

Preaching Predestination and Pastoral Ministry in the Caroline Parish

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This article examines manuscript sermons to reveal how a Calvinist minister, Hugh Ramsden, preached predestination from his parish pulpit in the late 1620s. It shows how he adapted a scholarly work for this purpose, sought to balance inclusive and exclusive visions of the Christian community, and attempted to frame the doctrine as a comfort. By comparing two manuscripts for the same sermon, the extempore aspects of his live preaching are explored. Lastly, it considers the negotiation that allowed Hugh's like-minded brother, Henry, to continue with Calvinist preaching under the Laudian regime of Richard Neile in the 1630s.

In 1627, Hugh Ramsden undertook to teach predestination to his parish in Methley, Yorkshire. His declared reason for doing so was that ‘happiness is the intent and end of us all, we doe all desire to bee happy, but it doth depend on religion’.¹ Rarely in modern times has predestination been associated with happiness, so how should we understand this? Christopher Haigh’s examination of court material concluded

BIA = Borthwick Institute for Archives; BL = British Library, London; TNA = The National Archives; WYA = West Yorkshire Archives

The manuscript of Hugh Ramsden’s Colossians sermons is entitled ‘A discourse upon the first and part of the second chapter to the Collosians By hugh Ramsden, Batchelour in Divinity’, inside a notebook catalogued as ‘manuscript volume belonging to Thomas Wilson of West Hardwick’ in the Nostell Priory Collection, WYA, WYW 1352/3/3/1/2/1. In this article the manuscript is referred to as ‘Thomas Wilson MS’. I have silently extended abbreviations used in the manuscript.

¹ The quotation is from Ramsden’s sermon on Colossians ii.2.

that predestination was so divisive and unpopular that parish ministers withdrew from preaching the doctrine.² Different source material, however, tells another tale. From his study of manuscript sermons Arnold Hunt observes that preaching predestination ‘could be harsh, legalistic, threatening and exclusive, but it could also be evangelical, comforting and inclusive’ depending on the minister and context. Julia Merritt’s study of a single Puritan minister demonstrates how he managed to bridge academic and parochial religion and successfully preach predestination to his parishioners.³ In a memorable image, she compared the challenge of nurturing the godly and acting as pastor to the whole parish as balancing on a tightrope, but made the case that, for ‘emollient, unifying, pastorally sensitive’ ministers, this was possible without doctrinal compromise. More recently, Leif Dixon’s work on ‘practical predestinarians’ proposes that predestination was a response to anxiety rather than its cause, and that the claims of early modern divines that it was a doctrine of comfort need to be taken seriously. He examines the various ways predestination was promulgated as a practical religion, with what he terms anthropocentric and theocentric approaches to assurance.⁴ This paper engages with this developing debate through the sermons of a relatively unknown, moderate Calvinist. Hugh Ramsden is interesting precisely because he was not a high-profile, controversial character, but represents what may have been a significant portion of Calvinist clergy who are quiet in the historical record. However, as Dixon points out, ‘the polemical and pastoral are far from mutually exclusive categories’, and the sermons studied here were preached at a time when the anti-Calvinist shift in the established Church was being felt in Yorkshire.⁵ How Hugh Ramsden and his younger brother Henry navigated the changing religious landscape adds to the insights of Dixon, Ann Hughes and Peter Lake on how Calvinist ministers were able to continue preaching predestination within the Caroline Church.⁶

² C. Haigh, ‘The taming of Reformation: preachers, pastors and parishioners in Elizabethan and early Stuart England’, *History* lxxxv (2000), 572–88.

³ A. Hunt, *The art of hearing: English preachers and their audiences, 1590–1640*, Cambridge 2010, ch. vii, quotation at p. 372; J. Merritt, ‘The pastoral tightrope: a Puritan pedagogue in Jacobean London’, in T. Cogswell, R. Cust and P. Lake (eds), *Politics, religion and popularity in early Stuart Britain: essays in honour of Conrad Russell*, Cambridge 2002, 143–61.

⁴ L. Dixon, *Practical predestinarians in England, c. 1590–1640*, Farnham 2014, 248–51.

⁵ *Ibid.* 261; R. Marchant, *The Puritans and the church courts in the diocese of York, 1560–1642*, London 1960, 44–51.

⁶ A. Hughes, ‘A moderate Puritan preacher negotiates religious change’, this *JOURNAL* lxxv (2014), 761–79; P. Lake, ‘Serving God and the times: the Calvinist conformity of Robert Sanderson’, *Journal of British Studies* xxvii (1988), 81–116; Dixon, *Practical predestinarians*, ch. v.

Hugh Ramsden, sermons and audiences

Hugh Ramsden was born in 1593 into a Halifax clothier family and grew up during the years when the vicar, John Favour, was transforming the parish into a beacon of Reformed religion. Favour pursued an agenda of moral reform, developed a grammar school and established a monthly preaching exercise that attracted ministers from across the region to preach to their peers and godly laity.⁷ Favour was successful and by 1612 it was claimed that ‘there is not one Popish recusant inhabiting in the said great and populous parish of Halifax’.⁸ Ramsden matriculated at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, in 1607 and after proceeding MA, became a Fellow of Merton College, where Henry Savile, a neighbour from Halifax, was the Warden.⁹ In 1618 Ramsden married and was instituted as rector of Methley.¹⁰ By 1624 he was a BD, chaplain to the archbishop of York, Toby Matthew, and a preacher at the Halifax exercise.¹¹ These commitments took him away from his parish enough for him to employ a curate, but he was resident in Methley, and his four children were baptised there.

Ramsden had his work cut out for him when he first arrived at Methley. As late as 1596 a location within the parish church was still referred to as ‘the place where the St Margaret altar stood’ and the incumbent for most of the intervening years had been Dr Timothy Bright, who was very learned but negligent of his duties.¹² The parish was also home to a group of Catholic recusants and church papists, including the extended Shanne and Burton families, who held various official roles in the parish and manor. In his commonplace book, Richard Shanne described a festive culture, including a 1614 Whitsuntide play performed in a barn next to the parsonage, followed by a rush-bearing procession. These events were popular, with Shanne claiming that so many people came to

⁷ For Favour’s campaign of moral reform see A. Cambers, *Godly reading: print, manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720*, Cambridge 2011, 166–71. Notes of sermons from the Halifax exercise are at BL, MSS Add. 4933 a, b.

⁸ H. Heaton, *The Yorkshire woollen and worsted industries*, Oxford 1965, 183–4. Heaton was quoting from Records of the Exchequer, TNA, E 134/11 Jas. I/Mich. 9 and 11.

⁹ The Ramsdens lived at Thick Hollins, Greetland, close to the Saviles at Bradley Hall.

¹⁰ The right to present the rector of Methley was held by the Crown but was influenced by Sir Henry Savile (a nephew of the Henry Savile of Merton College), who held the manor at Methley.

¹¹ Commission to consecrate Luddenden Chapel, diocese of York records, BIA, Reg. 31.

¹² S. H. Darbyshire and G. D. Lumb (eds), *The history of Methley*, Leeds 1937, 45–6, 53–4. Haigh quotes Bright’s caution on preaching predestination in his ‘The taming of Reformation’, 580.

watch the play ‘the tenth part of the people could not see it’.¹³ Ramsden may have had a tough time with the youths who enjoyed such festivities. In one of his sermons he cited the biblical story of children mocking the prophet Elisha, calling him ‘bald-head, bald-head’, and warned ‘hearken unto this text all young men that you never deride, mocke or taunt the minister’.¹⁴ However, Catholics, traditionalists and cheeky youths aside, he must have gradually built a certain amount of support at Methley as the parish church was re-pewed in 1624 and a new gallery installed in 1626.¹⁵ In October 1628, he left Methley to return to Halifax as its vicar. Hopes were high that he would revive the glory days of John Favour’s ministry and he was welcomed with bell-ringing. The parish purchased new hourglasses in painted iron frames and a velvet pulpit cushion with a silk fringe to facilitate his esteemed preaching.¹⁶ Sadly, his homecoming was short-lived as he died from a fever the following July. He was succeeded as vicar by his younger brother, Henry, who had followed him to Magdalen Hall and likewise proceeded MA. Henry had been a Fellow of Lincoln College and, from 1626, a lecturer in London. He remained vicar of Halifax until his own death in 1638.

Was Hugh Ramsden a Puritan? Ramsden himself was not averse to the contemporary label, as he expressed dismay that ‘so many are afraid to be accounted forward in religion, lest such a one should point the finger at him and say, Lo where a puritan goes a precise foole is’.¹⁷ As a term of historical analysis, he fits some of the observable features of Puritanism, although of a moderate variety. He was never censured for unconformity and was certainly of a very different stripe to a neighbouring Puritan minister, Alexander Cooke, who was accused of aggressive particularising from his Leeds pulpit and breaking off in mid-service to dismiss the bulk of the parishioners, before continuing to preach to a select band of followers.¹⁸

While he was the minister of Methley, and most probably during 1627–8, Hugh Ramsden delivered a *lecto continua* series of sermons covering Colossians i.15–ii.4. The sermons teach Reformed divinity, following the convention of dividing each verse to derive doctrines and uses, which are then expanded with objections and reasons, questions and answers, all

¹³ Diocese of York records, BIA, V.1619 CB; V.1623 CB; V.1627 CB. The Shanne family compounded for recusancy fines in 1629; C. Talbot, *Miscellanea* (Catholic Record Society liii, 1961), 314; the family book of Richard Shanne, BL, MS Add 38599, fos 47, 52, 71; E. O’Neill, ‘Amateur theatre in early modern England’, *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* xxxiii (2020), 188–224.

¹⁴ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.25. The passage quoted was 2 Kings ii.23.

¹⁵ Darbyshire and Lumb, *The history of Methley*, 36–7.

¹⁶ Halifax churchwardens’ accounts, 1628, WYA, WDP 53/5/1/1, fo. 60. The right to present the incumbent at Halifax was held by the Crown.

¹⁷ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.27.

¹⁸ TNA, STAC 8/215/6.

liberally supported with scriptural references.¹⁹ The eighteen manuscript sermons appear to have been collaboratively produced, with the minister working with scribes, as polished but concise drafts of what would be preached on each verse.²⁰ Ramsden may also have had a reading audience in mind, and the manuscript was certainly valued as an object and reread, as shown by the various readers' marks in the margins and the elaborate calligraphy of the title page and the large 'finis' at the end. In leaving the manuscript behind when he moved to Halifax, it became an ongoing resource for his old flock, whom he warned in his last sermon against falling back into 'Angel worship and will worship and traditions and seremonies and customes'.²¹ He may have been following the example of his first teacher, John Favour, who explained his reasons for publishing a work written in the final years of his life: 'I would not passe like an arrow in the ayre, or a ship in the sea, and leave no monument behind me to put my flocke in mind of those things which I would wish to be beleaved after my departure.'²² It seems that the manuscript was still valued and being circulated, or its ownership contested, thirty years later; in 1660, Thomas Wilson, a husbandman of West Hardwick in the neighbouring parish of Wragby, repeatedly wrote his name inside the cover of the notebook along with the claim that he was its true owner.

The sermons appear to be addressing both lay and clerical audiences in places, and it is quite possible that Ramsden was recreating elements of the Halifax exercise locally. Wragby had a preaching minister in 1627 and several payments were made to visiting preachers.²³ He may also have thought the sermons could be a useful resource for fellow preaching

¹⁹ Merritt describes how Robert Hill made similar use of the question-and-answer format: 'The pastoral tightrope', 148, 154.

²⁰ The source is complex, with probably three different scribes. At the beginning of the manuscript are two drafts of what would become the sermons on verses xxv and xxvi. The sermon on verse xx is restarted part way through. At the back of the notebook is a communion sermon on 1 Corinthians xi.29, entitled 'A sermon preached by Mr Hugh Ramsoen att his owne parish church at Medlay in Yorke shier', which appears to be a fair, full copy from hearer's notes. This sermon covers thirty-two sides, in contrast to the Colossians sermons, which cover between four and nineteen sides, suggesting that the latter are concise drafts. For collaborative and preparatory sermon writing see Hughes, 'A moderate Puritan preacher', 763, and Hunt, *Art of hearing*, 132–4, 140.

²¹ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. ii.4.

²² John Favour, *Antiquitie triumphing ouer noueltie*, 2nd edn, London 1619 (STC 10716), Epistle, A2v.

²³ From 1626 the Puritan John Atkinson was curate at Wragby and in 1627 Richard Coates was presented for 'preaching and denying to show his licence' there. Payments to visiting preachers at Wragby in 1627 include a Mr Hill, possibly Joseph Hill, curate of Bramley, Leeds, who had preached at the Halifax exercise: Marchant, *Puritans and the church courts*, 226, 254; BIA, V. 1627 CB; Wragby churchwardens' accounts, WYA, WDP 99/1/1/1, 99/70.

clergy.²⁴ In the main though, phrases such as ‘this congregation’ ‘in this place’ and ‘o man, woman and child’ show that Ramsden was addressing a local lay audience. The content of the sermons does not suggest a small, well-defined, and exclusive godly group but something more diverse.²⁵ Ramsden appears to directly address the less than godly with phrases such as ‘alas, many of you doe hardly handle the bible once in a yeare’. In a rare moment of finger-pointing he reprovved those who missed coming to church because of the weather, or because it was their ‘brewing day’ or ‘carving day’.²⁶ Much of the time, though, he used inclusive language, such as ‘our election’, and he expected his audience to know biblical characters such as Nebuchadnezzar and Simon Magus without introduction. The sermons are complex and challenging, and may have shot a bit over the head of some, but he cut and divided points as much as possible to make them intelligible and included everyday imagery and homely similes, so most of his audience could have felt there was something in it for them.

Arnold Hunt observes that ‘academic theology and parish religion were in continual dialogue with each other’ and comparison of the sermons with John Davenant’s commentary on Colossians shows that Ramsden was, at least in part, inspired by this scholarly work.²⁷ Ramsden adapted Davenant’s work for parish use, following his structuring and words in several places, but did not include the bishop’s citing of patristic and philosophical works, preferring instead to underpin points with scriptural references.

Teaching predestination and the Christian community

Ramsden carefully selected which verses to use in his sermon series to give his auditors a thorough grounding in predestinarian doctrine and its practical applications. He started at Col. i.15 (‘Who is the image of the invisible

²⁴ Rosamund Oates describes how Toby Matthew encouraged such practices, loaning his sermon notebook as a resource: *Moderate Radical*, Oxford 2018, 76–80.

²⁵ The sermons were possibly preached on a Sunday afternoon. In this sermon on Col. ii.3, Ramsden decried those who ‘when they shold bee att gods house on the Sabbath day amongst gods people to heare the mistery of life opened, then are they continually in the alehouse, and are even att this hower’.

²⁶ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. ii.3.

²⁷ Davenant’s Latin work, published in 1627, was based on lectures he had delivered as Lady Margaret’s Professor at Cambridge. The references in this articles refer to the translation by Josiah Allport (ed.), *An exposition of the epistle of St Paul to the Colossians by The Right Rev. John Davenant, DD, lord bishop of Salisbury*, London–Birmingham 1831. Other contemporary treatises on Colossians include a much reprinted one by Nicholas Byfield, *An exposition upon the Epistle to the Colossians*, 2nd edn, London 1615 (STC4216). Hunt, *Art of hearing*, 372. Merritt also describes how Robert Hill specialised in ‘translating, popularising, and making accessible to a lay audience the theological writings of other divines’: ‘The pastoral tightrope’, 147.

God, the first born of every creature’) for good reasons. On one level, this verse was an opportunity to denounce the physical imagery of traditional religion and Ramsden did not pass up the chance to refute the Catholic claim that Protestant churches were profane. However, his main focus was to establish some key ideas about the senses and knowledge that would underpin his later teaching. Firstly, he followed Davenant to set out some complex ideas about representation.²⁸ He explained ‘a representation of some patterne; first of all consider what an image is, in every image there is a similitude, or else it is not an image, but in every similitude there is not an image. There is a threefould representation of images’. He went on to discuss quality and substance in representations and how God could only be known through the ‘glasse’ of Christ. His second key message was that saints would have the ability to see in new ways, beyond their limited human senses. He stated as doctrine and reason, ‘the Christian is affected and ravished by the beauty of Christ . . . because that he hath spirituall eyes and therefore is able to behould such a glorie in the Sonne of God, as no naturall eye in the world can behould’. The third fundamental he established was the theme of the Gospel as a deep mystery, as ‘a man can never know so much but he may know more, for the misterie of Christ is a bottomlesse misterie, it can not be searched to the bottome, neither by men nor angles [*sic*]’.

With these foundations in place, Ramsden used the first four sermons to teach the divinity of Christ, his relationship to God, and his sacrifice as the beginning of his Church. He explained that ‘the church hath her originall and beginning from Christ as the woman was taken out of the side of man, soe the church out of the bleeding side of Christ hanging on the cross. Looke of what effect and force the root is to the tree, of soe great effect and force is Christ to his church’. Christ was also presented as the elder brother, the head of the Church who rose first. All God’s other children, through their union with Christ, would follow afterwards as the body of the Church. In his typical question and answer style he taught, ‘for what end rose Christ again? Christ rose again for our justification . . . what is justification? It is a whole discharge from the guilt of sin’.²⁹

From verse 20 (‘and having made peace through the blood of his cross by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him I say whether they be things in earth or things in heaven’), Ramsden entered into a full explication of the decrees of election, reprobation and atonement. Like Davenant, he set out an infralapsarian ordering, explaining ‘1. there was a time when God and man were once friends, 2. there was a time when God and man fell out, when God sent his messenger throughout the whole world to proclaime man a cursed reprobate, 3. there is a renewing of that ancient

²⁸ Davenant, *An exposition*, 173–9.

²⁹ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.18.

league and covenant once again'.³⁰ He followed Davenant in dividing reconciliation into six particulars. The sixth – to whom reconciliation was extended – was contentious, as the 'all things' of verse 20 could be interpreted in various ways. Both Davenant and Ramsden held to the Calvinist precept of limited atonement, so only the elect were saved, but they did so in different ways according to their audience. Davenant explicated a two-fold reconciliation – general and particular – from the standpoint of hypothetical universalism and he described how 'the value of the sacrifice, which is not only general, but infinite' was 'generally applicable to all'; but 'particular and applied reconciliation [was] effected in the heart and conscience of individuals'.³¹ Ramsden used the same two-fold structuring, but for him, the 'general' was the whole of Christ's Church and the 'particular' was the individual within it. It is interesting to consider why Ramsden, who otherwise closely followed Davenant here, veered away from introducing hypothetical universalism. There may be a clue in a later sermon, where Ramsden stated a minister should show 'care and wisdom to labour to foresee what cavils and acceptions [*sic*] might arise in the heart of his people and diligently to prevent them'.³² So maybe he was following his own advice and making the sensible call not to create confusion for his hearers in trying to explain how reconciliation could be 'applicable' but not 'applied'. It did not, after all, alter the sharp binary of salvation and damnation and may even have seemed cruel. This adaptation of a scholarly work suggests we should be cautious in suggesting that hypothetical universalism was a way to make predestinarian doctrine suitable for the parish pulpit.³³

Ramsden taught that reconciliation was entirely at the will of 'God's good pleasure' without any influence from man, and to emphasise this he introduced and explained the same Greek word as Davenant (*eudokia*).³⁴ His infralapsarian ordering did not in any way dilute the absolute sovereignty of God in election. However, the ordering of the decrees made it possible for reprobation to be a negative category and to recede

³⁰ Davenant, *An exposition*, 234. Hunt has proposed that infralapsarian Calvinism was acceptable to Laudians: *Art of hearing*, 384.

³¹ Davenant, *An exposition*, 244–5, 255. Michael Lynch has made an in-depth study of Davenant's theology: *John Davenant's hypothetical universalism*, Oxford 2021.

³² Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.24.

³³ It has been suggested that hypothetical universalism was one way predestination could be made amenable for parish preaching: Hunt, *Art of hearing*, 368; D. Como, 'Puritans, predestination and the construction of orthodoxy in early seventeenth century England', in P. Lake and M. Questier (eds), *Conformity and orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560-1660*, Woodbridge 2000, 64–87 at p. 70.

³⁴ Davenant, *An exposition*, 236. This word is written in Greek letters in the manuscript.

as a background state.³⁵ While Ramsden mainly addressed his audience as if they were among the reconciled, with the reprobate an ill-defined ‘other’, he was unambiguous on the stark doctrine of the fate of the soul. He bluntly stated that ‘there is no middle state – a saint of God [or] a limb of the Devil’ and warned that ‘might every man be persuaded that he is reconciled, the many should believe an untruth for all are not reconciled but the doctrine means every believing Christian’.³⁶ The last word is important here, as by ‘Christian’ he meant a member of Christ’s invisible Church. He used the common example of Esau and Jacob to illustrate God’s free will and retained Davenant’s Latin word (‘voluit’) to emphasise this. Given the unmeasurable distance between an omnipotent deity and man’s state of depravity, corruption and inability to help himself, the will of God just had to be accepted. Lack of acceptance was a sign of reprobation, as ‘whosoever he is that is an enemy to any part of the will of God is an enemy unto God ... whosoever hates the justice of God hates God’. It was a sign of ‘the unrenewed mind’ to plead against God’s justice.³⁷ This very strong message was fundamental to Calvinism and was, by its nature, necessarily total.

The ‘unrenewed’, however, had the potential to be understood in the sense of the ‘as yet unrenewed’ and this, along with framing salvation as reconciliation, could help in balancing inclusive and exclusive visions of the Christian community. Ramsden explained that ‘a church is nothing else but a company of people gathered together by a gracious and blessed call. There is a church which is not the body of Christ and there is a church which is the body of Christ’.³⁸ He was not advocating separatism, rather he was describing two entities that could exist in parallel – a visible national institution and an invisible spiritual body. Ramsden worked hard to ensure that the boundaries of the invisible Church were permeable and that his hearers could hope they might one day be part of it, as ‘God hath a season and opportunity wherein God will call and bring to the fellowship of grace, though already uncalled now, yet he will call them if they belong to him. When God will worke the worke of grace nothing should hinder it.’³⁹ Ramsden was at pains to point out that all must receive the benefit of preaching as the fate of souls could

³⁵ In not discussing reprobation, Ramsden was following Davenant, who stated that ‘The Apostle takes it for granted that the work of reconciliation is accomplished’: *An exposition*, 234. Dixon gives a thorough discussion on why reprobation was not usually mentioned in sermons: *Practical predestinarians*, 274–89; Hannah Cleugh notes that the foundational texts of the Church of England were silent on reprobation in her ‘Teaching in praying words? Worship and theology in the early modern English parish’, in N. Mears and A. Ryrie (eds), *Worship and the parish church in early modern Britain*, Farnham 2013, 11–30, 15–16.

³⁶ Thomas Wilson MS, sermons on Col. i.22, 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Col. i.21.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Col. i.17.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Col. i.21.

not be known. He advocated that ministers should ‘thirst after the salvation of all’ as ‘the preaching of the word is extended to every man because there is but one way of life and salvation extended to all, but one way for the rich and for the poore for the king and for the beggar’. Reiterating the point, he instructed ‘wee shold helpe those that are uncalled already to the fellowship of grace [in] two ways. Ffirst by sound suspension of judgement. Secondly by hartly prayers for them, that the Lord wold call them’.⁴⁰ This message was not just rhetoric. In a separate communion sermon, Ramsden exhorted the whole parish, in the strongest possible language, to only receive the sacrament if they were worthy, likening unworthy receiving to taking poison and inviting death and damnation.⁴¹ However, he was clear on the unknowable state of any individual’s soul: ‘my brethren, your faces I se, your consciences I know not; your harts I se not; therefore judge I you not, nor aquite nor condeme you not, but there is a God above which knows all seinge eyes the very insides of your hartes as naked and lightable as the lines and letters of any unfoulded booke’.

Ramsden described behaviours conducive to neighbourliness as a sign of being reconciled to God. In his explication of reconciliation he taught that ‘Jesus Christ makes reconciliation between God and man; secondly he reconciled us to ourselves; thirdly he reconciles man to man; fourthly he reconciled man to the creatures, even to the very stones of the street.’ He built on this when he described a ‘peaceable disposition’ and being ‘easily reconciled unto his brother that hath injured him’ as signs that a man was reconciled to God.⁴² In this way, he applied predestinarian doctrine without diminishing its core, making a doctrine which had the potential to be divisive instead into an incentive to get along with others.

Towards the end of the sermon series, Col. ii.2 (‘That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and [un]to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mistery of God, and of the Ffather, and of Christ’) allowed Ramsden to apply two-fold structuring to set out a ‘Christian love, which is double, either generall or speciall’. The former was ‘comon to all men’, but the latter was the love between saints, and here he had more rigorous expectations of what being ‘united in love’ should look like. He framed love for one’s fellow saints as a sign of being reconciled, expounding ‘there are many comfortable signes that shewes a man that he is a member of Christ, but none like this, when a man shews his love to God’s saints. Above all the signes of faith this is most evident to the eyes of the soule (love) for when the signes of faith doth faile, this stands’. He expanded on how saints should bear one another’s burdens, afflictions and wounded consciences, and ‘be communicate one with another and desire to doo good and receive good one of

⁴⁰ Ibid. Col. i.26.

⁴¹ Ibid. communion sermon on 1 Cor. ii.29.

⁴² Ibid. sermon on Col. i.20.

another and to give counsell and provoke one another to good workes'. Like anywhere, however, Methley was no utopia and personal frictions and rivalries were inevitable. Ramsden felt the need to instruct his hearers to love all saints, not just some. Reprising the bodily metaphor for Christ's Church, he exhorted them to 'rejoice for the good of our brethren' as 'the foote is not angry that the eare hath a ring, the neck a gold chaine about it'.⁴³ Above all, he urged them to stay close, as 'society and fellowship one with another sweetens and shortens their pilgrimage to heaven, for travellers if they want company their journey is long, but if they have company to talk and confer with their journey seemes the shorter'. He painted the picture of 'the people of God conferring together' as a forerunner for how it would be in heaven. Such a society would 'cover the frailty and infirmities of others' to prevent apostasy.

Patrick Collinson observed that 'most places exposed to Puritan preaching were likely to experience a cleavage at some point in the community' and Ramsden's sermons, in the end, are prescriptions rather than descriptions of local society in Methley.⁴⁴ They do, however, show how a Calvinist minister could fulfil his role as a pastor by using predestinarian doctrine to encourage an ideal of peaceable and neighbourly behaviour in general, while nurturing a godly community, and ensuring the boundary between the two was permeable. Rather than seeing teaching predestination and pastoral duties as conflicting imperatives, one could be a means for the other.

Teaching predestination and comfort: holiness, perseverance and assurance

Ramsden declared holiness to be the end of 'our' election, redemption, adoption, justification, regeneration, 'the mercies of God', and 'the infalible sign of reconciliation'.⁴⁵ He followed Davenant in using Col. i.22 ('in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproueable in his sight') to set out how holiness was two-fold, consisting of imputed righteousness from Christ and inherent holiness. The bishop stated that 'inherent holiness is not effected instantly, but increases daily', but Ramsden's words had a slightly different inference, explaining that justification brought 'a new obedience with our own inherent holiness'.⁴⁶ The effect was to suggest that some degree of inherent holiness was already a potentiality at the point of justification, only rendered

⁴³ Dixon has suggested the character of the hypocrite as a socially acceptable way to contain rivalries among the godly: *Practical predestinarians*, 292.

⁴⁴ Patrick Collinson, *Godly people: essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism*, London 1983, 4.

⁴⁵ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.22.

⁴⁶ Davenant, *An exposition*, 258; Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.22.

null by man's corruption. Was this a small artefact of supralapsarianism lurking inside an otherwise very moderate infralapsarian scheme? If so, it was useful in that it gave the hearer a confidence that their own inherent holiness had a strong base from which to begin.

Even if Ramsden's formulation gave the incipient saint a head-start, he made it clear there was still a long road ahead, as God's covenant came with conditions to grow in inherent holiness by use of the means of grace. He reminded his hearers that even Christ had to do this, as 'he did grow up daily more and more in all grace and spiritual understanding'.⁴⁷ He reproved those who did not make themselves worthy of God's grace or 'attain to that measure of knowledge that they might have attained unto'. The fault was laid squarely at their door 'either because they do not stir up their faith, or because they are not prepared for the receiving of such a benefit'. This was not preparationism in the sense of preparation for conversion, but an exhortation to live in an ongoing state of preparedness for receiving grace. The reconciled would want to do 'good worke', which meant 'whatsoever is conformable to the will of God. Thought is a good worke, a savory speech is a good worke, prayer is a good work and reading and hearing that which is good is a good worke'.⁴⁸ It was important to distinguish between the means of grace and grace itself, which was not something Ramsden felt confident many could do as they 'place holiness in the bare mean tools and instruments of holiness, for ask many and they will say to come to the church, to communicate is holiness, to hear God's word is holiness'. He went on to illustrate the difference, explaining 'it is absurd to say that physick is health yet physick is the way to health, and that meat is strength yet meat is the way to get strength'.⁴⁹ Echoing his words in the communion sermon, Ramsden tried to convey that holiness was an interior state rather than an outward performance, a concept which would be important for his teaching on assurance.

As he had with reconciliation, Christian love and holiness, Ramsden took a structured approach to assurance, dividing it by type and degree. Separating the thing and a sense of the thing, as introduced in the first sermon, it was presented as understandable that man should desire not only a state of reconciliation but a sense of reconciliation, which he described as 'a joyful sound'.⁵⁰ Hearers were not discouraged from being concerned about their state of reconciliation; in fact, like Richard Greenham, Ramsden repurposed such concern into a comfort, explaining 'hereby a man may know whether he be reconcild yea or no if he be one that desires unfeignedly to know whether he be reconcild or no'.⁵¹ He taught the doctrine 'every faithfull Christian must labour in particular to

⁴⁷ Ramsden was referring to Luke ii.52 here.

⁴⁸ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.21.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Col. i.20, a reference to Psalm lxxxix.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Col. i.22.

⁵¹ Ibid.

be persuaded of their own personal reconciliation', and identified the Gospel and the conscience as the two means by which a person may know they are reconciled. The latter came with the twin dangers of presumption and too little confidence, so Ramsden aimed for the mean, condemning those who were 'more bold than welcome' as atheists, while acknowledging that others were 'not so bold as welcome'.⁵² He warned against antinomianism and those who 'take liberty to sin because Christ is dead' and went as far as declaring that the death of Christ damned more in this way than it saved.⁵³

Ramsden followed most Calvinists of his time in linking assurance with 'perseverance in grace', explaining that 'men are not reconciled because they persevere, but they persevere because they are reconciled. . . that death of Christ that hath purchased one grace for us hath purchased every grace for us. Therefore if the death of Christ hath purchased reconciliation for us that same death hath purchased perseverance for us'. He emphasised that the saved 'must needs continue to the end' and contrasted this with the Arminian view 'that a man may be in a state of grace now for the present and afterwards fall away into a state of death and eternal condemnation'. As proof of the defectiveness of Arminian doctrine, he relayed that the author of the work afterwards became apostate and 'revolted into the tents of the devil'.⁵⁴ In other words, Arminianism was a fatal step towards Rome. Ramsden was taking a bit of a risk here. His sermons certainly contravened the 1622 Directions Concerning Preachers, as they taught 'positive doctrine' from the parish pulpit, and by this statement they also contravened King Charles's 1626 Proclamation, which attempted to quash doctrinal controversy in the aftermath of the publication of Richard Montagu's anti-Calvinist works.⁵⁵ In 1627, with Toby Matthew incapacitated but still archbishop, presumably Ramsden considered it a reasonable risk to speak these words and allow them to be written down in a manuscript.

⁵² Ibid. Col. i.21.

⁵³ Ibid. Col. i.22.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Col. i.23. Ramsden may have been referring to Benjamin Carier here: N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640*, Oxford 1990, 5.

⁵⁵ 'Directions concerning preachers', *Visitation articles and injunctions of the early Stuart Church*, I: 1603–25, ed. K. Fincham, Woodbridge 1994, 212; *By the king: a proclamation for the establishing of the peace and quiet of the Church of England*, 2nd edn, London 1626 (STC 8825). Selected scholarship in this area includes P. Lake, 'Calvinism and the English Church, 1570–1635', *Past & Present* no. 114 (1987), 32–76; A. Milton, 'Licensing, censorship, and religious authorship in early Stuart England', *HJ* xli (1998), 625–51; C. Clegg, *Press censorship in Caroline England*, Cambridge 2008, 45–72; D. Como, 'Predestination and political conflict in Laud's London', *HJ* xlvi (2003), 263–94. Como describes (pp. 268–70) how Thomas Salisbury was made to answer to the High Commission when his own sermon notes indicated he had preached against Arminianism and defended predestination.

Ramsden was concerned to persuade his hearers that perseverance did not mean an absence of sin, as ‘a true child of God may fall from the degree of grace, but he can never fall from the state of grace’. He went on to clarify this by outlining three degrees of falling: ‘a lapse’, as when Peter denied Christ, a ‘partial declination of the grace of God’s spirit’ and a total falling from ‘whole grace to whole impiety and ungodliness’.⁵⁶ A Christian could experience either of the first two and still be saved, as ‘God’s children when they fall grievously, they lose not the right of their first justification although they lose the use of it’. He illustrated this last state in two ways, firstly describing how a woman who had committed adultery was worthy of being divorced but her husband might choose not to do so, and secondly using the example of the boastful biblical king, Nebuchadnezzar, who had right to his kingdom, but ‘had not the use of his kingdom, so long as he was in the forme of a beast wandering in the forrest’. These illustrations are striking because the iniquity in both cases was not minor.

Ramsden followed this up with several sets of lists on ways to avoid falling away and apostasy, and reasons why hypocrites would only go so far before falling away. They all centred on sincerity, obedience and the conscience. These checks against hypocrisy and apostasy provided a counterbalance to the previous section in which Ramsden gave his flock a rather wide remit in how far an individual could fall from grace and still be able to consider themselves reconciled. A certain amount of falling from grace was to be expected, but what mattered was the sincerity of remorse for falling, as ‘If Peter sin when Christ looks upon him, he goes forth and weeps bitterly.’⁵⁷ Strictly speaking, then, rather than an absence of sin, sincere remorse and a tender conscience were the signs of perseverance, and therefore assurance. However, as the reconciled would be fearful, timorous, watchful, and ‘careful to persevere in the ways of God, for faith breed fear, fear breed care and care breed practice’, eventually the believer would end up in the same place. This reinforced Ramsden’s timescale of perseverance to the *end*, which, as it could not be known and was always in the future, allowed some scope for the sanctification process to evolve in circuitous ways.⁵⁸ The Christian would have the capacity and will to grow in grace, sometimes making progress, sometimes falling back, but the important thing was to be always facing in the right direction. Ramsden illustrated this with a warning ‘not to look back with Lot’s wife, for if a man turn back and revolt from good to evil, from the way of God and godliness, it is sure sign that he was never yet reconciled nor never

⁵⁶ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.23. Ramsden echoes Byfield here: *An exposition upon the Epistle*, 144–5.

⁵⁷ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.23.

⁵⁸ In this Ramsden resembles Dixon’s reading of Robert Sanderson’s approach: *Practical predestinarians*, 246.

shall be'.⁵⁹ This was a prescription for good intent and an examined life, rather than a perfect life.

Ramsden considered it was his role to 'minister cordially to you', but the conscience had to be awakened before comforts were offered and he maintained it was for the minister to decide when this was, explaining 'if wee cold see you broken in heart and low in spirit, then wold wee speake comfort to you and feast your soules with marrow and fattnes',⁶⁰ A sample of the promised comfort came in the next sermon, in the form of a 'self-help' list for various afflictions:

What is it thou dost fear (Condemnation?) read 8 Romans. 1. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Or is it the smart of affliction that troubles thee? Read Romans 8. 2 and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God. Is it the temptations of Satan that terrify thee? Read 6. Romans.20. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. Is it the last judgement day that terrifies thee? Read John 1.4 cap 17.⁶¹

Assurance was not all centred on the believer seeking signs of their personal reconciliation. In his sermon on Col. ii.2 Ramsden dwelt on 'general assurance' which was 'an assurance of the truth of the Christian doctrine'. In the end, this amounted to the same thing as personal assurance, as faith was the marker of salvation, but it invited the hearer to shift their attention from themselves. It diverted some of the tension inherent in the experimental mindset into an area where a believer could exercise agency through the acquisition of knowledge. Effort was needed here, and the minister declared 'it is the duty of Christians to strive to attaine all assurance of religious doctrine' and 'if wee be not assured and firmly settled in God's word, the fault is not in God but in ourselves'. There was a lot of knowledge to be acquired, and he listed a demanding curriculum:

the doctrine of election, the fall of Adam and so of all mankind, the law that is a killing letter, and that no man can possibly bee saved by it. Thou must know the covenant of grace, the doctrine of redemption, of justification, of Christian liberty, of mysticall union, of Christ's office, of regeneration, and lastly thou must know the doctrine of good workes and thou dost good workes and for what end.

And if that was not enough, 'thou must not doe them aiming at thine owne glory but at the glory of God'.⁶²

This 'anthropocentric' general assurance could only go so far, however, and was not the same as the 'full assurance' mentioned in the verse, which Ramsden described as being 'a firme perswasion [of] the heart built upon such infallible signs, that whatever I prescribe in my heart to bee a truth it must needs bee true'. He expanded with the question and answer 'whether

⁵⁹ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. i.23.

⁶¹ Ibid. Col. ii.2.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Col. ii.1.

⁶² Ibid. Col. ii.3.

is fulness of assurance of the nature of faith or noe? I answer, it is not. Assurance is of the nature of faith but fulness of assurance is not, for a man may have faith but not fulness of assurance'. He went on to illustrate this: 'the assurance of a Christian is like a shipp tossed on the sea, sometimes it hath a crosse winde, a backward winde, sometimes a full winde. Even so the assurance of faith is sometimes up and sometimes downe sometimes a crosse winde and sometimes a prosperous winde of the Spiritt'. So it was normal for assurance of faith to come and go, and this was due to the limited capacity of human perception. He asked

whether hath a true Christian as great certainty of the matters of ffaith, as in matters of sense and reason? I answer that he hath not for the things which wee know by sense and reason are more fallible and certaine then the things we know by faith. Because wee have such wavering hearts, that wee give more credit to the things wee see and understand by sense then those things which wee see and understand by the eyes of faith.⁶³

This recalled teaching from the very first sermon, in which he had set out seeing with spiritual eyes and man's incapacity to plumb the depths of mystery. As he had stated in an earlier sermon: 'impossible it is for us to search into the secrets of God in regard of the nature of those things that are contained in this mistery, ffor all that points of this mistery are supernaturall, farr beyond our capacity or reach of intelligence'.⁶⁴

The message Ramsden wanted to convey was that a certain level of assurance of faith could be derived from human effort to acquire knowledge, but this assurance could come and go. A 'fulness of assurance' was a spiritual gift from God and the Christian could live in hope of this but could not make it happen. This was a combination of the anthropocentric and theocentric approaches to assurance, as set out by Dixon.⁶⁵ It was comforting because it pushed an individual to do their best but acknowledged that some things were beyond human capacity and were in the mysterious realm of God's will. Ramsden likewise answered the question 'assurance in the matters of faith is a thing possible?' with the words, 'it is not in the power of man to beget assurance in the heart of any man, then pray thou that God wold get assurance in thy heart'.⁶⁶ 'Full assurance' was not a necessity of salvation, but a gift God could give in this life.

How did the live sermons sound to hearers?

Arnold Hunt observes that the textual remains of sermons rarely provide more than a shadow of what early modern people would have experienced

⁶³ Ibid. Col. ii.2.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Col. i.27.

⁶⁵ Dixon, *Practical predestinarians*, 247–51. See also Lake, 'Serving God and the times', 104.

⁶⁶ Thomas Wilson MS, sermon on Col. ii.2.

as they sat in their pews.⁶⁷ There are hints of Hugh Ramsden's preaching style in the Colossians sermons, as he used rhetorical questions, expostulations and rousing, emotional, sequences based on repetition, such as 'It is I that am risen, and it is I that am pardoned, it is I that was naked, and it is I that am covered.' There are also suggestions of call and response, where he ended sections with 'and let every child of God say Amen'.⁶⁸

However, there is a further opportunity to gain an insight into the live sermon. Right in the middle of the Colossians series is a sermon for a Gunpowder Day commemoration based on Acts xxiii.12, 13 ('and when it was day, certain of the Jews made an assembly and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drinke till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty that had made this conspiracy'). This sermon appears to have been delivered in Methley in November 1627, as the Colossians series continues seamlessly before and after it. In November 1628, shortly after arriving in Halifax, Ramsden delivered the Gunpowder Day sermon again. This time, his spoken sermon was captured by one of his hearers, the twenty-six-year-old John Lister, younger son of Samuel Lister of Shibden Hall.⁶⁹ John Lister's notes are to be found in the first of what would become nine pocketbooks of sermon notes, the rest of which date from the 1650s. Later in life he would use shorthand, but in 1628 the young man had not yet developed this skill. Instead, using his own system of abbreviations and by writing rapidly without a concern for legibility, he captured much of what Ramsden spoke from the pulpit.⁷⁰ The Lister text is as close as it is possible to get to a verbatim record of the spoken sermon without using shorthand. A comparison of the two manuscripts allows the extempore aspects of preaching to be identified.

The Methley and Lister texts are both structured around the same three doctrines, but the Lister text is considerably longer than the Methley one, with more embellished, expressive language. So, 'conspiracy' became 'bloody conspiracy' and 'consultation' became 'clandestine consultation'. The use of imagery and sensory language was significantly increased, with phrases such as 'prick of thorns', 'sting of vipers', 'words of oil and butter'

⁶⁷ A. Hunt, 'Recovering speech acts', in A. Hadfield, M. Dimmock and A. Shinn (eds), *The Ashgate research companion to popular culture in early modern England*, Farnham 2014, 13–30. A selection of works on preaching include M. Morrissey, 'Scripture, style and persuasion in seventeenth-century English theories of preaching', this JOURNAL liii (2002), 686–706; K. Armstrong, 'Sermons in performance', and J. Craig, 'Sermon reception', in P. McCullough, H. Adlington and E. Rhatigan (eds), *The Oxford handbook of early modern sermons*, Oxford 2011, 120–37, 178–97.

⁶⁸ Thomas Wilson ms, sermons on Col. i.21; ii.2.

⁶⁹ Shibden Hall Collection, WYA, SH₃/S/1.

⁷⁰ In addition to using common abbreviations, Lister devised his own, such as 'G' for God, 'hea' for heaven, 'rel' for religion and 'Ap' for apostle.

and 'rank smell of gunpowder' enlivening the spoken sermon. In his Methley manuscript, Ramsden illustrated the first doctrine with a battle image, describing how a 'captaine, when he is about to goe through great dangers and casually he speaks lovingly to his soldiers and saith, come on my noble hearts and pluck up your courage that we may win the field'. In the pulpit he brought this image to greater life, speaking of soldiers having to 'passe their pikes and fight in the mouth of cannons'. He added further images of resilience, such as oiled wrestlers fighting in the Olympic Games and wooden boards being hardened in the sun for shipbuilding. Acoustic patterns also made phrases more memorable. In the Methley text, the second doctrine was written as 'those oftymes should be our greatest friends who prove the cruellest and greatest enemies', but this emerged as the more poetic and resonant 'those who should be our best friends oftymes prove our bitterest foes', with rhyming of the first and last words and repetition of initial consonants.

The iniquity of the biblical plotters was also enhanced in the spoken version, with them being described as 'miscreants' and 'delinquent malefactors' and the 'Devil incarnate'. The image of the serpent was used several times as the embodiment of evil, with the plot set into the wider scheme of the eternal quarrel 'between the seed of woman and the seed of the serpent'. Sibilant sounds were used to emphasise menace, with the preacher describing the biblical plot as a 'devilish combination . . . a knot of sanguinary villains, cruel associates, like Simeon and Levi brothers evilly bound in hellish fraternity'. These sounds were repeated later in the sermon, when the wickedness of the 'infernal powder plot' was described as dire, hellish, black and devilish. The Methley text highlighted the plotters' 'blind and inordinate zeal of false religion', but this was made more pungent in the pulpit as 'blind zeal begat hatred, hatred cruelty and cruelty persecution'.

The emotional tension was brought to a peak three-quarters of the way through the sermon with a sequence that depicted the Gunpowder Plot as a sacrifice. The two texts are similar here, with colourful images of an altar, wood pyre, binding ropes and a sacrificing knife ready at the throat.⁷¹ However, the straightforward thanksgiving that followed this in the Methley text became an interactive call and response sequence in the live event, with different parts of the congregation being activated in turn. The preacher called out 'Let [us] call and sing. Host of heaven, stars, elect and all elect, wake up quire and sing, consort with us. Let old men say, mercy of God endure forever. Let young men _ and all creatures.'

⁷¹ Curiously, when Ramsden was four, a Roman altar stone was found behind his family home, Thick Hollins. The stone is now in the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The notes break off at this point, presumably because, as a young man, Lister was taking his turn to call out his response.⁷²

Of course a Gunpowder Day sermon was intended to be more dramatic than everyday preaching, so this is a heightened example. The point here is the relative difference between a preparatory text that was authorised by the minister for circulation, and a near verbatim record of the spoken sermon intended for private use. The Lister text shows the degree to which the minister extemporised to make the live event an engaging, emotional experience for his hearers. So, there is a strong case to be made that Ramsden's spoken sermons on Colossians would have been an engaging event, attracting at least some of the same crowd that had packed into the barn to see Richard Shanne's Whitsuntide play a dozen years earlier.

Henry Ramsden and the 1630s

Hugh and Henry Ramsden were preaching in different contexts and had different aims for their sermons, but in terms of predestinarian doctrine they were in accord.⁷³ Henry preached his sermon 'A gate to happiness' while he was a lecturer in London, probably in 1626. It was printed posthumously in 1639 at the instigation of John Goodwin, minister of St Stephen's, Coleman Street.⁷⁴ It has a narrower scope than his brother's work, with its avowed purpose being to 'shew the necessary coherence of sanctification with justification'.⁷⁵ Henry set out the two phases of holiness, as 'there are some things that concur in the first working of this life of grace and death to sin, and there are others that concur not to the first work, but to the increasing and augmentation of it'.⁷⁶ He taught the difference between the gift of grace and discerning that grace as 'at one time or

⁷² This sequence appears to be based on Psalm cxlviii. For call and response in sermons see Hunt, *The art of hearing*, 6–7, and J. Craig, 'Psalms, groans and dogwhippers: the soundscape of worship in the English parish church, 1547–1642', in W. Coster and A. Spicer (eds), *Sacred space in early modern Europe*, Cambridge 2005, 104–23 at p. 112.

⁷³ The brothers appear to have been close. Hugh named his eldest son after his brother, and after his death Henry erected a monument in Halifax parish church, extolling Hugh's virtues and mourning his loss.

⁷⁴ Four of Henry Ramsden's sermons were published posthumously as *A gleaning in Gods harvest: foure choyce handfulls*, 2nd edn, London 1639 (STC 20660). One of the sermons in the book is noted as being preached on Easter Day 1626. At the time Ramsden's sermons were published, Goodwin had just been in trouble with the bishop of London for preaching predestination: J. Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan revolution*, Woodbridge 2006, 61. It is unknown how notes of Henry Ramsden's sermons came into Goodwin's possession. However, Goodwin's predecessor at Coleman St, John Davenport, had been a student at Magdalen Hall at the same time as Henry Ramsden so there may have been a personal connection.

⁷⁵ Ramsden, *A gleaning*, 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 88.

other God gives another gift, that is, a gift whereby a man shall discern that grace'.⁷⁷ Henry explained man's frailty of perception, and the difference between reason and faith, in similar language to Hugh: 'for so many things are sure and certaine in themselves, and yet wee remaine uncertaine of them. The reason is, because the assurance of them procedes, not so much from the certainty of the thing, as our knowing and apprehending that certainty'.⁷⁸ Where Hugh had used the ship tossed on the sea as a metaphor for assurance coming and going, Henry deployed a meteorological image: 'just as it is with the Sunne, so long as the Sunne is continued, so long there is continuall ground and cause of light, but not withstanding the discerning and perceiving of the light may be taken from us by the night, or by an eclipse, or by clouds, that may take away the sight of the Sunne'.⁷⁹ As with Hugh, Henry put forward ways to achieve assurance through Scripture, conscience and God's spirit calming the conscience. He touched on the false persuasion of hypocrites, but cheerfully told his hearers that this was no reason for saints to deny themselves assurance, as 'if a man in a dreame think that hee eates, shall not men therefore that are awake be assured that they eate?'⁸⁰ Most importantly, he held to the Calvinist fundamental that salvation was not in any way due to human merit, but 'our death to sin and our life to Christ are both the effects of God's grace'.⁸¹

Henry's sermon also highlights a particular circumstance in which preaching predestinarian assurance may have been a comfort. It was delivered during a time of plague to a non-elite audience.⁸² Henry expounded:

they have fallen on the right hand, and on the left hand before us, and behind us, and wee ourselves know not when our turne may come. Now the lesse assurance we have of being here on earth the more wee should labour for assurance of our well being hereafter in heaven. And if wee have once this assurance, this will bestead us and minister comfort in all calamities.

If plague did come 'wee shall have infinite comfort, then when our doores shall bee shut up and we have no other comfort, yet then our conscience will witness comfortably, that notwithstanding wee die, yet wee shall come where wee shall live for ever'.⁸³

Given that Henry, like Hugh, was a committed Calvinist, it is interesting to examine how he managed to navigate the increasingly hostile environment created by the Laudian Archbishop Richard Neile in the 1630s. Like his brother, Henry was never censured for unconformity, and he responded to Neile's coercive programme of church interior

⁷⁷ Ibid. 69. ⁷⁸ Ibid. 54. ⁷⁹ Ibid. 67. ⁸⁰ Ibid. 70. ⁸¹ Ibid. 81–2.

⁸² Ramsden also applied the comforts of assurance for the poor, the disgraced and the sick: *ibid.* 76–7. ⁸³ *Ibid.*

reconfiguration with a negotiation that allowed him to continue with his calling.⁸⁴

As may be expected for Halifax, there had been substantial investment in the first three decades of the seventeenth century to furnish and configure the parish church for sermon-centred worship. The pews and lofts pointed towards a pulpit set deep into the nave, and the chancel was partitioned off as a separate communion room. After visiting the parish in 1633, Neile's chancellor, William Easdall, demanded a re-ordering of the pews and the replacement of the chancel partition with a screen to accord with ceremonial worship. He visited again in May 1635, and this time required 'the pulling downe of all the lofts in the body of the church of Halifax and making the same decent and cleane'.⁸⁵ Henry Ramsden and his churchwardens appear to have then voluntarily adopted a beautification project. In 1636 they bought twenty-nine books of 'leafe gould' and 'fower hundred and odde stars for the chancel', probably resulting in golden stars set against a blue painted ceiling, as scaffolding was also erected at this time. The Ten Commandments were given gilded frames and a border made for the king's arms. The lofts were decorated with a 'crest all along the foreside' and the pulpit was enhanced with an expensive canopy.⁸⁶

Was this adoption of the Laudian 'beauty of holiness' evidence of a switch to ceremonial worship and Arminian divinity? This would be surprising, given Henry Ramsden's Calvinism and the godly nature of several of the churchwardens, including the Gunpowder Day sermon note-taker, John Lister, who contributed a substantial £4 2s. to the project.⁸⁷ A stronger interpretation is that the actions were a deliberate strategy of negotiation with Easdall. During his 1635 tour, the chancellor had also visited Sheffield, which, like Halifax, had a long history of Calvinist preaching. The vicar of Sheffield was compelled to resign for his unconformity and a perjury case was brought against the churchwardens for not reporting him. The perjury case was used to force through changes to the church interior, and, after they complied, the churchwardens were acquitted but still had to pay the £13 costs of the court case.⁸⁸ The beautification at Halifax can be seen as Ramsden and his churchwardens negotiating a more favourable treatment than occurred at Sheffield. Relations with the chancellor were further smoothed by the parish making a lavish show of welcome in Halifax, footing a huge bill of £5 11s. for his stay at the Cross

⁸⁴ A. Foster, 'Church policies of the 1630s', in R. Cust and A. Hughes (eds), *Conflict in early Stuart England: studies in religion and politics, 1603–1642*, Harlow 1989, 193–223 at p. 202.

⁸⁵ Diocese of York court records, BIA, Chancery AB 26, fo. 40v.

⁸⁶ WYA, WDP 53/5/1/1, 1636, fo. 81.

⁸⁷ Shibden Hall Collection, WYA, SH1/OB/1636.

⁸⁸ Marchant, *Puritans and the church courts*, 69–74.

Inn and spending a phenomenal 19s. for ringing the bells on his arrival.⁸⁹ The strategy worked and won the parish several concessions. Some of the lofts, so necessary for hearing sermons, were still in place a year after they should have been removed. The pulpit was allowed to remain deep inside the nave, acting as the focal point of sermon-centred worship, in contrast to Sheffield, where it had been moved to the chancel arch. Thus, the essential spatial and material elements conducive to preaching were retained at Halifax, and, most importantly, the Calvinist minister was allowed to continue as vicar until his death in 1638.⁹⁰ Henry's monument in Halifax parish church celebrates how he was faithful in the 'discharge of his function and particularly attentive to the Church's interest for near eight years', words which subtly attest to his skilful working 'with' the Laudian regime to preserve Calvinist preaching in his parish.⁹¹

That this was Calvinist negotiation and survival rather than conversion is further confirmed by the fate of Henry Ramsden's ceremonialist successor, Richard Marsh. He was chased out of the town as soon as possible at the start of the Civil War, in which conflict Halifax was firmly on the side of Parliament. By the 1650s, Halifax was established as a Presbyterian town and the preaching exercise had resumed. Oliver Heywood described its renewed success in that 'not only neighbouring ministers preached in their turns, but strangers far and near were sent for to preach it'.⁹² John Lister continued to hear sermons and, now with the aid of shorthand, filled another eight volumes with his notes.

The sermons of Hugh Ramsden, and his brother Henry, reveal several interesting points for understanding Calvinism in the early Caroline parish. They show that there was no single paradigm for teaching predestinarian doctrine, but rather a core of principles that could not be compromised, on top of which preachers had a degree of freedom to adapt in response to their audience and setting. Ministers were able to work flexibly, but without doctrinal compromise, to promote both inclusive and exclusive visions of the Christian community that could work alongside each other. This flexibility of character meant that Hugh and Henry Ramsden were able to do more than survive in an anti-Calvinist, Laudian Church. These sensitive and adaptable ministers sought to bring comfort and assurance to their flocks. They deployed the full range of options open to them within Calvinist orthodoxy, combining an imperative for human agency and effort with the unknowable mystery of God's will and

⁸⁹ WYA, WDP 53/5/1/1, 1635, fo. 78.

⁹⁰ The impact of events at Sheffield on Halifax can be seen in the difficulties in recruiting twelve new churchwardens the following year: WYA, WDP 53/5/1/1, 1637, fo. 84.

⁹¹ J. Horsfall Turner, *Biographia Halifaxiensis*, Bingley 1883, 169.

⁹² Oliver Heywood, *The Rev. Oliver Heywood, B.A., 1630–1702; his autobiography, diaries anecdote and event books, IV*, ed. J. Horsfall Turner, Brighouse 1882, 16.

grace. These anthropocentric and theocentric approaches to assurance worked together dialectically, like cogs and oil in a complex machine, within which a sincere believer could fail, repent and still not lose hope of salvation.