciful a God will inflicte such a punishment upon it." Could it be that anyone missed the point of earlier messages about sinfulness and not think that it was important? The ministers preaching in Groton would have certainly known that the call to battle against general sinfulness was one that would have to be delivered from the pulpit throughout their careers.

While the battle against general sinfulness was taken seriously, many ministers saw the pragmatic advantage of singling out certain sins for special attention. On a few occasions, the preachers of Groton provided laundry lists of specific things to avoid. In

---

41 Sermon Notebook, p. 75.
many aspects these instances fit popular perceptions of the ways in which puritans were sour characters who were always ready to give out a catalogue of sins and reproaches. Even though what is often considered puritanical is more accurately described as Victorian, the puritan ministers in Groton still proscribed many behaviors. Mr. Leigh preached fiercely against "all unclean persons... them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness...Hipocrites...Swearers...Lyars...Fearful persons...Ignorant persons...Drunkards...These are the most Common sinnes." In another sermon, the preacher upbraided the ministry, magistracy, and family heads who had not done enough to "beat downe sins, swearing, drinking, Idleness." Lists such as these show that there was a perception among puritans in the mid-seventeenth century of the pervasiveness of vice in English life. These examples also support interpretations, such as John Spurr's, that "Puritans were obsessed with the immorality and the religious apathy of their neighbors." The godly often turned to these long catalogues of errors in an effort to advance what modern historians have labeled the Reformation of Manners. Grouping sins together was one technique to combat evil, but often specific vices from such lists were examined much more thoroughly and called to the attention of the Congregation as things to avoid at all costs.

Drunkeness was a sin that received a great deal of attention and the ministers at Groton often counseled against "such as delight to powre downe stronge drinke."
Drinking to excess was seen as a bad thing in and of itself. One minister asked the congregation to "pray for them that sitt in drunkennesse, that God would send his word to them, &c." The preacher on August 19, 1627 reminded his congregation that "drunkennesse is a great sine & will bring Judgment, but when a man practiseth this by artifice before or after, woe to such... woe to thee that givest thy neighbour a drink, & that are running to [pull] him in." This admonition suggests that there were ministers who perceived that members of the parish were choosing not only to openly defy the teachings of the church about drinking, but encouraging others to do the same. The negative effects of drunkenness were easily visible and recognizable as evil, but often it was also linked with other sinful behaviors and thought to be an agent of general moral laxity. Winthrop recorded one instance of a minister dramatically linking drunkenness with another major sin, lust, and a host of other terrible deeds. The minister cried out, "oh dangerous lust!...oh vile lust! that deprives me of consolation - So for drunkennesse: if it carry thee to bad Company, to whoredome, to dice, cards, &c. o filthy lust!" Drunkenness was viewed as a gateway to other, perhaps more serious, types of proscribed behavior as well as being strongly linked to the other arch-sin of lust.

Lust is often challenged in the sermon notebook, but it is not always clear what is meant by the term. In the above reference, the lust that was decried seemed to be the

---

49 Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, eds., *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 25. While arguing that the drive to eliminate sin in England was not solely a puritan endeavor, Durston and Eales point out that the obsession with drunkenness was peculiar to the puritans. Also note the contrast here to how the Reformation advanced in Germany. Luther reveled in his appreciation for fine German beer. E.G Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, eds., *Martin Luther*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), p. 151. In a letter Luther wrote, "What other cause do you think that I have for drinking so much strong drink, talking so freely and making merry so often, except that I wish to mock and harass the devil who is wont to mock and harass me."

50 Sermon Notebook, p. 134.
51 Sermon Notebook, pp. 75-76.
52 Sermon Notebook, p. 147.
tendency to be drawn away from the paths of righteousness. Although a traditional sense of lust as being directly related to sexuality is implied in the reference to being drawn to whoredome; cards, dice, and the terrible sin of drunkenness also are related to the idea of the vile lusts which should be thrown off. In another case, a minister told the congregation that "we must cast out the wayes which would hinder us from the attaining of it [salvation], as the lusts, viz. Carnall wysdom...& pride." 53 Here worldly wisdom and pride are hindrances to true faith, a different concept than lusts drawing the body into more physical sins and debauchery. Despite this ambiguity about what is meant by the term, the ministers frequently employed it in a general way. Winthrop recorded admonitions "that Christians must take up a resolution to caste off all Lustes, &c." and that "there must be everlastingge warre with our lusts." 54 In another sermon he recorded, "being once called from our lusts we must have no more." 55 Perhaps the ambiguity of the concept of lust made the term useful to the preachers as it could conjure a variety of images amongst the listeners so that each might apply it in a way that was personal and meaningful. Whatever was meant by lusts, there was a clear call to fight against them from the pulpit in Groton.

The major vices of drunkenness and lust were not the only concerns that the ministers spoke of in detail. Idleness was treated disfavorably as the minister on July 27, 1628 warned the congregation that "thou shalt not be able to stand before him in the daye when he will saye to thee: I gave thee tyme &c., & thou didst spend it in Idlenessse, or in thy lusts. Therefore mispend not thy time." 56 There were precious few moments to live

53 Sermon Notebook, p. 104.
54 Sermon Notebook, pp. 190, 147.
56 Sermon Notebook, p. 185.
on the earth to have any wasted in sinfulness. Even the very loss of time itself was considered sinful, as was emphasized by the preacher who reminded the parish that "the life of a Christian is not a loose & lazy life, as the Common professors betraye it to be: Idleness must be avoyded." Such calls to use every moment profitably were directly related to the elements of Calvinism that have so often been pointed to as being particularly compatible with the newly developing economic system of capitalism.

Covetousness was also something to be avoided. One minister went so far as to claim that "balles of evil fire inflame in a man that hath a Covetous desire, ayming at 100 [pounds per year]." This last example reminds us of the duel function of the pulpit as both a place to offer religious instruction as well as maintain social control. J.T. Cliffe's study of puritan gentry families sheds light on this notion. Cliffe points out that the godly local elites performed their functions as upholders of social order with grave seriousness, seeing that as a part of their God-given duties. With a member of the gentry such as Winthrop recording the notes, the local squire may have taken distinct pleasure in hearing the prohibition against covetousness because it may have been designed to maintain his inherited status as one of the important figures in the area without competition from upstarts.

While pointing out sins to avoid regularly, the ministers also offered practical instruction about the proper way to behave. They began by reminding the congregation

---

57 Sermon Notebook, pp. 100-101.
58 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), and R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1938). These two books stand at the heart of a highly charged historiography that moves away from the focus of this thesis, but it would have been inappropriate to not include a reference to the relationship that obviously comes to light in the warnings against idleness.
59 Sermon Notebook, p. 68.
that "it is not enough to depart from evil, but we must also walk in holiness." On another occasion, the minister simply exhorted the congregation to "walk as Children of light." This type of life was entered upon after submission to God and instruction from His Word. Mr. Allen, preaching on an unrecorded date, taught the people of Groton that God was trying "to stir us up to the meditation of God's promises, for these will be as a goad to stir us up to every good day." And if reading the Scriptures and meditating upon the promises that were found there was not enough of a goad to good deeds, another preacher suggested that all believers should "give up ourselves unto God, begging wisdom & direction from him." The strength and motivation to lead a moral life, then, was seen to flow directly from God as the source of all moral behavior.

Given the identification of all goodness with God, it is perhaps not surprising that many acts were considered good only insofar as they conformed with what was found in the Scriptures concerning Jesus and his actions. The life of Jesus became a tangible source from which to draw practical hints about how to live out a moral life. Winthrop recorded one minister encouraging all Christians "to be harmless & profitable to others...Christ's whole life was an example of meekness: so we should be like him." While this example dealt with certain attributes of Christ, the model was applied in many different scenarios. As long as a characteristic could be pointed to as being Christ-like it would logically follow that all Christians "should be like him." Not only were human actions judged against Jesus', any activity was sanctified if done with a desire to unite with Christ in mind. The preacher on September 2, 1627 pointed out the connection

---

61 Sermon Notebook, p. 118.  
62 Sermon Notebook, p. 105.  
63 Sermon Notebook, p. 94.  
64 Sermon Notebook, p. 46.
between our actions and the relation of the believer's love of Christ. The minister taught, "The Love of Christ is an holy affect calling us to delight in Christ & to desire Communion with him." 66 This desire to be connected with Christ then reminded the believer of the need to follow the commandments and generally purify his or her heart. The love of Christ and desire to please him were central to the moral teaching of the church leaders in Groton. They offered the life of Jesus as both the inspiration, and the example of how, to live a good life in a sinful world.

Concomitantly with their discussion of individual sins to avoid, however, the preachers also had specific examples of virtues to acquire if possible. Mr. Lea reminded the congregation of the need "to doe Justice and showe mercye, &c Pro 22.22 Rob not the poore nor oppresse &c." 67 Social justice was seen as both a positive and negative command. The people were positively to be just and promote mercy while negatively refraining from oppressing and robbing. Another preacher taught that "everyone that is called from his lusts must labor to be very holy in his hearte, nature, works, calling & conversation." 68 Holiness was an important attribute to seek. And if anyone were to be worried that they could not attain perfect holiness in this life, that should not stop them from doing whatever they were capable of at the moment. The minister counseled, "objection: we are not able to attaine this holiness: answer: not an absolute perfection that thou must labor for it, because it is here in the making & shalbe perfected hereafter... seeing we cannot here attain the perfection, let us endeavor towards it all our dayes." 69

Knowing that there were great difficulties in trying to live a moral life, the ministers did

65 Sermon Notebook, p. 129.
66 Sermon Notebook, p. 84.
67 Sermon Notebook, p. 81.
68 Sermon Notebook, p. 120.
what they could to encourage their flock to travel along the narrow path trod by Jesus as their guide.

Most studies of early Stuart church history suggest that the period was dominated by increasingly heated battles of theological polemics. Approaching Winthrop's sermon notebook with that assumption and searching for disputation and disruption leads to an initial shock when one discovers that the vast majority of the notebook is devoted to the notion that was described here as practical divinity. Rather than worry about the rarified university debates or the controversial ecclesiastical policies carried out in London, the ministers at the parish church at Groton focused on providing practical spiritual instruction to the people in their charge. They confronted them with the gospel and told them why it was important to decide to accept and follow it. The teachers provided instruction as to how it could be accepted and stressed the life-changing power of that submission to Christ. They also made clear that moral behavior was related to the process of following the gospel and embarking upon a new life of faith. The ministers provided practical moral instruction and guided the congregation through the everyday matters of life. This emphasis on the mundane is especially significant as a corrective to the feeling that can be generated by historical narratives that suggest that the 1620s and 1630s were filled with nothing but controversy and exciting fireworks. Even during times when parliament, the universities, and the diocesan cathedrals were bitterly

---

69 Sermon Notebook, pp. 121-122.
70 White, Predestination, Policy, and Polemic, pp. 85-87. White has noticed this with reference to the controversies surrounding the Elizabethan Presbyterian movement. In many parishes, he argues, uncontroversial works were found in puritan libraries and practical divinity was the most common type of teaching referred to in the localities. Ironically, this information is found in the midst of a monograph dedicated to participating in understanding the polemical debates of the age.
disputing points of theology or church practice, some parishes were quietly persevering in the struggle to nourish the spirituality of individuals through practical divinity.
In the very first entry of John Winthrop's sermon notebook, the unnamed preacher urged his flock to consider their spiritual state closely. Winthrop noted, "whosoever thinks he is in the waye [of righteousness] let him answer this Question (for every one sertches after heaven etc.) art thou suspitis of a badd waye, as a travellor in the night. Wert thou at any tymre out of the waye?" The preacher next exhorted the congregation, "to trye our hearts to daye etc.: & trust not the waye which we find easy." This call to self-reflection, and instruction as to how it should be done, is only the first of many examples of preachers in Groton, Suffolk, urging the congregation to examine their lives in light of what is now known as experimental predestination.

The Calvinist theological tradition used experimental predestination in attempts to determine the state of one's soul by carefully observing God's providential interactions over time. Among Calvinists, particularly with Beza's influence after Calvin's death, God's providential selection of a limited number of persons to salvation was highly emphasized and known as predestination. Among many later Calvinists, such as the
Puritans in England, attempts were made to determine who might be within that limited number of people. They did this by examining their lives, or "experimenting," to see if their experiences displayed evidence of God's favor, a sign that they were indeed destined to be with God in heaven after dying. Peter Lake argues that this emphasis on closely scrutinizing one's life for assurance of salvation stood at the heart of Puritan piety. The evidence from John Winthrop's sermon notebook supports this notion for the parish of Groton, where experimental predestination was a topic regularly considered in the sermons preached there in 1627 and 1628.

Although most of the hotter sorts of English Protestants would have reluctantly admitted that nobody could be absolutely certain that they, or anyone else, were a member of God's elect, this did not prevent them from examining their lives in the spirit of experimental predestination. Puritans wanted to see whether or not their own behavior, or signs of God's providential hand at work in their lives, pointed to their elect status. This emphasis on probing the secrets of God, according to several modern scholars, began not with Calvin's original understanding of predestination, but with later attempts to apply such ideas to the human condition. Stephen Brachlow writes:

"Reformed theologians after Calvin made sanctification, or the visible 'effects' of grace, the foundation for the assurance of salvation, while Calvin taught that faith, not works, was itself reassuring." Although a later development and somewhat disjointed from Calvin's own theological stances, experimental predestination was, by the early

---

1 Sermon Notebook, p. 5.
2 Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?, p. 178.
3 Morgan, Godly Learning, p. 23. Also Kendall, Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649, chapter 2. Both scholars point out the incongruities between Calvin's writings about predestination and the later developments within Calvinism.

The use of experimental predestination fit a congregational setting in which ministers were responsible not only for the spiritual health of their flock, but were also expected to protect morals and patrol behavior in a world without police forces. One contemporary criticism of the puritans' emphasis on predestination was that it neglected the need for social teaching within the church. John Cosin, a passionate adversary of English puritans, charged his opponents with neglecting the Law and Sacraments to the detriment of social order. Non-puritans, especially those responsible for order within the church and state, considered antinomianism one of the greatest dangers of a strict adherence to predestination. It is perhaps not surprising, for pragmatic purposes at the very least, that puritan preachers, who seem to have taken their responsibilities of upholding social order seriously, focused on experimental predestination as a way of reminding their congregations that antinomianism was inappropriate. Moral behavior, while not the cause of salvation, was still required as evidence that true faith was active in a Christian's life, or as John Spurr characterizes it, “sanctification proved justification.”

The emphasis on experimental predestination can also be seen as a logical extension of the desire among puritan preachers, described in the previous chapter, to

---

6 Antinomianism was a rejection of moral law. The position was held by a small group of strict Calvinists, who believed that the predestined elect could not lose their salvation regardless of their actions, good or bad. These types of believers were responsible for some sensational public displays of lewdness and disregard for authority, feeling confident of their elect status and ability to do whatever they wanted in this life.
offer practical Christian instructions from the pulpit. The preachers intentionally avoided controversial theological points, such as the precise nature of God's predestination. Instead, their emphasis on experimental predestination centered not on the doctrine itself, but the way it could be seen at work in believers' lives. The church leaders also encouraged people to live moral lives in an effort to "make their calling and election sure." Even Court preachers, according to Peter White, "were preoccupied with the problems of assurance and how to distinguish between the regenerate and unregenerate..." While the universities may have been embroiled in controversies over the precise nature of theological predestination, puritan parishes, such as Groton, were more concerned with recognizing the practical elements of predestinarian beliefs.

Trying to catch glimpses of God's will through providential events and the analysis of behavior was not limited to individuals. Experimental predestination also affected the way in which puritan divines approached ecclesiology, or the study of the nature of a true church. Brachlow writes, "If visible Christianity was the basis for judging the reality of individual faith, it also became a test of the existence of a true church." He argues that the level of seriousness with which a group scrutinizes the church through experimental predestination was a relatively reliable determinant of whether or not a group of dissenters would remain within the Church of England as puritans or step outside of the fold as separatists. Those who felt that a real church could

---


9 It should be remembered also that there was a Royal ban on controversial preaching about predestination throughout this entire period. James I issued directions in 1622 that prohibited preachers to touch upon this hot topic.

10 2 Peter 1:10

only be made up of true believers, or those who through experimental predestination found themselves to be assured of their elect status, were more likely to separate from a parish structure that yoked them with their reprobate neighbors. Many puritans that remained within the Church of England did so because they admitted to imperfection of human understanding, especially in determining the truthfulness of experimental predestination. Those who remained within the established church also admitted that some people, seemingly of the elect, were probably hypocrites waiting to be discovered. Others, they felt, had not yet recognized and claimed their position among the known saints. Thus, the notion of experimental predestination was connected to the very important theological realms of Puritan ecclesiology and soteriology, the study of the doctrine of salvation.

John Winthrop, even in periods that predate this sermon notebook, was an active participant in the introspective culture of experimental predestination. Lee Schweninger argues that Winthrop was not terribly popular with his fellow students at Cambridge because of his intense consciousness of personal sin and desire to escape it. Winthrop was not only concerned about his own sins, but also those of the English Church and society. As an adult in 1624, he and other like-minded individuals composed a list of "Common Grievances Groaning for Reformation." The results of such scrutiny played a significant role in his later decision to emigrate to the "howling wilderness" of the New World. On May 15, 1629, Winthrop wrote to his wife, "the Lorde hath admonished,

---

12 Brachlow, Communion of Saints, p. 130.
13 Kendall, Calvin and English Calvinists to 1649, p. 7. Experimental predestinarians often warned of the dangers of those who displayed "temporary faith."
14 Brachlow, Communion of Saints, pp.114-149. Chapter 3, Church membership and Saving Faith, explains the variations of these ideas in some detail.
15 Schweninger, John Winthrop, p. 2.
16 Schweninger, John Winthrop, p. 6.
threatened, corrected, and astonished us, yet we growe worse and worse...[H]e hath
smitten all the other Churches before our eyes... I am veryly persuaded, God will bring
some heavye Affliction upon this land, and that speedylye." 17 Since England spurned
the warnings of God by failing to examine its spiritual state carefully and reform its ways,
Winthrop made his decision to escape God's punishment, just as Lot fled the destruction
of Sodom and Gomorrah. 18 The sermon notebook stands at a critical junction between
Winthrop's earlier concern for experimental predestination and his later decision to leave
for New England, based upon the judgments of God upon Old England. 19 Not
surprisingly, the notebook offers insights into how preachers used the ideas of
experimental predestination in their sermons. It is to these ideas that we now turn.

Whatever the meaning and use of the ideas, Winthrop's sermon notebook
indicates that the congregation was encouraged to examine their lives closely on a regular
basis. The sermon notebook deals with the issue of experimental predestination as it
revolves around two major themes. First, there are many exhortations to perform careful
self-examination. Next, the sermons offer practical tips about how to go about internal
probes. These two elements have received a great deal of attention in puritan
historiography and the notebook only underscores the significance of this type of thinking
in godly circles. 20 Winthrop's notebook, though, contains examples of how this tradition
was applied within a specific parish instead of in tracts and printed sermons.

17 John Winthrop, quoted in Schweninger, John Winthrop, p. 8.
18 Genesis 18,19.
19 This theme is considered again in the conclusion, chapter 7.
20 Durston and Eales, eds., The Culture of English Puritanism, p. 13, Spurr, English Puritanism, p. 43, and
Fincham, ed., The Early Stuart Church, p. 8. Each of these studies explain, with varying degrees of
complexity, the basic position of experimental predestination and its place in puritan piety. Many other
drawn.
On many occasions, much like in the very first sermon in his notebook, Winthrop recorded preachers at Groton calling the congregation to look closely at their lives to see if they could find evidence of their elect status. The tenth sermon was almost entirely dedicated to explaining various elements of experimental predestination. In it, Winthrop recorded the preacher as offering, "Use. To see how the Lord would have his assured of their salvation." This would lead to yet another use, "to provoke us to desire to know where our happinesse lyes, & not suffer the devill to delude us any more." 21 In the eighteenth sermon, Winthrop recorded the preacher as pointing out this use for the scripture reading for the service, "to stire us up to search our hearts for the truth of grace, for when Afflietion comes it will be tried...it is not enough to suppose thou hast ffaith, but trye it by the fire in thy prosperity. [the truth of grace] was that which supported Job in his [trial]." 22 The preachers fought against the tendency of their listeners to become complacent in their experiences of faith. Mere church attendance and participation in rituals or prayers was not enough to assure one of elect status. The preachers' call was clear; assurance could be attained, but only in continuing scrutiny of the heart, not in simple adherence to church ceremonies. The ministers frequently returned to this theme of soul-searching and its importance. Importantly, though, they did not merely leave their congregations at that point. They often took the next step of offering Scriptural guidance as to how this necessary process could be carried out.

Some of the recorded sermons offered generalized notions of how best to probe the heart. After reminding the congregation "to take knowledge how careful God is to have the knowledge of his glorye [leave] unto his children," the ministers spoke of the

---

21 Sermon Notebook, pp. 31-32.
ways God did this so that the parishioners could look for similar evidence in their own experiences. Using scriptural terminology, the preachers offered help to the congregation in their introspection. In the twenty-second sermon, recorded on September 2, 1627, Winthrop noted, "Use: 1. To examine and trye our Faithe by the fruite. If we see no fruite & others can see none, we may suspect of a working ffaith." Yet another example of this type of general advice can be found later in the notebook. In the thirty-second sermon, Winthrop wrote, "Use: to try whether Christ hath called us by this power it hath had upon our hearts." A significant amount of ambiguity remains after these instructions. What types of fruits are to be considered evidence of salvation? How does one recognize the power of God acting on one's heart? The preachers did their best to answer these questions.

Sections of the sermon notebook provide evidence of preachers offering more specific advice concerning what the believers should consider when trying to determine where they stand with God. On February 24, 1628, in a particularly long entry, Winthrop recorded several bits of advice. He noted that those who are elect should not be marked by corruption or sinfulness, reminding believers that "the members must be as the head." Following the example of Christ was often seen as the most obvious and effective way to tell whether or not you were given grace by God. The preacher on December 16, 1627, gave a series of indications through which elements of eternal assurance could be glimpsed. Winthrop noted, "every one that is called from his lusts must labor to be very holy in his heart, nature, workes, calling, & conversation." Not only is this a practical set of instructions to encourage holiness to fill all aspects of one's life, such as fill so

23 Sermon Notebook, p. 82.
24 Sermon Notebook, p. 134.
many of the pages in John Winthrop's notebook, it also carries a reminder that this holiness had a deeper meaning than at first apparent. Winthrop wrote, "it is the grant whereby we may gather our assurance of salvation." Still more specific advice was given when a preacher noted, "if thou wouldst know if thou be prepared, see if lust be weakened & growne distasteful to thy life, if thou followest thy former evil Courses without Checks of Conscience, &c, or Bitterness, &c." In the event that members of the congregation at Groton may not have known what elements of their lives to examine, the preachers offered them guideposts. According to Winthrop's notebook, believers were told that glimpses of their soul's estate could be seen by scrutinizing the extent to which their lives followed the patterns laid out by Jesus, or whether or not they exemplified holiness in all that they did.

Wanting to avoid having their parishioners fall into thinking that sacraments have special powers in and of themselves, the preachers at Groton turned sacramental teachings into yet another format to examine the power of God at work in the world and, perhaps, at work in their own souls. Puritan preachers in Groton emphasized that God, and not any sacrament in and of itself had the power to save sinners and transform their lives. Rather than relying on the sacraments to help make one justified, the preachers taught that when approaching the sacraments it was an appropriate time to reflect on the state of one's soul, apart from the benefits of the sacrament itself. Winthrop noted a warning that "it is not sufficient for us to finde rest in the outward meanes, &c, as

---

26 Sermon Notebook, p. 120.
27 Sermon Notebook, p. 164.
28 Webster, Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England, p. 115. Webster also noted the connection between self-reflection and approaching the sacraments. His argument was drawn specifically from Eucharistic practices among puritans.
This inward search when approaching the sacrament was also called for by the preacher of the 25th sermon. Of this sermon, Winthrop wrote, "so in our coming to the Supper we must examine ourselves." Beyond looking internally in preparation for Communion, the sacrament of baptism was used by one preacher as a context for introducing careful self-scrutiny. This preacher taught, "for such of us as are of age to enquire whither we have the power of baptism (which [not] all have) or onely the sign. The power is known by these 4 signes 1: Corruption wilbe washed, not just rooted out: 2: thou hast faith in some measure 3: some power to obedience, &c....so we should walke in newnesse & life." This teaching combined a call to examination with specific points in which judgements could be made. The sacramental practice of the church provided specific opportunities for believers to examine certain elements of their faith for evidence of regeneration.

As viewed through the sermon notebook of John Winthrop, the preaching in Groton in 1627 and 1628 touched upon the ideas of experimental predestination frequently and in a variety of ways. The preachers actively encouraged the practice of careful self-scrutiny while also offering practical advice to their flock about how they could go about performing the task. Even though the strict Calvinist theologians of the universities might never have approved of the idea that anybody could know about their status of election in this life, this did not prevent the ministers in local congregations from offering guidance to their flocks when they inquired about the state of their souls. In any religion which emphasizes a judgment and afterlife, it is perhaps inevitable that people will wonder, as the rich man asked Jesus, "teacher, what good thing must I do to get

29 Sermon Notebook, p. 109.
eternal life?" 32 When this question was advanced in the seventeenth century, people in
puritan congregations were referred to the teachings of the sixteenth-century Reformers
who emphasized that true faith was what was necessary for this salvation and only God's
elect were given this gift. If they questioned further about how one might know if he or
she had been given such a gift, the answers that Puritan ministers gave would most likely
have touched upon the ideas of experimental predestination. The many references to this
type of thinking in Winthrop's notes indicate that it played a very prominent part in the
spiritual life and discipline of the parish at Groton.

31 Sermon Notebook, p. 91.
32 Matthew 19:16.
Soothing troubled souls was yet another aspect of practical divinity. This settling role was important for puritan ministers because, as John Spurr recognizes, "the godly lived in a constant state of tension between anxiety and confidence."¹ As the ministers at Groton sought to meet the everyday needs of their parishioners, they repeatedly returned to one word in their sermons: comfort. This word is associated with a variety of related ideas, but most often with the notion of affliction or tribulation. Winthrop's notebook, then, gives several examples of how this general puritan tendency to be attuned to afflictions and the need for comfort was played out in a specific place.

The preachers offered the godly comfort about their relationship with God. As was seen in the last chapter, there was a deep concern about the status of a person's soul in Groton and it was often probed through experimental predestination. Some parishioners at Groton, perhaps, felt that they were outside of God's grace and damned for eternity. A recent examination of puritan piety concludes that many of the godly "struggled for years before they could finally convince themselves that they were saved, and large numbers were never able to rid themselves entirely of lingering, nagging doubts

¹ Spurr, *English Puritanism*, p. 43. Spurr also argues that offering comfort was a major role for a puritan minister (p. 61) because many puritans were wrapped up in a cultural pattern that left many Christians "on the edge of despair." (p. 103).
about their elect status." It is not surprising, then, that the preachers should offer some comforting words to these troubled souls, as well as reassuring all of the godly of the security that accompanies a salvific faith in God. Paul Seaver recognizes this and discusses how the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, or the inability to lose a truly justifying faith, was used both to comfort those who were experiencing a "salvation panic" as well as those who were dealing with the challenges of living out the life of faith begun in a conversion experience. To those troubled in conscience about their salvation, the preacher of the thirty-first sermon offered "great comfort to those that find sinne condemned in them," and "Comfort to all that will crie for mercy, it is offered to all." The preacher on February 24, 1628, echoed this idea. Winthrop recorded: "what an excellent thing it is for us to heare of the favor of God [procured through Christ's sacrifice] &c. it should be our greatest comfort." In an effort to offer a message of comfort to all godly Christians, Mr. Allen preached on September 9, 1627, "for Comfort of all Gods people, who have this part all the promises of God." By remembering all of the good things that God promised to his followers, the Christian could be relieved of many of the anxieties of this life. Other preachers used the lure of comfort to remind their parishioners of the need to be morally vigilant and active in their spiritual lives. Regarding the sixteenth sermon, Winthrop wrote, "these that doe this sett themselves to glorify God [,] God will blesse them, & give them sweet hearts & comfort." The message offered there suggested that if one was interested in receiving comfort, they had

---

2 Durston and Eales, eds., The Culture of English Puritanism, p. 11.
3 Seaver, The Puritan Lectureships, p. 33.
4 Sermon Notes, p. 132.
5 Sermon Notes, p. 160.
6 Sermon Notes, p. 94.
7 Sermon Notes, p. 52.
better actively glorify God with their lives, which would bring them the relief they desired. In a sermon found later in the notebook, an unnamed preacher exhorted his hearers "to trust God & walk Comfortably in his ways." Here, peace is given as one walks in God's ways. Indeed, according to that preacher, walking in God's ways is what brings the comfort to the believer in the first place. Parishioners in Groton were offered many soothing words about God's love for them in the face of the uncertainties of life in the early modern world.

Winthrop frequently recorded messages of comfort given in close relationship to some type of trial or affliction that the individual believer or community of faith may have been experiencing. Affliction was often seen as an unavoidable outcome of living a Christian life, and its recognition was not peculiar to the puritans living in Groton. Seaver points out two different tracts, the Seven Treatises of Richard Rogers and Robert Bolton's Instructions for a Right Comforting Afflicted Consciences, which both "aimed at solving the innumerable problems afflicting the saints in his uneasy attempt to live in a fallen world." The preachers at Groton certainly fell into line with those of their clerical colleagues who emphasized that afflictions were a natural part of the spiritual life. One anonymous preacher taught that one of the uses of a never failing trust in God is that it will "arm us for Affliction, since it will come." Mr. Mott, on June 8, 1628, preached that the Christian need not fear inevitable troubles because God offered "Comfort in all Afflictions." The preacher of the eighteenth sermon reminded his hearers that "the

---

8 Sermon Notes, p. 142.
9 Seaver, The Puritan Lectureships, p. 33.
10 Sermon Notes, p. 141.
11 Sermon Notes, p. 169.
Apostle applies this to their present condition, to comfort them against afflictions. He did not stop at the proclamation of comfort, but offered some clues of how to recognize the sweet succor. He reminded that comfort could be gleaned from "the interruptions of those afflictions, when need requires." and "the considerable issue & good effect of these afflictions, to shew prays &c." Other ministers focused their attention on how to receive comfort when in the midst of affliction. In the sermon Winthrop noted from December 16, 1627, the preacher taught, "receiving affliction I have set the Lord before mine eyes. &c. ... there hath been always a smart harmony & comfort in God which made for the waye of Salvation." In this case the preacher's message made clear the need to turn consciously to the Lord when in distress. One week later, on December 23, 1627, he went even further, offering a list of things to do in order to take advantage of the way that "God promises us comfort in great distress." In order to be relieved, the believer, according to that minister, must submit willingly to God's commands and rejoice in the strength of the Lord. In this way the ministers at Groton were able to turn the offer of comfort into a tool for exacting obedience to God's commands by making his comfort conditional upon the obedience of the Christian believer. No matter how it was procured, comfort was seen as a necessity because life in early modern England was full of naturally occurring afflictions.

Some afflictions, however, were not the result of natural disasters and sicknesses at all, but rather were the result of attacks or battles with both spiritual and temporal enemies of the godly. When Winthrop noted preachers referring to the need for comfort

---

12 Sermon Notes, p. 58.
13 Sermon Notes, p. 58.
14 Sermon Notes, p. 123.
15 Sermon Notes, p. 127.
against these confrontational afflictions, he offered a clue that the ministers of Groton
were not entirely insensible to the conflicts occurring within the English church, such as
the furor over the published works of Richard Montague or the proper way to respond to
the Thirty Years' War. On February 24, 1628, the preacher at Groton pleaded with the
congregation to "be well acquainted with all fundamental doctrine, especially that of our
redemption... it is the main grant of comfort, to support us in our temptation & Christian
warfare." The warfare being referred to in this case was almost certainly spiritual, in
which the believer must battle the forces of evil in the form of demons hurling
temptations at unsuspecting pilgrims, trying to force them from the narrow path of
salvation. Yet, it was not always so clear that this type of militant imagery was not a
coded reference for the temporal enemies of the godly. The preacher of the fourteenth
sermon seemed to have worldly enemies of the godly in mind when he offered his words
of comfort to the congregation: "we must consider the great comfort that will be to us in
standing against the opposition of the wicked." In order to brace the parishioners for
conflict with the wicked, they were taught that God would provide them with comfort in
the midst of their difficult task. In the same sermon, the minister reminded his listeners
that even if they did not actively battle their adversaries, the attacks of their enemies
would bring the conflict to them still. The steadfast believer should take heart, though,
according to Winthrop's notes, because "it is the counsell of god at all times & wilbe to
the end of the world that though they meet with never so much opposition of wicked men
yet they should not feare nor be troubled." The words of the preachers were designed

---

16 See Chapter 6 for fuller discussion of tensions at the national level.
17 Sermon Notes, p. 157.
18 Sermon Notes, p. 42.
19 Sermon Notes, p. 41.
to offer comfort and encouragement in the midst of conflict. While this type of imagery could certainly have been applicable, given the puritan mindset, in any age, the superabundance of disputes and altercations between puritans and the religious establishment during this period suggest that the words of these preachers were somehow related to contemporary struggles, both in Groton and in the larger, national church. It should be noted that these examples are relatively few, coming from only two sermons found before the middle of 1628.

Beginning in the summer months of 1628, a marked change is visible and conflict between the godly and their enemies takes the center stage of Winthrop's sermon notes. One preacher presented a particularly striking example of the lengths the puritan ministry would go to convey a comforting message from God during this openly recognized struggle as puritans braced themselves against the promotion of their enemies within the hierarchy of the English church. If ever the parishioners grew weary of their tribulations, or doubted the continuing love of God for them, Mr. Newton sought to comfort them with a series of reminders of their connection to God. On August 30, 1628, Newton preached, "We are his chosen people...we are Gods Jewelles...we are his servants, nay, we are his friend... we are of God's privy counsell: again, we are his sonnes...he is our husbande: nay, we are his neighbors... we are to him as the berryes to the vine." 20

Alongside the prevalence of comforting words throughout the earlier part of the notebook, this collection of images seems to be designed to powerfully ease the minds of the godly and bolster them in the face of intense conflict. In order to understand the context of the conflict that spurred these extra-comforting words, we must first explore

---

the notebook's identification of potential enemies, which was confined to pointing out the perennial bugbear of English Protestantism: Roman Catholics.
Roman Catholic polemicists often cited the fragmentation of the Protestant churches of Europe as a sign of their schismatical nature and lack of divine authorization. By the beginning of the seventeenth century Catholic authors were gleefully able to point out serious divisions between the major groupings of Lutherans and Calvinists, radical offshoots such as anabaptists, and even divisions within confessions such as the Arminian troubles in the Calvinist community in the Netherlands. Despite the barriers that were being erected between Protestants, one concept tended to be universally held among them: an intense hatred of the doctrines and practices of the Roman church. ¹ This was especially true of the Protestants living in England in the early seventeenth century, who, despite divisions based upon church polity, were easily able to agree upon a common enemy in the Roman church and its leader, the Pope. Some scholars even argue that anti-popyery was a part of the shared religious and political heritage of the people of England throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. ² Certain English men and women,

¹ Milton, Catholic and Reformed, pp. 383-399.
² Durston and Eales, eds., The Culture of English Puritanism, p. 6.
though, took the aversion to Rome more seriously than others. Hot Protestants were well known to have been more likely to publicly inveigh against the Roman church with greater frequency and higher intensity. The sermons heard by John Winthrop in Groton contained a variety of references to the church of Rome which were duly recorded in his notebook. These references show that East Anglian ministers not only fell into line with the common aversion to Rome shared by all English Protestants, but contained an intensity which showed them to be characteristic of a puritan understanding of anti-Catholicism.

Frequently within the notebook, Catholicism was referred to in ways that were endorsed by English Protestants generally. Most of these references use relatively minor errors of doctrine or practice within the current or former Roman church in order to express appreciation for how the English Reformation corrected such abuses. In the very first sermon recorded in the notebook, for example, the preacher taught that "in other things as of popery: there were Indulgences for their sins, but [here] were you and convinced of your sins." Rather than turning to an erroneous doctrine of purgatory and indulgences, the minister praised the English divines for honestly decrying people's sins so that they can be eliminated rather than used as a money-raising device. Later in the same sermon, the preacher informed the congregation that "this daye in Spain there is not a bible in their owne language to be found in any famyly scarce." In case the differences with English practice were not recognized or understood, he reminded the audience "not to doe like nations failed." When, on August 26, 1627, Mr. Lea sought to describe the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Scribes gaining the best seats in the synagogues, he

---

2 Sermon Notes, p. 6.
mentioned, "so were the Popes & Cardinalls to be so extolled." Such passing linking of traditional Roman church leaders with the opponents of Jesus was a simple way to reinforce the negative image of Catholicism. In a sermon given in the summer of 1628, a section concluded by exclaiming, "so that opinion of the papists falleth to the grounde that we may not goe to God, but by the mediation of Saints or Angells & he is near when they call upon him." It was taken as a matter of importance that teachings refuted various points of Catholic doctrine. Still, over one hundred years after the Reformation began, these pastors felt the need to remind the congregation in Groton of the various ways in which the Protestant doctrines of the English church were more sound than those found in the Roman churches of the Continent. Very few English Protestants would have disagreed with those sentiments or found them to be out of place.

Winthrop's sermon notebook does not stop here. More serious charges were leveled against Rome that went beyond what most Protestants would have been comfortable defending. Puritans took a hard line on identifying the Pope as Antichrist himself. Anthony Milton argues that for Puritans "a heightened sense of the threat from the papal Antichrist was held to be one of the signs of election." With this desperate sense of apocalyptic struggle and the need to be vigilant, Mr. Lea reminded the parishioners at Groton that "our Land may yet be brought under the bondage of Antichrist." The threat from this diabolical force manifested itself in various ways, calling for extreme vigilance at all times. In September, 1627, the minister taught his flock "to watch against the snares of the wicked, who seek to withdrawe men from

---

5 Sermon Notes, p. 79.
6 Sermon Notes, p. 165.
7 Milton, Catholic and Reformed, p. 36.
8 Sermon Notes, p. 70.
believing as [Elimas] did, & the popish teachers doe, by calling to Saints &c." ⁹ This passage identified papists with wicked forces who would like nothing more than to tear the believers away from their faith. This matches up with John Spurr's characterization of the puritan fear that Catholicism represented "the epitome of the unholy." ¹⁰ The thing that made these unholy papists most dangerous, according to the puritans, was the relentlessness with which they attacked the true church and the underhanded ways in which they did it. The preacher on August 19, 1627 reminded his auditors of "the danger of having communion with such men. Our protestants account it unsafe thus to talk with a Papist, or a Jesuit, when they knowe not their artes, for they will not persuade them to gross things at first: they will [compose] signs & [laud] to [gain thee] &c...they have artes & many tricks to gett them in." ¹¹ English Puritans were keenly aware of the many ways in which Catholics attempted to get a foot in the door with small concessions hoping to later expand into full attacks on Protestantism. ¹² In the face of such sly attacks, the best defense was thought to be a blanket attack on all Catholic practices. Winthrop recorded, in February, 1628, a command to "wholly exclude them which containe the practice of papists, which brings forth their masses, & pilgrimages, & building churches, &c." ¹³ The puritan line against popery was clear: do not tolerate it in the least.

⁹ Sermon Notes, p. 85.
¹⁰ Spurr, English Puritanism, p. 81.
¹¹ Sermon Notes, p. 76.
¹² Lake, Anglicans and Puritans? Lake points out how moderate Calvinists at times accused Puritans, particularly radical Presbyterians, of being so divisive in their church policies that they were the ones providing the Catholics with the needed space to get a foot in the door. Although it was debatable as to who forgot to seal the entrances, the hotter sorts of Protestants were clearly concerned that the smallest cracks would be exploited by papists.
¹³ Sermon Notes, p. 157.
The most extensive treatment of popery in the notebook came in a sermon heard on December 9, 1627. The unnamed preacher took the opportunity to both praise the English reformers for their zeal in dismantling traditional religion in the previous century, while decrying what he saw as a clear drift back towards the Roman faith. He identified the breakdown of true faith as a collective problem of three distinct groups of people, the governors, clergy, and people of England. At first, these groups were zealous for the truth. Winthrop recorded, "for when were we called to the light of the truth over from popery ... great the zeal of our governours for this ende: so was the company of our ministers, to bring it into contempt ... [and] so great was the zeal of the people in pulling downe Abbyes & images." 14 This description of societal roles should not be surprising. The erastian nature of the English Reformation under Henry VIII began by placing the political rulers in position of great responsibility for ensuring the continuing vitality of the English Church. 15 This was a job that seemed to have been especially important to puritan gentry families who saw it as their special role to offer patronage to godly ministers to provide an effective preaching ministry in their area. 16 Those ministers, then, were responsible for preaching the truth to the people who, in turn, should enthusiastically embrace the saving gospel and turn away from their former ways under the Roman church. The preacher on this occasion made it clear that the positive response of the past had wonderful results for all of England: " & what is the effect of this zeal [?] it made us prosper & freer every way." 17 Despite this prosperity and freedom that were

14 Sermon Notes, p. 116.
15 Erastianism refers to the placement of religious authority in a state under the clear domination of the secular leadership.
17 Sermon Notes, p. 116.
brought by turning away from Rome, the preacher had little praise for the prevailing religious atmosphere of his day. He again looked at the three divisions of society mentioned earlier, but this time with reproaches for each of them. The minister chided, "but now we are fashioning ourselves to it, &c... 1. Our magistrates doe not hate it, &c, 2. Our ministers have no heart to raze it down, 3. Our people are ready to flock to it." 18 In the face of this backsliding, the minister offered an exhortation to cut off further retreat to Rome and invoked again the legacy of the Reformation to motivate his listeners. Winthrop recorded his plea, " to admit no thought of Reconciliation with the worst again. Our fathers blessed God for delivering them from it, & shall we hate our fathers to return to it again." 19 In this, the most extensive discussion of popery found in Winthrop's sermon notebook, we find nothing but scorn for the traditional faith as well as a great fear that England was moving in the wrong direction and into the grasp of the pope.

According to Winthrop's notes, the preachers in Groton regularly cited the Roman church and its doctrines and practices in order to deride them and offer teachings to counter them. Their harping on the subject seems to give credence to Anthony Milton's observation that puritans naturally spoke and wrote about Rome much more regularly than more moderate Protestants of the period. 20 Such preachers also followed certain conventions about the way in which popery was invoked among the hotter sorts of Protestants. Roman Catholicism was seen as the religion of Antichrist, antithetical to anything holy, and continuously attempting to undermine true Protestant worship. On several occasions the preachers warned against the dangers of compromising in the least with popery. This matches up closely with the notion that any slight break in the

18 Sermon Notes, p. 116.
19 Sermon Notes, p. 116.
defenses against the religion of Antichrist would quickly be exploited by Romanists and used to completely overturn the Protestant Reformation. It is clear, based upon the way that Catholicism is discussed in the sermons at Groton as the antithesis of true religious belief and practice, that nothing worse could befall the church than a return to the Roman faith. As Winthrop recorded in his notebook: "Popery supplies us the greatest lust that ever we found in the desert of our ignorance." It was against this lust, more than any others, that the ministers in Groton seemed to be guarding their flocks against.  

---

22 Sermon Notes, p. 116.
23 This is especially significant when considering the warnings against lust found in the practical divinity teachings (see above, pp. 26-27).
Although the previous chapter suggested that John Winthrop's sermon notebook provided a few hints of contentions within the church and state in England, it is important to realize that for the majority of sermons these hints of polemics did not detract from the more central themes of presenting practical theology from the pulpit. This, however, began to change in the sermons Winthrop heard in the summer of 1628. The religious turmoil that could be seen in parliamentary proceedings and in print debates finally caught up with the parish of Groton. This chapter examines the ways in which this was evident and attempts to examine why the nature of the sermons changed at that particular moment. Rather than pinpoint themes that run through this section of the notebook, it will be more constructive to analyze the sermons as they appear in chronological order. In this way, the outbreak and escalation of controversial material can be charted and examined as they appeared in Winthrop's notes.

One sees a new spirit of contention in the sermons at Groton from the very beginning of Mr. Mott's second sermon on June 8, 1628. He chose 1 Thessalonians 5:19
as his text and Winthrop summarized the verse as "Quench not the Spirit." 1 After a
generalized discussion of how individual believers should not quench the spirit within
their own lives and spurn the sanctification that accompanies it, Mott turned his attention
away from the pious within the pews. He argued that another use for this scriptural
passage was "to show how desperate an estate those are in who goe on in opposition to
the ministry, which hath the dispensation of the spirit." 2 By alluding to the ministry as
an institution that had the dispensation of the spirit, those who opposed it were presented
as a group that sought to quench the work of the spirit in the world. Given the
relationship forged earlier in the sermon between the spirit and the sanctification of the
believer, whoever it is that Mott had in mind as being opponents of the ministry were
logically presented as being opposed to the sanctification of the nation. This same
connection was alluded to again near the end of the sermon when Winthrop recorded
another use of this verse from Thessalonians as a reminder "not to oppose the good things
we see in others...such as seek to drive out of others al gud motives with sports, &c." 3
This seems to be a reference to the Book of Sports which was vigorously opposed by the
godly as an affront to their sense of how to keep the Sabbath holy. 4 The tone of Mott's
sermon clearly broke with the others, at least to this point, but it represented only the
opening shots of an escalating polemical battle waged from the pulpit in Groton.

The next sermon in the notebook was recorded on July 13, 1628. Although a full
month after the previous sermon in the notebook, the passion of the controversial tone

1 Sermon Notes, p. 171.
2 Sermon Notes, p. 172.
3 Sermon Notes, p. 173.
4 The Book of Sports was first issued by James I in 1618 and was then reissued by Charles I in 1633. It outlined a series of recreational activities that could be pursued on Sundays after attendance at a local parish prayer service.
had not decreased. Early in the sermon, the preacher warned that his listeners should
“take heed we passe not from us his word” as though that were a real threat at the
moment.  

The pronouncement came at a time when the hotter sorts of Protestants feared
that the Bible was not being consulted enough for the determination of doctrine and
liturgical practice. This notion is better understood when compared to a later warning
that “that church which hath his gospell hath a full meanes of Salvation, so as they need
not unwritten traditions &c.”  

This was a common puritan criticism of the Elizabethan Settlement, exacerbated by the sacramental focus of the new divines gaining ascendancy
under Charles I. The preacher did not stop there, however. He went on to clearly outline
his perception of the ongoing struggle for a more fully reformed church. His comments
betray a feeling that recent events must be viewed as a move away from a more perfect
polity and practice. Winthrop wrote:

They who intend to take away the gospell from Christians, intend to take away
Christ, for it is the word preached that is properly the ordinance of God therefore
we should praye that that manner of some that go about this may not prevayle, &
if any doe intende this, if it be any governance in the church, cursed be he, God
putt his name out of the book of lyfe.  

Many common puritan preoccupations are easily visible within this passage. The
opening provided a sense of the backwards slip from a more reformed practice to one
which has godly elements removed or “taken away” from it. The possibility of returning
to Roman Catholicism out of a lack of vigilance was a theme often returned to, and, as
we will examine later, was a note that was intended to strike a deep chord within Puritans
everywhere.  

It also introduced the puritan preoccupation with preaching by referring to

---

5 Sermon Notes, p. 174.
6 Sermon Notes, p. 174.
7 Sermon Notes, p. 175.
8 See Chapter 6 below.
it as a response to the ordinances of God. Prayer, though, is not neglected here. It is resorted to in an effort to win God over to the side of the puritans in the battle for the church’s soul. The preacher then concluded with the very dramatic cursing of leading churchmen who oppose puritanism. As we shall see, it may well have been movements on the episcopal bench that inspired this outburst of polemic in the first instance.

Mr. Leigh identified similar themes in his sermon preached in Groton one week later. He opened his lesson by reminding the congregation that “God hathe longe been warning us of a great Judgement by his wordes...”⁹ In earlier sermons, this type of message had been presented as a warning to all people, followed by an “altar call” seeking new converts who desired to escape the wrath of God. In this changed summer of 1628, however, Mr. Leigh continued to add references to judgment without attempting to win souls for Christ. He preached, “God hath added death sentences upon particular Countryes & persons, & upon the whol race of wicked, as against Caine.”¹⁰ Going even further, Mr. Leigh also resorted to proclaiming the curses of God from the pulpit.

Winthrop noted:

Especially cursed are they which take a lawe for condemning sine, as the drunkarde, who makes Lawes for drinking by forme & measure...& cursed are those who established lawes for the restraint of Gods worshipp... & cursed are they that make lawes for establishment of Idolatrye, ps 16.4. so he that breaks & taunts men to break the comands of God.¹¹

As we saw earlier, a major thrust of the moral teachings from this puritan pulpit was a message against drunkenness. The godly may have viewed any accommodation with this vice as a provocation. Again, the proper form of worship emerged as a source of tension. The reference to idolatry may also be related to the notion of proper worship. One of the

⁹ Sermon Notes, p. 176.
¹⁰ Sermon Notes, p. 176.
more vigorously contested issues between puritans and their ecclesiastical adversaries concerned kneeling to receive the Eucharist. Puritans commonly perceived it as an act of worship of the sacramental elements that not only resembled idolatry, but smacked of Catholicism. At no point in this sermon did Mr. Leigh use the proclamation of God’s judgment as an opening to offer salvation to his auditors. His message can be understood more as a battle cry and delineation of sides rather than a simple proclamation of the gospel as was found in earlier sermons.

In the very next week, July 20, 1628, Mott preached again, focusing heavily upon the need to condemn sin. He began by defining the parameters of debate in no uncertain terms by declaring that “God hates all wicked men.” He used the opportunity to fire arrows of denunciation at those who were thought to be “soft on sin.” After a series of condemnations of those who downplay the seriousness of sinfulness, he powerfully reminded the congregation that “heaven is not an Inne for all Comers.” As in the last sermon, salvation was emphasized as a limited offer in an effort to throw light on how evil the opponents of the puritans were. The claim suggested that the issues that were disputed were far from adiaphoratic, but pertained to the very heart of religious truth and the state of eternal souls. In an effort to make the threat of hell more palpable, Mr. Mott provided imagery that prefigured arguments that Jonathan Edwards would use in his most famous sermon of the next century. Mr. Mott preached, “but to think that this torment shall never have ende, never, never Ceasing to have been here 4000 yeares, yet is no

---

11 Sermon Notes, p. 177.
12 Ferrell, Government by Polemic. Her fifth chapter is given to a discussion of the explosive divisive potential of the simple act of kneeling to receive the sacrament.
13 Sermon Notes, p. 179.
14 Sermon Notes, p. 179.
nearer an ende than when the first came in." 15 The need for all Christians to labor to save others from hell is finally recognized as the sermon draws to a close, but not without a stern reminder of "woe to them that seek to drawe others to hell." 16 Winthrop also included a line which betrayed that the preacher was aware that some people may have become uncomfortable with the increasing aggressiveness of the church leadership. Winthrop recorded, "objection: this preaching of Hell will scare men out of their witts: Answer: Christ, the meek lamb, preached it." 17 With such a role model, Mr. Mott braced his own resolve and encouraged his like-minded co-religionists to do the same. As was by that point very apparent, conflict was in the air. The puritans had no intention of losing the battle for England’s soul because they were too squeamish to preach the full truth as they saw it.

The intense polemic found in these several sermons was toned down a bit in the final six sermons recorded in the notebook, but there are certainly still aggressive challenges. In a striking passage from Mr. Phillips’ sermon from July 27, 1628, he explicitly brought up the buzzword among modern historians of this period: Arminianism. When discussing the benefits of having a child-like faith, Mr. Phillips reminded the congregation that there were some ways in which it was not positive to be like children. Winthrop recorded, "to such as children, with every winde of doctrine as children with toyes, as those that would drawe us to Arminianism, which if it were truth, we were no thing before." 18 He clearly was interested in advocating a steadfast devotion to the central truths as understood within the traditional parameters of Calvinism, even though

15 Sermon Notes, p. 180.
16 Sermon Notes, p. 181.
17 Sermon Notes, p. 181.
18 Sermon Notes, p. 188.
the newer doctrines advanced by Arminians might have all of the attraction of a tempting new toy to a curious young child. This passage is especially interesting because it suggests that the earlier references to generic opponents of the ministry may have been directed at those who they would have identified, as Mr. Phillips did, as Arminians. In a sermon preached by an unknown minister sometime during August, 1628, there was a return to the extended polemics against those designated as "wicked." The preacher on this occasion wanted to provide an outline by which the parishioners could identify their opponents. He taught:

The works which a malicious man walkes in are 1: hypocrice, that he may deceive the godly...2. Upbraidinge the godly for their holyneasse, &c...3. Open contempt of their society, & having them in abomination, as the Egyptians had the Hebrews...4: rejoicing to do them hurt, & in the afflictions which God sendeth upon them.  

It is not surprising to find a puritan minister calling attention to the fact that there were many within any given community that actively ridiculed the godly and their public professions of righteousness. Despite being a distinct minority of the population, puritans vocally sought to enforce a reformation of manners and strict observance of the sabbath which few non-puritans appreciated. Even if the puritans of Groton had been receiving taunts at earlier times, it was not until this fateful summer that the preachers thought fit to emphasize this type of opposition in their sermons. As Mr. Newton pointed out in his sermon on August 31, 1628, puritans felt themselves to be witnessing "the sad dismall troubles of the church."  

An examination of the state of affairs in England at the national level in the summer of 1628 shows that the tensions evident in Groton were probably not confined to

---

19 Sermon Notes, p. 192.
that single East Anglian parish. Although John Winthrop's sermon notebook exclusively highlighted religious concerns, these were not the only types of problems that informed citizens, such as Winthrop, were watching closely. To understand why a large number of English men and women felt that 1628 was a year of acute crisis requires us to sort through complex inter-relationships between warfare, politics and religion in the late 1620s.

The English stance towards the Thirty Years' War, which broke out on the Continent in 1618, caused grave concern among the hotter sorts of Protestants in England. As Conrad Russell pointed out, "though the war was not primarily a religious war, the majority of English Puritans thought it was." Thinking that the very existence of Protestantism was in the balance, many puritans watched with horror as the Crown vacillated in policy between alliance with Spain, then war with the huge powers of Spain and France simultaneously. It was this latter policy which brought great embarrassment as the English suffered terrible defeats at the hands of the Spanish at Cadiz and the French at the Isle of Rhe in 1627. With these terrible defeats and a sour outlook for the Protestant war effort elsewhere on the continent, many English puritans were convinced that not enough was being done to support the Protestant cause and the ultimate outcome might be the reestablishment of Catholicism throughout Europe. To this already gloomy picture of the war was added the news, in the summer of 1628, that

---

21 Sermon Notes, p. 200.
23 Russell, The Origins of the English Civil War, p. 17. Russell suggests that the bewildering foreign policy shifts called into question the competence of the King's advisors, particularly the Duke of Buckingham.
24 S.R. Gardiner, History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of Civil War, 1603-1642, vol. 6 1625-1629. (New York: AMS Press, 1965 originally published in 1897). Gardiner provides incredibly detailed descriptions of each of these campaigns. Although noted for his Whiggish outlook on history, Gardiner continues to receive high praise for his meticulous attention to detail in his narratives. See Russell, Origins of English Civil War, introduction.
the French Protestants at la Rochelle were in desperate straits. Puritans feared the worst, that the Catholic King Louis would soon utterly destroy Protestantism within his jurisdiction. This was particularly embarrassing to the English because they had pledged their support to this French Protestant community and they were unable to live up to their commitment. The reasons for that, though, belong largely to a political story.

England's poor military showing was the result of a lack of funding which sprang from political troubles between Charles I and his parliaments. Parliament well knew that one the greatest sources of its political leverage was through its control of the nation's purse. Through constitutional developments, the parliament gained the perennial right to vote certain types of taxation and subsidies that were used to finance the government. By the time of Charles I's reign, the parliaments had learned that their identification of grievances and lawmaking decisions could carry greater weight if they were made a condition to the granting of the subsidies needed to run the government. Charles I, though, unable to tolerate being told how to operate his government, dissolved his first two parliaments in 1625 and 1626 before they voted him any subsidies. Desperate for money to finance military maneuvers on the Continent, the king turned to a forced loan in 1627 rather than summon a parliament. This caused quite a furor in the countryside as many people refused to pay the loan, leading to the arrest of seventy-six members of the gentry in an effort to ward off further disobedience. Despite these highly unpopular expedients, the war efforts were still disastrous, leading to the necessity of calling parliament again in early 1628. Knowing that it was in a stronger position

---

because of the king's desperation, the parliament quickly set about the task of outlining specific grievances against the king and his ministers in their conduct of war and the raising of extra-parliamentary taxes. The result of this was the struggle to write, pass and enforce the famous Petition of Right. The immense significance of this document as a symbol of strife between the Crown and Parliament made for many tense speeches and threatening pronouncements from both sides. Parliament was prorogued, not dissolved, at the end of June amidst high tensions. Gardiner notes that "the crisis was more serious, the breach [between Charles and Parliament] more complete and hopeless, than ever before." Perhaps more ominously, the disputes were leaving the halls of Parliament and spilling onto the streets of London. On June 13, Dr. Lambe, a necromancer who was reputed to have been behind some of the Duke of Buckingham's schemes, was beaten to death by a mob in broad daylight. Lambe was not the ultimate target, though, and on August 22, 1628 the Duke of Buckingham himself met his end at the hands of an assassin's dagger. It would be an understatement to say that political passions were quite high in the summer of 1628.

Yet, religion was not divorced from the political proceedings of the summer of 1628. Some of the grievances that the Parliament identified during their sessions were religious ones, particularly relating to the disturbing trend of the advancement of anti-Calvinists in the English Church. Most of these grievances were to come out in the session of 1629 because 1628 was primarily dedicated to the Petition of Right. Several religious issues did find their way into parliamentary debates in June, the last month of

---

27 Gardiner argued that the Petition of right is second only to the Magna Carta in its significance for English constitutional development. While this is perhaps not a sentiment shared by modern revisionist historians, the importance of the political battle surrounding this document should not be underestimated.

the 1628 session. Despite receiving a favorable response from Charles concerning the Petition of Right, the Parliament still thought it fit to put forward another formal Remonstrance of grievances, this time paying more attention to religious issues. In the course of debate, Sir Edward Giles, Richard Knightley, and Sir William Beecher brought attention to a rising tide of Arminianism within England and asked for a further investigation of this trend. 29 As the Remonstrance was being considered, the Commons voted to impeach Dr. Roger Manwaring on the ninth of June. Manwaring had greatly upset the sensibilities of the Commons by preaching two sermons before the court in which he implied that anyone who refused to pay the king's forced loan would be damned. 30 Manwaring's case was an extension of the concerns that accompanied the rise of Arminianism within the church expressed in the Remonstrance. Because Arminianism seemed to rely so heavily upon court patronage, divines of that stripe were also actively supporting the very unpopular political decisions of the king and his favorite, the Duke of Buckingham.

These maneuvers within the parliament were not left unnoticed by the king. Following the prorogation of the Commons, Charles proceeded to make several movements among the episcopal bench which showed that he had no intention of backing down to the religious challenges issued from parliament. S.R. Gardiner detects a sinister streak in Charles' decisions that summer. He notes, "having the opportunity of flinging defiance in the face of the Commons, he chose to place in high positions in the church the men whom he knew to be most unpopular." 31 On July 9 Charles pardoned the recently impeached Dr. Manwaring and placed him in an influential rectory which was often a

29 Tyacke, Anti-Calvinists, pp. 133-134.
30 Hutton, The English Church from the Accession of Charles I to the Death of Anne, p. 28.
stop-over parish for future bishops. He then, within a span of a few days in mid-July, moved Bishop Neile from Durham to Winchester, Bishop Montaigne from London to Durham on his way to the Archbishopric of York, and Bishop Laud from St. David’s to London. These translations were all clearly promotions. Each of these bishops were well known for their Arminian leanings and propensity to oppose puritanism wherever they found it. Laud and Neile were made Privy Counselors in 1627 and their influence in the church and state was already looked upon with fear by the hotter sorts of Protestants in England, as was noted by some of them in the Remonstrance of the Commons from June. While Gardiner viewed these promotions with a focus on their political ramifications, we must not forget what these movements must have looked like to puritans throughout the country, particularly in a parish such as Groton. The upward mobility of these sworn enemies within the church could not have been other than an ominous cloud rising on the horizon of those who were already anxious about the future of godly religion. It would be anachronistic, however, to view the raising of Laud to London as being the central worry of the godly in England. Although he would go on to be the scourge of the puritans during the Personal Rule of the 1630s as Archbishop of Canterbury, his promotion in 1628 was not the most disturbing decision Charles made in July 1628. As Gardiner and Tyacke both call attention to the fact that “the promotion that gave the greatest offence was undoubtedly that of Richard Montague to the bishopric of Chichester.” As far as puritans were concerned, Montague was church enemy number one.

The story of the battle between Richard Montague and the puritans began in 1624. The troubles were initiated when Montague published a book in that year entitled, *A Gagg for the New Gospel? No. A New Gagg for an Old Goose*. This book, which was technically an answer to Roman Catholic criticisms of the Church of England, caused a great stir among committed Calvinists of various kinds in England. Montague claimed that the errors Catholics attributed to the English church were really just puritan exaggerations and rejected also by the English church. As Calvinist critics lined up to contest Montague's claims, he published a second controversial work in 1625 entitled *Apello Caesarem*, in which he defied the rulings of the Synod of Dort. This was too much for Parliament which, after investigation, charged him with publishing doctrines that were contrary to the official teachings of the English church. This censure, in April of 1626, was powerless because Charles had taken Montague under royal protection in July of the previous year. The York House Conference of February, 1626, showed that Montague was backed by influential figures in both church and state. These issues were not resolved when the other tensions of 1628 were included into the picture. On the day that the Remonstrance of the Commons was put to vote, June 11, 1628, a separate committee suggested additional specific charges against Montague. In spite of the continued attempts by Parliament to censure him and the clear loathing with which even moderate Calvinists, let alone more committed puritans, held his books, Charles made the decision to elevate Richard Montague to a bishopric. This news, of course, was received

alongside the other dramatic movements already described. It was simply too much to bear and vocal opposition was heard almost immediately.  

Given the dramatic tensions at the national level of the church, it is understandable that John Winthrop's sermon notebook indicated a drastic change in the tone and topics of sermons heard in the summer of 1628. Although a small parish, it was not far removed from either London or the University of Cambridge and Winthrop, at least, maintained an elaborate network of communication that kept him connected with important news. As Stephen Foster argues, one of the hallmarks of puritanism was a type of cosmopolitanism which kept the godly informed of national and international church developments. It is also likely that the parish church at Groton was not alone in its criticism of the latest turn in the affairs of the church. In December, 1628, Charles issued a declaration in which he claimed that one of his duties, as "supreme governour of the Church...[was] to conserve and maintaine the Church committed to our charge in the unity of true religion, and in the bond of peace: and not to suffer unnecessary disputations, altercations, or questions to be rysed, which may nourish faction both in the church and common-wealth." Before that point there were many disputes within the church, such as the furor over Montague's publications, but there was no general declaration issued. Perhaps the pattern of sermons seen in Groton offers some insight into why the declaration was issued in late 1628. According to Winthrop's notes, sermons in Groton were focused on practical divinity and local concerns in 1627 and the

36 Hutton, The English Church from the Accession of Charles I to the Death of Anne, p. 30.
37 Winthrop's correspondence found in The Winthrop Papers shows him either being given news or asked for what he might know from a variety of figures throughout the region and in London.
first half of 1628. All of this changed in the summer of 1628 and the formerly mild sermons became very confrontational. If other parishes throughout the realm followed a similar pattern, the peace would have been disturbed much more in late 1628 than before that point, explaining the need for a declaration restoring peace after the breakdown of civility. John Winthrop’s notes suggest that scholarly attention should be focused on the summer of 1628 as a significant turning point in the relationship between puritans and their opponents in the English church.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

John Winthrop’s sermon notebook is only a small slit through which to view the religious history of the parish of Groton, let alone larger regions such as the diocese of Norwich or even all of England. Yet, the information we are able to gather from it can be added to the other pieces of evidence that are available from different sources to provide a more complete and better developed picture of the religious life of early Stuart England. The entire enterprise of writing history largely depends upon this careful selection of evidence and the crafting of a narrative that best fits the available data. Newly discovered, or rediscovered, sources can be used in two different ways. First, they can be used to test whether theories already developed within a given historiography can be seen at work in the newly found evidence. Next, depending on what the comparison reveals, the source can be tapped to either challenge the reigning historiography, even suggesting a completely new line of inquiry, or offer further validation of existing studies. In either case, the examination creates a more fully nuanced understanding of a given period and offers more details from which further questions and projects can be planned.  

This thesis has argued, based upon the evidence in Winthrop’s notebook, that the current

Arminian/Calvinist historiography is moving in the right general direction as it questions the centrality of this theological divide, but offers a critique of the lack of focus on antipopery as a mechanism for conflict in recent scholarship.

In the introductory chapter, the origins of the Calvinist/Arminian historiographical debates were discussed, but not some of the more recent contributions and conclusions. Following Nicholas Tyacke's argument that a group of Arminians intruded upon the English church under Charles I and broke down the prevailing Calvinist consensus among English Protestants, many historians took up the question of how this intellectual takeover of the church might have occurred and caused the upheavals that it did. R.T. Kendall argues, based upon his detailed studies of theological treatises and university debates, that there was very little theological difference between Calvinists and Arminians. Peter White would later seize upon this notion and offer further evidence. ²

This is an important distinction because Tyacke's original thesis rests on the assumption that Arminianism was essentially an antithesis of Calvinistic predestinarian theology and the main threat of Arminianism resulted from this heretical intrusion upon what most English people thought of as the true faith.

With the avenue of jarring doctrinal heresy blocked off, other historians began arguing that different flashpoints were truly more decisive in the breakdown of peace. Some suggest that the true battleground concerned church order and the breakdown of sabbatarianism while other historians point out that English lay people feared that clerics

59. Todd offers a critique of drawing too many conclusions from too few sources. She also criticizes the tendency to not look with enough depth into existing sources.² R.T. Kendall, Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649, p. 113. He claims that there seemed to be no concern for theological subtleties at the time and both parties thought they were enemies and so treated one another accordingly despite their doctrinal closeness.
were encroaching too much upon the secular powers of the state. John Spurr modestly mentions that the debates between Laudians and puritans “went far deeper than the single issue of predestination.” This is in contrast to Peter Lake’s puzzlement over the “bizarre obsession with predestination” and the way in which it “is threatening to obscure what I take to be the real issue at stake in the current debate.” Lake goes on to offer that the shifting definitions of what was sacred and profane and the way in which Laudians pursued the beauty of holiness were a great offense to puritans and the cause for perpetual tensions between the groups. Similarly, Lori Anne Ferrell comments upon the “seemingly endless preoccupation” with predestination and offers advice that historians “would do well to temper their preoccupation with theologians more or less enthusiastic about predestination.” A variety of explanations exist among historians offering alternative points of tension within the English church, but many of the recent studies take it as their goal to expose the fact that predestination was not the center of the debate without necessarily replacing it with a fully developed theory of why the religious history of the 1620s and 30s was so filled with conflict. This more complex picture, spurning a single, one-size-fits-all answer, is more likely to be accurate because of the complex sets of motivational factors that always enter into momentous historical movements, but one other overarching factor has not been fully considered.

Throughout the historiographical debates, discussions of the English fear of popery has gone hand-in-hand with the studies of problems between Arminians and

---

4 Spurr, English Puritanism, p. 86.
Calvinists, but usually as an afterthought and rarely as a central focus. Even Nicholas Tyacke, whose work emphasizes how seriously English Calvinists took the threat of Arminianism in the 1620s and 30s, unwittingly provides evidence that something more than Arminianism was truly at stake. In a Parliamentary debate on January 26, 1629, Francis Rous led a Calvinist argument. Tyacke observes, "the violations, [Rous] thought, reduced to two, consisting of both a growth of Catholicism and Arminianism." Tyacke goes on to write, "Moreover he claimed that the two phenomena were biologically connected, 'for an Arminian is the spawn of a Papist.'" Tyacke also finds similarities in the commonplace book of the fourth Earl of Bedford, writing, "[Bedford] sees Arminianism leading logically to Catholicism, writing of the former as 'the little thief put into the window of the church to unlock the door.'" This type of association of Arminianism and Catholicism is strikingly evident in Tyacke's work, yet he seems not to address it. Although examples could be multiplied, only one more will be given here. Tyacke considers another debate in parliament in which "the reply of Pym and numerous other Calvinist members of the House of Commons was that...they were the true orthodox loyalists and that the new Arminian religion was both heterodox and the means of introducing Roman Catholicism to England." What was more disturbing to the Calvinists, the heterodoxy or the threat of Catholicism? While Tyacke consistently suggests that it was the heterodoxy, there seems to be good reason to seriously consider the other as being more significant.

---

6 Ferrell, Government by Polemic, pp. 8-9, 143.
Other historians are much more conscious of the relationship between the fear of popery and the threat represented by Arminian church policies. As Peter White admits, "concern about Arminianism was part of a wider concern about popery." In a very sophisticated way, Robert Clifton separates the issues of popery from that of Laudian innovations. While admitting that most English opponents of Laud may have fully known that he and his cohorts were not Roman Catholics themselves, their policies were widely held to lead down the slippery slope towards Catholicism in a way that was unacceptable to determined Calvinists. While some studies tackle the issue of English anti-popery head on, in most cases it is just an indirect admission alongside a different focus. Perhaps fears linger among historians that if they stress anti-popery too heavily in their analysis of the causes of the English Civil Wars they would be simply echoing the cruder sorts of arguments that were given by xenophobic English Protestants at the time. While a degree of caution and understanding is certainly called for from the semi-detached perspective of the modern historian, truthfulness should not be compromised in an effort to remain politically correct.

Winthrop's sermon notebook provides support for many of the above-mentioned historiographical trends. Ultimately, the notebook suggests that it was indeed popery, and not a sophisticated theological dispute about predestination, that probably lay at the heart of why the puritan preachers of Groton sounded such a shrill alarm in that parish in the summer of 1628. The very structure of the entries and their division into a larger,

---


peaceful section dedicated to issues of practical divinity and a smaller, intensely polemical warning cry towards the end of the notebook provided an excellent internal contrast of sermon styles and a chronology of a breakdown that can be shown to match up with heightened religious and political tensions throughout the country. Its maintenance of a baseline of anti-Roman Catholic feeling also provided a constant factor that transcended the divisions between the first and second part to show that it was an important enough idea to be taught during peaceful and more highly polemical atmospheres.

The sermons found in the first two-thirds of the notebook corroborate the arguments that suggest that there was little separating Calvinists and Arminians in their theology. In the second chapter, we examined the way in which the early sermons sought to lay out basic ‘practical’ instructions for living the Christian life. These instructions often centered on moral precepts and probably were developed out of a great fear of the antinomianism that was known to be possible among those who held a strict creedal predestinarian position. Some strict Calvinists understood election as a state in which those chosen by God were unable to be damned regardless of their actions in their earthly lives and how horrible they might be. The ministers at Groton fought against this by stressing a doctrine of experimental predestination, discussed in the third chapter, which used moral actions as the primary basis for determining the status of one’s soul to election or reprobation. This effectively curtailed the antinomian tendencies that could accompany a creedal predestinarian position. This strain of preaching, though, developed great fears concerning election in certain members of the parish. As the fourth chapter explained, the ministers devoted attention to comforting the consciences that may have
been afflicted by the teaching of experimental predestination if they feared that they were not among the saints who would be enjoying eternal life in heaven. Throughout these types of teaching, the ministers greatly stressed the responsibility on the part of their hearers to *put into practice* the teachings that they heard from the pulpit. They were encouraged to *believe* the message of salvation. These imperatives were presented to the parish in such a way that suggested that they could and should do these things through an act of their own will. This makes perfect sense from the practical standpoint of motivating listeners and inspiring specific actions. It does not, however, do a good job of creating a distinct boundary between Calvinist and Arminian theologies of grace.

Arminian doctrine was predestinarian, seeing God as offering a free gift of eternal life to certain, pre-chosen people. Arminian theologians did emphasize, however, that the believer had a responsibility to accept the gift through faith. This notion has been usefully summarized as a gift exchange. In such an exchange, something freely given becomes no less of a gift because the recipient reaches out his hand to receive it. In this way, Arminians often stressed the need to actively *put into practice* the moral teachings of the church and *believe* the message of salvation. As is suggested through the italicization, the teachings relating to grace and the practical need to work out one’s salvation with fear and trembling within this Calvinist’s sermon notebook are, at times, indistinguishable from Arminian teachings.

The sixth chapter documented the rise of highly critical and polemical materials in the sermons heard in Groton in late 1628. With great passion, the ministers attacked a group of people that they saw as enemies to the faith who were attempting to destroy their ministry. The sermons focused less on providing instruction to those present and
began to be polemical blasts against groups obviously understood to stand outside of the boundaries of those the ministers were addressing. The first grouping of sermons followed patterns that were common to most known preachers throughout England such as avoiding overt controversy and providing practical instructions from the pulpit. The later sermons, however, shed these conventions of English preaching and entered boldly into disputed topics of theology and ecclesiology. As discussed in the sixth chapter, the timing of these attacks in the sermon notebook suggest that they were related to debates that were raging at the national level. Despite the existence of similar debates at earlier times (some ranging back to the later years of the reign of James I), it was not until the highly charged summer of 1628 that the sermons of Groton acknowledged or participated in these struggles. Perhaps the ministers in Groton felt that it was necessary to allow the events occurring at the universities, Parliament, or within the episcopal bench to spill over into their sermons as they saw the scales clearly tipping quickly against puritans within the English church. It is clear that, whatever the reasons for the change might have been, the small group of sermons found near the end of John Winthrop's notebook provide a distinct contrast from those heard in the larger initial section.

Little emphasis was given to practical divinity as the notebook gave way to polemics in its second portion, but a bridge still remained between the two sections of the notebook: anti-popery. The fifth chapter discussed the role of anti-popery in English Protestant thought and the tendency among puritans to place more weight on anti-popery than many of their fellow members of the English church. The chapter also considered

12 Patrick Collinson, *Godly people: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism*, (London: The Hambledon Press, 1983), p. 495. Collinson notes that most preachers throughout England preached "little that was sensational or political, little that was likely to fall foul of ecclesiastical censorship. Apparently the themes of moral and practical divinity predominated."
evidence from Winthrop's notebook that suggest that the sermons heard in Groton fell into line with this puritan model. Another important aspect of the use of anti-papal rhetoric in the sermons at Groton is the fact that it can be found throughout the notebook, and not only in the first or second sections. This is in direct contrast with the preachers' discussions of predestination or practical morality, which were confined largely to the opening section of the notebook. Anti-papal ideology, then, was a message that was considered appropriate and necessary to maintain through relative peace and in the midst of theological conflict.

This continuation of anti-popery and turn away from predestinarian focus within the notebook supports the historiography that argues against the preeminence of Calvinist/Arminian predestinarian debates in the breakdown of religious peace before the English Civil Wars. If differing doctrines of grace and predestination were truly at stake, one would expect to see more emphasis on orthodox Calvinist interpretations of these concepts and a warning against the danger of innovative ideas along these lines within the notebook as the controversy begins and expands. Instead of that, the bitter polemics were couched within a context of anti-papal rhetoric and even included some directly anti-Roman material in the attacks themselves. Arminians were directly called out as being enemies, but as noted above, it is essential to distinguish what the label of Arminianism would have incorporated in the English mind. The sermons did not include any implications that an Arminian notion of free will was what made them dangerous. There was, however, a sense of fear within the sermons that a return to Roman Catholicism was imminent in the face of Protestant collapse. This evidence found at the parish level clearly supports those who argue for the importance of anti-popery in the breakdown of
Even further, it suggests that the issue of anti-popery deserves a more conspicuous presence in the historiography of this period if more parishes responded to the Arminian advance as Groton did.

While seeking to contribute to the ongoing historiography of the breakdown of peace in the build up to the English Civil Wars, this study also has implications for other projects, particularly those relating to gaining insight into John Winthrop’s motivations as he made the critical decision to leave for New England in 1629. Many of Winthrop’s biographers, notably Richard Dunn, seemed to imply that Winthrop’s decision to emigrate was a rather spur of the moment decision made in the same year that he left. The notebook says nothing of America, nor does it betray a sense that Winthrop is considering moving there. However, it does contain evidence that Winthrop was hearing discouraging sermons about the state of the English nation and church beginning earnestly in the summer of 1628. The sermon notebook cuts off by the fall of 1628 because Winthrop was in London at that time working in the Court of Wards and Liveries. Winthrop would have certainly continued to seek out Puritan preaching while at the capital. It is very reasonable to suspect that many of the city's puritan preachers might have vocally expressed grave concerns about the church as their new bishop,

---

13 The examination of parish level evidence will also serve to offset the large number of studies devoted to studying the breakdown at a national level only and focusing on university disputations, published sermons and tracts, and parliamentary debates. While these studies may illumine why many educated people may have responded to the changing religious climate in the way that they did, these studies prove to be less useful for describing how and why common English men and women responded to the rise of Arminianism.

14 Richard S. Dunn, "John Winthrop Writes his Journal," WMQ, 41, (1984), p. 188. Dunn writes that when Winthrop boarded the Arbella he "had never participated in overseas colonization and [his] interest in New England was extremely recent." He goes on to say in passing that "when the king broke completely with his Puritan critics in Parliament in March 1629, Winthrop decided to emigrate to America."
William Laud, began to operate in the diocese. Thus, by the time Charles broke with the parliament in March 1629, Winthrop would have been exposed to nearly nine months of passionate preaching from puritan pulpits warning of the impending dangers to England based upon religious grounds. Dunn's reconstruction, giving too much priority to political motivation, does not account for the possibility that the seeds of discontent leading to emigration were planted nearly one year prior to what was formerly thought.

John Winthrop's sermon notebook, lying unused for so many years, is much like a newly unearthed archeological site. Careful study of it will facilitate its incorporation into the body of available evidence to historians of early Stuart England and will allow for a more detailed understanding of this pivotal era of English history. This thesis begins that process by relating the contents of the notebook to current historiographical trends as well as identifying other areas of inquiry that could be enlightened by this source. The fruitfulness of this source for the study of a single parish and the interconnections that can be made to descriptions of the national church also point to the need to search out new ways of understanding and incorporating the histories of localities within larger frameworks of historical argument.

\footnote{This, of course, recognizing that some may have prudently remained quiet for fear of disciplinary action from their new bishop.}
Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


