

The Problems of Performing Piety in some Exeter Dissenting Sermons c.1660–1745

David Parry* 
University of Exeter

This article explores the theme of hypocrisy in a multi-volume collection of hitherto unstudied manuscript sermons by Exeter Dissenting ministers from the Restoration to the mid-eighteenth century, held by the Devon and Exeter Institution. In these sermons, the theme of hypocrisy is addressed in a variety of senses and contexts, including the imposition by conformists of forms of worship not required by Scripture; the false accusations of hypocrisy made against Dissenters; the insincere performance of piety; the tendency of sinners to justify vice as virtue and virtue as vice; and the incompatibility of persecution with true New Testament Christianity. These sermons trace a move from Reformed orthodoxy towards rational Dissent, with a soteriology that increasingly makes moral performance a condition of final salvation. The possibility of insincere performance of piety and virtue by hypocrites may have created increased anxiety in a context in which soteriology and ethics were increasingly entangled.

Hypocrisy was a double-edged term for puritans and Protestant Dissenters from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. While ‘the hotter sort of Protestants’¹ were often suspected by their

* The research for this article was undertaken as part of the Leverhulme Trust-funded project ‘Writing Religious Conflict and Community in Exeter, 1500–1750’ (RPG-2020-404). I am grateful to the staff and volunteers of the Devon and Exeter Institution, especially Paul Auchterlonie (who first alerted me to the existence of these MSS), Sonia Llewellyn and Beth Howell. I am also grateful to James Honeyford, Robert Strivens, Kathleen Lynch, Anna Pravdica, Robert Wainwright and the anonymous readers for SCH for their helpful feedback. Department of English and Creative Writing, University of Exeter, Queen’s Building, The Queen’s Drive, Exeter, EX4 4QH. E-mail: d.parry@exeter.ac.uk.

¹ A phrase applied to puritans by Percival Wibun, *A Checke or Reprooffe of M. Howlet’s Untimely Schreeching in her Majesties Eares* (London, 1581), fol. 15^v, popularized in modern scholarship through its citation by Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967; repr. Oxford, 1990), 27.

Studies in Church History 60 (2024), 340–362 © The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Ecclesiastical History Society. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.
doi: 10.1017/stc.2024.15

neighbours and opponents of a performative piety that hid moral failings and religious delusions – as evidenced by literary caricatures of puritan hypocrites, from Ben Jonson's *Zeal-of-the-Land Busy* to Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* – the hypocrite was also a category that generated anxiety within puritan and Dissenting circles.² Within the context of puritan and later Nonconformist practical divinity, the hypocrite was not simply one who pretended to moral virtue while lacking it in practice, but one who professed saving faith while, in fact, being devoid of it.

As literary scholars have noted, John Webster's revenge tragedy *The White Devil* (1612) – which involves the hypocritical performance of virtue by murderous Italians, including a cardinal who becomes pope – was performed less than a year before a Paul's Cross sermon entitled *The White Devil, or the Hypocrite Uncased* was preached by the Bedfordshire minister Thomas Adams in March 1613.³ Adams, and probably Webster, borrowed the phrase 'the white devil' from Luther's commentary on Galatians, in which Luther remarks that 'This white Deuill which forceth men to commit spirituall sinnes, that they may sell them for righteousnes, is farre more daungerous then the blacke deuill, which onely enforceth them to commit fleshly sinnes which the world acknowledgeth to be sinnes.'⁴ Luther's 'white devil' refers to a more subtle and more deadly form of hypocrisy than the scheming poisoners of Webster's play. The agents of the white devil, in the context of Luther's commentary, are on a human level 'religious, wise, and learned men' who are not guilty of 'those grosse vices which are against the second table'

² On accusations of puritan hypocrisy and the figure of the 'stage puritan', see, for instance, Patrick Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical Vitriol: Religious Satire in the 1590s and the Invention of Puritanism', in John Guy, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge, 1995), 150–70; idem, 'Antipuritanism', in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), 19–33; Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000); Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, CT, 2002), esp. chs 13–15 (521–700).

³ Thomas Adams, *The White Devil, or the Hypocrite Uncased: In a Sermon Preached at Pauls Crosse, March 7. 1612* [i.e. 1613] (London, 1613). See, for example, Emma Rhatigan, 'Reading the White Devil in Thomas Adams and John Webster', in Adrian Streete, ed., *Early Modern Drama and the Bible: Contexts and Readings, 1570–1625* (London, 2012), 176–94.

⁴ Martin Luther, *A Commentarie of M. Doctor Martin Luther upon the Epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians* [sic] (London, 1575), 20–1. Adams cites Luther in *The White Devil*, 1–2.

of the Ten Commandments.⁵ Rather, in seeking salvation through human works and penances, Luther sees these men as denying the righteousness of Christ, freely given through faith, thus denying salvation to themselves and their followers.

This radicalization by Luther of the notion of hypocrisy that sees even, and especially, those who strive to live righteously as potential hypocrites, anticipates the soteriological anxiety that came to surround the notion of hypocrisy, especially among the hotter sort of English Protestants known as puritans and their successors in post-Restoration Protestant Dissent. The emphasis of Dissenting piety on sincerity of heart, intensifying concerns articulated in the sixteenth-century Reformation, generated anxiety, since the heart can only be known by the outward signs of speech, behaviour and the outward forms of worship, all of which can be counterfeited.⁶ As Matthew J. Smith notes in his introductory essay for a special issue of *Christianity and Literature* on the history of sincerity, 'Protestants often described the sincerity of contrition as un-searchably internal, but for this reason, and paradoxically, the purity of outwardly visible practice accumulated new importance as a testimony to that internal reality.'⁷ The paradox that Smith attributes to early modern Protestants in general is arguably even more true of the hotter sort of Protestants and their Dissenting offspring. As I note in the same issue of *Christianity and Literature*: 'Such culturally pervasive early modern anxieties about the gap between inner reality and outward performance are reflected in Puritan attacks on the "hypocrite" – that is, the person who plays the part of a believer but is not truly so'.⁸

⁵ Luther, *Galathians*, 20. For Luther and hypocrisy, see in this volume Charlotte Methuen, "'God really hated the hypocrites": Hypocrisy and Anti-clerical Rhetoric in the Early Lutheran Reformation'.

⁶ On the opposition between sincerity and hypocrisy in both conformist and Nonconformist sermons in the mid- to late seventeenth century, see in this volume Anna Pravdica, "'See sincerity sparkle in thy practice": Antidotes to Hypocrisy in British Print Sermons, 1640–95'. On the sixteenth-century reformers' emphasis on sincerity as a concord between one's heart, words and actions, see, for instance, John Martin, 'Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe', *American Historical Review* 102 (1997), 1309–42, esp. 1329–33.

⁷ Matthew J. Smith, 'w/Sincerity, Part I: The Drama of the Will from Augustine to Milton', *Christianity and Literature* 67 (2017), 8–33, at 18.

⁸ David Parry, "'A Divine Kind of Rhetoric": Rhetorical Strategy and Spirit-Wrought Sincerity in English Puritan Writing', *Christianity and Literature* 67 (2017), 113–38, at

This article explores the treatment of the theme of hypocrisy in a series of manuscript sermons by Exeter Dissenting ministers held in the archives of the Devon and Exeter Institution (DEI) that I believe are as yet unstudied, as no reference to them appears in key secondary studies of Protestant Dissent in Exeter that I would otherwise expect to cite them.⁹ The DEI has catalogued as one collection twenty-six volumes of manuscript material, in several hands and bound in a variety of physical formats, from short quarto and octavo to substantial folio volumes. The collection is made up predominantly of sermon texts, many written out in full, but some presented as notes under brief heads or in shorthand notation. The collection also includes handwritten religious material other than sermons per se, such as catechisms, topical and controversial religious treatises, and historical notes on Scripture, all of which merit further study. This article will focus on the sermons to be found in the first sixteen volumes of the collection (DEI MSS 143.1–16), all of which appear to be written in the same hand, which are bound in volumes of a uniform size (c.165 x 105 mm), and therefore show internal evidence of forming a cohesive collection prior to acquisition by the DEI. These sixteen volumes contain a total of 297 sermons across 7,617 pages, which take the form of full-length sermons written out in longhand rather than summary notes.

Although I have not identified the scribe, at least in the case of the two sermons attributed to James Peirce it is evident that the scribe is not the preacher, since the volume in which these sermons appear (DEI MSS 143.2) contains a sermon in the same hand referring to Peirce's death. It seems likely that the scribe is not the preacher of

114. See also Michael P. Winship, 'Weak Christians, Backsliders, and Carnal Gospels: Assurance of Salvation and the Pastoral Origins of Puritan Practical Divinity in the 1580s', *ChH* 70 (2001), 462–81, at 474–6; Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c.1590–1640* (Farnham, 2014), esp. 39, 130–8, 273–4, 322–7.

⁹ Key secondary studies of Dissent in Exeter and the Exeter Controversy in particular include Allan Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter 1650–1875* (Manchester, 1962); Fred J. Powicke, 'Arianism and the Exeter Assembly', *Transactions of the Congregational History Society* 7 (1916–18), 34–43; Roger Thomas, 'The Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: The Salters' Hall Debate', *JEH* 4 (1953), 162–86; William Gibson, *Religion and the Enlightenment 1600–1800: Conflict and the Rise of Civic Humanism in Taunton* (Oxford and New York, 2007); Bracy V. Hill, 'The Language of Dissent: The Defense of Eighteenth-Century English Dissent in the Works and Sermons of James Peirce' (PhD thesis, Baylor University, 2011); and David L. Wykes, 'The 1719 Salters' Hall Debate: Its Significance for the History of Dissent', in Stephen Copson, ed., *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters' Hall Debates of 1719* (Oxford, 2020), 31–61.

any of the sermons, but a third party who transcribed the sermons either from oral delivery or from earlier manuscript sources.¹⁰ I have not found certain evidence of the scribe's identity, but one intriguing clue is that the fifteenth volume is inscribed 'F. Hallett 1747' on the front free endpaper (the right-hand page facing the inside of the front cover board).¹¹ This name and date potentially correspond to Frances Hallett, widow of the minister Joseph Hallett III who preached some of these sermons. This may point towards a familial preservation of Exeter Dissenting heritage in transcribing these sermons, though it is also possible that Frances could be the volumes' owner, but not their scribe.

The majority of sermons in these sixteen volumes are undated and appear to represent weekly morning and evening Sunday services. A handful of dated sermons were clearly preached on special occasions, including public and private fast days, the birthday of George II, the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, and the deaths of local Dissenters. Most of these sermons focus on matters of everyday faith and practice, such as prayer and temperate living, but they also address topics as wide-ranging as arguments for the afterlife, the nature of angels, and providentialist readings of English history. In these sermons, hypocrisy is addressed in a variety of senses and contexts, including the imposition by conformists of forms of worship not required by Scripture; the false accusations of hypocrisy made against Dissenters; the insincere performance of piety, even by some professing Dissenters, who are thus judged by these sermons to be in fact hypocrites; the tendency of sinners to justify vice as virtue and virtue as vice; and the incompatibility of persecution with true New Testament Christianity.

In the early modern period, Exeter was a key centre for the hotter sort of Protestantism.¹² Following the Restoration, Exeter's puritan

¹⁰ On the relationship between oral, manuscript and printed sermons in this period, see, for instance, Jennifer Farooq, *Preaching in Eighteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge, 2013), esp. 144–50. For excellent discussions of these dynamics more widely, compare, on an earlier period, Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge, 2010), esp. 131–63, and, in relation to New England, Meredith Marie Neuman, *Jeremiah's Scribes: Creating Sermon Literature in Puritan New England* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013).

¹¹ Exeter, Devon and Exeter Institution [hereafter: DEI], MSS 143.15, front free endpaper.

¹² On Exeter's religious politics from the sixteenth century to the Restoration, see, for example, Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, 1–17 (ch. 1, 'Before the Restoration'); Mark Stoye, *From Deliverance to Destruction: Rebellion and Civil War in an English City* (Exeter, 1996); and Bernard Capp, *England's Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation*

leanings led to the presence of a substantial population of Protestant Dissenters. A nationwide 1715 survey of Nonconformist congregations by the London Presbyterian minister, John Evans, identified three Presbyterian meetings in the city with a combined attendance of 2,250, as well as an Independent congregation with 400 hearers, a Baptist congregation of 300, and 120 French Protestants.¹³ Exeter was also the usual location for the meetings of the United Brethren of Devon and Cornwall, often known as the Exeter Assembly, a voluntary association of Presbyterian and Independent ministers across the region that cooperated for mutual counsel, the subsidy of poorer congregations, and the training, licensing and discipline of ministers from 1690 to the mid-eighteenth century.

Within the sixteen volumes of manuscript sermons under consideration here, many of the sermons are unattributed, but those that are attributed are assigned to four preachers who hail from the dominant Presbyterian strand of Exeter Dissent: Robert Atkins (1628/9–85); ‘the Revd. Mr. Joseph Hallett’ (i.e. Joseph Hallett II, 1656–1722);¹⁴ the ‘late Reverend Mr. J: P:’, identifiable as James Peirce (1674–1726); and ‘the Reverend Mr Jos: Hallett, Junr.’ (i.e. Joseph Hallett III, bap. 1691, d. 1744).¹⁵ Robert Atkins was a member of the founding generation of post-Restoration Dissenting ministers, being ejected from a parish living at St John’s Exeter in 1662, having previously been a parish minister in Essex and then a preacher to the Presbyterian congregation of East Peter’s that occupied half of Exeter Cathedral in the Interregnum. Atkins retained the respect of many conformists, including the bishop of Exeter, John Gauden, who intervened to have Atkins released when imprisoned on charges of slander, although this did not preclude Atkins from incurring several fines for preaching to conventicles in his house.¹⁶

and Its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649–1660 (Oxford, 2012), 240–56 (ch. 12, ‘Exeter: Godly Rule in Action’).

¹³ London, DWL, MS 38.4, cited in Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, 71. Exeter also had a Quaker population, not included in Evans’s Survey, perhaps as the Friends lay outside the boundaries of orthodox Dissent. On the Exeter Friends, see Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, esp. 15–16, 52–4, 61–2, 72, 111–13, 115–16.

¹⁴ DEI, MSS 143.1, contents page.

¹⁵ DEI, MSS 143.2, contents page.

¹⁶ Stephen Wright, ‘Atkins [Adkins], Robert (1628/9–1685), clergyman and ejected minister’, *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/166>>, accessed 25 January 2024; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, 12, 21–30, 35–7, 45–7.

The two Joseph Halletts in these notebooks need disambiguating, a challenge made all the more complicated by the fact that there were three Joseph Halletts across three generations, all of whom were Dissenting ministers in Exeter. The three Halletts are conveniently differentiated by historians with Roman numerals. Joseph Hallett I (bap. 1620, d. 1689) was a parish clergyman in Somerset prior to his ejection at the Restoration in 1660 and, after some time ministering to a conventicle in Dorset, was licensed as a Presbyterian preacher in Exeter in 1672. Hallett I eventually became the first minister of James's Meeting, the largest of Exeter's four Presbyterian meeting houses, built in 1687 and named in honour of James II's declaration of indulgence of that year.¹⁷ Given that one of the sermons attributed to Joseph Hallett Jr in this collection is dated after the death of Joseph Hallett II, it appears that, in the context of these notebooks at least, 'the Revd. Mr. Joseph Hallett' refers to Joseph Hallett II (1656–1722), and 'the Reverend Mr Jos: Hallett, Junr.' refers not to Hallett II (as one might suppose), but to Joseph Hallett III (bap. 1691, d. 1744).¹⁸

While Robert Atkins was an orthodox Trinitarian Presbyterian, Joseph Halletts II and III, alongside James Peirce, were key players in a controversy that split the Nonconformist community, not only in Exeter, but across the nation; a controversy variously referred to as the Exeter Controversy or the Exeter Arian Controversy. Joseph Hallett II was his father's assistant at James's Meeting, continuing as assistant minister to his father's successor, George Trosse, and becoming pastor of the congregation on Trosse's death in 1713,

¹⁷ On Joseph Hallett I, see Alexander Gordon, rev. Stephen Wright, 'Hallett, Joseph (bap. 1620, d. 1689), clergyman and ejected minister', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12008>>, accessed 25 January 2024; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, esp. 30, 36–7, 40–2, 45–6, 56, 67.

¹⁸ On Joseph Hallett II, see David L. Wykes, 'Hallett, Joseph (1656–1722), Presbyterian minister and tutor', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12009>>, accessed 25 January 2024; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, esp. 48, 62, 67, 77, 79, 82, 87–9, 92–5, 97–8. On Joseph Hallett III, see David L. Wykes, 'Hallett [Hallet], Joseph (bap. 1691, d. 1744), Presbyterian minister and biblical scholar', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12010>>, accessed 25 January 2024; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, esp. 71, 78, 94, 113–14; Arthur W. Wainwright, 'Locke's Influence on the Exegesis of Peirce, Hallett, and Benson', in Luisa Simonutti, ed., *Locke and Biblical Hermeneutics: Conscience and Scripture* (Cham, 2019), 189–205.

with James Peirce appointed as his assistant.¹⁹ From around 1713, a group of students at the Exeter Academy – the first of three Dissenting academies in Exeter, educating both laity and candidates for the Dissenting ministry, of which Hallett II was principal – secretly discussed, and in some cases adopted, Arian views on the Trinity. The group included Hallett II's son Joseph Hallett III. After these views came into the open in November 1716, the ensuing controversy saw the Exeter Assembly, after consulting colleagues in London, require ministers to affirm their belief in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity at their meeting of May 1719. Those who refused included Hallett II and Peirce, who had by then already been expelled from the congregation of which they were ministers. Indeed, the locks on James's meeting house were changed without warning in March 1719 so they were unable to enter. Hallett II and Peirce's followers erected a new meeting house, known as the Mint Meeting, in which they were able to continue ministering to a congregation of Arian Nonconformists, whose non-Trinitarian views technically placed them outside the legal scope of toleration. Joseph Hallett III in turn became Peirce's co-minister at the Mint Meeting on his father's death in 1722.

'GAUDY CEREMONIES' VS 'GOSPEL SIMPLICITY'

Given that three of the four named preachers in these notebooks were on the non-Trinitarian side of the Exeter Controversy, it is striking that only a minority of the sermons explicitly advocate a heterodox view of the Godhead.²⁰ Many of the sermons reflect the preaching

¹⁹ On Peirce, see David L. Wykes, 'Peirce, James (1674–1726)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21782>>, accessed 25 January 2024; Wainwright, 'Locke's Influence on the Exegesis of Peirce, Hallett, and Benson', 189–97, 204–5; and esp. Hill, 'The Language of Dissent'.

²⁰ The Trinitarian controversy is outside the primary focus of this article. Sermons by Joseph Hallett III in particular occasionally advocate directly a subordinationist Christology, in which the Son is a distinct being who is not equal to the Father and is not to be given equal worship (for example, see his sermon on John 15:9: DEI, MSS 143.3, 102–24). Robert Atkins's sermons predate the split, and he appears to be an orthodox Trinitarian. For instance, in speaking of the roles of the three persons of the Godhead in salvation, he teaches 'That the whole Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, do joyntly concur in this great work, to destroy the works of the devil in us. According to that known Maxim, those works of God that do respect the Creature, they are the joynt works and operations of the whole Trinity': DEI, MSS 143.7, 169–70. Atkins here paraphrases the

styles, piety, practices and perspectives common to Dissenters as a whole. For example, these sermons consistently polemicize against the ceremonies of the established church not contained in Scripture and the imposition of religious conformity, while recognizing that some members and ministers of the established church are truly godly.²¹

In a sermon on the need for a broken and a contrite heart, Joseph Hallett II attacks the hypocrisy of formalist ritual performance, which he particularly associates with the ceremonies of the established church:

So little do ritual performances, tho' instituted by God himself, please him, when they are mere formalities, which they are always, where the heart is unhumbed, is not broken with a sense of sin, and sorrow for it, and when the Life is Unreformed. Much less are guady [*sic*] Ceremonies of Mens Appointment, such as Crosses, and Bowings, and Cringes, and white Garments, and the like, pleasing to God; when the heart is haughty, and proud, and the Life full of cruelty, oppression, and Scandalous Revilings of others.²²

Hallett II tells us here that a sincerely repentant heart, rather than only outward forms of worship, is required to be accepted by God. This is the case even with those 'ritual performances' instituted by God, in the context of referring to the Old Testament sacrificial system with which the psalmist compares the broken and contrite heart. Conformist ceremonial worship, however, since it is only of 'Mens Appointment', is even further from pleasing God, although even Dissenters can be mere formalists and hypocrites if their hearts are unhumbed.

In another sermon, Joseph Hallett II links the contrast between ceremony and simplicity in worship more explicitly to the divisions

patristic maxim *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* ('the external works of the Trinity are indivisible').

²¹ Thus, for instance, while lamenting the established church's failure to accept godly Dissenters as Christians on an equal footing, Joseph Hallett III extends this courtesy to godly members of the established church: 'And thus we lay our Communion open (not indeed to profane men, and Unbelievers, but) to all serious, and faithful Christians, how much soever they may differ from us in matters not relating to salvation': DEI, MSS 143.5, 438.

²² DEI, MSS 143.1, 147.

between conformists and Dissenters. Speaking of offence that is ‘taken, but not given’,²³ he expounds:

Thus some are offended with those of the Dissenting way among us, because they do not worship God in the parish Churches; as if there were some what of holiness in their Churches, and as if the place made their Services the better, and the more acceptable to God, and the more profitable to the people. They will not hear a serious profitable discourse in a Meeting-House; they are offended because of the place, as if a pious Discourse was the worse for the place. This is an offence taken, but not given. Thus some are apt to be offended at the worship of God, when it is not set off with a great deal of pomp and Pageantry; as if a gaudy worship was the most acceptable to God: and a worship with Gospel Simplicity was to be disregarded.²⁴

In this sermon, Hallett II does not deny that holiness can be found in the parish churches, only that it is inevitably tied to the place. It is interesting to note that ‘gaudy worship’ continues to be a concern for Dissenters decades after the struggle between puritans and Laudians.

Yet the accusation of hypocrisy is a double-edged one in the intra-Protestant polemic between Dissenters and conformists. The preachers of these sermons address how one should deal with false accusations of hypocrisy, including those that are laid against Dissenters by conformists. While advising in general against Christians speaking too highly of their progress in virtue and godliness, Joseph Hallett III makes the concession that it is right to vindicate one’s character against false accusations of hypocrisy where the honour of true religion is at stake. He argues that ‘Your clear reputation is a mean of supporting the honour of God, and of Religion, which would suffer thro’ your disgrace’.²⁵ Giving biblical examples of self-defence from Job and St Paul, Hallett III observes that:

After these Examples, it is always allowable for you to speak in your own just and necessary defense. If you are accused as hypocrites, you may modestly declare that you are the sincere servants of God. If you are accused as unrighteous and ungenerous, you may modestly speak of

²³ Ibid. 269.

²⁴ Ibid. 270–1.

²⁵ DEI, MSS 143.5, 304.

the instances of Justice which you have shewn, and of the liberal alms that your hands have bestow'd.²⁶

The vindication of Dissenters from charges of hypocrisy is a necessary aspect of the vindication of the godliness of the Dissenting cause.

'A SUBTILE DEVIL': PARADIASTOLE AND DIABOLICAL DISSIMULATION

Yet the preachers of these Exeter Dissenting sermons also concede that there are indeed hypocrites among their hearers. The fact of professing godly faith and adhering to a Dissenting congregation does not guarantee sincere repentance, upright life or saving faith on the part of the professing Nonconformist. In a sermon focused specifically on the topic of hypocrisy, Joseph Hallett III warns that 'This Delight in Piety and Virtue may be counterfeited' since,

It is the natural Temper of a corrupt Heart to deceive it self, and the World, with a vain shew; and by the help of a subtile Devil, it soon finds out many Inventions, which shall, at first sight, resemble Grace, and not be distinguish'd from it, without a strict Examination, and careful Comparison.²⁷

What is especially anxiety-inducing here for Hallett III and his hearers is that the hypocritical 'corrupt Heart' is capable of deceiving not only the outside world, but also itself. The hypocrite may thus falsely believe himself or herself to be sincere, since the devil is 'subtile' enough to counterfeit even the effects of divine grace, a counterfeit that can be discerned, but only with difficulty, through the tools of 'strict Examination, and careful Comparison' advocated by Nonconformist practical divinity. The 'subtile Devil' here has resonances with Luther's 'white devil', bringing to mind a soteriological anxiety about the counterfeiting of inward faith, as well as the counterfeiting of outward actions.

In this sermon, Hallett III outlines both blatantly egregious forms of hypocrisy, characterized by clearly visible impiety and immorality in outward behaviour, and the more outwardly respectable, but in fact more spiritually deadly forms of hypocrisy, in which one might deceive others, and even oneself, by a show of piety and virtue while

²⁶ *Ibid.* 308.

²⁷ DEI, MSS 143.6, 339–40.

lacking true inward faith. He speaks of the Israelite king Jehu, who ‘pretended a Zeal for the Lord’ in cutting off Ahab’s house and the priests and worshippers of Baal, but continues: ‘Yet there was no sincerity in this. For still he took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel, with all his heart’.²⁸ Sincere faith requires a wholeheartedness, not merely outwardly zealous actions. Where Jehu counterfeited a godly zeal, Hallett III observes:

In like manner every other Grace may be counterfeited. And no Marvel: since Satan has transform’d him self into an Angel of Light. 2 Cor.XI.14. Now, if the Devil, who is a complete sinner, can appear like an Angel of Perfection, how much more easy is it for a Man that is not so wholly abandon’d to Vice, to imitate in appearance, an imperfect Saint?²⁹

Here natural virtue, the human goodness that derives from common grace but is insufficient for salvation, contributes towards hypocrisy rather than working against it, since it can give the appearance of the working of saving grace that is only present within the true saints of God. However, the distinction between the two is muddled by the fact that the obedience of the saints is never perfect in this life, and thus the sins of the saints, that may make them appear to be hypocrites, act as cover for those who are truly hypocrites in their lack of the grace they profess to possess.

Those who are carnal and thus lacking the Holy Spirit within them to sanctify them can perform the outward forms of godly exercises, including religious practices characteristic of the Nonconformist community:

Tis very possible, for instance, that a carnal Mind, which is enmity to God, and can take no Pleasure in Communion with him, may yet pretend to his Acquaintance, that he rejoyces, when the Lord’s Day is come, and that another Opportunity, for going into God’s Presence.

²⁸ Ibid. 340.

²⁹ Ibid. 340–1. 2 Cor. 11: 14 regarding Satan transforming himself into an angel of light is quoted in another context by Joseph Hallett III in a sermon on angels: ‘Another title given to the good angels is, Angels of Light, 2. Cor. XI. 14. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light: that is, he acts as if he were an Angel of Light’: DEI, MSS 143.3, 389. On the use of this biblical text in doctrinal controversies of the patristic era, see in this volume Sophie Lunn-Rockcliffe, ‘The Devil as “Father of Lies”: Ideas of Diabolical Deceit in the Donatist Controversy’.

It is possible such a one may, in the Church, manifest to those around him the outward and usual Tokens of Seriousness, and Pleasure, such as lifting up the hands and Eyes, and a calm attentive look, that shall seem to express an undisturb'd Mind: and yet all the while, he may be so far from delighting in Acts of Devotion, as to wish in his heart that the day were over, and he might return without fear of Men's censure, to the pursuit of a beloved World, and to the Gratification of his Carnal Lusts.³⁰

This is a form of hypocrisy in which the performer of godly piety deceives his companions, but there is an even deeper and more insidious form of hypocrisy that Hallett III highlights: 'But there is another kind of Hypocrisy, which is more difficult to be discern'd, and therefore the more dangerous and fatal'.³¹ In this form of hypocrisy, the hypocrite deceives even his own heart, feeling a subjective sense of pleasure in obeying some divinely ordained duties, but yet not truly, in St Paul's phrase, 'delight[ing] in the law of God after the inward man' (Rom. 7.22).³² The self-deceived hypocrite may even feel religious emotion in response to the means of grace: 'A Man, who lives in a continued Course of fleshly Lusts, all the week, may, I believe, be really affected under a Sermon, or in the Prayers of the Church, yet this is mere hypocrisy after all.'³³ Hallett III elaborates that the one who sincerely rejoices in obedience to God 'has a heart that is pleased in every Duty, without Exception: so far, at least, as that his Pleasure prevails over his Reluctance; or, in other words, that his Delight in every Virtue is greater than his Aversion to it'.³⁴ It is not enough to take pleasure in obedience to God in some things: for instance, being fervent in prayer while oppressing the poor. Only the one who takes pleasure in all divinely ordained duties can be deemed to have sincere and saving faith. Hallett III's emphasis on the need for a searching self-examination owes much to the puritan practical divinity of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but his emphasis on duty and the moral affections as the means of distinguishing sincerity from hypocrisy echoes perhaps more the

³⁰ DEI, MSS 143.6, 342–3.

³¹ Ibid. 343.

³² The possibility of self-deceiving hypocrites was also raised in this period across the Atlantic by Jonathan Edwards: see Ava Chamberlain, 'Self-Deception as a Theological Problem in Jonathan Edwards's *Treatise concerning Religious Affections*', *ChH* 63 (1994), 541–56.

³³ DEI, MSS 143.6, 343–4.

³⁴ Ibid. 344.

emphases of the moral philosophy and divinity of the long eighteenth century.³⁵

The passage from 2 Corinthians 11 cited by Joseph Hallett III regarding Satan transforming himself into an angel of light is also cited by the sixteenth-century German rhetorician Johannes Susenbrotus in relation to the rhetorical figure of *paradiastole*, which excuses a vice by redescribing it as a virtue that it resembles (for instance, calling cowardice prudence or rashness, courage). Susenbrotus observes: ‘we have an example of *paradiastole* when vices show themselves under the guise of virtue, and by this means even the Devil himself can be transfigured into an Angel of light.’³⁶ The *paradiastolic* dynamic is one that is invoked both in more secular early modern moral philosophy, and in puritan practical divinity, to explore the subtleties of vice and satanic temptation, and it is one that surfaces numerous times in these Exeter Dissenting sermons.³⁷

In one of the seventeenth-century sermons by Robert Atkins, for instance, we read:

And so some Covetous persons, they labour to justify their covetous practices, under the notion of honest thrift, and good husbandry. So some drunkards, they will Nick-name that sin of theirs, and say, it is but good fellowship, and boon-companions, what harm is there in it?³⁸

The description of covetousness as good husbandry, and of gluttony and drunkenness as good fellowship, are textbook examples given by sixteenth-century Elizabethan rhetoricians, such as Thomas Wilson

³⁵ See, for instance, Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1991–2000); Louise Joy, *Eighteenth-Century Literary Affections* (Cham, 2020).

³⁶ Johannes Susenbrotus, *Epitome troporum ac schematum* (Zurich, 1540), 46, cited in Quentin Skinner, ‘Paradiastole: Redescribing the Vices as Virtues’, in Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander and Katrin Ettenhuber, eds, *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge, 2007), 149–64, at 160.

³⁷ *Paradiastole* has been explored extensively in relation to early modern ethics and political rhetoric in the work of Quentin Skinner: see, for example, Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996), esp. 138–80 (ch. 4, ‘The Techniques of Redescription’), and idem, ‘Paradiastole’. On *paradiastole* in relation to puritan practical divinity, see David Parry, ‘As an Angel of Light: Satanic Rhetoric in Early Modern Literature and Theology’, in Gregor Thuswalder and Daniel Russ, eds, *The Hermeneutics of Hell: Devilish Visions and Visions of the Devil* (Cham, 2017), 47–71; idem, *The Rhetoric of Conversion in English Puritan Writing from Perkins to Milton* (London, 2022), 52–60, 132–4, 194–200, 225–42.

³⁸ DEI, MSS 143.7, 246.

and Henry Peacham,³⁹ as well as by religious writers of a puritan leaning, including William Perkins,⁴⁰ Arthur Dent, Lewis Bayly, Richard Bernard and John Bunyan.⁴¹ Robert Atkins's characterization of hypocrisy thus participates in the traditions both of Renaissance humanist rhetoric and of godly practical divinity, traditions whose influence can be seen as ongoing in the sermons of the later preachers found in these notebooks, despite their departures from the Presbyterian orthodoxy of Atkins.

In keeping with Aristotelian ethics, in which virtues are the golden mean between two vices,⁴² Atkins notes that sinners are often happy to hear vices denounced that are opposite to their own:

I am persuaded, that a Covetous heart, doth love to hear a sharp and searching sermon against Prodigality. And on the other hand, The Prodigal, he is willing that the base sin of Covetousness, should be loaded with most approbrious language, and that jearring, and scorning, and contempt should be cast upon it. But this doth not hinder, but that the one, and the other, may regard iniquity in the heart.⁴³

Sinners are happy to hear the vice that is opposite to theirs denounced as this gives cover to their paradiastolic disguising of their vice as virtue, but this does not show any genuine love of virtue for its own sake.

³⁹ Peacham defines paradiastole as 'when by a mannerly interpretation, we doe excuse our own vices, or other mens whom we doe defend, by calling them vertues, as when we call him that is craftye, wyse: a couetous man, a good husband: murder a manly deede: deepe dissimulation, singuler wisdome: pryde cleanlyesse: couetousnesse, a worldly or necessary carefulnesse: whoredome, youthful delight & dalyance: Idolatry, pure religion: glotony and dronkenness, good fellowship: cruelty seuerity. This fygure is used, when vices are excused.' Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1577), sig. N4^v.

⁴⁰ Among the errors of the common people listed by Perkins is 'That drinking and bezeling in the alehouse or tauerne is good fellowship, & shews a good kinde nature.' William Perkins, *The foundation of Christian religion, gathered into sixe principles* ([London?], 1591), sig. A2^v.

⁴¹ Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heauen* (London, 1601), 102; Lewis Bayly, *The Practise of Pietie Directing a Christian How to Walke That He May Please God*, 3rd edn (London, 1613; first publ. 1611), 253–4; Richard Bernard, *The Isle of Man: or, the Legall Proceeding in Man-shire against Sinne* (London, 1626), 31 (see 28–32 for a wider attack on redescribing vice as virtue); John Bunyan, *The Holy War* (1682), ed. Roger Sharrock and James F. Forrest (Oxford, 1980), 130. Christopher Hill notes that all these texts attack the redescription of 'covetousness' as 'good husbandry', but Hill does not use the specific term paradiastole for this rhetorical redescription: Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church 1628–1688* (Oxford, 1988), 161–6.

⁴² See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106a–b.

⁴³ DEI, MSS 143.7, 278.

Another key biblical passage often cited in these sermons in relation to the paradiastolic redescription of virtue as vice and vice as virtue is Isaiah 5: 20: ‘Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!’ [AV].⁴⁴ For instance, a seventeenth-century sermon by Robert Atkins comments:

The Prophet, or God by the prophet, denounced against such a wo, that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness. Intimating, that there be some in the world, that call good evil, and evil good, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness. Now, Sirs, they that do so, it is no wonder if they chuse that evil, which they fancy to be good; and reject that good, which they apprehend to be evil.⁴⁵

The sinner who redefines good as evil, and vice versa, here seems not to be a conscious hypocrite, since he or she chooses evil under the appearance of the good (*sub specie boni*).⁴⁶

However, the sinner retains culpability for his or her disordered understanding, according to Joseph Hallett III, who says of the ‘wilful sinner’:

The eyes of his Understanding are so darken’d, that he cannot see his Danger, and discern the difference between moral good and evil: or else his understanding is so disturb’d, and disorder’d, as that he fancies evil to be good, and good to be evil; and walks on quietly toward Hell, while he foolishly thinks himself to be in the safe way to heaven.⁴⁷

Elsewhere Hallett III warns that we ‘cannot but expect his vengeance, if thro’ our own Carelessness, and Prejudice, we call evil, Good, and Good, evil.’⁴⁸ The blurring of moral boundaries signified by the Isaiah text evidently remains an ongoing concern for Exeter

⁴⁴ On this verse in relation to Milton’s Satan exclaiming ‘Evil be thou my good’, see Paul Stevens, ‘The Pre-Secular Politics of *Paradise Lost*’, in Louis Schwartz, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, 2014), 94–108, at 105; Parry, *The Rhetoric of Conversion*, 239.

⁴⁵ DEL, MSS 143.7, 254–5.

⁴⁶ Atkins comments: ‘That they which do regard iniquity, they do not regard it as a thing that is evil, under that notion, but they regard it as a thing that which to them hath the appearance of Good. There is no man that loves the sin, but he loves it, either as pleasant, or as one way or other profitable.’ Ibid. 254.

⁴⁷ DEL, MSS 143.4, 65–6.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 431.

Dissenters across the decades from Atkins's to Hallett III's ministry, despite the theological shifts between them, while Hallett III's sinner who 'walks on quietly toward Hell, while he foolishly thinks himself to be in the safe way to heaven' appears to be a 'sincere hypocrite' of the kind that Ava Chamberlain identifies in Jonathan Edwards's thought.⁴⁹

'ONE OF THE GREATEST AND WORST OF SINS': THE DOUBLE HYPOCRISY
OF PERSECUTION

Another key focus for discussion of hypocrisy in these manuscript sermons relates to religious persecution, a topic in which both orthodox and rational Dissenters had a vested interest. There are two key ways in which persecution fosters hypocrisy, according to these sermons. One is that if individuals are coerced by force into adopting religious practices or professing religious beliefs to which they do not truly adhere in their hearts, they are compelled to be hypocrites. The other is that religious persecution is incompatible with New Testament Christianity, and so professing Christians who persecute others reveal their profession of Christianity to be false, and thus hypocritical.

The hypocrisy of persecution is at times described within the framework of paradiastolic redescription. For instance, Joseph Hallett III laments that 'In Popish Countries the greatest crimes, such as Idolatry and persecution are transubstantiated into virtues: and the highest virtues, such as Scriptural Worship, and Christian Charity, are condemn'd as the most heinous sins'.⁵⁰ His vehement sorrow still has room for the ingenious pun of 'transubstantiated into virtues', a striking phrase that has the ring of a verbatim transcription of Hallett III's words.⁵¹ In another sermon, Hallett III notes that even 'most of those, who call themselves Protestants' have 'imitated the Persecuting Example of the Church of Rome' by oppressing religious minorities, 'and then the exercise of Moderation

⁴⁹ Chamberlain, 'Self-Deception as a Theological Problem', 543.

⁵⁰ DEI, MSS 143.4, 324.

⁵¹ Hallett III precedes this observation with the comment that 'in a country, where Popery, and Persecution are established by Law ... it is most reputable, in the Opinion of the Majority, for a man to be superstitious and a Persecuter. Then he will obtain a good report, as a man of piety, and zeal. While those, that will avoid these things, will be branded with the odious names of Hereticks, or Lukwarm Professors.' Ibid. 324.

toward them, is by the furious and persecuting spirits [called] impious Lukewarmness'.⁵² In relation to the evil of persecution, he elsewhere remarks that 'We must not call evil good, and good evil. We must not delude the souls of Men.'⁵³

In exploring these themes, Hallett III in particular moves beyond the self-interest of advocating liberty for Protestant Dissenters towards a more universal notion of religious freedom for all, including Roman Catholics and even Muslims.⁵⁴ These themes are highlighted, for instance, in a series of three sermons by Hallett III on the Gunpowder Plot, the first of which is headed 'Preached on the, 5th November. 1733'.⁵⁵ These sermons provide a distinctively Nonconformist interpretation of English history and shed light on the troubled triangulation of early modern English religious politics between the established Church of England, Protestant Dissenters and Roman Catholics. Hallett III makes the point that the statutory commemoration of 5 November is not binding on Dissenters, commenting:

And tho' the Government has not commanded us to observe this day (for it speaks only to the establish'd Church) yet we cannot but think our selves more than ordinarily obliged to Celebrate this day with hearty thankfulness to God, since our worthy Predecessors the Dissenters were particularly level'd at by the common enemies of the Nation, and must have been the first that would have fallen a Prey to their teeth, if a merciful God had not broken the snare, and given us a Deliverance.⁵⁶

Hallett III here argues that it is appropriate and even especially fitting for Dissenters to mark the occasion, since they would have been first in the firing line in the event of the triumph of popish tyranny. He blames the Gunpowder Plot on 'Our restless and implacable enemies, the Persecutors of the Church of Rome', who 'would first have

⁵² Ibid. 122–3.

⁵³ DEI, MSS 143.5, 190.

⁵⁴ Hallett III's advocacy of liberty in the religious sphere for Roman Catholics and adherents of non-Christian religions within a Protestant state may be linked to the decreased political threat of popery with the establishment of the Hanoverian succession and the defeat of the Jacobites in 1719. (I am grateful to one of the readers for SCH for this suggestion.)

⁵⁵ DEI, MSS 143.3, 452. Punctuation original.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 459–60.

devour'd the Dissenters, and then the larger body of the nation'.⁵⁷ He thus aligns Dissenters with the wider English Protestant cause, while privileging Dissenters as the truest Protestants and thus the most at risk from the tyranny of popish persecution. Hallett III also sees the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which deposed the Roman Catholic James II and led to the 1689 Act of Toleration, as another providential deliverance serving the cause of the true gospel: 'Thus again, the good Providence of God interposed for our Deliverance from the dreadful Dangers of the two worst things in the world, Popery and Arbitrary Power.'⁵⁸

However, although Hallett III's providential reading of English history aligns Dissenters with a broader national Protestant cause that includes the established church and sees political 'Popery' as a persecutory force to be resisted, he advocates a wider religious toleration that would include Roman Catholics, as well as Dissenters. In his second Gunpowder Plot sermon, Hallett III argues that although papists are in error, for instance in their belief in transubstantiation, they should be reasoned out of such errors, rather than coerced into renouncing them:

If we can by argument convince the Understanding of a Papist, that this is a false doctrine, we shall do well. But if we threaten him with Persecution, unless he will deny this doctrine, we shall hereby tempt him to deny what he verily believes to be the Truth of God. That is, we should hereby tempt him to sin against his Conscience, and so to sin against God, and ruin his own soul.⁵⁹

Even though the papist is wrong about transubstantiation, Hallett III argues, to force him into denying this doctrine insincerely would be to lead him 'to sin against his Conscience', which will incur more severe divine judgment than the erroneous belief itself. It is sin to violate one's conscience or to coerce another person into denying theirs, even if that conscience is misguided. Although this sermon does not use the language of 'hypocrisy' explicitly, its condemnation of speaking or acting contrary to one's conscience is implicitly a condemnation of the hypocritical outward performance of that which is contrary to one's inward convictions. This emphasis on the sin of

⁵⁷ Ibid. 456.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 459.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 471.

coercing conscience resonates with the concerns of the Exeter Controversy and the consequent Salters' Hall Controversy (1719) that splintered English Dissent. It has been rightly pointed out that the 'non-subscribers' were not all necessarily united by anti-Trinitarian doctrine, but rather by the principle that subscription ought not to be compelled to doctrinal formularies beyond the plain words of Scripture.⁶⁰

Yet Hallett III's rejection of coercion in matters of religion extends beyond debates around the limits of acceptable divergence in doctrine within Protestant Dissent to a wider advocacy of toleration, even to those who profess religions outside of Christianity altogether. In another sermon, he states that 'Persecution is one of the greatest and worst of sins that men can possibly commit'⁶¹ and that it is contrary to the spirit of New Testament Christianity:

That I may make this appear to the greatest advantage, I shall put the case of a professed christian (for I cannot allow him to be a real one) persecuting a Mahometan, in order to induce him to renounce his trust in Mahomet, and to receive the blessed Jesus as the only and alufficient Mediator.⁶²

Hallett III remains an exclusivist with regard to religious truth, affirming: 'I make no doubt, but that the Mahometan is grossly mistaken',⁶³ but condemns persecution on the principle that religious coercion is always wrong. If the persecutor forces the 'Mahometan' to deny his belief without truly persuading him to change his inner convictions, he is compelled to become a hypocrite, which is displeasing to God, even though the doctrine he is coerced into confessing is true. At the same time, the persecutor is also a hypocrite: he is a 'professed Christian' but Hallett III 'cannot allow him to be a real one' since his profession is denied by his un-Christlike actions.

⁶⁰ Thomas, 'The Non-Subscription Controversy'; Wykes, 'The 1719 Salters' Hall Debate', esp. 39–47. Wykes asserts that the Salters' Hall debate 'was not about doctrine' (31), perhaps an overstatement, but also observes that 'the controversy at Exeter does seem to have been about the Trinity' (59).

⁶¹ DEI, MSS 143.3, 230.

⁶² *Ibid.* 230–1.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 231.

‘THERE IS SOMETHING STILL FOR YOU TO DO’:
MORALIST SOTERIOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Finally, and more briefly, I would like to consider how theological shifts in English Nonconformity (as in English Protestantism more broadly) over the period covered by these sermons generated increased anxiety over the possibility of hypocrisy in the quest for salvation. The transition from orthodox to rational Dissent in the Exeter Presbyterian community marked by these sermons is a subtle one. While departures from previous orthodoxy are clear in the small number of sermons that deny the equality of the Son with the Father, they are less clear with regard to soteriology, the crucial questions of how individuals are saved and how they can know that they are saved.

While Joseph Hallett III certainly departs from the classic Calvinistic understanding of the election of particular individuals to salvation, in favour of an assertion of God’s predestination of ‘the believing Gentiles in general’,⁶⁴ what is more subtle is an apparent drift away from the Reformation’s emphatic assertion of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, towards an understanding of salvation that makes the final salvation of an individual depend at least in part on a life of sincere, though imperfect, obedience.⁶⁵ Hallett III comments: ‘It is very true that sincere Repentance, and a holy Life are absolutely necessary to our Salvation’,⁶⁶ and though the grace of God and the presence of the Spirit enable Christians to prevail against sin, Hallett III exhorts: ‘There is something still for You to do. You must repent, believe, and to the utmost of your power sincerely obey the Gospel. And then he will give his help and blessing’.⁶⁷ Hallett III even teaches that ‘God loves his rational creatures, according to the moral qualifications that he observes in them’⁶⁸ and that ‘God will love you more, when you become more like him’.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ DEI, MSS 143.5, 8.

⁶⁵ For similar debates in sixteenth-century continental and English Reformed traditions regarding whether the covenant of grace required ethical performance on the part of believers as in some sense a condition of final salvation, see Robert Wainwright, *Early Reformation Covenant Theology: English Reception of Swiss Reformed Thought, 1520–1555* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 2020), esp. 1–41, 146–221, 331–49.

⁶⁶ DEI, MSS 143.4, 225.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 228.

⁶⁸ DEI, MSS 143.5, 336.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 339.

For Hallett III, the gospel dispensation is still one of grace, in that God no longer requires the impossible standard of perfect obedience for salvation that the old covenant of the law of Moses required. He says that the new covenant ‘has lower’d the Terms of Acceptance with God’,⁷⁰ but that we are still required to do that which is within our power: ‘We can do some thing towards our Salvation: But then what we can do would not prove sufficient and effectual, unless God did work in Us and with us.’⁷¹

This emphasis on the necessity of obedience as a ground of final salvation, and not only an evidence of it, correlates with what C. FitzSimons Allison termed ‘the rise of moralism’ (though Allison’s survey ends in the later seventeenth century) and what Isabel Rivers has identified as a shift from ‘the religion of grace’ to ‘the religion of reason’ in both conformist and Nonconformist circles during the long eighteenth century.⁷² Joseph Hallett III’s Dissenting preaching is in line with what Mark Smith has described as the neo-Arminian soteriology of the eighteenth-century Church of England, which:

agreed with the Reformed position that God justified sinners on the basis of the merits of Christ but contended that sinners had nevertheless to qualify for the benefits available under the new covenant by fulfilling their obligations – a sincere attempt, assisted by the grace of God, to obey the law of Christ – in other words, the practice of holiness and good works.⁷³

On the Dissenting side, there are close parallels with the ‘neonomianism’ of Richard Baxter, who argued that, in the gospel, Christ has given a new law in which sincere through imperfect obedience is required for an individual’s acquittal and final salvation at the Day of Judgment.⁷⁴ There are also close links with the soteriological

⁷⁰ DEI, MSS 143.4, 445.

⁷¹ DEI, MSS 143.5, 117.

⁷² C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (London and New York, 1966), esp. ix–xii, 117, 189–212; Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, esp. 1: 25–163.

⁷³ Mark Smith, ‘The Hanoverian Parish: Towards a New Agenda’, *P&P* 216 (2012), 79–105, at 85.

⁷⁴ On Baxter’s soteriology, see Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter’s Doctrine of Justification in its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Zoetermeer, 1993; repr. Vancouver, 2003). On Baxter’s influence on rational and orthodox Dissent into the eighteenth century, see, for instance, Robert Strivens, *Philip Doddridge and the Shaping of Evangelical Dissent* (London, 2015), 21–45.

thought of John Locke, who (as summarized by Diego Lucci) required ‘the fundamentals of Christianity – that is, faith in Jesus the Messiah, repentance for sin, and obedience to the divine moral law – and the conscientious study of Scripture as necessary for salvation’, but in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) states that under the new covenant law of Christ ‘*Faith is allowed to supply the defect of full Obedience*’.⁷⁵

I suggest that this shift to a soteriological emphasis on the absolute necessity of sincere repentance and sincere obedience to attain final salvation places additional weight on the inward sincerity of the individual, and conversely generates increased anxiety regarding the possibility of a hypocrisy that performs the outward form of obedience to God, but without sincerity of heart. Hypocrisy and sincerity function as key terms, both in relation to ethical virtue and saving faith, in Protestant thought from the Reformation onwards, but the anxiety caused by the possibility of insincere performance of piety and virtue by hypocrites was intensified in a context in which soteriology and ethics were increasingly entangled.

⁷⁵ Diego Lucci, *John Locke’s Christianity* (Cambridge, 2020), 77; John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, As Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford, 1999), 19, cited in Lucci, *John Locke’s Christianity*, 93 (italics original). For links between Locke’s biblical exegesis and that of Peirce and Hallett III, see Wainwright, ‘Locke’s Influence on the Exegesis of Peirce, Hallett, and Benson’, 189–97, 204–5.