

# *Godly Women in Early Modern England: Puritanism and Gender*

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## I

This paper argues that Puritanism and gender interacted in dialectic fashion in seventeenth-century England and changed one another significantly as a result of that interaction.<sup>1</sup> Such Puritan strategies as reliance on the experience of the individual, extensive use of literacy, and infusion of spiritual issues into all activities deeply affected women's spirituality and their conventional roles in the community. At the same time, changes in the traditional practices of gender altered the Puritan experience. Gender gave new reality to the Puritan emphasis on spiritual egalitarianism, the Puritan practice of godly communion and counsel, and the development of lay-clerical relationships. From the interaction between Puritanism and gender, new forms of reciprocity and alternative sources of authority emerged among the godly.

The term 'Puritan' was highly charged in the seventeenth century and remains controversial to this day. Within the last decade, historiography has emphasised the doctrinal consensus in English Protestant thought before the rise of Arminianism in the 1630s.<sup>2</sup> As pre-revolutionary Puritans have been placed more firmly within the Church, however, historians continue to debate a number of related and sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> I am much indebted to the theoretical arguments of Joan Wallach Scott, 'On language, gender, and working-class history', in her *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York 1988, ch. iii. Scott sees gender 'in the construction of social and political meaning': p. 55. See also Susan Cahn, *Industry of Devotion: the transformation of women's work in England, 1500-1600*, New York 1987, 9. Although I have serious qualifications about Cahn's study, I find her notion of a 'dialectical interaction of ideology and material conditions' a useful model.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640*, Oxford 1987; Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English society 1559-1625*, Oxford 1982.

intractable issues—how broadly to apply the label of Puritanism, the merit of identifying Puritans rather than Puritanism, the distinctions between a Puritan movement and a Puritan style of piety. Scholars who reject Puritanism on methodological or philosophical grounds often prefer such phrases as ‘the godly’ or ‘godliness’ to distinguish the ‘hotter sort of Protestants’ from the rest of the visible Church.<sup>3</sup>

Historians who continue to find validity in the use of the term ‘Puritanism’ (or ‘Puritan experience’, or ‘Puritan mentality’) increasingly define the phenomenon in terms of its experiential and spiritual nature. Most of the Puritan laity of early Stuart England, including the godly women discussed in this article, conformed to the Prayer Book. The essence of their Puritanism is to be found in their religious fervour and their ‘doctrine of daily practice’;<sup>4</sup> in their personal encounters with God through Scriptures or through preaching as ‘an instrument of reform’.<sup>5</sup> In Peter Lake’s terms, Puritanism created an ‘internal spiritual dynamic’ applied to the external world.<sup>6</sup> Personal experience of God was critical if the individual believer was to achieve assurance or a sense of election; godliness in turn implied practice, those good works and that daily behaviour which reflected membership of the elect. This spiritual core provided the cohesive, unifying basis of Puritanism, and according to Paul Seaver, the result was ‘a common religious idiom’, a mentality that crossed lines of class and gender.<sup>7</sup>

Contemporaries used the term ‘Puritan’ pejoratively, and those who might have been so branded preferred to describe and count themselves

<sup>3</sup> For recent examples of the debate, see Paul Christianson, ‘Reformers and the Church of England under Elizabeth I and the early Stuarts’, this *JOURNAL* xxxi (1980), 463–82; Patrick Collinson, ‘A comment: concerning the name Puritan’, *idem*, 483–8; Peter Lake, ‘Puritan identities’, *idem*, xxxv (1984), 112–23; G. E. Aylmer, ‘Collective mentalities in mid-seventeenth century England: I. The Puritan outlook’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth ser. xxxvi (1986), 1–25; John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan attitudes towards reason, learning and education, 1560–1640*, Cambridge 1986, ch. i. I have also found helpful an unpublished paper by Peter Lake, ‘Defining Puritanism – again?’, presented at the Conference on Puritanism, Millersville University, Millersville, PA, 4 April 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 3, 18. Morgan prefers the term ‘Puritan’ to ‘Puritanism’, a distinction difficult to maintain since he recognises the existence of a ‘group mentality’: p. 17. See also Gordon E. Rupp, ‘A devotion of rapture in English Puritanism’, in R. B. Knox (ed.), *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent: essays in honour of Geoffrey Nuttall*, London 1977.

<sup>5</sup> Brian G. Armstrong, ‘Puritan spirituality: the tension of bible and experience’, in E. Rozanne Elder (ed.), *The Roots of the Modern Christian Tradition*, Kalamazoo 1984, 242–5; William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: the coming of revolution in an English county*, Cambridge 1983, 93. Cf. John Booty, ‘Joseph Hall, *The Arte of Divine Mediation*, and Anglican Spirituality’, in Elder, *Roots of Modern Christian Tradition*. Booty sees Anglican spirituality rooted in corporate worship and the Book of Common Prayer: see esp. p. 219.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*, Cambridge 1982, 282.

<sup>7</sup> Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington’s World: a Puritan artisan in seventeenth-century London*, Stanford 1985, 183–4. For the experiential or ‘experimental’ nature of assurance see R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Oxford 1979, esp. pp. 6–9; Kendall, however, finds the term Puritan ‘not very useful’.

among the godly or God's saints, members of the elect, 'professors' seeking salvation. Yet the godly might well have approved recent attempts at definition, for their own testimony reinforces current historiography. In his autobiography, Bulstrode Whitelocke responded to critics who had censured his mother 'for being too much of the persuasion of the Puritane'. Whitelocke points to her encounters with the Lord: 'Certainly she feared God truly, and if that be to be a Puritan, she was so.' Elsewhere he reasons 'the more purity you practice, the more you will please the pure God', here linking his mother's Puritanism with her daily behaviour, that is, her godliness.<sup>8</sup> When Sir Robert Harley sympathetically defined the "Character" of a Puritan' in 1621, he too focused on behaviour. First and foremost, 'A P[uritan] Is he that desieth to practise what others profess.' Moreover, Harley anchored Puritan behaviour in Scripture, for the Puritan 'dares do nothinge in the wor[ship] of God or course of his life, but whatt gods worde warra[n]ts hym'.<sup>9</sup> His wife, Lady Brilliana, implicitly and explicitly demonstrates throughout her rich correspondence her strong reliance on her own experience to shape her understanding of God and godliness. In 1638 she urged the 'priuet duties' of prayer and devotional readings upon her son Edward, then at Oxford: 'Experimentally, I may say that priuet prayer is one of the beest meanes to keepe the hart cloos with God.' Later in 1642, as her own health and the national political situation deteriorated, she continued to draw on her own experiences: 'I can experimentally say, that the Lord will sheawe most mercy, when we stand in most need of it.'<sup>10</sup>

If intense spirituality dominated the Puritan's existence, it ought also to provide the framework for an examination of the interaction between Puritanism and gender. The Puritan practised experiential religion, sought the assurance of salvation, and practised godly behaviour – activities accessible to women, especially literate women. Moreover, Puritanism had a particular appeal for women. Functioning in a society that both prized and expected female piety, and denied the status of the Puritan divine, women might seek the greater status of Puritan saint. With but a few notable exceptions, however, historians have shown little interest in exploring individual spirituality as a means of understanding gender (that is, the socially constructed roles for men and women and the

<sup>8</sup> BL, Add. ms 53, 726, fos 59r, 7r. Whitelocke puts forward their grandmother as a model for his own daughters.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from Jacqueline Eales, 'Sir Robert Harley, K.B., (1579–1656) and the "character" of a Puritan', *The British Library Journal* xv (1989), 150. Eales provides an edited version of the document (pp. 150–2) and points out that with his sympathetic portrait, Harley was inverting the popular literary form of satirical characterisation (p. 136). For discussion of 'character literature' in relationship to Puritanism, see Collinson, 'A comment', 486–7.

<sup>10</sup> *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley*, ed. Thomas Taylor Lewis (Camden Society, 1st ser. repr. 1968), no. 58, pp. 15, 178; Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads: the Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the outbreak of the English Civil War*, Cambridge 1990, 51–2.

exercise of authority between men and women). Instead they have been more concerned to examine the family as the key to understanding gender relations.<sup>11</sup>

It is not difficult to understand why a rich body of scholarship has developed on the nature of patriarchy within the Puritan (or Protestant) family. The family, after all, was the main arena within which women performed their daily activities, and increasingly after 1590, as the state failed to create a godly Church, Puritan divines emphasised the importance of the family and household religion (the spiritualised household) as a means of achieving godly behaviour.<sup>12</sup> Moreover the family has been all the more attractive to historians because of the wealth of accessible source materials, numerous sermons and advice books, written mostly by Puritan divines, setting forth prescribed forms of behaviour for both men and women.

We know that Puritan divines entirely agreed with their fellow Protestants as well as their Catholic predecessors in describing the family in patriarchal language and endowing the good wife with conventional female virtues. The husband was 'head' to the wife and head of the spiritualised household, which practised and taught religious piety. As the cleric John Lyster explained in a traditional analogy, 'euen as the congregation is in subiection unto Christ, likewise let the wiues be in subiection unto their husbands in all thinges'.<sup>13</sup> Although the wife retained the theoretical right to disobey the husband if his command violated God's law, this qualification was often submerged or de-emphasised in patriarchal rhetoric. William Gouge, in his widely read *Of domesticall duties*, even argued that the husband 'is as a Priest vnto his wife, and ought to be her mouth to God when they two are together'.<sup>14</sup> Richard Greenham, another Puritan divine, discounted all other gifts a wife might have, 'yet not being subject to her husband they are nothing... if shee be not obedient she cannot be saued'.<sup>15</sup> The virtues demanded in such circumstances follow logically: a godly woman should be pious, humble, patient, submissive, and often silent. In short, the language calls for the suppression of individual identity. Samuel Clarke praised the godly matron, Lady Alice Lucy, because in marrying 'She knew that her taking of a *second self*, was a self-denying work; and therefore she resigned both her *reason* and her *will* unto her *Head* and *Husband*'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For one of the few exceptions, see Peter Lake, 'Feminine piety and personal potency: the "emancipation" of Mrs Jane Ratcliffe', *The Seventeenth Century* ii (1987), 143–65. Lake provides a thoughtful study of gender in the context of Puritan spirituality.

<sup>12</sup> Seaver, *Wallington's World*, 188; Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 169.

<sup>13</sup> John Lyster, *A rule how to bring up children*, London 1588, 27v.

<sup>14</sup> William Gouge, *Of domesticall duties*, London 1622, 235.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Greenham, *The Workes of the Reverend Richard Greenham*, ed. H[enry] H[olland], London 1612, 742.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this later age*, London 1683, ii. 140.

The problem, of course, is to judge whether such language was prescriptive or descriptive, and to reconcile such sources with contradictory evidence which suggests that the spiritualised household elevated the importance of motherhood, fostered affectionate companionate marriages, and enhanced the moral authority of women in the family. Brilliana Harley seems to have anticipated her own future when, still single, she described marriage as ‘the Holiest kind of companie in all the world... as Each bee made privie to [the] others mind will and purpose in all things’.<sup>17</sup> The Puritan divines themselves stressed reciprocity as well as patriarchy in their writing. Gouge saw man and wife so conjoined that ‘their hearts may be as one, knit together by a true, spirituall, matrimoniall love’;<sup>18</sup> and Greenham remarked that wives must be honoured ‘albeit the weaker vessels, because they be heires of the same grace with vs’.<sup>19</sup> Moving from social theory to social practice, the historian encounters some instances of harsh patriarchy – for example, husbands using property or children to punish recalcitrant wives – but more frequent evidence of warm and loving relationships.<sup>20</sup>

The result of such ambiguity is a contentious historiography which has helped us to understand the origins of the spiritualised household, its relationship to Puritan social theory, and the diversity of social practice.<sup>21</sup> It seems likely that all sides in the historiographical debate reflect a part of the truth. Warm and loving marriages did not preclude the practice of

<sup>17</sup> ‘The Commonplace Book of Brilliana Harley’, Nottingham University Library, Portland ms, London Collection, fo. 176r.

<sup>18</sup> Gouge, *Of domesticall duties*, 236. To appease irate female parishioners, Gouge sought to emphasise mutual responsibilities and duties for husband and wife. Rather than extract full superiority, the husband ought to make his wife ‘a ioynt Governor of the family with himselfe’: ‘The epistle dedicatory’, *ibid.* <sup>19</sup> Greenham, *The Workes*, 742.

<sup>20</sup> In 1603, George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland, withheld funds from his wife Margaret, who was reduced to dependency on friends. Clifford also conveyed all his lands outside of jointure away from their only surviving child Anne: Kendal Record Office, WD/Hoth/Box 44. When in 1632, Lady Lucy Jervoise wanted her sons to attend Oxford, she felt compelled to beseech her husband ‘you doe not keepe them bake because t[he]y are mine but showe them some loue because t[he]y are yours’: Hampshire Record Office, Jervoise ms of Herriard Park, 44M69, Box E 77, 16 May 1632. For affectionate marriages between godly ‘yoke fellows’, see John Penry’s final testimony ‘of my love to so deare a sister and so lovinge a wife’: BL, Add. ms 48,064, fo. 19r; Lady Elizabeth Lucy’s account of her mother-in-law: Folger Library, V.a. 166, fo. 23; the correspondence of Rebecca Sherfield: Hampshire Record Office, Sherfield Papers, 44M69, L 31; William Waller’s remarks on his three wives: William Waller, *Divine Meditations upon severall occasions*, London 1839; and the reaction of Lady Joan Barrington to the death of her husband Sir Francis: *Barrington Family Letters 1628–1632*, ed. Arthur Searle (Camden Series, 4th ser. 1983), no. 28 *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, New York 1988, ch. iii, surveys the current state of the historiography. See also Diane Willen, ‘Women and religion in early modern England’, in Sherrin Marshall (ed.), *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: private and public worlds*, Bloomington 1989, 148 and nn. 55–8. For a recent analysis of the complexities and ambiguities of gender relations, see Linda Pollock, ‘“Teach her to live under obedience”: the making of women in the upper ranks of early modern England’, *Continuity and Change* iv (1989), 231–58.

patriarchy, all the more so because women themselves internalised society's teachings about proper gender roles, which legitimised male authority. Lucy Hutchinson, author of a remarkable laudatory biography of her husband, wrote after the Civil War to her daughter about the 'ignorance and weaknesse of iudgement (which in most knowing woemen is inferior to the masculine understanding of men)'.<sup>22</sup> During the 1620s, in affectionate letters to her husband Henry, Rebecca Sherfield signed herself as the traditional 'louing and obedient wife'.<sup>23</sup> Lady Brilliana Harley, confident in her husband's affection and strong in her own opinions, was so involved in her sons' education (and her husband apparently so preoccupied with cheese) that her brother complained to Sir Robert 'in your howse the order of things is inverted'.<sup>24</sup> None the less, Lady Harley never overtly challenged the patriarchal assumptions of her faith. To her son at Oxford she confided in 1640; 'I pray god, if euer you have a wife, she may be of a meeke and quiet spirit.' And one year later, in May 1641, although she wished to join her husband in London, she assured him 'what you shall say is best I shall most gladly do'.<sup>25</sup> (Ironically, her deference to Sir Robert's opinion left her at their country estate in Brampton in 1643 – there to assume the role of the formidable godly matron withstanding a royalist siege.)

Given patriarchy in the family, the society, and the Church, both Catholic and Protestant women traditionally used religion as one of the few avenues open to them to provide meaning in their lives. The rewards of piety had always included a sense of self-worth and the opportunity for spiritual self-expression; religion also offered the means to cope with the perils of childbirth and, through Christian humanism, enhanced esteem for motherhood. These rewards crossed denominational boundaries.<sup>26</sup> Puritanism, however, now offered women additional advantages and opportunities. Peter Lake has written about Mrs Jane Ratcliffe, matron of Chester, who integrated and transformed conventional female virtues into a 'cult of personal godliness'. Lake's telling analysis demonstrates how Ratcliffe used godliness 'as a source of personal potency or charisma'.<sup>27</sup> Not all godly matrons were as charismatic as Mrs Ratcliffe,

<sup>22</sup> Lucy Hutchinson, *On the Principles of the Christian Religion; addressed to her daughter; and on Theology*, London 1817, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Hampshire Record Office, Sherfield Papers, 44M69, L 31/3.

<sup>24</sup> BL, Loan 29/172, fo. 172v.

<sup>25</sup> *Letters of Brilliana Harley*, 85; BL, Loan 29/72, letter of 17 May 1641 and subsequent letters.

<sup>26</sup> Willen, 'Women and religion', 140 esp. n. 2 for bibliography on this issue. For recent discussions which show how women used religion in a liberating way to assert control over their lives, see Ellen Macek, 'The emergence of feminine spirituality in *The Book of Martyr*', *the Sixteenth Century Journal* xix (1988), 63–80; Retha M. Warnicke, 'Lady Mildmay's journal: a study in autobiography and meditation in Reformation England', *ibid.* xx (1989), 68; Marilyn J. Westerkamp, 'Anne Hutchinson, sectarian mysticism, and the Puritan order', *Church History* lix (1990), 482–96.

<sup>27</sup> Lake, 'Feminine piety', 155, 157.

but a number of them similarly managed to transform, or perhaps transcend, conventional norms of gender.

Puritan divines themselves understood that saintliness or godliness created a spiritual context in which conventional restrictions on gender roles could not and should not be enforced. The Puritan preacher Thomas Gataker observed, 'the same common saluation is propounded to both Sexes: the same means of attayning it are likewise common to either'.<sup>28</sup> The requirements of godly behaviour – rigorous study of Scriptures, daily prayer, reliance on preaching, strict observance of the Sabbath, religious instruction of children, good works, fellowship and counsel within the godly community – were both obligation and privilege, the means to feel and to reflect assurance, and they must therefore be accessible equally to men and women. Stephen Gere, another godly cleric, spoke against the 'blasphemy of those Papists and Atheists, that cannot endure Women should meddle with the Scriptures'. In Gere's writings women are clearly the weaker vessel until grace and salvation are discussed, at which point in his text the sexes become rather interchangeable, for 'grace makes men and women excell'.<sup>29</sup> With assurance of election, women could take on new attributes, strengths such as 'sharpnes of apprehension and soundnes of iudgement' not ordinarily granted their gender.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, elect women were closer to males on other grounds. Given the Puritans' tendency to emphasise sin, feminine frailty and weakness lost its uniqueness and became submerged in the general sinfulness of mankind.<sup>31</sup>

But if Puritanism in some sense transcended gender, gender in turn also affected Puritanism. Women's spirituality developed its own characteristic features in the godly community. Puritans had a special term for those godly women assured of salvation. They were 'ladies elect', the object of laudatory book dedications, the subject of eulogies and funeral sermons, role models worthy of praise and emulation. Thomas Gataker explained that 'examples of the weaker Sex' achieving godliness were all 'the more effectuall; for that, as they sham[e] men, if they come short of such, so they giue women incouragement'.<sup>32</sup> Peter Lake argues that these ladies elect created 'a certain female solidarity in godliness, a sisterhood in Christ'. With limited access to the public arena, women's zeal was all the

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Gataker, *Pauls Desire of Dissolution, and Deaths Advantage. A Sermon Preached at the Funerall of that right vertuous and religious Gentlewoman Mrs Rebekka Crisp*, London 1620 [sig. A<sub>4</sub>r].

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Gere, *The Ornament of Women, Or, A description of the true excellency of Women*, London 1639, 2, 20. See also Samuel Torshell, *The woman's glory. A treatise asserting the due honour of that sexe*, London 1645, 11, 210ff.

<sup>30</sup> Gataker, *Pauls Desire of Dissolution*, sig. B<sub>1</sub>v.

<sup>31</sup> In a funeral sermon for Lady Frances Roberts, Hannibal Gamon argued the case both ways. On the one hand, sin was universal: 'By nature then both sexes are alike faultie'. On the other, since women were the weaker vessel 'by so much the combat she hath, is more difficult, and the victory she gets, more commendable': Hannibal Gamon, *The Praise of a Godly Woman*, London 1627, 3-4. <sup>32</sup> Gataker, *Pauls Desire of Dissolution* [sig. A<sub>4</sub>r].

more narrowly focused and all the more fervent.<sup>33</sup> Patrick Collinson has drawn attention to another feature of women's godliness: 'the spiritually intimate dealings – one is tempted to call them affairs – between women of the leisured classes and certain popular and pastorally gifted divines'.<sup>34</sup>

In some respects gender reinforced the medieval features of Puritanism. Collinson sees similarities between godly matrons and pre-Reformation women who depended upon their confessors. We can go even further and note how the piety of godly women resembled styles of devotion practised by nuns. Like Catholic nuns, godly women were seen and sometimes saw themselves as brides of Christ; they performed good works associated with nuns in the early modern period, especially religious instruction and acts of medical charity; some of them achieved special status in the community, not unlike Catholic 'holy women'; and in the 'special pastoral attention' which they sought and received, they again resembled female religious orders.<sup>35</sup> But ultimately godly women did more than develop their own form of spirituality. Their influence transcended the personal or private sphere, marked the lay Puritan community, and affected Puritan practical divinity.

## II

The Puritan sought God through Scriptures, prayer, meditation and sermons. It was a rigorous and demanding process. Sin was inescapable and corrupted not only the individual, but the collective nation, causing affliction both in the family and the state. Even when assurance was attained – and often this occurred, if at all, only after years of anxiety – the struggle against sin and AntiChrist must continue, for 'every day must have a dayes increase in godlinesse'.<sup>36</sup> Moving through such a spiritual

<sup>33</sup> Lake, 'Feminine piety', 158–9.

<sup>34</sup> Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, 75. Collinson here is speaking of Protestant women but the phenomenon he describes is most prevalent in the godly community.

<sup>35</sup> For the 'female style of piety' practised by convent nuns, see Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: women and morals in Reformation Augsburg*, Oxford 1989, ch. vi, esp. pp. 240–2. Roper argues that the early Reformation 'ruptured' this form of religiosity but leaves open the question of whether Protestant women may subsequently have been able to reconstruct 'a female-centred piety': p. 265. I intend to discuss the whole question of religious self-imagery in a forthcoming study. Puritan clergy were especially fond of using bridal imagery. For a striking example, see *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, ed. Andrew A. Bonar, Edinburgh 1891. Rutherford applied the image to males as well, but used it most consistently throughout his extensive correspondence with women. Margaret Clifford explained to her daughter that they would suffer discontent, with or without a husband, 'ontille we enjoy that most blesset howsbant Jesus Christ': Kendal Record Office, WD/Hot/Box 44, letter of 29 Jan. [1616], fo. 3. For medieval use of bridal imagery, see Carolyn Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the religious significance of food to medieval women*, Berkeley 1987, 28, 290–1; idem, *Jesus as Mother: studies in the spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley 1982, ch. iv; Roper, *The Holy Household*, 206.

<sup>36</sup> Greenham, *Workes*, 689.

world, individual believers could experience either a sense of joy or a sense of despair, depending on their spiritual progress and their disposition. It is hardly surprising that they sometimes sought out select clergy who might serve their intellectual and emotional needs and counsel them throughout their spiritual journey. Significantly, such relationships were often reciprocal. Not only did clergy benefit from the patronage and protection that their lay friends in the ranks of the gentry could offer, but they too might also find inspiration and comfort in these friendships.

Puritanism then was not only experiential but also pastoral in nature, a combination which created ambiguities. On the one hand, the individual believer was to confront God directly; on the other, the minister retained some of the authority of the Catholic priest, mediating God's word and guiding the spiritual development of individual believers. As Richard Greenham explained, 'when the Lord determineth to beget soules, he appointeth spirituall fathers fit and able for that purpose'. Preaching was indispensable. When a faithful minister sincerely and purely preached God's word, 'it is all one as if the lord himself dwelt personally among us'. Significantly, Greenham believed that not only should the minister preach publicly, he should also attend his parishioners in their home and instruct them privately. Either gently and lovingly, or if necessary, with rebukes, the minister must 'spurre forward the godly'. He was the physician of their souls and they, in turn, owed him respect, obedience, and even fear.<sup>37</sup>

Despite this exalted view, as Paul Seaver reminds us, the Puritans were in fact 'not a priest-ridden people'. A number of factors conspired to prevent the clergy, significant as they were, from intimidating the laity in general, or the female laity specifically. The strong patriarchal emphasis in their own writings helped keep the clergy in check, for the husband and father as head of household religion remained central to Puritan teachings.<sup>38</sup> The superior social position of the gentry also counted for much in the hierarchal society of Stuart England, and here class allowed godly women to exert the authority that their gender alone would deny them. Finally the very nature of the Protestant creed with its emphasis on the individual's interaction with Scripture kept the clergy in their place, just as it ensured the importance of that place.

Godly women of the elite classes, often widowed, acted as patrons, benefactors and protectors of the clergy. In the Elizabethan period, Lady Anne Bacon probably financed some of the writings of John Field, and she presented a number of Puritans to livings.<sup>39</sup> Both Lady Bacon and her

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 357, 341, 352, 344-5, 877, 349, 353. For a discussion of the pastoral side of Puritanism, see Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 10, 13, 81-6, 94, 305; Claire Cross, *Church and People 1450-1660: the triumph of the laity in the English Church*, London 1976, 161. For the position of the minister, see Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, 89-90, 156.

<sup>38</sup> Seaver, *Wallington's World*, 187-8.

<sup>39</sup> Richard L. Greaves, 'Foundation builders: the role of women in early English nonconformity', in Richard L. Greaves (ed.) *Triumph over Silence: women in Protestant history*, Westport 1985, 70-81; Cross, *Church and People*, 160.

sister, Lady Elizabeth Russell, sought to influence their brother-in-law, William Cecil (and Lady Russell also appealed to her nephew Robert Cecil) on behalf of godly candidates.<sup>40</sup> Anne Dudley, dowager countess of Warwick, and Katherine Hastings, dowager countess of Huntingdon, also promoted the appointment of Puritans.<sup>41</sup> Later, in the Stuart period, the cleric John Davenport turned to Lady Mary Vere, an elect lady, to exert influence with her brother-in-law, Secretary of State Sir Edward Conway; the matriarch Lady Joan Barrington gave financial support out of her household accounts to a number of Puritan divines and was asked to intervene with the earl of Warwick on behalf of ecclesiastical candidates; Lady Jane Barnardiston provided financial support to the Feoffees for Impropriations and, through an intermediary, donated £150 for the efforts at reconciliation among continental Protestants, a cause which also won the support of Lady Anne Finch Waller.<sup>42</sup> Lady Lucy Jervoise corresponded with one of Lord Conway's secretaries to obtain church patronage in Hampshire and was not deterred when her initial suit failed to bring results.<sup>43</sup> Lady Constance Lucy established a lectureship to promote religious instruction of the poor.<sup>44</sup> Through such means, godly women acted as members of the elite, using their status in society to reinforce their religious convictions.

If class or status seems to provide an adequate explanation for patronage, gender would seem to explain the strong pastoral relationships that developed between godly women and Puritan divines. The evidence is impressionistic but consistent. Women turned to the clergy, just as men did, to facilitate assurance, cope with grief and bereavement, prepare for death, but they were much more likely than men to develop strong, perhaps intense, and long-lasting relationships with their clergy. Eric Richardson suggests that 'certain women, at least, were more willing than men to tolerate spiritual dependence upon a pastor', a view which other historians share, but which does not do justice to the variety of ways in which gender operated.<sup>45</sup> Emotionally or intellectually satisfying relation-

<sup>40</sup> Greaves, 'Foundation builders', 81; Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, London 1967, 443.

<sup>41</sup> Joan B. Goldsmith, 'All the Queen's Women: the changing place and perception of aristocratic women in Elizabethan England, 1558–1620', unpubl. PhD diss., Northwestern 1987, 129; *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic* (hereinafter *CSPD*), ii, 609.

<sup>42</sup> Greaves, 'Foundation builders', 79–81. For Barrington, see Essex Record Office, D/DBa, A 15 and *Barrington Family Letters*, 220–1. For Barnardiston and Waller, see PRO, SP 16/351/100, fo. 260r, SP 16/463/67 (*CSPD*, 1640, 568–70). Lady Vere also promoted the appointment of James Ussher as archbishop of Armagh; see his letter of thanks: BL, Add. ms 4274, fo. 32r.

<sup>43</sup> Hampshire Record Office, Jervoise ms of Herriard Park, 44M69, Box E 76, letter to Mr William Wilde, dated only 24 April. <sup>44</sup> Folger Library, V.a, 166, fo. 7.

<sup>45</sup> R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England: a regional study of the diocese of Chester to 1642*, Manchester 1972, 111. Also Patrick Collinson, 'The role of women in the English Reformation illustrated by the life and friendships of Anne Locke', in *Godly People: essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism*, London 1983, 275. Cf. Willen, 'Women and religion', 151.

ships with clergy were one of the few legitimate male–female friendships open to respectable married women. Some women, such as Lady Margaret Hoby, emotionally dependent on her chaplain Richard Rhodes, perhaps sought to compensate for a less than satisfactory marriage, while others, like Mrs Anne Busbridge, appreciated spiritual counsel during the difficult days of pregnancy.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, intellectual exchange and pastoral approval could validate the spiritual experiences of women, either compensating for their lack of book learning and formal training or allowing a meaningful amount of self-education.<sup>47</sup> Frank and mutual exchange also provided an avenue for women to influence clergy and thereby indirectly affect a larger community. One twenty-three-year-old woman instructed her minister on the contents of her own funeral sermon, thus at least in death using her close relationship with her pastor to speak publicly and authoritatively to the godly community.<sup>48</sup>

If we examine the clerical networks created by a few godly women, we begin to appreciate the complexity and variety of these relationships. The Barringtons of Hatfield Broadoak were an influential Puritan family in Essex. Sir Francis Barrington, an ally of Richard Rich, earl of Warwick, served repeatedly as a member of parliament and, in 1627, he spent ten months imprisoned in the Marshalsea because of his opposition to the forced loan. His wife, Lady Joan Barrington (aunt to Oliver Cromwell), chose imprisonment with her husband and was deeply grieved when he died in 1628. She was a forceful and respected figure, an elect lady, consulted by the earl of Warwick about ecclesiastical appointments and by members of the godly community about spiritual matters. Although her sons and sons-in-law were themselves prominent figures, she became, as a widow in her seventies, undisputed head of the Barrington family.<sup>49</sup>

Within the surprisingly large clerical network created by Lady Barrington, three figures are most notable. Ezekiel Rogers was for twelve years domestic chaplain to the Barringtons and then, in 1621, became rector of the Barrington living of Rowley in Yorkshire. Suspended for Non-conformity in 1636, he subsequently migrated to New England. William Chantrell may have briefly served as chaplain to the Barringtons but from 1616 to 1643 he was rector of Walkington, another Yorkshire living in the gift of the Barringtons. Chantrell had occasional conflicts with authorities in Yorkshire over his religious views. James Harrison was lecturer at Hatfield Broadoak from 1626 until his death some sixteen years later. During these years he also acted as domestic chaplain and tutor for at least

<sup>46</sup> *Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599–1605*, ed. Dorothy M. Meads, Boston 1930, 63, 66, 154, 159, 166, 243 n. 180; East Sussex Record Office, Dunn ms 51/58, Simon Moore to Anne Busbridge, 26 Nov. 1632.

<sup>47</sup> John Ley, *A pattern of piety or the religious life and death of that grave and gracious matron Mrs Jane Ratcliffe*, London 1640, 65 and Lake, 'Feminine piety', 149–50.

<sup>48</sup> Gerec, *The Ornament of Women*, 86–91.

<sup>49</sup> Hunt, *The Puritan Moment*, 220. Hunt provides a perceptive psychological portrait of Joan Barrington. See also *Barrington Family Letters*, introduction.

one of the Barrington grandchildren. He was attacked by the ecclesiastical authorities in 1636 when he preached a long sermon and shortened set prayers.<sup>50</sup>

As the family chaplain, the young Ezekiel Rogers was by his own account much affected by Lady Barrington. Writing to her from Yorkshire in 1621, he confessed 'You were the first with whom I had any so serious and solemne converse about matters tending to the worke of grace...I haue therefore good cause to haue you in my choisest remembrance.' Perhaps unnerved by his removal from Hatfield Broad-oak, Rogers was now insecure in their relationship 'for this yeare or two you latt[late] did sensibly withdraw your former affection'. Rogers was particularly troubled by Lady Barrington's recent reluctance to continue their 'holy converse', and he begged her to tell him if he had inadvertently offended her. He wanted more than a client-patron relationship for, as he explained, 'the care and thought that you tooke about this some yeares since, did make me looke after the same with the better regarde. I pray God increase those attentions and cares in you and me'. Significantly, Rogers wrote to Lady Barrington separately, asking that he be excused to Sir Francis for not writing.<sup>51</sup>

Whatever the difficulty in 1621, Rogers's relationship with Joan Barrington continued. In 1623, he still saw her as a spiritual authority and sought the comfort of some words from her who carried 'a perpetuall Sabbath' in her soul.<sup>52</sup> Ill in 1626, he reminded her of her role in his spiritual development and asked for her help again:

I must not, I cannot forget those times, when the Lorde working powerfully on your soule, made you (in seeking my poore helpe) an occasion of much quickning and benefit to me... I must not now at this time write to profite you; but to desire your lines and prayers to helpe me to profit by diuers afflictions that I haue had.<sup>53</sup>

He commended her in 1627 for her decision to follow her husband to prison, a decision he saw as natural given her disposition and her affection for her husband. At least her withdrawal from worldly occasions freed her for 'serious meditation of that solemne change [death and salvation] which your age and my infirmities may putt us in'.<sup>54</sup> His emotional dependency now gone, theirs had become a more equal relationship.

Finally, after the death of Sir Francis, when Lady Barrington suffered doubt over her own election, Rogers became her mentor, a figure of authority adopting a stern tone. He wrote in February 1630 that, for whatever reason, the Lord had 'not dealt so largely' with her in the matter of assurance as with his other saints. Lady Barrington's

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 13, 255–8. For Harrison, see also Mary Bohannon, 'A London bookseller's bill: 1635–1639', *The Library*, 4th ser. xviii (1938), 424 and PRO, SP 16/351/100, fo. 262v.

<sup>51</sup> BL, Egerton ms 2644, fo. 196.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. fo. 203r.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. fo. 240r.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. fo. 251r.

temperament was partly to blame but the main problem was weakness of faith. The consequences were grave for without assurance, 'you cannot have so large a measure of love to your God'. Rogers reminded her that Christ's promise was irrevocable and urged her to seek assurance from the Lord. 'Let me tell you from some little experience, that the lorde so sought will sooner or later be founde.' In November, he hoped 'that your olde disease of melancholy is banished away by faith, as it is high time'. He repeated the message in January 1632, reminding her that since God's covenant was unchangeable, she had little to fear.<sup>55</sup> Whether Roger's counsel and chiding brought Lady Barrington comfort is not clear, but she did apparently promise him £100 before his departure for New England.<sup>56</sup>

In 1626, shortly after his appointment as lecturer at Hatfield Broadoak, James Harrison wrote to Joan Barrington, and, referring to an issue of religious controversy, thanked her for encouraging his 'forwardnes'.<sup>57</sup> For the most part, however, their relationship was based not on ecclesiological issues but on friendship, family, and patronage. When his wife was ill, he wrote to the Barringtons separately, asking for their prayers and thanking Joan for her advice.<sup>58</sup> He offered her guidance during her spiritual crisis in 1629 but always in a mild, deferential tone. He was grateful when she agreed to stand as godmother to his son, felt able to ask her for money for the poor, and regretted her prolonged absence from Hatfield Broadoak where she could 'doe God so much service and so much further the publicke good'. Prayer was always a great equaliser in lay-clerical relations, and Harrison asked Lady Barrington for her prayers, for example in June 1630, so that he might learn from the affliction of his illness and so that his infant son might be blessed.<sup>59</sup> As well as prayers and stipends, Lady Barrington gave Harrison and his wife a number of small gifts, from cakes to capons.<sup>60</sup>

It is not possible here to do justice to all Lady Barrington's many clerical contacts. What is most remarkable, however, is the number of clerics included in her circle. For William Chantrell, she remained first and foremost a benefactress. Thus when Lady Barrington's eldest son, Sir Thomas Barrington, was selling lands in Yorkshire, Chantrell requested

<sup>55</sup> *Barrington Family Letters*, 128–30, 167, 225–6. See also Hunt, *The Puritan Moment*, 221–2. Rogers also urged Lady Barrington to find inspiration from other saints and complained that charity was too meagre during his days at Hatfield Broadoak.

<sup>56</sup> BL, Egerton ms 2648, fo. 133r. This sum was apparently never given to Rogers as, increasingly during the 1630s, Rogers's relationship with Sir Thomas Barrington, deteriorated: J. T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry: the great Puritan families of early Stuart England*, London 1984, 136 and Ronald A. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York 1560–1642*, London 1960, 100–2.

<sup>57</sup> BL, Egerton ms 2644, fo. 230r. I am grateful to Alasdair Hawkyard for the transcription of this letter.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* fos 261r, 262r.

<sup>59</sup> *Barrington Family Letters*, 71, 74–5, 86, 108, 85, 160.

<sup>60</sup> Essex Record Office, D/DBa, A 15, *passim*.

that she intervene to save two parsonages and bestow them worthily.<sup>61</sup> Daniel Rogers, brother to Ezekiel, in dedicating one of his treatises to her, referred to the 'love and respect... (not my selfe alone) but sundry of our name and Tribe have received from your Ladiship'.<sup>62</sup> Arthur Hildersham, a Puritan vicar in Leicestershire, was a Barrington relative, who occasionally visited, sent Lady Barrington one of his books, and received small gifts from her.<sup>63</sup> Others who received her support included the Puritan writer Adam Harsnett, local clergy from neighbouring parishes, poor ministers not even identified by name in her household book, and the Nonconformists Thomas Hooker and Nathaniel Ward.<sup>64</sup>

Joan Barrington was not unique. Lady Mary Vere, another elect lady of the period, corresponded with a circle of clergy who admired her godliness, accepted her patronage, and found emotional solace in her friendship. To her niece, Lady Brilliana Harley, there was 'not a wiser and better woman'.<sup>65</sup> The widow of William Hoby by whom she had two sons, in 1607 Mary married Horace Vere by whom she had five daughters. Theirs was a godly marriage, but Mary Vere suffered her share of affliction: the death of her sons at age fourteen and twenty-three, the death of a son-in-law, and in 1635 the death of her second husband.<sup>66</sup>

Lord Vere was commander of English troops in Holland, and at the Hague the Veres came into contact with several English Nonconformist clergy. One such, John Burgess, spent about eight years in Holland after his refusal to subscribe to the canons of 1604. As household chaplain to the Veres, he established a reciprocal relationship with Mary Vere, which lasted throughout his life.<sup>67</sup> Back in England in 1617, Burgess wrote to Lady Vere about her recent bout of melancholy, perhaps provoked by the death of her son. He was gratified to hear of her experience of salvation. A year later, taking a living in Warwickshire in 1618, Burgess wrote of his wife's tender affection for Lady Vere and thanked her for her kindness to his children.<sup>68</sup> Accompanying Lord Vere in 1620 in the Palatinate, Burgess subsequently discussed with Lady Vere his grief on the death of his wife after thirty years of marriage. He acknowledge her counsel: 'Your good Ladyship doth well remember me of our duties of submitting willingly to the hand of god.' He wrote at length about his ministry with

<sup>61</sup> *Barrington Family Letters*, 168.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel Rogers, *Treatise of the Two Sacraments of the Gospell: baptisme and the supper of the Lord*, 2nd edn., London 1635, sig. A<sub>2</sub>[r]. Like so many of her clerical friends, Daniel Rogers wanted to help Lady Barrington reach assurance.

<sup>63</sup> *Barrington Family Letters*, 61–2, 161; Essex Record Office, D/DBa, A 15, fo. 51r.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* fos. 20v, 26r, 28r, 35f; *Barrington Family Letters*, 14, 100.

<sup>65</sup> BL, Loan 29/173, fo. 260r; Jacqueline Levy, 'Perceptions and Beliefs: the Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the outbreak of the First Civil War', unpubl. PhD diss., London 1983, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Clarke, *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons*, ii. 144ff.; *Dictionary of National Biography*, xx. 238.

<sup>67</sup> Keith L. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch backgrounds of English and American Puritanism*, Urbana 1972, 30.

<sup>68</sup> BL, Add. ms 4275, fos 60r, 62r.

the soldiers, his marriage, and the manner in which his wife died: 'See how being with my Ladie Vere I cannot leave this longe talkinge.' Burgess obviously took comfort from Vere's affection for his late wife; now in return for her services to his children, he touchingly promised 'by exchange' to do all in his ability to serve 'your deare and honorable Lorde, whom I will before none but your self to love'.<sup>69</sup>

John Davenport was another cleric with whom Mary Vere established a close mutual friendship. Unlike Burgess, who was eighteen years her senior, Davenport was about sixteen years younger than Mary Vere and seems to have first known her in London, where he asked her help in the early 1620s to secure his vicarage and lectureship.<sup>70</sup> In 1628 he gave her special counsel about her mission in Holland and although she grew weary of being abroad, Davenport 'rejoiced' in her resolution to stay and 'doe God all the service you can in that place'.<sup>71</sup> As early as 1628, Davenport referred to his problems with the High Commission and William Laud, the newly appointed bishop of London. Deprived of his benefice in 1633 he justified his own Nonconformity and at the same time reassured Lady Vere 'I doe not censure those that doe conforme (nay I account many of them faithfull and worthy instruments of God's glory).' Patronage was one measure of glory, and Davenport, earlier involved in the Feoffees for Improvements, recommended worthy candidates. That the authorities would view some of these men with suspicion did not deter him. He explained to Lady Vere: 'It is not in the Bishop's power to take away from you what is settled upon your Nobility and others by magna charta.'<sup>72</sup> Subsequent letters were sporadic but continued until 1647 when he was writing from New Haven, Connecticut.<sup>73</sup>

Lady Vere's clerical correspondents also included William Ames (Burgess's son-in-law), John Dod, Dr Preston, Lawrence Chaderton, and Obadiah Sedgewick.<sup>74</sup> Her eulogiser explained that she loved ministers as ambassadors of Christ and deserved the title '*Delicia Cleri*, The Ministers delight'.<sup>75</sup> For their part, although Puritan clergy often looked to Lady Vere for patronage, her reputation with them ultimately rested less on her rank than on her godliness. At one point Burgess wrote to her that she so excelled in virtues that he saw not what he might propound useful to her. So advanced was she in the exercise of Christian duties that she rather deserved praise than any exhortation from him. Davenport wondered

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. fos 68–69v. I again thank Alasdair Hawkyard for transcribing this letter.

<sup>70</sup> Greaves, 'Foundation builders', 81. Davenport was admitted to the vicarage and lectureship at St Stephen, Coleman Street, London; Eales calls him 'Lady Vere's protege' there: Eales, *Puritan and Roundheads*, 62.

<sup>71</sup> BL, Add. ms 4275, fo. 160r. Davenport had consulted with Dr Sibbes, and both clerics agreed that Lady Vere should remain in the Hague.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. fo. 166v. For Davenport's intercessions on behalf of other clerics, see also PRO, SP 16/13/15.

<sup>73</sup> BL, Add. ms 4275, fo. 173r.

<sup>74</sup> Levy, 'Perceptions and beliefs', 160 n. 160. Correspondence is found in BL, Add. ms 4275, 4276; unfortunately, Vere's letters to the clergy do not survive.

<sup>75</sup> Clarke, *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons*, ii. 147.

whether he were 'worthy to enjoy such a freind. Sometimes, I think I placed too much content in the inioyment of your presence, yet agayne I check myselfe fearing least I did not prize you enough'.<sup>76</sup>

If godly women became emotionally dependent in lay-clerical relationships, it would seem that so too at times did the clergy, and that these relationships must therefore be understood as reciprocal. Clergy wrote to godly women separately from their husbands. Often they hoped for action from their female correspondents, usually in the form of ecclesiastical patronage. Samuel Rutherford, a Scottish Presbyterian, wrote to female correspondents, advising them how to motivate and 'stir up' their husbands.<sup>77</sup> For the most part, however, the clergy bestowed pastoral advice and in return sought and received prayers, support, advice, and consolation. Their status and learning gave them great advantages but not always superiority. As Thomas Gataker said of Mrs Rebecca Crisp, 'I did... as well benefit by her, as benefit her.'<sup>78</sup>

Godly women did not necessarily defer to clerical authority. Their enhanced moral stature as elect ladies, their commitment to godliness, their superior social rank, or some combination of these circumstances, could promote independent behaviour. Lady Joan Barrington had a stormy and public break with Roger Williams, the future founder of Providence, Rhode Island, when he offended her sense of social propriety.<sup>79</sup> In that dispute, Lady Barrington asserted her right to rank and deference. Lady Vere's clash with the conformist cleric Stephen Goffe, on the other hand, seems to have focused on ideological disagreement. After the English authorities had persuaded Lord Vere to accept Goffe as military and personal chaplain, the latter remarked that he had to contend with Lady Vere's fury.<sup>80</sup>

Lady Harley's critical judgment extended to clergy across the theological spectrum and reflected her strong convictions and commitment to godliness. Debating the power of prayer, she refused to defer to her son's tutor at Oxford.<sup>81</sup> Although she and her husband defended the Nonconformity of rectors at Brampton Bryan, she did not give her support unconditionally. In the late 1630s she fell out with Richard Symonds, a suspended Nonconformist minister, who had joined the Harley household in order to tutor their youngest sons. Her dissatisfaction with Symonds's extreme views and his influence on the children led to his departure. Symonds had associated with the separatist Walter Cradock,

<sup>76</sup> BL, Add. ms 4275, fos 64r, 160r.

<sup>77</sup> *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, 214.

<sup>78</sup> Gataker, *Paul's Desire of Dissolution*, sig. B<sub>2</sub>r.

<sup>79</sup> Williams served as chaplain to Barrington's daughter and son-in-law, Sir William and Lady Masham. In 1629 Lady Joan felt he twice insulted her, first by contemplating marriage with a Barrington niece, his social superior, then by warning Lady Barrington that her fear and anxiety were messages from God, 'loud alarums to awaken you... Certainly (madame) the lord hath a quarrell against you'. So offended was Lady Barrington that to the Mashams' dismay and Roger's sorrow, she refused to see him for a number of months: *Barrington Family Letters*, 64–8, 79, 91; Hunt, *The Puritan Moment*, 221, 223.

<sup>80</sup> *CSPD*, 1633–1634, 324.

<sup>81</sup> *Letters of Brilliana Harley*, 65–6.

whom Lady Harley assessed as a 'worthy man, but some times he dous not judg cleerely of things'.<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, her husband, Sir Robert, subsequently petitioned the Long Parliament on Cradock's behalf.<sup>83</sup>

After the opening of the Long Parliament, Lady Harley became increasingly critical of clergy whom she perceived as threats to the godly cause. She was an active participant in a survey of the Herefordshire ministry ordered by the Commons and, in correspondence with her son, spoke openly of her desire for the abolition of episcopacy.<sup>84</sup> During the agitation of 1642, she criticised Dr Rogers, whose preaching in Hereford she found 'most intollerabell'. Rogers offended her by his scandalous attack on parliament. She sent copies of his sermons to both her husband and son, and urged that he be silenced, preferably summoned by the House of Lords.<sup>85</sup> When Sir Robert failed to act quickly enough, she turned to her son: 'Good Ned, put your father in minde of it. I doo longe almost to haue him [Rogers] punished.'<sup>86</sup> A year later, having withstood the first siege of Brampton Bryan, she anxiously asked her husband 'if the faithfull Ministers be remoued and carried up to London... what shall be come of the country' and warned him that already 'theare is a popish Minister crowded in hir'.<sup>87</sup> It was the complaint of a woman confident of her ability to judge the soundness of her clergy.

### III

As noted earlier, women of various religious persuasions could use their spirituality as an emotional release from patriarchy or as a means to enhance their status. Puritans monopolised neither the practice of piety nor the concept of sainthood. Not surprisingly, therefore, godly women shared patterns of behaviour with other pious women. In early modern England, devout Protestant and Catholic women alike practised household religion, set a premium on the moral and religious education of their children, performed charitable activities, and established close relationships with their spiritual advisers.<sup>88</sup> But Puritanism offered women enhanced status and reciprocity without demanding a cloistered

<sup>82</sup> Levy, 'Perceptions and beliefs', 148–52, 170–1; Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry*, 77–8; *Letters of Brilliana Harley*, 26. <sup>83</sup> Eales, *Puritan and Roundheads*, 106. <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 109–10.

<sup>85</sup> See her letters to Sir Robert on 19 May and 27 June 1642: BL, Loan 29/173, fo. 250r, 261r. <sup>86</sup> *Letters of Brilliana Harley*, 174, letter of 27 June 1642.

<sup>87</sup> BL, Loan 29/72, letter of 2 Sept. 1643.

<sup>88</sup> In the mid sixteenth century, Mrs Elizabeth Bowes established a 'spiritual and ideological relationship' with John Knox, who became her son-in-law, and the recusant Margaret Clitherow became emotionally tied to priests whom she hid in her home. The degree of reciprocity in these relationships, however, is not clear. See Willen, 'Women and religion', 150–5. On the spirituality of English female recusants, see Marie B. Rowlands, 'Recusant women 1560–1640', in Mary Prior (ed.) *Women in English Society 1500–1800*, London 1985, 149–80; J. D. Hanlon, 'These be but women', in Charles Carter (ed.), *From The Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: essays in honor of Garrett Mattingly*, New York 1965, 371–400.

life, martyrdom, or mysticism. In its attempt to integrate godliness into daily practice, its emphasis on a type of sainthood within ordinary life,<sup>89</sup> and its creation of a godly community of lay figures, Puritanism offered women new opportunities to redefine traditional relationships and roles.

As in lay-clerical relationships which developed reciprocity, so too in other respects, elect ladies modified the conventional norms imposed on gender. Religion integrated the private and public spheres of their world. Brilliana Harley and the Barrington women were politicised – not in the sense that they acted in the public, political realm but in the sense that they closely followed the fate of continental Protestants and judged events in parliament. Joan Barrington purchased half a dozen maps and several newsbooks during her widowhood. Members of her family circulated newsbooks and corantos among themselves, and those in London diligently reported the latest political intelligence to her. Her daughter-in-law, Lady Judith Barrington, was fascinated with military affairs and wrote to her about the latest continental battles.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Lady Brilliana provided news for her son Edward at Oxford. She explained to him, ‘I would willingly haue your minde keep awake in the knowledg of things abroode’.<sup>91</sup> These godly women well fit William Hunt’s category of ‘Protestant Imperialists’, who avidly supported an active continental policy. Moreover, they practised a form of active citizenship for, like the Puritan artisan Nehemiah Wallington, they had recourse to the ultimate political acts of prayer and fasting.<sup>92</sup> In 1629 Elizabeth Masham, daughter of Lady Joan Barrington, looked forward to the fast in London on Ash Wednesday: ‘I pray God fitt us all earnestly to cry to the lord; we never had such need as now we have.’<sup>93</sup>

They also participated fully in the godly community as spiritual authorities and advisers to their fellow ‘saints’. Godliness, not gender, qualified members of the elect to offer wisdom and guidance to one another, and roles were often reciprocal or reversible, one moment a saint dispensing advice, then, afflicted with doubt, receiving counsel. In January 1629 Thomas Bouchier begged his aunt Joan Barrington for ‘such divine councel as yow maye easile enrich me with, I beseech yow therefore give a drop from your fountaine’. A few months later Bouchier responded to Lady Barrington’s own depression, admitting ‘tis strainge that such a striplinge sholde advise your wise gravitye’. In January 1631, a melancholic Bouchier again turned to his aunt for comfort, now

<sup>89</sup> I am grateful to Dr Miriam U. Chrisman for discussing this issue with me.

<sup>90</sup> Essex Record Office, D/DBa, A 15, fos 6, 21r, 23v, 27r, 56v; *Barrington Family Letters*, e.g. 38–9, 50–1, 203, 210, 214–15, 226–7; Hunt, *The Puritan Moment*, 226.

<sup>91</sup> *Letters of Brilliana Harley*, 32. Even Lady Harley’s ten-year old daughter followed and wrote about continental battles: Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, 94.

<sup>92</sup> Hunt, *The Puritan Moment*, 169ff. and Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 178. Cf. Lake’s concept of active citizenship: Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English conformist thought from Whitgift to Hooker*, London 1988, 242.

<sup>93</sup> *Barrington Family Letters*, 56. See also Joan Barrington’s attitude to fasting in 1636 to combat plague: BL, Egerton MS 2646, fo. 102r.

referring to her as 'a mother in Israel'.<sup>94</sup> Lady Lucy Jervoise counselled patience to her friend Henry Sherfield when he was in trouble for iconoclasm.<sup>95</sup> Judith Barrington and Sir Simonds D'Ewes supported each other during a period when both were suffering.<sup>96</sup> Lady Frances Roberts showed skill as well as zeal in providing spiritual help for her acquaintances.<sup>97</sup> Jane Ratcliffe did more than give counsel: through prayers she mediated with God on behalf of her female friends.<sup>98</sup>

Puritan preachers recognised that godly women performed a public role by virtue of their moral stature, influence, and example. Thus Samuel Ainsworth lamented the death of Mrs Dorothy Hanbury as a severe loss, affecting the Church and the state as well as the parish and the family.<sup>99</sup> John Harrison described Joan Barrington as 'an instrument of much good amongst us'.<sup>100</sup> Richard Sibbes wrote that both Lord and Lady Vere were 'imployed in great services for the common good'.<sup>101</sup> Mary Simpson, a godly woman whose 'birth and breeding was meane', was none the less commended at her funeral as an 'elect vessell' who during her several years of sickness had been an 'eminent preacher'.<sup>102</sup>

Through the device of the funeral sermon, clergy exalted godly women as models and constructed new social roles for them in the community. Patrick Collinson, calling attention to the classical tradition behind funeral sermons, argues that preachers described godly virtue as the result of human character rather than grace.<sup>103</sup> The implications in terms of gender are dramatic. Intended as edification, such sermons did not simply establish the 'godly equality of women'<sup>104</sup> but often implied moral superiority. Thus John Collings, Simpson's eulogiser, thought he might

<sup>94</sup> *Barrington Family Letters*, 49, 61, 176. For this phenomenon among a different network of the godly, see Anthony Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War: Sussex 1600–1660*, London 1975, 64.

<sup>95</sup> Hampshire Record Office, Jervoise ms of Herriard Park, 44M69, Box E 77, 20 Apr. 1633. I am grateful to Professor Conrad Russell for drawing my attention to this letter.

<sup>96</sup> BL, Harleian ms 387, fo. 8r.

<sup>97</sup> Gamon, *The Praise of a Godly Woman*, 28.

<sup>98</sup> Ley, *A pattern of piety*, 62.

<sup>99</sup> Samuel Ainsworth, *A Sermon Preached at the Funerall of that religious Gentle-woman Mrs Dorothy Hanbury*, London 1645, 31. Cf. Nathaniel Parkhurst, *The Faithful and Diligent Christian described... Preached at the Funeral of the Lady Elizabeth Brooke*, London 1684, 37.

<sup>100</sup> *Barrington Family Letters*, 122.

<sup>101</sup> Richard Sibbes, 'The epistle dedicatory', in *The Bruised Reed, and Smoaking Flax*, London 1630.

<sup>102</sup> John Collings, *Faith and Experience or, A short Narration of the holy life and death of Mary Simpson*, London 1649, 72, 66. Collings explains that during the three years of her sickness, Simpson 'did more good, to poore soules... by telling them her experiences, directing, quickning, exhorting, strengthening, satisfying them, than God hath honoured any of us who have been preachers of his word, to doe in much more time': pp. 66–7.

<sup>103</sup> Patrick Collinson, "'A Magazine of Religious Patterns': an Erasmian topic transposed in English Protestantism", in *Godly People*, 516. For other remarks on the use of funeral sermons, see Lake, 'Feminine piety', 143–5; Owen Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: studies in spiritual autobiography*, New York 1977, 24–5. Lake notes that 'Idealized such portraits might be, but they had also to be recognizable': p. 160.

<sup>104</sup> The phrase is used by Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 39.

learn righteousness from his subject.<sup>105</sup> In a funeral sermon for Lady Mary Strode, John Barlow urged her husband William to 'strive to walke in her steps'.<sup>106</sup> The preacher Hannibal Gamon wished men generally to 'emulate and imitate Women in their deserved attributions of Praise'. Eulogising Lady Frances Roberts, Gamon urged his listeners not only to adopt her piety and virtues but also to heed her reproaches and follow her exhortations.<sup>107</sup>

Godly women performed significant service for Puritanism through household religion, a topic to be explored in another context. This paper has instead gone beyond the family to consider how Puritan women interacted with the godly community. It demonstrates that godliness tempered patriarchy: the need to follow Puritan strategies in their daily life allowed godly women to transcend significant restrictions traditionally imposed on gender. Far from isolating women within the confines of household religion, godliness integrated public and private spheres, allowed reciprocal relationships between laity and clergy and between men and women, and provided moral authority and increased status to elect ladies. These changes in gender roles in turn influenced the practice of Puritanism. Godly women were not simply recipients of pastoral advice, but active agents in the development of lay-clerical relations. Their example and counsel encouraged other members of the godly community, and, as allegedly 'weaker vessels', their godliness personified spiritual egalitarianism. If godly women rarely challenged existing authority overtly, they did change the way in which men and women interacted. Their presence does much to explain subsequent developments in Puritanism, including the emergence of radical sectarian women in the 1640s.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Collings, *Faith and Experience*, 72.

<sup>106</sup> John Barlow, 'The epistle dedicatory', in *The True guide to glory. A sermon preached at ... the funeral of the Lady Strode of Newingham*, London 1619.

<sup>107</sup> Gamon, *The Praise of a Godly Woman*, 34–6.

<sup>108</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented at a seminar directed by Professor Esther Cope at the Folger Institute Center for the History of British Political Thought, Washington, DC, June 1990 and at the joint meeting of the North American Conference on British Studies and the Southern Conference on British Studies, New Orleans, 1990. I thank Professor Cope, Professor Barbara Harris and Professor Arthur Slavin for discussing the paper with me.