

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Puritanism, Spiritual Kinship, and the Lord's Supper in Elizabethan and early Stuart England

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Abstract

The rhetoric of spiritual kinship was a pungent part of a “discourse of separation” which materialized among the English puritans in post-Reformation England. Using print literature aimed at properly preparing the godly to come “worthily” to the Lord's Supper, most of which was penned by puritan divines, this article examines family language in use among the godly in the context of the communion meal in the Elizabethan and early Stuart national church. This rhetoric signaled a real identity – an identity tied intimately to the nexus of right doctrine and a certain type of English Protestant practice. The present essay traces out the theological framework that buttressed this identity and suggests the ways in which family language fostered both inclusive and exclusive responses among the godly as they sought to “rightly” celebrate the sacrament. It argues that the use of the language of spiritual kinship helped the godly come to terms with their uncomfortable position in a national church they considered insufficiently reformed, and with the difficulties that ensued from “holy” living, as naturally unholy beings, in a fallen world. This study contributes to our understanding of the informal mechanisms by which early modern English Protestants could navigate the choppy waters of social and religious life in Elizabethan and early Stuart England. More generally, this consideration of a distinctive puritan usage of familiar scriptural language to make sense of England's religious landscape in this period underscores the interpretive importance of remaining acutely aware of discursive context in early modern religious sources.

Keywords: Puritanism; sacraments; practical divinity; post-Reformation; Church of England

1. Introduction

On one Sunday afternoon in the last decade of James I's reign, minister John Randall put the following questions to his parishioners in Little Eastcheap, London: “What nearer natural bond, than to be children of the same father? What sweeter name of love, than the name of father? And is it so in nature, how much more in grace, to be spiritual brethren, and children of our heavenly father?”¹ Randall framed the rest of

¹John Randall, *Three and Twentie Sermons, or, Catechisticall Lectures upon the Sacrament of the Lords Supper: Preached Monthly before the Communion* (London, 1630), 96. After Randall's death in 1622, his son

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his sermon, meant expressly to help his listeners prepare for the following week's celebration of the Lord's Supper, around this concept of spiritual kinship, its supremacy over natural relations, and its role in the sacrament of communion. He went on to explain that at the Lord's table there was to be maintained a tight bond of Christian fellowship, or "a lovely communion," among all participants.² That fellowship was grounded in their common spiritual adoption, through Christ, by the "same father," God. This adoption was the "fountain" of their communion with each other and was brought to its height at the Lord's Supper, "the sacrament of love and amity among God's children."³ Thus the communion meal was only for the "faithful," or those to whom the "saving benefit" of grace in Christ was applied.⁴ From this, according to Randall, "all" should surmise "that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a public testification, a comfortable nurse, a mutual bond, a sure confirmation of that spiritual communion which the faithful have amongst themselves."⁵ At the Lord's family table, the love of the "children of God in earth" was "sweetly confirmed."⁶

Such framing of the supremacy of godly spiritual relations, and the close connections they demanded, while conventionally Protestant at first glance, became in Elizabethan and early Stuart England a particular mark of the "puritans," or the "godly."⁷ They endeavored to set themselves apart as the purveyors of "true religion" in a national church inclusive of all but the most (they felt) brazenly iniquitous English subjects.⁸ In fact, it was in the struggle over the shape and nature of the comprehensive national church in this period that the idea of the spiritual family, and everything it implied, was in full flower among the "hotter sort" of English Protestants. It helped the puritans drive a conceptual wedge between the "godly" minority and the "ungodly" majority within an otherwise capacious Church of England. Manifestations of this concept in puritan devotional comportment therefore reflected and perpetuated the central tensions in post-Reformation English religious life. Significantly, this came to a crescendo as the "godly" sought to realize their vision for the Lord's Supper in this national church "but halfly reformed."⁹ Central to that vision was a communion meal administered only to those within the English church who were, in accord with the Apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11, "worthy" receivers – that is, adequately prepared for the sacrament through a rigorous process of spiritual self-examination. This examination was to ensure would-be communicants did not partake of the meal while actively engaged in

Joshua Randall collated these sermon manuscripts for publication. For ease of read, and where appropriate, spelling has been modernized in this and all subsequent quotations from early modern sources.

²Randall, *Three and Twentie Sermons*, 96.

³Ibid., 91, 98.

⁴Ibid., 88.

⁵Ibid., 98.

⁶Ibid., 100.

⁷See, e.g., Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: "Orthodoxy," "Heterodoxy" and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 76–78, 407–408. Lake describes puritanism in reference to a "distinctively puritan synthesis or style" that is not reducible to certain enumerable characteristics and was tied intimately to a sense of "godly insiderhood" and reciprocal recognition. This paper adopts Lake's experientially driven interpretive matrix. Therefore, the use of either "puritan" or "godly" throughout is largely synonymous, though the latter term is more representative of contemporary discourse, particularly this group's self-identity and self-fashioning before the Civil War(s).

⁸Ibid., 978.

⁹Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), chap. 2.

sin, without having due regard for the significance of the ordinance, or as unbelievers (often unselfconsciously) in the guise of faithful believers. To that end, puritan divines promoted intensive regimes of spiritual preparation through print and in their parish ministry. These regimes offer historians an informative, if fleeting, glimpse of the dynamics of puritan spiritual kinship and the formation of an “imagined” community of God’s family.¹⁰ This was a community conceptually set apart from those in the English church (even “most of them”) they supposed “hypocrites,” only “outwardly” practicing “true” religion.¹¹

Patrick Collinson’s early work on the separatist and congregational “tendencies” in puritan voluntary religion noted the stress this kind of conceptual polarity could put on the parish, and his subsequent work, which somewhat softened the initial argument, observed that this stress, rather than leading ineluctably to separation and independence from the national church, ‘mitigated and to some extent kept in check by a profound and widespread aversion for separatism and a conscientious respect for religious institutions’.¹² What is more, Collinson pointed to the “strength of the conventional bonds” that kept the most progressive puritans “within the formal communion and community of their parish churches.”¹³ What the present essay argues, and the majority of the extant sacramental preparation materials suggest, is that these checks on “religious anarchy” that Collinson described were actually enhanced by the exclusivist tendency of the godly to mentally divide the world into the godly and ungodly, and then assimilate the former into a conceptually concrete, and affectively meaningful, spiritual family.¹⁴ Thus spiritual kinship, both in act and idea, worked to positively strengthen the position of the puritans *inside* the national church.

As Alexandra Walsham has recently noted in a more general way, “two ostensibly contradictory instincts” sat right “at the heart of puritanism: inclusion and exclusion.”¹⁵ Wrestling with this contradiction, this paper suggests that as a rhetoric of distinction and separation, the language of spiritual kinship let loose the built-up pressure of godly life amid the mass of the ungodly. It helped non-separating puritans remain within the fold of the English church, even as the window for the formal dominance of progressive Protestantism in that church began to close over the course of this period. This was all given expression in regimes of self-examination, developed and disseminated in the void (it was thought) yet to be filled with proper biblical discipline, which were meant to establish and ensure worthy participation in the communion meal. These regimes involved the adoption of some significant combination of the

¹⁰Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹¹Randall, *Three and Twentie Sermons*, 308.

¹²Patrick Collinson, “The Godly: Aspects of Popular Protestantism,” in *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism*, ed. Patrick Collinson (London: Hambledon, 1983), 1–18. Quoted at 17. Cf. Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 242–283. See also, Patrick Collinson, “Sects and the Evolution of Puritanism,” in *From Cranmer to Sancroft: Essays on English Religion in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Patrick Collinson (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 129–144.

¹³Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, 275.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁵Alexandra Walsham, “The Godly and Their Neighbours: Puritanism and Religious Pluralism in Early Modern England (1559–1642),” *French Journal of British Studies* 27, no. 3 (December 2022): 2.

key physical idioms of what has been called “experimental predestinarianism,” which could help the godly, in a fallen world, recognize themselves and others as God’s “children.”¹⁶ Having established at the Lord’s table, at least ideationally, the contours of this family writ-large, they could perform their duties of love and care for those that comprised the household of God, as well as for those outside of the spiritual family. Kinship language then helped inculcate a sense of separation by utilizing the entirely biblical, and often conventionally Protestant, image of the spiritual family – an outline of which could be pieced together from the Elizabethan prayer book – but doing so in a more intense way, headlined by a set of consistent, though nebulous, affective markers shared by God’s true children to help themselves and others know they were of his family and belonged at his family table.¹⁷ As will be discussed below, one of these markers was a specific duty of care and concern for those outside of the family of God. The language of spiritual kinship helped the puritans to delineate between the two sides and act accordingly, in service, they hoped, to God, one another, and their “ungodly” neighbors.

The present essay traces out the theological framework that buttressed this identity and suggests the ways in which it fostered both inclusive and exclusive responses among the puritans as they sought to “rightly” celebrate the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. It argues that the use of the language of spiritual kinship helped the godly come to terms with their uncomfortable position in a national church they considered insufficiently reformed, and with the difficulties that ensued from “holy” living, as naturally unholy beings, in an unholy, fallen world. Broadly, this study considers the impact of processes of inclusion and exclusion on religious experience in early modern England. It contributes to our understanding of the informal mechanisms by which early modern English Protestants could navigate the choppy waters of social and religious life in Elizabethan and early Stuart England. More generally, this examination of a distinctive puritan usage of familiar scriptural language to make sense of the religious topography with which they were confronted underscores the interpretive importance of remaining acutely aware of discursive context in early modern religious sources.¹⁸

II. Historical Background

Though for much of the twentieth century it was common for historians of Elizabethan and early Stuart England to speak of the communion meal as something of a dead letter for ‘hot’ Protestants, forever subsidiary to word-centered, predestinarian preaching, recent studies have done much to reinvigorate our understanding of the sacrament’s significance across English Protestantism in this period.¹⁹ Indeed, as a means of grace, a

¹⁶Channeling R. T. Kendall’s still serviceable distinction between “credal” and “experimental” predestinarians, see Peter Lake, “Calvinism and the English Church 1570–1635,” *Past & Present* 114, no. 1 (February 1987): 32–76. For a perhaps less ideologically laden term, see Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590–1640* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 11–12.

¹⁷See, e.g., *The Booke of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments* (London: Christopher Barker, 1577), G5r. For example, it seems the only instance of the use of the word “family” to refer to the English church in the 1559 prayer book is the collect to be used on Good Friday (“Almighty God. . . behold this thy family”). Puritan usage of such kinship terms is far more intricate, explicit, and exclusivist.

¹⁸For a model of the potential fruit of this kind of approach, see generally, Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁹See, e.g., Arnold Hunt, “The Lord’s Supper in Early Modern England,” *Past & Present* 161, no. 1 (November 1998): 39–83; Christopher Haigh, “Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion

commemoration of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice for sin, and as a bonding agent for the constituent members of Christ's body on earth, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper sat squarely at the center of Protestant piety in early modern England. In fact, its centrality to "right" worship at every point on the English Protestant spectrum led to not a few moments of intense dispute within the national church. Everything from the posture to be assumed at the reception of the elements to the positioning and decoration of the communion table came under scrutiny.²⁰

To avoid consuming the symbol-laden bread and wine to their "own damnation," as Paul had warned the early church at Corinth, believers were encouraged to sufficiently prepare their hearts and minds for this sacramental meal. This preparation could also be cast more constructively, with its efficacy as a spiritual prophylactic giving some ground to its function as a vessel for reverence and worship. As Samuel Ward, the puritan Master of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge jotted in his manuscript for an early seventeenth-century sermon, it was because there was "no greater testimony of [Christ's] love" than "this H[oly] sacrament," that each communicant should "come to these H[oly] mysteries with all due preparation."²¹ Most often, however, both aspects of what ultimately constituted 'worthy' reception were combined in clerical appeals for sufficient lay preparation.

Though the instruments of worship in the national church proscribed unworthy receiving, and promoted preparatory self-examination through pre-communion exhortations, homilies, and private conferences with the clergy, in the absence of a more satisfactory disciplinary frame, the puritans considered this simply insufficient for so great a responsibility.²² As Martin Ingram's adept work on the ecclesiastical courts in this period makes clear, however, it was not an utter *lack* of institutional disciplinary activity that raised puritan hackles. In fact, the church courts were "reinvigorated" after the entrenchment of the Elizabethan settlement and became an effective tool of conformity and moral restraint for the national church.²³ Rather, the puritans were concerned with church disciplinary structures, and the uses to which they were put, that were inapposite to a mode, or disposition, of piety that the godly believed was biblically prescribed. Therefore, those within the national church that were most critical of its capacity to effectively promote worthy receiving in this period, that is, non-separating, even "moderate," puritans, were particularly committed to promulgating intensive regimes of preparation, and often did so in print.²⁴

in Post-Reformation England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51, no. 4 (October 2000): 721–740; and Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 336–351.

²⁰See, e.g., Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c. 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²¹Sidney Sussex College Library, Cambridge, MS. O.8.

²²See *The Booke of the Common Prayer* (London: R. Grafton, 1549), sig. D4–D5v and *The Boke of Common Prayer* (London: Edward Whytchurche, 1552), sig. M6r–M6v. The exhortations for worthy receiving in the 1552 edition were carried over to the 1559 edition. The second book of homilies (1562–1563) detailed a more rigorous regime of self-examination than the provisions in the prayer book. See *The Epistles and Gospelles* (1540), fol. lxxviii–lxx and "15. An Homily of the Worthy Receiving and Reverent Esteeming of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ," in *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition*, ed. Gerald Bray (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2015).

²³See Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁴See, e.g., Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 292. See also, Peter Lake and Isaac Stephens, *Scandal and Religious Identity in Early Stuart*

It has been frequently suggested that this preparative print literature, particularly the “separate manual” for communion preparation, is traceable to Christopher Sutton’s 1601 *Godly Meditations upon the Lordes Supper*, a Protestant reworking of the Jesuit Luca Pinelli’s 1598 *Libretto di brevi meditazioni del Santiss. Sacramento*.²⁵ This overlooks a string of extant English affective preparatory manuals from the second half of the sixteenth century. This genre of experiential Protestant literature, connected genealogically to medieval Catholic devotional practices, had shown its nascent glimmers on the Continent from the outset of the Reformation.²⁶ In England, this material really got its legs by the 1580s.²⁷ In fact, Andrew Maunsell’s 1595 *Catalogue of English printed books* had an entire section dedicated to sacramental preparation manuals, almost all of which, it appears, had been published before 1590.²⁸ Thus, this body of printed material was available for lay devotional consumption in England well before the turn of the century. It had become a fixture of the famous puritan “practical divinity” by the end of the same.

The general structure of the regimes of preparation detailed in this print literature followed a consistent pattern. They were agreed, as an anonymous manual from 1580 began, that the Lord’s Supper was not for “every one which hath taken upon him the outward sign and badge of Christianity, which is the sacrament of Baptism,” but only for those who are “true Christians,” and thus the “children of God.”²⁹ For them only were the elements appointed, so that as “God’s dear children” they might have “spiritual nourishment” and so “be fed to everlasting life.”³⁰ In this sacrament, the author wrote, they were “made one body with [Christ], and members one of another, and an holy temple of God, through the Spirit of Christ dwelling” in them.³¹ These, God’s “children,” were worthy receivers of the communion meal, and worthy reception served to assure them of their status as children, the elect of God.³² Due preparation was an aid to this assurance, and a means of helping them discover the requisite traits of the worthy receiver: “sound knowledge” of right doctrine, “a steadfast faith in the truth” of the gospel promises, “unfeigned repentance” for sin, “sincere love” to God and man, and “thanksgiving” to God

England: A Northamptonshire Maid’s Tragedy (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 2015), 360. On the nature and contours of moderate puritanism, see Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

²⁵Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 291; See, e.g., Chris Jones, “Reformed Sacramental Piety in England 1590–1630” (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2012), 25; Harry Spillane, “Eucharistic Devotion and Textual Appropriation in Post-Reformation England,” *The Seventeenth Century* 36, no. 6 (2021): 869; and Will Tarnasky, “‘Let Your Servant Depart in Peace’: Seventeenth-Century Eucharistic Preparation as *Ars Moriendi*,” *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 24, no. 2 (2022): 103.

²⁶See Martin Luther, *Ain gütte trostliche predig von der würdigen berayttung zü dem hochwürdigen Sacrament* (Wittenberg, 1518). See also, e.g., Amy Nelson Burnett, “Instructed with the Greatest Diligence Concerning the Holy Sacrament,” in *From Wittenberg to the World: Essays on the Reformation and its Legacy in Honor of Robert Kolb*, eds. Charles P. Arand, Erik H. Herrmann, and Daniel L. Mattson (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 47–66.

²⁷See Haigh, “Communion and Community”, 724–725.

²⁸Andrew Maunsell, *The First Part of the Catalogue of English printed Bookes* (London: 1595), 93–94.

²⁹Anonymous, *A Preparation to the Due Consideration and Reverent Comming to the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Lorde* (London: Christopher Barker, 1580), sig. A6r.

³⁰Ibid., sig. B4r.

³¹Ibid., sig. B4r.

³²See, Ibid., sig. C4.

evidenced by obedience to his commands.³³ This rubric, variously adapted and supplemented, was meant to help would-be communicants identify in themselves and others, the essential signs that they were God's children and therefore invited guests at the table of the Lord. It stipulated more systematically, and in more detail, the schemes for self-examination found in the instruments of the institutional church. The pre-communion homily in the second book of homilies (1562–1563), for instance, set forth, in broad fashion, “three things” that were “requisite in him which would seemly. . . resort to the Lord's table”: “a right and worthy estimation and understanding” of the nature of the sacrament, a “sure faith,” and “newness or pureness of life” after communicating.³⁴ It is important to note here, too, that the exhortations to worthily receive the sacrament in both the 1562–1563 book of homilies and in the 1559 prayer book were to be made at the minister's discretion. This is reflected in many of the extant visitation articles of the early Stuart church, which were less concerned with the minister's involvement in a communicant's subjective preparation, than they were in promoting and preserving an objective standard of “worthiness” for all communicants.³⁵ Feeling particularly hamstrung in the pursuit of holiness by their inherently depraved natures – the common lot of humanity because of the fall – the godly used more intensive regimes of preparation as both a guard against their sinful pollution of the Lord's Supper, and as a means of assurance of salvation and therefore their place in God's family. Thus, it is in a literature committed to defining and preparing “worthy” receivers, that a coherent theological framework for the language of spiritual kinship, which was to supersede all other earthly bonds, is particularly apparent.

This language worked as an affective theological shorthand that allowed members of the godly, who remained enmeshed in what they considered to be an ill-reformed state church, to identify one another without resorting to the evils of separation. Self-examination in preparation for the Lord's Supper was an invitation for the godly to perpetually query the boundary of God's family, their relation to it, and its relation to a comprehensive national church. That church, while “true” in the barest sense of the term, and “true,” in large part because of the godly few operating within it, was considered insufficiently biblical in its discipline and ceremonial particulars.³⁶ To William

³³Thomas Wilcox, *A Forme of Preparation to the Lordes Supper* (London: Robert Waldegrave, 1587), sig. A2v–A2r.

³⁴See “15. An Homily of the Worthy Receiving and Reverent Esteeming of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ.” To these requirements for worthy receiving the 1559 prayer book added discretionary exhortations that stipulated reconciliation with God and man, “trust in God's mercy,” and “humble and hearty thanks” to God “for the redemption of the world.” See “The Order for the Administration of the Lordes Supper, or Holy Communion,” in *The Booke of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments* (London: Christopher Barker, 1577).

³⁵See, e.g., “Bishop Francis Godwin's Injunctions for Llandaff Diocese, 1603” and “Bishop Miles Smith's Articles for Gloucester Diocese, 1622,” in *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994), I: 1–3, 204–210. This objective standard was tied generally to knowledge of the Christian faith (as expressed in the prayer book catechism) and a lack of engagement in open and notorious sin.

³⁶See, e.g., Patrick Collinson, “The English Conventicle,” in *From Cranmer to Sancroft* (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 166–167; Patrick Collinson, “The Cohabitation of the Faithful with the Unfaithful,” in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, eds. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 63; and Peter Lake, “William Bradshaw, Antichrist and the Community of the Godly,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 4 (October 1985): 579.

Bradshaw, that “model divine” of the moderate puritan tradition, it was precisely because the godly presence in the English ministry “is a means to keep out a worse and a way in time to bring a better, if a better be to be brought in” that, in practical terms, non-separation was so important.³⁷ In different terms, John Randall made a similar point when he told his parishioners that the national church was “a true visible church” because “by the blessing of God some true believers” existed within it and performed the “special exercises of saving faith” in “the truth and singleness of their hearts.”³⁸ This did mean however, as Patrick Collinson and Peter Lake have argued, that non-separating puritans were “in a more exposed position than separatists,” who, being religiously disconnected from the mass of the ungodly, were far less ambivalent about social and commercial interaction with them.³⁹ The former set themselves the more precarious task of identifying the ungodly and trying to create mental and emotional distance from them from the inside.⁴⁰ These puritans therefore felt keenly the pressure of keeping up their social and affective-theological distinctiveness while living among those with whom they were to share the perquisites and demands that attended continued enmeshment in the national church. One of the purposes of this essay is to argue that family language, particularly when deployed in relation to the Lord’s Supper and preparation thereto, was a relief valve – a mechanism of distinction and separation – that allowed non-separating puritans to dial down the pressure of godly living from within the Elizabethan and early Stuart national church. While Alexandra Walsham has recently traced the centrifugal forces that notions of the spiritual family unleashed on the inclusive, institutional church, this essay argues that puritan conceptions of spiritual kinship also exerted a kind of centripetal pull that helped achieve a shaky stasis at the parish level in Elizabethan and early Stuart England.⁴¹

The rhetoric of spiritual kinship was then an especially pungent part of a “discourse of separation,” which materialized among the English godly in ways that are, at least as a conceptual frame, not dissimilar from the “acts of ritual separation” John Bossy traced in the emergent English Catholic community.⁴² This rhetoric operated, in theory, as one aspect of a more general practice of distinction and separation pursued by the puritans. For example, Patrick Collinson’s work on “voluntary religion,” or, the prophesyings, conventicles, sermon-gadding, fasts, and other forms of “exclusive fellowship” that helped the godly pursue holiness from within the national church, comprehended many aspects of this practice of distinction and informal separation.⁴³ The godly

³⁷William Bradshaw, *The Unreasonableness of the Separation* (Dort: George Waters, 1614), sig. G; and Lake, *Moderate Puritanism*, 277.

³⁸Randall, *Three and Twentie Sermons*, 307–309.

³⁹Collinson, “The Cohabitation of the Faithful with the Unfaithful,” 62. See also, Collinson, “The English Conventicle,” 167 and Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988), 144–145. See also, Lake, “William Bradshaw, Antichrist and the Community of the Godly,” 580.

⁴⁰See Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, 145.

⁴¹Alexandra Walsham, *Generations: Age, Ancestry, and Memory in the English Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 163–164.

⁴²See John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 108–148. See also, Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 9.

⁴³See Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, 242–283 (NB: 268–270) and Collinson, “The Cohabitation of the Faithful with the Unfaithful,” 51–76. See also, Lake, “William Bradshaw, Antichrist and the Community of the Godly,” 588; and “‘A Charitable Christian Hatred’: The Godly and their Enemies in

were committed to enduring the tension of an existence in and among the throngs of the ungodly, while pursuing further reformation through the means at their disposal. Thus, while keeping up their prosecution of religious change in the political sphere, a project that Nicholas Tyacke has ably sketched, they pursued the obverse side of what was ultimately the same coin of the puritan movement: holy living in obedience to scripture and the mutual edification of Christ's body, the household of God.⁴⁴

Increasingly a function of godly religious exercise, the deployment of any one of these aspects of distinction and separation from within the national church was contextually located and constructed. When brought to its culmination in the most potent representation of puritan ritual separation, the Lord's Supper duly fenced and administered, the use of family language, as an instantiation of a godly "discourse of separation," was as productive as it was descriptive. Among the godly, the language of an idealized spiritual kinship provided a rhetorical sharp edge to the otherwise blunt sword of the sacrament in what they held to be an insufficiently reformed English national church. Stated another way, godly moves to effect a "rightly" administered communion meal were, at least conceptually, attempts at instituting a "ritual of separation" refined, fueled, and sustained by this "discourse of separation" and all that it entailed, cast most colorfully in the biblicist language of the spiritual family. The undulations of English social, cultural, and political life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would ultimately stymie this ideal as a national project, but the rhetoric of spiritual kinship proved both malleable and enduring. Indeed, across this period it served as a conceptual aid for puritans grappling with the inherent tension between the separateness demanded by their commitment to experimental predestinarianism, and the strictures of an inclusive English national church.

This rhetoric was far more important than the attention it has received in the historiography lets on. While significant studies have considered ties of spiritual kinship in early modern English Catholicism, specifically as they cropped up in the sacrament of baptism and the practice of Godparenthood, much of this work has seen the progress of Protestantism in England as destructive of communal relations, both spiritual and natural.⁴⁵ Alexandra Walsham has deftly contested this claim.⁴⁶ Far less has been done, however, to consider the concept of the spiritual family from the Protestant perspective, especially with regard to its internal dynamics and cohesive potential.⁴⁷

the 1630s," in *The Culture of English Protestantism 1560–1700*, eds. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (London: Macmillan, 1996), 145–183. See generally, Euan Cameron, "The 'Godly Community' in the Theory and Practice of the European Reformation," in *Voluntary Religion*, eds. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 131–153.

⁴⁴See, e.g., Nicholas Tyacke, "The Puritan Paradigm of English Politics, 1558–1642," *Historical Journal* 53, no. 3 (2010): 527–550, NB: 537; and Catherine Lila Chou, "'To Omit the Precise Rule and Strayt Observacion': The 1572 'Bill Concerning Rites and Ceremones' and the Campaign for Liturgical Diversity in the Elizabethan Church," *Journal of British Studies* 59, no. 1 (January 2020): 80–100. See also, Karl Gunther, "Rebuilding the Temple: James Pilkington, Aggeus and Early Elizabethan Puritanism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60, no. 4 (2009): 689–707; and Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, "The Ecclesiastical Policy of King James I," *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 2 (1985): 169–207.

⁴⁵See, e.g., John Bossy, "Blood and Baptism: Kinship, Community and Christianity in Western Europe from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," *Studies in Church History* 10 (1973): 129–143. Cf. Will Coster's more ambivalent findings in *Baptism and Spiritual Kinship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁴⁶See Walsham, *Generations: Age, Ancestry*, 140–169.

⁴⁷Cf. Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620–1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Indeed, for the puritans, this rhetoric signaled and helped give form to a consistent body of affective religious practices that helped the godly identify to whom and from whom their greatest rights and responsibilities were due and allowed them to do so within an ecclesial settlement they stubbornly hoped to further reform. In fact, as Peter Lake has described it, this “capacity, which the godly claimed, of being able to recognize one another in the midst of a corrupt and unregenerate world” formed the “core of the moderate puritan position,” a core buttressed by a shared view of the experiential “implications of right doctrine” in the lives of the godly.⁴⁸ Thus was, as J. Sears McGee has suggested, the puritan use of family language “considerably more weighted” than historians have acknowledged.⁴⁹ At base, these familial constructions were not perfunctory discourse or mundane pleasantries – though they might be so employed in the demotic. Rather, they signaled a real identity, helped create a community, and conceptually separated the godly from the ungodly in a national political–ecclesial context that inhibited such circumscription. We need to take seriously the implication born by this kind of rhetoric: that the godly saw themselves – quite literally – as a spiritual family, of which natural relations were but a faint type.⁵⁰

III. The Theological Framework of the Spiritual Family

A return to the printed preparation material will help us see both the affective theological framework of this discourse and its application to a central, if not *the* central, idealized act of puritan “ritual separation” – the Lord’s Supper. In 1587 Thomas Wilcox, known chiefly to historians for his role in helping draft *An Admonition to the Parliament* (1572), but respected by contemporaries for his pastoral sensibilities and practical, affective concern, published a short treatise on communion preparation for his parishioners in Hertfordshire.⁵¹ Wilcox’s treatise made clear that a requirement for worthy receiving was a “sincere love to all men,” but the exercise of this love was especially due to those with whom one was “straightly bound, either by the bond of nature or Christian profession.”⁵² Importantly, the worthy receiver had to acknowledge that they were “especially to regard the household of faith.”⁵³ This household, this “church,” was “the company of all God’s elect, whom God hath singled from the rest of the world unto himself, and a fellowship of holy ones whom the Lord hath made holy unto himself.”⁵⁴ For these, the godly were “carefully to stir up themselves, to have bowels of compassion, and fellowlike feeling” and “to be like affectioned one of

⁴⁸Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, 282. See also, Patrick Collinson, “Night Schools, Conventicles and Churches: Continuities and Discontinuities in Early Protestant Ecclesiology,” in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, eds. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 224.

⁴⁹James Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans, and the Two Tables, 1620–1670* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 172n.2. See also, Charles H. George and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 401.

⁵⁰See McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England*, 171–234. See also, Diane Willen, “‘Communion of the Saints’: Spiritual Reciprocity and the Godly Community in Early Modern England,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 23–24.

⁵¹On Wilcox’s position as “one of the earliest of the ‘affectionate, practical’ puritans, the spiritual directors of Calvinism,” see Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 86.

⁵²Wilcox, *A Forme of Preparation*, sig. D6r, D7r.

⁵³*Ibid.*, sig. D6r, D7r.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, sig. A7r.

them to another” in accord with God’s word.⁵⁵ This “fellowlike feeling” among the “household of faith” was particularly important to maintain, and therefore to identify, through intensive self-examination in preparation for the Lord’s Supper.

Wilcox observed that in addition to “sealing up. . .in our hearts” the “benefits” of salvation offered in Christ, offering “spiritual nourishment,” and serving as a “mystical union. . .betwixt Christ and his church,” the sacramental meal sealed the “holy band of unity and love, that ought to be amongst the members of the church,” who were to be “partakers of one bread” and to become “one body in Christ.”⁵⁶ The sacrament, he explained, was “a pledge of that spiritual strength and blessed continuance, that we have in the holy fellowship of the body of Christ.”⁵⁷ In diligent preparation and self-examination, the godly were to discover through their own initiative, though with the help of “Christian conferences” with a godly minister, sufficient evidence that they were of God’s family and therefore worthy participants in the communion meal.⁵⁸ Only true believers, or those, as Wilcox put it, with “a steadfast faith in the truth of all [God’s] promises, but chiefly of those that concern the forgiveness of sins. . .and the hope and fruition of heaven in the life to come,” were worthy receivers, and worthy receivers because they had properly become God’s “children.”⁵⁹ What made this difficult of course, especially in a church, to puritan sensibilities, insufficiently reformed, and therefore without the biblically prescribed discipline meant to help corral the godly sheep and extricate the goats, was that these children “cannot be perceived or seen by men’s eyes.”⁶⁰ The invisible nature of the true church, which was “not tied to any one place” but had “some” resident in “every age and nation,” made due preparation for the Lord’s Supper then all the more important – pursued properly, it would help the godly identify evidences of their salvation, and thereby confirm their membership among God’s elect, his “household,” and thus their invitation to partake of his appointed “outward” sign of that membership.⁶¹

These are themes that Richard Sibbes took up as well, despite a significantly less querulous relationship with the national church than Thomas Wilcox had cultivated.⁶² Even in his staid conformity, Sibbes’s use of the rhetoric of informal separation in the context of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper mirrored Wilcox’s framework in substantial part. Indeed, in *The Saints Cordials* (1629), attributed in the main to Sibbes, he noted plainly how different the godly really were from their ungodly neighbors. He observed that, “being converted,” Christians, though still natural born sinners, nevertheless have “this peculiar favor granted” per 1 John 3:1, “to be called the sons of God.”⁶³ In this conversion, and subsequent adoption, “they have a new kindred and guide, God is their Father, they are members of Christ. . .they are led by the Spirit of God.”⁶⁴ Carnal

⁵⁵Ibid., sig. A7v.

⁵⁶Ibid., sig. B1r–B1v.

⁵⁷Ibid., sig. B1r.

⁵⁸Ibid., fol. 3.

⁵⁹Ibid., sig. A2r, sig. A3v.

⁶⁰Ibid., sig. A7r.; Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 29; Cf. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*.

⁶¹Wilcox, *A Forme of Preparation*, sig. A7r, sig. C1r.

⁶²See generally, Mark Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000).

⁶³Richard Sibbes, *The Saints Cordials* (London: Robert Dawlman, 1629), 264. At least one of the sermons in this volume (“The poor doubting Christian drawn unto Christ” pp. 3457–366) has been attributed to Thomas Hooker.

⁶⁴Ibid., 264.

persons fail to see the beauty of this transformation. Though “Christians shine in the world as stars in a dark night,” the blindness of the ungodly prevents their seeing it.⁶⁵ While it may be that Christians themselves are *temporarily* blinded by the sin which flows so naturally from their Adamic depravity, – and for that Sibbes scolded them – the ungodly remain *permanently* blind to this effulgence. His warning is an object lesson in the precariousness of spiritual kinship as it was worked out among the godly. Sibbes’s hearers were “brethren,” unless they failed to recognize or rightly esteem the “saints,” among whom they maintained outward religious fellowship. Should this be the case, they were on the knife-edge of eternity: either (pre)destined for the hellish inheritance of the forsaken, or among those weak Christians in need of “reform,” but “brethren” of a common “father” indeed: “Brethren, what shall I say to you? If your eyes be so blinded, that you cannot see the Church. . . cannot see beauty in a Christian’s face, wisdom in his language, glory in his behavior, even in affliction: when their happiness is revealed, it will be a proof against you, that you have not that anointing of God, which teaches you all things.”⁶⁶

For Sibbes, the godly simply recognized and appreciated the godly – the “sons of God” see Christ’s beauty, his light, in the carriage and conduct of their brothers, their fellow “sons,” the “children of God.”⁶⁷ Among them, this inspired an otherworldly and ineluctable partiality. The divide between the godly and the ungodly was thus fixed and impermeable, predetermined from time out of mind through the eschaton, and enacted on earth through the miraculous affinity of believers for each other. This elevated, or intensified, sense of affection for other believers was simply made part of what it was to *be* a believer. True Christians had to *feel* with the intensity of affinity Sibbes described, or they were in danger of one day looking around to find themselves eternally in the company of the ungodly.

Yet the stain, or “blackness,” of sin complicated this tight economy of spiritual kinship.⁶⁸ For, as Sibbes had noted in an earlier sermon in the same volume, “the careless brutish world, that are not worthy of correction, God lets them go on in smooth waters to hell,” while “God will look to those of his family, that are near him: he will have a special eye to them, he will have his family well ordered.”⁶⁹ God chastises and corrects his children through judgment, while the ungodly seem, with their depravity, to pass on their merry way. However, Sibbes explained that “if judgement begin at the house of God, where shall the sinner and ungodly appear? If the godly taste of the cup of God’s anger, the wicked must drink off the dregs of his wrath.”⁷⁰ So the sin-stained members of God’s family would be punished and refined in this life, while the ungodly might seem to skirt justice on earth, only to be held to account on judgment day. This complicated then the identification of the visible members of God’s invisible, spiritual family, who might quite plausibly look sin-laden, but be merely at a lower rung of the ladder of God’s chastening sanctification in this life. It was only by peeling back layers of sin through the practices constitutive of a “godly” life – a central component of which was recognition of, and love for, the “brethren” – that one might experience the comfort that flowed from knowing they had indeed “a new kindred,” and God for a “Father.”⁷¹

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., 264–265.

⁶⁷Ibid., 265–266.

⁶⁸Ibid., 265.

⁶⁹Ibid., 38.

⁷⁰Ibid., 39.

⁷¹Ibid., 264.

This was a practice in imprecision, but it was nonetheless a reflection of an ontological reality – God was “Father” to some and not to others – so it mattered deeply that a taxonomy of the spiritual family was, at least imperfectly, imposed.

This all came to a head at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. For, Sibbes wrote, “thou that would come unto the table, thou must remember thou art to be one of [God’s] family.”⁷² This was the requirement *sine qua non* of worthy reception. A would-be communicant had to determine whether they belonged to the family of God through rigorous preparatory self-examination. This preparation worked on two levels. First, because “there are many corners in the heart of man,” “it is hardly sounded, it is full of hypocrisy” and man is all too “wonderful ready to deceive his own heart,” all had to examine themselves to see if they were truly God’s children.⁷³ It was imperative then that those who wished to sit at the table of the “King of Kings” prepare themselves each time they were to partake of the elements, for the “greatest hypocrite will have a good conceit of himself.”⁷⁴ Given the threat of a false assurance of salvation they had to “labor” to make their “election sure.”⁷⁵ Second, however, while God’s children were the only proper guests at the table, they were such “worthy” guests only if they were duly prepared. As Sibbes said, “sin is odious unto Almighty God,” especially that sin committed by his blood-bought children.⁷⁶ It was indeed “worse” for them “to continue in rebellion against God, [than] for a stranger who knoweth him not.”⁷⁷ By their inclusion in God’s family, they were expected “to have new fruit.”⁷⁸

The difference between these two levels of preparation was essential. Expositing 1 Corinthians 11:29–30 (“For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weakly and sick among you, and many sleep”), Sibbes noted that, “God’s children, if they come without preparation, unreverently, they eat such judgment to themselves, God will send sickness upon them.”⁷⁹ This they do because “Gods children eat judgment to themselves, to avoid condemnation.”⁸⁰ For Sibbes, “judgment is opposed to condemnation,” as the latter was reserved for the ungodly. His distinction between the two was meant to comfort those that might hold themselves back from the sacrament because of a sense of their own unworthiness for such “heavenly manna.”⁸¹ These were the “many” who “think that if they come unworthily, they shall be damned presently.”⁸² Though “neither the children of God, nor the wicked, shall escape judgment” if they come to the Lord’s table unprepared, only the ungodly “shall have sentence of damnation.”⁸³ The “children”? “Sharp punishment.”⁸⁴ As Sibbes had noted earlier, the “child of God” that comes unworthily to the Lord’s table is punished, chastened, and edified for their

⁷²Ibid., 295.

⁷³Ibid., 287.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., 288.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

own good, to avoid the eternal condemnation which is the lot of the ungodly.⁸⁵ Preparation then served both to identify and refine God's children so that they might be appropriate guests at his "family" table. As ever, though, the stain of sin made this anything but a straight-forward devotional exercise. In a national church that lacked the full reformation craved by many of the godly, the admixture, as Sibbes said, of "Corn and Tares," "good and bad," "sometimes children, sometimes bastards" found in "every church visible," required rigorous individual initiative to sift itself.⁸⁶

Thus did the theological framework of spiritual kinship work affectively to help moderate puritans, like Sibbes, recognize one another without perforce rending the body of Christ through outright separation. The meaning and use of family language entailed a set of shared devotional activities, at the center of which was the worthy reception of the sacrament, the "sign" and "seal" of the "gospel" and the "comforts of Christ," "not to all, but unto them who have grace."⁸⁷ The spiritual family, or the household of God, was a stable theological category for the invisible church, but one which was constantly contested, questioned, and ultimately unknowable – and therefore unstable – in the visible church. Nevertheless, the central theological, indeed individual, importance of the former dictated the need to approximate it in the latter in the celebration of the Lord's Supper: God's family feast. This was a large part of the kindling that helped fuel the conflagration over the sacrament across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England.

This too marked Jeremiah Dyke's steady selling sacramental preparation manual, *A Worthy Communicant*, first printed in 1636.⁸⁸ Put simply, for Dyke, only "God's family and household" had "a right" to "eat of these holy things," the body and blood of Christ received truly and spiritually.⁸⁹ He equated this family with those that have genuine "faith" – a faith "in Christ's blood" – which made those that possess it "partakers of Christ's benefits," including the benefits found in the sacramental meal: "comfort, joy, refreshment, and ravishment of spirit."⁹⁰ Furthermore, Dyke made clear that, for members of this spiritual family, though "there is a love and a respect to be given to all men, according to their relations, worth, quality, &c." it was "brotherly love" "towards such as are brethren" which was to be the godly's "heartiest and sweet affection."⁹¹ Adducing a host of scriptural texts, Dyke made clear that this love was to be expressed to the faithful "as saints under the relation of brethren, because they be brethren, because they be sons of God the same Father, sons of the church the same common mother, and members of Christ our elder Brother."⁹² In their self-examination then, it was imperative that the aspiring communicant identify "whom they love best, to whom their hearts and affections are closest knit."⁹³

It was essential too that they recognized that "the love that is among the saints" "excludes not any whom God hath received."⁹⁴ This Dyke tied to the community of

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., 265–266.

⁸⁷Ibid., 289.

⁸⁸Jeremiah Dyke, *A Worthy Communicant* (London: R.B. for R. Dawlman, 1636). Dyke's preparation manual saw at least seventeen editions in this period.

⁸⁹Ibid., 132.

⁹⁰Ibid., 27, 116, 130.

⁹¹Ibid., 362–363.

⁹²Ibid., 360.

⁹³Ibid., 365.

⁹⁴Ibid., 366.

the godly, writing that the Apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 2 “doth not say, love a brother, or such of the brethren, but love the brotherhood, the whole fraternity, society, and company of the saints, the whole brood and brotherhood of God’s people.”⁹⁵ No true Christian was to be turned out of the family of God – this was an inclusive social vision cast necessarily as a feature of the exclusive ecclesial and eternal divide between the godly and the ungodly. Importantly, the godly simply “love their brotherhood, their company, their conference and communion” with each other.⁹⁶ As the puritan William Attersoll had made clear decades before in his 1606 sacramental treatise *The Badges of Christianity*:

all such as receive the same doctrine, embrace the same religion, and meet at the same table, must be united in Christian love, gentleness, meekness, and patience one toward another, supporting one another, bearing the burden one of another, being alike affected and disposed, guided by one spirit, nourished by the milk of the same word, acknowledging one father, professing one faith living in one body, walking in one calling, looking for one kingdom worshipping one Lord, meeting at one supper.⁹⁷

Attersoll described a positive, genuinely bucolic view of “godly” life together that was at once open to all – through the free preaching of the Gospel and lived expression of its evidentiary entailments – and closed to most – by their rejection of just this sort of admonition.

The divide between the family of God and the mass of the ungodly was a stark one, with very real consequences. Coming to the Lord’s table unprepared, without the requisite faith in Christ that marked the children of God, would redound to the unworthy receiver’s damnation. As Dyke puts it, “instead of receiving Christ,” these unbelievers “receive Satan, and hardening from him in sin, and more strength and greediness unto sin.”⁹⁸ They would receive neither the benefits of the sacrament nor the evidence of those benefits in a life lived in increasing edification for their own growth in grace – “a main end and fruit of this ordinance” – and for the spiritual benefit of their brethren.⁹⁹ “Every faithful receiver” of the Lord’s Supper was to experience “spiritual growth” after partaking worthily, which was to manifest in their carriage and comportment in daily life.¹⁰⁰ The right receiver had an increasing “appetite” for “spiritual food,” “a sharp appetite” such that “though he have been well fed on Sunday, yet he can have a stomach to a sermon again, before the week go about.”¹⁰¹ Worthy reception thus inculcated in God’s family an increasing adherence to a regime of piety and affectively constructed religious practice from which unworthy partakers, unbelievers, increasingly devolved. Thus, God’s children were to be recognizable as such, set apart in speech and behavior.

In a rare treat for historians, Nehemiah Wallington, a seventeenth-century London woodturner (and, incidentally, one of John Randall’s parishioners for a time), recorded his thoughts on both Jeremiah Dyke’s *A Worthy Communicant* and Daniel Rogers’s

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid., 369 (mispaginated “305”).

⁹⁷William Attersoll, *The Badges of Christianity* (London: W. Iaggard, 1606), 339.

⁹⁸Dyke, *A Worthy Communicant*, 71.

⁹⁹Ibid., 402. On edification, see, e.g., David D. Hall, *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 166–167. See also, Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, 86–88.

¹⁰⁰Dyke, *A Worthy Communicant*, 402.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 406–407.

similarly well-known sacramental treatise, *A Treatise of the Two Sacraments of the Gospel*.¹⁰² This he did “gather in time of trouble when Satan would kept me from the Lord’s Supper.”¹⁰³ To avoid simply abstaining from the communion meal as an over scrupulous caution against unworthy receiving – a practice frequently decried by the authors of the print literature and to which Wallington had succumbed at least once in his youth – he used the preparation rubrics promulgated by Dyke and Rogers to trace out evidence of his salvation and therefore his fitness as a “guest to go to the table of the Lord.”¹⁰⁴ Following roughly the preparation outline Dyke promoted, Wallington ticked off six “marks” that he was “a child of God.”¹⁰⁵ The fifth mark he considered was whether or not he was “God’s child by my love to the children of God and so fit to go to the Lord’s table.”¹⁰⁶ He was contented to observe that “those are dearest to me who are dearest to God.”¹⁰⁷ Not only did he love these saints, but, just as Dyke had suggested (369), he loved being with the godly; he loved “their brotherhood, their company, their conference and communion with them.”¹⁰⁸ Finally, he expressed his “fellow feeling” with “their miseries,” observing that he was “especially. . . glad when their souls prosper.”¹⁰⁹ Here, we see Wallington’s lay appropriation of these regimes of preparation, a key component of a “distinctively puritan synthesis or style” almost indistinguishable from what we find in the texts of prototypical puritan divines, as he encountered them in the print literature, applying their precepts to his own life for his own comfort and his own assurance.¹¹⁰ Wallington’s sacramental piety was elevated out of a conventionally Protestant mode in preparation by its integration of “various parts of the puritan world view” together – here, “puritan subjectivity” and “a puritan sense of the community of the godly.”¹¹¹ Wallington displayed what Patrick Collinson called “the predictable and consistent forms” of “conditioned”

¹⁰²David Booy, ed. *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618–1654: A Selection* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 283.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 38. See, e.g., Haigh, “Communion and Community,” 730. It was a constant concern in the printed preparation literature that the godly not abstain from the Lord’s Supper over a hypercritical focus on their sin. See, e.g., William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine* (Cambridge: John Legate, 1591), sig. k7r–8v; Dyke, *A Worthy Communicant*, 49. On the practice of abstention due to common claims of being out of charity or unreconciled with neighbors, see Christopher Haigh, *The Plain Man’s Pathways to Heaven: Kinds of Christianity in Post-Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 72–73 and Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 194. For this phenomenon on the Continent, see David Warren Sabean, “Communion and Community: The Refusal to Attend the Lord’s Supper in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany*, ed. David Warren Sabean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37–60. Cf. Alexandra Walsham, “Supping with Satan’s Disciples: Spiritual and Secular Sociability in Post-Reformation,” in *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Professor W.J. Sheils*, eds. Nadine Lewycky and Adam Morton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 37.

¹⁰⁵Booy, *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 283.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.* See also, Abram Van Engen, *Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹¹⁰See Lake, *The Boxmaker’s Revenge*, 76–78.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 78.

“secondary voluntarism,” that is, religious exercises that flowed from “man’s will renewed as the instrument of God,” and which “created a closed and programmatic world of language and experience” among the puritans.¹¹² Wallington’s appropriation of this preparatory regime – this sacramental continent of the “programmatic world” of the puritans – was by no means a perfect salve to his troubled conscience, as he hesitatingly felt only “in some measure persuaded of God’s love to me in Christ and discern the Lord’s body” in the sacrament.¹¹³ Nevertheless, he did “believe that Christ will as certainly nourish my soul, as the outward element can any way be fit to nourish my body.”¹¹⁴ Wallington’s identity with the family of God, the visible saints, through in part his love for these “children of God,” substantiated in his own mind, and was to substantiate his public profession of, his place among this elect people. This incorporation was symbolized visually in his participation in the Lord’s Supper.¹¹⁵

For the godly then, the language of spiritual kinship served as a discourse of separation that rhetorically comprised, particularized, and begat the family of God, especially at the communion table, where the elect had the benefits of their salvation sealed to them and they received the spiritual nourishment to which only they were entitled. They existed in direct contradistinction to the wider mass of the ungodly. As Kentish clothier Robert Saxby prayed after one celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the 1620s, “thou hast separated us, o Lord from the wicked, in this holy banquet, so keep us we pray thee from their corruptions.”¹¹⁶ These two camps were discrete, theologically coherent categories around which individual puritans could and did construct identities, but they were far from straightforwardly applied. As Paul Seaver observed about Nehemiah Wallington’s identification with the godly community, “it is not at all clear what the boundaries of the community were in practice.”¹¹⁷ *Doing* the right things – sermon-gadding, godly converse, frequent and duly prepared participation in the Lord’s Supper – only got one part of the way there. These practices had to be motivated by, and conducted with, right *feeling*. The rhetoric of spiritual kinship and the discourse of separation it helped construct was meant to encapsulate both *doing* and *feeling*. The voluntarism of the *soi disant* godly, composed of acts of devotion not any individual one of which was sufficient evidence that one was a child of God, had to be measured alongside an internal diagnosis of the presence of a proper affective disposition.¹¹⁸

At base, too, this was a question of predestination. As the preparation literature made clear, only those that God had elected to salvation, and had experienced some measure of the fruits thereof, were to be counted among his family. This left non-separating puritans in the “ambiguous” position of recognizing a stark divide between the godly and the ungodly without the tools in a sin-veiled world to definitively, at least in any dispositive sense, identify each other.¹¹⁹ The language of the spiritual family, though

¹¹²Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, 251–252.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 288.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵See also, Hunt, “The Lord’s Supper in Early Modern England,” 40.

¹¹⁶Cambridge University Library Additional MS. 3117. Pious miscellany of Robert Saxby, fol. 66.

¹¹⁷Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 190.

¹¹⁸See, e.g., Peter Lake, “Defining Puritanism – Again?,” in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis J. Bremer (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 6.

¹¹⁹See Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, 151.

as practically imprecise as other terms of separation (and affection), such as “godly” or “saint,” was a means of puritan converse that when deployed entailed a whole theological framework tied to the fatherhood of God and his care for his children. This framework gave rights and demanded responsibilities and, when invoked, served as a sign of inclusion in God’s household. Though it sometimes overlapped with other terms of affinity, the rhetoric of spiritual kinship was lifted from the pages of scripture and deployed by the godly in a kind of elevated Protestant *patois*, constructing bonds of love and affective intimacy that were to supersede all others.

IV. The Family of God and English “Good Neighborhood”

All this is not to say, of course, that the godly exclusively used kinship terms to delineate the bounds of, to channel Barbara Rosenwein’s work on the Middle Ages, their “emotional community.”¹²⁰ Nor is it by any means the case that spiritual kinship was uniquely puritan in origin or orientation. English Protestants of every stripe in this period deployed an array of terms to describe their religious relations: “saints,” “friends,” “brethren,” the “elect,” even at times, “neighbor.” In fact, the practice of identifying co-religionists as spiritual family, a family with, at least in theory, thicker roots than consanguineous or affinal relations, stretched back not only to the early church, as Joseph Hellerman’s work has shown, but also to scripture itself.¹²¹ With the Bible as a common *ur-text*, it is therefore unsurprising to find terms of spiritual kinship in varied usage among all Christian constituencies in England. Thus, in the mid-1630s, did John Williams, as Bishop of Lincoln, speak narrowly of the “brethren of the clergy,” and William Laud in even narrower terms of “my brethren the bishops.”¹²² More pointedly, in a screed against puritan opposition to the “altar” policy of the Caroline church, arch-Laudian Edward Kellett referred to those “false-brethren, who, in their own conceit, are the most intelligent, pure, apostolical, and strongest Christians, censoriously judging all things.”¹²³ Thus, we get a hint of just how ideologically charged spiritual kinship language could be in this period. For Kellett, “brethren” imbricated in its meaning a host of ceremonial, devotional, and – necessarily – political postures. The spiritual family here was marked by traits that were precisely the inverse of those that characterized puritan religious kin. Conforming “brethren” were amenable to Laudian altar policy, and the puritan “false brethren” were not. Thus was this ideological agenda a sieve through which common scriptural terms were filtered, creating, in turn, a distinctive and exclusivist idiom within an inclusive national church. Again, discursive context is essential in coming to terms with what contemporaries meant, and thought they were doing, in deploying the language of the spiritual family.

¹²⁰Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 2. See also, Anthony Milton, “Religion and Community in Pre-Civil War England,” in *The English Revolution c. 1590–1720: Politics, Religion and Communities*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 62–80.

¹²¹Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001).

¹²²James Bliss and William Scott, eds. *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud, D.D. Sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1857), VI:ii: 425, 459.

¹²³Edward Kellett, *Tricoenium Christi; In Nocte Proditionis Suae* (London: 1641), I:82. See generally, Peter Lake, *On Laudianism: Piety, Polemic and Politics during the Personal Rule of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Complicating things further, the puritans could deploy spiritual kinship language in ambivalent ways.¹²⁴ In his preparatory work, *A Short Treatise of the Sacraments* (1582), John Prime, vicar of Adderbury in Oxfordshire, elided the categories of “neighbor” and “brother,” which were, as we will see below, treated by most puritans as conceptually distinct, the former broad enough to encompass all of humanity, and the latter reserved for “true” believers. As Prime detailed, self-examination in due preparation for the sacrament consisted in faith, “to be settled in our hearts towards God,” and “love, to be shewed to our neighbor,” and “the latter proceeds out of the former, and both from the spirit of God.”¹²⁵ Both were “stirred up and strengthened by repentance, in the worthy repairing to, & receiving at the Lord’s table.”¹²⁶ Thus proper examination was to locate in the preparer “assured faith, brotherly love, earnest repentance.”¹²⁷ This ascription of “brotherly love” to “neighbors” somewhat confuses, however, the key distinctions Prime made between the godly and the ungodly throughout the treatise. In fact, he explicitly distinguished between the “bare name of Christianity, the bark and letter of the word, the outward elements of the sacrament” which was “after a sort in common to all,” and “true Christianity,” or “a good understanding, and the inward grace of these things” which were “proper to the godly and none other.”¹²⁸ What is confusing here is that often in this period, “neighborhood” was thought to encompass all people, whether “godly” or “ungodly,” only some of whom would be “brethren,” God’s children.¹²⁹ Trebly confusing was the concomitant tendency among some early modern authors, exhibited clearly in Prime’s comments, to refer to spiritual, natural, and figurative but natural brethren (that is, sharing a common humanity), often in the same discussion. So, in this instance, Prime’s purpose in pairing “brotherly love” with “neighbor” was to call to mind the love Christians were to have for all people as fellow image-bearers of their creator God. This is different altogether from the strand of love which, as Prime described, the “godly” were to show to their “brethren of the same parent, of God in his church.”¹³⁰

This striated love propounded different classes of duties meant to make its possessors, as a mark of their identity among the elect of God, good neighbors, friends, and English subjects.¹³¹ As Arnold Hunt has detailed in his skillful treatment of English preaching in this period, this was an argument many puritans took up to combat the assertion by their enemies (noted below) that their “style” of piety disrupted good “neighborhood” and the tranquility of the parish.¹³² It was the godly that were actually the purveyors of “the highest form of neighborliness” precisely because in their godliness they were called and committed to loving their neighbors, to some degree, as their “brethren.”¹³³ John Frewen, rector of

¹²⁴No doubt related, at least in part, to the English translation history of such biblical terms. See generally, Naomi Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible: Scripture, Society, and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23–49.

¹²⁵John Prime, *A Short Treatise of the Sacraments Generally, and in Speciall of Baptisme, and of the Supper* (London: Christopher Barker, 1582), C7r.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid., D8.

¹²⁹See, e.g., Andy Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity: English Neighbourhoods, 1500–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 16–23.

¹³⁰Prime, *A Short Treatise of the Sacraments*, E1v.

¹³¹See, e.g., Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 188–191.

¹³²See Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 286–291.

¹³³Ibid., 291.

Northiam, Sussex, explained in a treatise on godly living (which included extended discussions of sacramental preparation) that “by the word neighbor, God means not only our kindred and friends. . .but he will have us to have an eye, to the common alliance, which he has set among us: for therefore are we all formed after his image . . . besides this, we be all of one nature. The which ought to hold us in true unity and brotherly love.”¹³⁴ This was why Henry Smith felt confident asserting in his 1591 *A Treatise of the Lord’s Supper*, that in preparing for the sacrament through self-examination, because “there be more differences between the children of God, and the children of the world, than there be between men and beasts,” the godly should find in themselves love for even their enemies, as “ye shall never see the wicked love their enemies.”¹³⁵

Writing several decades later, William Pemble triaged this love requisite to sacramental preparation in like manner. He noted that communicants were to display “that affection of the heart, whereby we wish good unto our neighbour. . .and are willing, in what we are able, to doe him that good, we would have done to our selves in his case.”¹³⁶ This affection operated in two ways. One was “more general,” and the love was to be directed at “man as man,” based on a common “communion of nature.”¹³⁷ The second was “more particular, respecting man as a Christian, made one of the household of Faith, and of that blessed number of those, whom Christ is not ashamed to call Brethren.”¹³⁸ Daniel Rogers’s *A Treatise of the Two Sacraments*, written in the same year, offered a similar sketch of the multiple layers of the exercise of love that was “a necessary grace for the sacrament.”¹³⁹ This love, though it “especially is occupied about brethren,” entailed a specific concern for those outside of the family of God.¹⁴⁰ For as “there is an holy overflow of love in the godly” which “even extend to such as are without,” they were to offer a “usefulness in common life,” and “neighborly offices,” like caring “especially of orphans and widows” and serving to “advise and protect the shiftless and wronged” in their local communities.¹⁴¹ But they were “especially” to implement this love among “that household of faith, our fellow brethren.”¹⁴² Even here, though, the highest duty of love the godly had were to those who were to them “nearest unto in place and also in compass.”¹⁴³ This was a pragmatic realization that a necessary component of the love requisite for the worthy reception of the Lord’s Supper was its act, or exercise. Since “nothing can act beyond it[’s] own sphere,” the “love of the saints shines most beautifully within her own precinct,” where it could be implemented in daily life.¹⁴⁴ The children of God owed a duty to all human beings, but especially to the “household of God” and even more particularly to those in the household to whom they were most physically proximate. While the extent to which all these categories overlapped in a comprehensive church was at

¹³⁴John Frewen, *Certain Fruitfull Instructions and Necessary Doctrines Meete to Edify in the Feare of God* (London: John Windet, 1587), 118.

¹³⁵Henry Smith, *A Treatise of the Lords Supper* (London: R. Field, 1591), 87–88, 90 (mispaginated “60”).

¹³⁶William Pemble, *An Introduction to the Worthy Receiving the Sacrament of the Lords Supper* (London: J.B. for James Boler, 1633), 54.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Daniel Rogers, *A Treatise of the Two Sacraments* (London: John Bellamie, 1633), 183.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 141.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 180.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid., 180–181.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

the heart of puritan political and ecclesiological agitation in Elizabethan and early Stuart England, they were nevertheless conceptually distinct for the godly.

Despite such interpretive complications, the language of spiritual kinship, as it appears in godly preparation literature, did have a discrete puritan usage that signaled an entirely conventional Protestant theological framework, but did so at a different register, one perhaps more fervent or inflamed, and adumbrated a particular, though never fixed, set of affective practices by which the godly could attempt to recognize each other and, ultimately, themselves, as God's elect "children."¹⁴⁵ That this rhetoric was a feature of puritan discourse and was known to be such in this period is especially clear from extant anti-puritan sources. John Spurr has noted that the puritans' critics could discern a "recognizable manner" in their discourse, which included the fact that they "called one another 'sister' and 'brother.'"¹⁴⁶ As Peter Lake has consistently pointed out, the stereotypes and caricatures that marked anti-puritan satire are reliable evidence of a particular mode of "godly" conduct, and thus the discourse mocked in satirical pieces would have been recognizable to contemporaries.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, it was only because anti-puritan polemicists could assume their audiences would recognize this kind of speech as distinctive of an English Protestant of a certain kind that their sardonic arrows hit their mark.¹⁴⁸ Thus when playwright John Marston described acerbically in 1598, "that same devout meal-mouth'd precisian, that cries 'good brother,' 'kind sister' . . .," we can be confident that the godly's use of this language was peculiar enough for this to elicit a smirk from their antagonists.¹⁴⁹

The same can be said for the vitriol laced through a series of anti-puritan libels that came to light in Dorchester in 1608. The third of these libels, presented in verse, pointed out that puritans did brazenly assert that they were "god's dear children, holy saints."¹⁵⁰ The author of this poem contended further that the puritans believed "whosoever is not of their sect a brother is sure cast away," that is, reprobated eternally and utterly debarred

¹⁴⁵See, e.g., Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 26–27. Cf. Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge*. NB: 407–408.

¹⁴⁶See John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603–1689* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 41.

¹⁴⁷See, e.g., Peter Lake, "On Thinking (Historically) with Stereotypes, or the Puritan Origins of Anti-Puritanism," in *Stereotypes and Stereotyping in Early Modern England: Puritans, Papists and Projectors*, ed. Koji Yamamoto (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 63–64 and Peter Lake, "Anti-Puritanism: The Structure of a Prejudice," in *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England*, eds. Peter Lake and Kenneth Fincham (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 85.

¹⁴⁸Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists & Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 605, 608. Cf. Patrick Collinson, "Bartholomew Fair: Theatre Invents Puritans," in *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1576–1649*, eds. David L. Smith, Richard Strier, and David Bevington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); see also, Patrick Collinson, "Ecclesiastical Vitriol: Religious Satire in the 1590s and the Invention of Puritanism," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 150–170. NB: 164–170. Cf. Patrick Collinson, "Antipuritanism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, eds. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22; Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, xiii and Patrick Collinson, "Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as Forms of Popular Religious Culture," in *The Culture of English Puritanism*, eds. Christopher Durston and Jaqueline Eales (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), 34.

¹⁴⁹Morse Shepard Allen, "The Satire of John Marston" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1920), 101. Taken from Marston's "Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image, and Certain Satyres" (1598).

¹⁵⁰Rosalind Conklin Hays, C.E. McGee, Sally Joyce, and Evelyn Newlyn, eds. *Records of Early English Drama: Dorset and Cornwall* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 182–183. See also, Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, 363–372.

from the inheritance of the elect.¹⁵¹ Raising a related concern, Richard Montagu, in his *Appello Caesarem* (1625), attacked the “puritanical” spirit which made an “idol” of the “Godly brethren,” that is, the concept of this narrowly construed spiritual brotherhood.¹⁵² Similarly, in a sermon preached before Charles I in 1631, Robert Skinner upbraided the puritans for their uncharitable and fractious use of the term “brethren.” He opined that this term was to be a signification of the family of God *in toto*, meant for all professing Christians, and therefore was to be shorn of “any restraint to some few of a fashion or a faction.”¹⁵³ The puritans used it, however, “as if none but themselves were worthy to wear it.”¹⁵⁴ Beyond the more public forms of polemic and satire, a group was presented before the Star Chamber in June of 1632 for having informally “contrived a false and scandalous libel” in doggerel that began “to this effect,” “there is a report of a crime committed between some of the holy brotherhood,” and “ending with a scurrilous verse, wench lie still, etc. and none did suspect that they were the elect.”¹⁵⁵ This “brotherhood” considered itself, apparently, to be “holy” and “elect,” allusions meant to signal and satirize a specific kind of Protestant, or a particular way of *being* Protestant. This “way” was marked by the use of spiritual kinship language to identify and bind the elect in a subtle acknowledgment of a common approach to a prosaically Protestant theological framework that, it was expected, would manifest itself in a unique “style” of affective divinity.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the language itself, used in this way and to this end, had become part of that style.

V. Conclusion

Puritan use of this language signaled in the ideal, a bond of unity, an affinity, *par excellence*. Whatever other relations bound people together, whether friendship, neighborhood, or physical kinship, the spiritual family was preeminent. Spiritual kindred were so intimately conjoined that they formed one body, a body predetermined by God and a body that was ultimately abiding, incapable of division. But this was not the case in that body’s imperfect, visible manifestation in a fallen world. Use of familial terms in a spiritual setting was a contingent exercise that always had to be negotiated, and reconsidered, and existed, just as Alexandra Walsham has so helpfully pointed out in her work on toleration, along a “complex continuum.”¹⁵⁷ In other words, the concept of the spiritual family was in practice more ambivalent, given the state of English Protestantism in Elizabethan and early Stuart England and the contested nature of the national church across this period, than the inherent exclusivity of the terms and their root in the doctrines of election let on.

Considering this language through the lens of that subjective ambivalence contributes to our understanding of the informal mechanisms by which early modern English Protestants came to terms with the quiddities of socioreligious life in post-Reformation England. In a broader sense, this examination of a distinctive puritan usage of familiar scriptural language suggests the importance of paying close attention to discursive context

¹⁵¹Hays, *Records of Early English Drama*, 182–183.

¹⁵²Richard Montagu, *Appello Caesarem: A Just Appeale from Two Unjust Informers* (London: Printed by H.L. for Mathew Lownes, 1625), 3.

¹⁵³British Library, Additional MS. 20, 065, fol. 16r., from a “sermon preached at Whitehall before the king, December 27, 1631.” A special thanks to Peter Lake for this reference.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵Samuel Rawson Gardiner, ed. *Reports of Cases in the Courts of Star Chamber and High Commission* (London: Nichols and Sons, 1886), 149.

¹⁵⁶See Lake, “Defining Puritanism – Again?,” 6.

¹⁵⁷Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance*, 231.

in early modern sources. Indeed, as Patrick Collinson reminded us, the “penchant for dichotomizing” was “by no means a Puritan peculiarity,” and thus this idiosyncratic use of a biblical delimiting concept, the spiritual family, is part of a wider early modern rhetorical universe.¹⁵⁸ The puritan effort to, in a fallen world, identify and engage with God’s “children” is one particular instance of the “skeptical problem,” as Susan Schreiner has put it, that pervaded early modernity: though contemporaries were agreed that objective truth existed, they were faced with the fact “that human epistemological abilities did not seem able to penetrate or reach that very truth.”¹⁵⁹ Accordingly, this examination of the language of spiritual kinship as it was deployed by the English puritans, in all its uncertainty, has woven one corner of the wider tapestry of early modern Protestant social and cultural life. It is suggestive of the insights to be generated by closer studies of the dynamics of imagined communities in international Protestantism in this period.

The puritans had to accept the possibility that hypocrites were dissembling among the godly, the chaff with the wheat, which marked not just life in a fallen world, but especially life in a land without a fully reformed church in the style of those exemplars on the Continent. Yet this rhetoric of separation, for all its flexibility, adaptability, and surprising inclusivity, retained in its godly usage an exclusivity that was well enough known to be mocked. For the language of the spiritual family was a mechanism by which the “godly” recognized and acknowledged one another, however imperfectly. As such, the rhetoric of spiritual kinship was a means through which they could engage in the edification of Christ’s body on earth and embody in some sense the ends of the further reformation for which they had so fervently agitated.

Therefore, spiritual preparation for the Lord’s Supper offered to the godly a site of conceptual family formation that strengthened their ranks from within the national church, enacting partially and informally that which, it was still hoped, would be accomplished formally – the better equation of the invisible and visible churches in England through further, and more progressive, reformation. The language of the spiritual family thus served as an affective theological shorthand and by examining the record to see how, when, and in what ways this discursive act was employed, we can glimpse a coherent, if porous, puritan culture. This culture developed amid, and engaged with, the central tensions of post-Reformation English religious and political life. The extant sacramental preparation material is one window into this process, but one which is in a prominent place and provides an excellent view.

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¹⁵⁸Patrick Collinson, “The Puritan Character: Polemics and Polarities in Early Seventeenth Century English Culture,” in *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, 118.

¹⁵⁹Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xiii.

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