

## “The Mysteries of Christ”: James Ussher Among the Puritans, 1626

By Richard Snoddy

In the early days of 1626, James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland,<sup>1</sup> preached a series of six sermons from a number of English pulpits. His chosen text was Hebrews 9:14, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered up himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” This gave Ussher a starting point for the consideration of a range of doctrines from the person and work of Christ through to the conscience and Christian service. This article explores these sermons which have never been published and survive in manuscript in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, having been acquired at auction in 1915.<sup>2</sup> The content of the sermons is fascinating and the reader will be given a taste of Ussher’s preaching style, but before we consider what Ussher says, we must give some attention to the context in which Ussher says it. It would be all too easy to abstract these sermons from their historical context and appreciate their instruction, edification, and challenge, but our understanding will be enriched by giving some attention to the nature of the audience and the events of the mid-1620s.

The manuscript looks less like a set of auditor’s notes than a presentation copy with a frontispiece and a title, “The mysteries of Christ unfolded and applied. Together with the nature, offices, acts and errors of the conscience declared. // In six sermons by the right reverend Father in God Dr Usher Lord Primate of Armagh and Metropolitan of all Ireland.” At the bottom of this page there is the note “Taken in characters and transcribed by W.I. [or W.J].” There is no indication of where the series begins but the date of the first sermon, and presumably the second, is 1 January 1626. The third sermon, and presumably the fourth, are undated but were preached at Felsted in Essex. The fifth sermon was preached at Bishopsgate St. in London and there are good grounds

to infer a date of 29 January. The sixth sermon takes us to Islington, then lying outside London to the north. A further sermon is included on the text 1 Peter 4:17, at Great St. Bartholomews, London, on 2 July 1626. As it is not part of the series, and for reasons of space, it will receive only brief attention in this article’s conclusion.

There is one unusual feature about this collection which explains why these sermons, preached in several different locations, cohere together and can be regarded as a series. It is clear that some of Ussher’s

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1. For Ussher’s biography, see Alan Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Other important sources are Nicholas Bernard, *The Life & Death of the Most Reverend and Learned Father of Our Church Dr. James Usher, Late Arch-Bishop of Armagh, and Primate of All Ireland* (London, 1656), 19–20. Other biographical accounts can be found in Richard Parr, *The Life of the Most Reverend Father in God, James Usher, Late Lord Arch-Bishop of Armagh, Primate and Metropolitan of all Ireland* (London, 1686); Charles R. Elrington, “The Life of James Ussher, D.D., Archbishop of Armagh,” in *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher, D.D., Lord Archbishop of Armagh, and Primate of All Ireland*, ed. Charles R. Elrington and J. H. Todd, 17 vols (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1829–64), 1:1–324; R. Buick Knox, *James Ussher: Archbishop of Armagh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967); Hugh Trevor-Roper, “James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh,” in *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 120–65.

2. “The mysteries of Christ unfolded and applied,” Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng.th.e.25. Apart from the appearance of the title in the footnotes, the spelling and punctuation in citations from the manuscript are lightly modernized. For acquisition, see Falconer Madan and H. H. E. Craster, *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford ... Vol. VI (Accessions, 1890–1915) Nos. 31001–37299* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 488 (#36905). An edition of these sermons is in preparation for publication.

hearers moved with him. There are references at the beginning of the final two sermons to indicate this: “Heretofore in another place I have entered into the explication of these words of the Apostle before some honourable personages here present”; “I have at other times and places entered into the explication of this text before some honourable personages present in this congregation.”<sup>3</sup> It can be safely assumed that these must be the same people addressed as “right honourable and beloved in Christ” in the first sermon, and the third: “In these words (right honourable, &c) is contained (as heretofore in another place I have declared)...”<sup>4</sup> The address points to people of elevated station, and some of them are travelling from Essex, to London, and on to Islington. There is enough here to make some solid deductions about the circles Ussher was moving in at this time and to conclude that he was closely associated with the Earl of Warwick.

The third, and presumably the fourth, sermons were preached at Felsted in Essex. This was at the heart of the territory of Robert Rich, second Earl of Warwick, whose residence at Leighs (or Leez) Priory was on the parish boundary. He was one of the greatest landowners in England. His father, the third Baron Rich, was a zealous Protestant who funded a private fleet to prey on Spanish shipping in the Caribbean. When England made peace with Spain in 1604 he moved his base of operations to Flushing and Middleburg in the Low Countries, and when the Dutch made peace with Spain five years later, his ships sailed under commission of the Duke of Savoy. This was a work of righteousness, taking the fight to papal antichrist; as a bonus it could be highly profitable. He was able to purchase the earldom in 1618 during a temporary breach in relations with

Spain when King James was short on funds, but he never enjoyed the confidence of the King and he died in 1619, his son becoming the second Earl. Even before this young Robert was engaged in private maritime warfare against Spain. This ran against the king’s foreign policy and was highly risky.<sup>5</sup> Walter Raleigh was executed to appease Spain after his men, against his orders, attacked a Spanish outpost on the Orinoco River.

Warwick was also one of England’s most powerful ecclesiastical patrons. His patronage extended far beyond his twenty-two advowsons, the right to present a candidate to vacant benefices, through more informal means of encouragement, protection, and financial support. He was at the centre of a complex web of friendship and patronage, and in years to come would be closely linked to Edmund Calamy, Stephen Marshall, Obadiah Sedgwick, Jeremiah Burroughs, and other preachers who would be vocal advocates of the Parliamentary cause in the 1640s, but whose own disagreements would contribute to the downfall of that cause.<sup>6</sup> Whilst known for his good humour, he had a sincere concern for his own spiritual welfare, and obviously valued the counsel and friendship of godly preachers. Sharing an eschatologically-charged anti-popery, Ussher and Warwick must have gotten on well. Recent historians have come to a greater appreciation of the leading role of nobles such as Warwick and William Fiennes, Viscount Saye and Sele in the run up to the Civil War. John Adamson, in his book *The Noble Revolt*, describes Leighs Priory in 1640 as the “topographical and moral centre” of opposition to the King.<sup>7</sup> We see here, through this manuscript, the precursor of that opposition, a circle around Warwick with deep concerns about the direction of state and church.

The venue of the sixth sermon, Islington, also has a strong connection to Warwick. His first wife having died in 1623, Warwick had recently remarried. Susan, widow of the wealthy London alderman William Halliday, brought into the new union Halliday’s forty-four-acre estate, later known as the Mildmay Estate, on the south side of Newington Green and a little under a mile north east of St. Mary’s Church on the eastern extremities of the parish boundary.<sup>8</sup>

As the Warwick connection comes into sharper focus, an ideal candidate for the role of scribe steps forward. “W.J.” is likely William Jessop. After training as a clerk in law, he became man of business to Warwick, and later served as secretary to the Providence Island Company and as a senior official in the Commonwealth.<sup>9</sup> With his legal training he had fluency in stenographic systems such as character, and the

3. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 91r, 109r.

4. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 4r, 53r.

5. Sean Kelsey, “Rich, Robert, second earl of Warwick (1587–1658),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004); William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 160–67.

6. Barbara Donagan, “The Clerical Patronage of Robert Rich, Second Earl of Warwick, 1619–1642,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120, no. 5 (Oct 1976): 388–419. See also Kenneth Shipps, “Lay Patronage of East Anglian Puritan Clerics in Pre-Revolutionary England” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1971), 167–212.

7. John Adamson, *The Noble Revolt: The Overthrow of Charles I* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2007), 26.

8. A. P. Baggs, Diane K. Bolton, and Patricia E. C. Croot, “Islington: Other estates,” in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 8, Islington and Stoke Newington Parishes*, ed. T. F. T. Baker and C. R. Elrington (London: Victoria County History, 1985), 57–69.

9. G. E. Aylmer, “Jessop, William (bap. 1603, d. 1675),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

records of the Providence Island Company show that he made extensive use of shorthand.<sup>10</sup> Such systems enabled listeners to record what they heard with much greater accuracy than had previously been possible.<sup>11</sup> Many of the published collections of Puritan sermons actually come from auditors' notes. For example, large numbers of the sermons of Richard Sibbes and John Preston, lecturers at the Inns of Court where these skills were learned and honed, survive for precisely this reason. Jessop is a perfect fit for the identity of our scribe, taking down the sermon in characters and then writing out a neat copy, perhaps for the personal use of his master, the Earl of Warwick.

Given this, it is possible that the venue for the first, and possibly second, sermon is Leighs Priory, Warwick's residence. This would be a plausible explanation for the venue not being specified. Another strong possibility is Hatfield Broad Oak in Essex. We know that in late December 1625 Ussher and John Preston preached there at what William Hunt suggests was "a sort of regional synod of the godly." We do not know what went on there or who was present and the manuscript notes of Ussher's and Preston's sermons on that occasion are in rather poor condition and somewhat jumbled.<sup>12</sup> But it is the last sighting of Ussher in the historical record before the New Year; just two days before. Hatfield Broad Oak was the seat of Sir Francis Barrington, a Member of Parliament who worked closely with Warwick in protecting and promoting godly preachers. He would later refuse to act as a collector for the king's "forced loan" and died in 1628, his life shortened by a spell in prison. His wife Joan was a formidable woman, and aunt to Oliver Cromwell. Sir Francis had family connections to Ussher, was instrumental in Ussher's invitation to preach before the House of Commons in 1621, and described Ussher as his "most noble friend."<sup>13</sup>

This gives some idea of the circles Ussher was moving in at the beginning of 1626. The previous year had brought his elevation to the archiepiscopal see of Armagh and leadership of the church in Ireland, one of the last actions of King James. It had also seen the death of James and a new king, Charles, come to the throne amid serious concerns about the direction taken in church and state.<sup>14</sup> The rise of a ceremonialist faction in England threatened the word-centred piety of the Puritans.<sup>15</sup> The doctrinal tenets of Arminianism were also perceived as a threat to the Reformed character of the established church, with the writings of Richard Montagu sparking debate in Parliament.<sup>16</sup> Warwick had been pushing the new king's confidant George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham to come off the fence on religious policy, and a disputation before

Buckingham at his London residence, York House on the Strand, was just a few weeks away.

The evidence presented here is further confirmation of Ussher's connections with English Puritanism, not only its clerical, but also its political manifestation, and would seem to link him even more closely to the Essex network than suggested by previous scholarship.<sup>17</sup> A faction was emerging which would oppose and resist royal policy.<sup>18</sup> The manuscript gives a glimpse of a group hearing sermons, and no doubt praying and fasting, and meeting in conclave,<sup>19</sup> in advance of the York House Conference.

### I. A NEW YEAR'S GIFT<sup>20</sup>

Ussher begins his first sermon observing that this season

10. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 371. See British Library, Add. MS 10615.

11. For a judicious discussion of shorthand as a recording medium for early modern sermons, its accuracy, and the evidential value of auditors' notes, see Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 142-47.

12. Hunt, *The Puritan Moment*, 193. See also, Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620-1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9-10. Essex Record Office, D/DBa F5/1, fol. 4r. The notes are in the hand of John Kendall, steward to Sir Thomas Barrington. Ussher's sermons are dated 28 and 30 December.

13. Ford, *James Ussher*, 112; *Barrington Family Letters, 1628-1632*, ed. Arthur Searle, Camden Society 28 (4th series) (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983), 12.

14. An excellent orientation to the history and historiography of the English church in this period is *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

15. Peter Lake, "Lancelot Andrewes, John Buckeridge, and Avant-Garde Conformity at the Court of James I," in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 113-33; Charles Prior, *Defining the Jacobean Church: The Politics of Religious Controversy, 1603-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 158-203.

16. Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c.1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 125-64. For a re-appraisal of Montagu, see Jay T. Collier, *Debating Perseverance: The Augustinian Heritage in Post-Reformation England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 93-123.

17. On Ussher's Puritan connections, see Elizabethanne Boran, "An Early Friendship Network of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, 1626-1656," in *European Universities in the Age of Reformation and Counter Reformation*, ed. Helga Robinson-Hammerstein (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 116-34.

18. Christopher Thompson, "The Origins of the Politics of the Parliamentary Middle Group, 1625-1629," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 22 (1972): 71-86.

19. On such practices, see Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England*, 60-74.

20. These section headings are for the reader's convenience. They do not appear in the manuscript where the sermons are simply numbered.

of the year is a time “wherein by ancient custom” the incarnation is celebrated, so there is no more appropriate theme to take up than the “end,” the purpose of the incarnation—that Christ was sent to die for us to purge our consciences from dead works—and to meditate on the great gift that God has given us in Christ.<sup>21</sup>

This particular day, moreover, is a “special day,” Ussher announces, a day “by the appointment of the Church set apart,” to commemorate the circumcision of our Saviour, the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord. It seems like a small detail as we read the Christmas story but the Church in her wisdom considered it a matter of some weight, “a thing not to be lightly passed over,” for Christ here gave us “an obligation both for his active and passive obedience.” This is a bond to his Father, signed in his blood, by which he humbled himself, put himself under the law on our behalf, binding himself to perform that obedience which we could not perform ourselves.<sup>22</sup> This motif was commonplace. It is reflected in the Collect for 1 January in the Book of Common Prayer: “Almighty God, who madeſt thy blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; Grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit...” etc.<sup>23</sup> But beside our “principal debt of obedience” there is “a debt of penalty” and Ussher, developing an idea found in the Fathers, believes that Christ,

by circumcision gives obligation that he will pay that debt too. That day when the foreskin of his flesh was cut off was the first blood of our Saviour shed, and it was a pawn and pledge that all the rest should follow, that all the blood in his veins should be shed for the redemption of his Church.<sup>24</sup>

So right from the opening comments, Ussher is setting forth the purpose of the incarnation in terms of

Christ’s active and passive obedience, the active obedience of his perfect, sinless life, and his passive obedience, the obedience of his suffering and his death, both set forth to deal with the sinner’s double debt. This is rich theological fare, opening up themes to which Ussher will return.

Ussher then turns from marking the place in the liturgical calendar to observe that in the secular calendar it is the “opening of the year, and all things are new.”<sup>25</sup> Christ makes all things new. A new commandment, a new and living way to enter the most holy place, a new creature in union with Christ, the old things passing away.<sup>26</sup> Christ makes a new year too, being anointed to proclaim the gospel, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord in which the captives are to be set free.<sup>27</sup> “Will you have a new year’s gift?” asks Ussher, alluding to the courtly custom of gift giving on 1 January.<sup>28</sup> “He is that too. To us a child is born, to us a son is given.”<sup>29</sup> He gives not only remission of sins and heaven, he gives himself. This truth is strikingly conveyed in the sacrament, where we are offered not Christ’s benefits, but Christ himself, his body and his blood.

The occasion is thus an invitation to meditate on the mystery of Christ, this Christ who gives himself in his active and passive obedience. Ussher acknowledges this is a “deep point.” He might be “censured for making choice of it,” something “somewhat secret and abstruse,” but this is the glory of the gospel and it is a cause for shame if these things are strange to us:<sup>30</sup>

if we have been ignorant before let us be sorry for it, and think that Christ checks us in that speech of his to Philip. Have I been thus long with thee and knowest thou not me? Hath Christ been above sixteen hundred years with thee (at the beginning whereof this mystery was made manifest) and art thou as ignorant as if it were locked up still? This may not be.<sup>31</sup>

The fulfilment of the minister’s calling, its “height and perfection,” is the unfolding of this mystery, to make it understandable. He reminds his hearers that these are things that angels longed to look into. He pictures the two cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, their faces turned towards the mercy seat, or “propitiatory” as Ussher calls it—a type of Christ’s passive obedience, of course—it seems as if he does not even feel the need to spell this out—and the tables of the law within, which Ussher sees as typifying Christ’s active obedience. It is as if they desired to see into the secret which is now made known by the Church.<sup>32</sup>

All this is by way of exordium. “Now to the point,”

21. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fol. 4r.

22. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 4v–5r.

23. *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 281.

24. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fol. 5r–v. Cf. for example, Ambrose, *Epist.* 78.2–4, in *Sancti Ambrosii ... Opera Omnia ... Tomi Secundi Pars Prior*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiæ Latina* 16 (Paris: Migne, 1880), cols 1323B–1324A.

25. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fol. 5v.

26. John 13:34; Heb. 10:20; 2 Cor. 5:17.

27. Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18–19.

28. Felicity Heal, *The Power of Gifts: Gift Exchange in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 68–84.

29. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fol. 6r.

30. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 7r, 8r.

31. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fol. 7v; John 14:9.

32. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 8v–9r.

says Ussher.<sup>33</sup> We need to know Christ in his person, and to know him in his office.

Ussher then begins to set out a clear exposition of a two-nature Christology. "It is but one person, but one He, but one Jesus, but one Christ. See the text; how much more shall the blood of Christ who through his eternal spirit offered up himself, etc." It is not one person offering and another being offered. He offered up *himself*. There is one Christ, but in this one person there are two natures: eternal spirit, and flesh and blood; one nature eternal, and the other having a beginning in time, that is flesh.<sup>34</sup>

I beseech you think not that these are curiosities, and things more fit for the learned than others. Assure yourselves they be things the substance whereof must be known by the meanest of all God's children. I would not trouble you with them if they were not necessary to be known. He that shall think there are two persons in Christ or but one nature shall not come to heaven. Therefore bend your attentions a little in this case that you may be able in some sort to understand this great mystery, and know it is a part of your glory that God is pleased to make you schoolfellows with the angels. They are glad to learn it, to look into it.<sup>35</sup>

Ussher reassures his hearers that he will not enter into "school distinctions" that they would not understand. Clearly there are laity present; this is not a clerical conference. "Yet notwithstanding," insists Ussher, "unless you understand the substance of it you cannot be saved. To think that Christ hath two persons and but one nature is a fundamental error and one that holds such an error pertinaciously cannot come to salvation."<sup>36</sup>

Ussher then turns to Colossians 2:9, "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." "In him," in Christ, in the person, dwells the "fullness of Godhead," the fullness of the divine nature, and the fullness of manhood too. These are two distinct things dwelling in one person. Ussher, echoing creedal language, affirms, "I believe him to be very God, and I believe him to be very man." Two natures in one person, but neither mingled one with the other, nor changed one into the other: not mingled, so that it is neither one thing, nor the other that it was before, but a "third kind of thing," as in an apothecary's mixture; nor changed or transmuted, as the water when Christ changed water into wine, ceased to be water. Without bringing in technical terms, Ussher is trying to convey a Chalcedonian understanding of the two natures in the person of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

But how did this happen? How did the word become

flesh? "By assuming into the unity of his person that which was not there before. He took to himself what he was not and remained what he was." This is an incomprehensible mystery: "the strangest thing that ever was." Our dust and ashes taken in, to dwell in "the same room, under the same roof," as the everlasting Godhead. Christ took a nature, but he had no person other than the second person of the Trinity. He assumed no person, but took a nature to the person. Ussher admits, "This is hard." He tries to draw an analogy with the water of the Thames flowing into the sea to show how something may lose its subsistence, its particular existence, and yet retain the nature of water. But unlike the Thames "Christ's human nature had no other existence at all but in the second person of the Trinity."<sup>38</sup> Again, Ussher avoids technical language but this is a clear affirmation of *anhypostasia*, the doctrine that Christ remains one person because the human nature he assumed was impersonal, having no previous independent, autonomous, or personal existence.<sup>39</sup> He insists once more on the importance of this teaching:

These are not speculations unnecessary, idle and curious, and such as are fit only for the schools. It is a mystery revealed to all saints. All saints must know the very substance of the point though they be not able to express it as I do or as the schools do. It is the great mystery kept secret from the foundation of the world, and now by the commandment of God to be revealed.<sup>40</sup>

He reminds his hearers that the "first letter of Christ's name is 'Wonderful'" and adds that there are some things in religion that God would have us wonder at.<sup>41</sup>

Ussher recalls the apparitions of Christ in the Old Testament, to Abraham, to Manoah, and others. Pointedly, as Ussher retells the story of Manoah, the Angel of the Lord's name is not "secret" (as per the King James Version, Geneva Bible, etc), but "wonderful" (which most modern translations now seem to prefer). On these occasions the second person of the Trinity did not assume flesh into the person as in the incarnation,

33. "The mysteries of Christ," fol. 9r.

34. "The mysteries of Christ," fols. 9v–10r.

35. "The mysteries of Christ," fol. 10r–v.

36. "The mysteries of Christ," fol. 10v.

37. "The mysteries of Christ," fols. 11v–12v.

38. "The mysteries of Christ," fol. 13r–v.

39. For a helpful explanation of this doctrine, see Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 199–201.

40. "The mysteries of Christ," fol. 14r.

41. "The mysteries of Christ," fol. 14v; cf. Isa. 9:6.

but as a garment that a man puts on and then takes off again. Like Ussher's cloak, it sits loosely, and for a time, not with "fast and inseparable union."<sup>42</sup>

How can this be? How could such a union be attained and maintained. When the Serpahim stand before God's presence they cover their faces and their feet, crying "Holy, holy, holy."

The angels that excel in strength and might, most admirably without all human infirmity of flesh, when they come into the presence of Almighty God they cannot endure the brightness of his glory that fills the world, they cover their faces not daring to look on that sun, yet what is that to this, that flesh and blood should be brought in and dwell there, that it should be able to subsist there and not be consumed with that brightness which the angels are not able look on.

The discussion moves on to the burning bush and to the manner in which God's glory was present in tabernacle and temple and how difficult it was to approach him. All these things were but figures of the great mystery of the incarnation.<sup>43</sup>

Christ is God and man conjoined. He is Immanuel, God with us, with respect to his person, but he is also Immanuel with respect to his office. He is the medium, the mediator of a new covenant by which God and man might be reconciled. Ussher's language has shades of Anselm's as he says:

God was highly dishonored and it was not for his honour to pass by this indignity from sinful flesh, therefore he must redeem us with a price, and that not of silver and gold, but he must bring an oblation, a propitiatory sacrifice, even himself.<sup>44</sup>

So as priest Christ offered himself by his eternal spirit, a sacrifice without sin. Man alone could not make such a sacrifice; God could not die, nor be subject to the law on our behalf.<sup>45</sup> This is the priestly part of Christ's office, in things pertaining to God. In things pertaining to men, Christ exercises prophetic and kingly office. The prophetic office makes known this mystery to our

42. "The mysteries of Christ," fols 14v-15r.

43. "The mysteries of Christ," fols 15v-18r; Isa. 6:2-3.

44. "The mysteries of Christ," fols 19v-21r.

45. This is the essential argument of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. For a modern translation, see *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 260-356.

46. "The mysteries of Christ," fol. 22r-v.

47. "The mysteries of Christ," fols 23r-25v.

understanding and conscience, and the kingly office works on our will and affections. So he clearly sets out the *munus triplex*, the threefold office of the mediator, anticipating many of the notes of the sermons that would follow in the series.<sup>46</sup>

Aware that the time is pressing, Ussher promises to speak more on these things, but pleads,

in the meantime consider the mighty love of God and admire it. Thou hast offended God to the death; to work thy reconciliation one must die whose death must be of that worth that in exact justice; it must be of more value than thy death and the deaths of all the sons of Adam world without end. Oh, the Son of God loved thee, and he would fain have died for thee but he could not; how can life die? How can he that was God everlasting and the author of life be subject to any change? Therefore because he could not die as he was remaining equal with the Father he took thy nature that he might die. How much then art thou bound to the Son of God that loved thee so dearly, that was touched with thy infirmities when he was God unchangeable, unpassable. Before his incarnation he had a mind to lay down his life for thee (take heed to the Church which is redeemed with the blood of God; so it was the blood of God) but being not able to shed blood as he was God alone he will look in the other nature for this end, that whereas the Father was ready to cleave thee in pieces with the sword of his wrath he will go between and take a nature that the dint of the blow should light on his precious body and soul.

Ussher assures his hearers that he will press on to the cleansing of the conscience, God providing "a bath of his own son's blood" to cleanse our consciences and purge us from dead works. Without this cleansing our works come out of a "muddy stream." Before, works were "fuel that should burn me in hell"; now they shall be fruitful, they shall "follow me into another world" and "I shall be rewarded for them." "But the time is past," he sighs, and closes in prayer.<sup>47</sup>

This sermon is a richly-textured treatment of the incarnation and the relationship between the two natures in the person of Christ. Typical for Ussher, it brings in many biblical references and allusions. The material is conceptually dense but it is no dry exposition of abstruse doctrine. Ussher repeatedly insists on the importance of this knowledge of Christ, and the climax is a direct personal appeal. He ends with a sketch of the trajectory of the series, closing on a bright note of gospel hope.

## II. GOD'S OWN BLOOD

Ussher's second sermon develops the Christological discussion by considering the necessity of the incarnation, more specifically why our Mediator had to be God as well as man, before closing with a lengthy and moving meditation on Christ's sufferings.

He opens with a brief recapitulation of the points made previously. The brevity and the direct address—"I declared to you ..."—suggest that he is speaking to the same audience, possibly later the same day and that this is an afternoon sermon, a common Lord's Day practice.<sup>48</sup>

He develops a point previously touched on, the nature of the one who made atonement for us, through discussion of the propriety of language predicated on a Reformed understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum*:

thereof whatsoever is performed in either nature is most truly verified of the whole person. And that makes the price of our redemption of infinite value, whatsoever is done by the divine or human nature is properly verified of the whole person of Christ so that, it is as true that the second person of the Trinity shed his blood as it is true the second person of the Trinity created the world: not by any trope or figure (as some unadvisedly interpret it) the foundation of our salvation stands on the property of that speech. That is, that without all tropes or figures the blood of the second person of the Trinity was shed, for this is the ground, whatsoever is done in either nature is verified of the whole person.<sup>49</sup>

Since the action is the action of the person, not merely a nature, this is a proper way of speaking. He does not cite it until later the sermon, but no doubt Ussher has Acts 20:28 in mind, where Paul addresses the elders of "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." It is this that makes the ransom payment of infinite value.<sup>50</sup>

Ussher returns from here to a more thorough discussion of the Anselmic or soteriological case or for why Christ had to be both divine and human, and now the discourse takes an unusual turn. Ussher speaks of the representative headship of Adam and Christ, quoting from 1 Corinthians 15:47: "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven." The redemption must be accomplished by someone in whom we have as great an interest as we have in Adam. Why is Adam's sin made ours? There is a bond in nature. He was the "stock and foundation of the natural life which I have." Christ acts in a similar way; our being

has a foundation in him. It must if he is to be the solution to our plight in Adam. "So that mankind," Ussher claims "have as near a union unto Christ in respect of their natural existence as they could have in Adam." But how can that be so? This is why it is important that Christ is not merely man, but eternal spirit. In every act God concurs more to its production than any second cause. Our natural existence is owed to Adam, but even more so to Christ due to his divinity, and just as what Adam did in falling is made common to all, so is Christ's work made a "common thing." Since this is such an unusual argument, it is worth giving the core of it here:

This is a ground in natural philosophy that as God is the first cause of all so he doth concur to the producing of every act more immediately than any second cause. A man may think God puts heat into the fire and the heat works of itself when straw is put to it. But it is not so, fire will not burn if God makes it not to burn, it is not the infusion of the first quality that is able to produce an act. God must concur. He is not like the builder who though he be gone the house stands, but God must stand by it else the house falls. He is not an idle gazer on, but the earth stands by thy word, if he uphold it not all things must come to nothing again: so when our Saviour Christ would incite us to be kind to our enemies, "That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good." The word in the original is ἀνατέλλει; he riseth the sun, that is the nature of the word, he not only causeth the sun to rise or set, but he is the actor, he doth rise the sun. All we do drive at is this, that God doth more immediately concur to the producing of any act than any secondary cause can do. So here is the point. I am of his generation (take me in respect of natural existence) and much more than of Adam's, therefore whatsoever Christ did for me may be likewise more than what Adam did for me. Therefore when Paul came to speak among the philosophers at the university of Athens he cites a saying of their poet they are God's generation in respect of their natural being, and he confirms the saying of that poet. Seeing then we are the generation, the offspring of God we ought not to think the Godhead to be like gold or silver or stone; so that seeing he that was to be our redeemer had an eternal spirit, and that we are the offspring of God and

48. "The mysteries of Christ," fol. 26r.

49. "The mysteries of Christ," fols 26v–27r.

50. Stephen R. Holmes, "Reformed Varieties of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*," in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 70–86.

in a more effectual manner than Adam's and so are more beholden to God for generation than to Adam, then whatsoever Christ did is not done by him as a private man but by the one who hath the very stock of our being in him, so that what our Saviour hath done is made a common thing, he being one in whom all the stock consists.<sup>51</sup>

Ussher roots Christ's representative headship in divine concurrence. He contrasts God, the first cause, who is also immanently proximate in concurrently causing our existence and all of our actions to the good, with Adam, a remote secondary cause. Whilst he does not directly address the question, it is clear that this fits nicely with, and is perhaps driven by, his hypothetical universalism, the view that Christ died for all, not merely the elect, but within a predestinarian framework in which only God's chosen elect come to enjoy all the benefits of his work.<sup>52</sup> This novel argument from concurrence extends the scope of redemption to all created humanity.

This argument is later reproduced in *Immanuel* (1638), a short work on Christology derived from sermonic material which covers much of the same ground as the 1626 sermon series. It was dedicated to Thomas

Wentworth, Lord Deputy of Ireland, and presented to him as a New Year's gift. In *Immanuel* it is introduced with the following words regarding the redemption: "what should the purchase of a stranger have been to us? Or what should we have been the better for all this, if we could not derive our descent from the purchaser, or raise some good title whereby we might estate ourselves in his purchase?" This leads to the argument from concurrence: "God doth more immediately concur to the generation and all other motions of the creature, than any natural agent doth or can do." He is thus closer to us than Adam, and even our "very next progenitors," and can be accounted our true next of kin, our kinsman redeemer.<sup>53</sup> Ussher's nineteenth-century editor, Charles Elrington, comments that in *Immanuel* "there does not seem any thing peculiar in his view of the subject,"<sup>54</sup> but on this point Ussher appears to be venturing into the speculative realm. The doctrine of concurrence is not a new idea, and in *Immanuel* Ussher makes a marginal reference to Thomas Bradwardine (d. 1349), Oxford theologian and, very briefly, Archbishop of Canterbury to bolster the point,<sup>55</sup> but the application of this doctrine to representative headship and by extension to questions around the intent and extent of Christ's satisfaction does appear to be a novel speculative move on Ussher's part.<sup>56</sup>

Returning to the 1626 sermons, Christ had to be an eternal spirit, furthermore, so that his human nature would be sanctified, kept and preserved in the midst of temptations, and so that great value would be conferred on the sacrifice; a value that, put in the scales, would outweigh our sins. Just as the altar gives value to the sacrifice made on it, Christ's divine nature gave value to the human nature. It was the altar, the brass altar, on which the sacrifice was made, which sustained it in the midst of the fire of God's wrath that would come upon him, a punishment of such weight and force that if Christ had been a mere creature he could not have borne it.<sup>57</sup>

All this is nothing of course if Christ does not rise again. As Paul reasons, if Christ is not risen from the dead, our faith is in vain and we remain dead in our sins. So Ussher proceeds to show how the resurrection makes "Christ's death of force," and this is another reason why he had to be both God and man. Man alone can suffer, but cannot overcome death.<sup>58</sup>

But this is still not sufficient. The sacrifice must be applied, again something that can be done only if Christ is an eternal spirit. Ussher uses one of his favourite patristic analogies here: a medicine cannot help by being prepared, but by being applied.<sup>59</sup> But almost as if he appreciates a weakness in the analogy, he says,

51. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 31v–33r; Matt. 5:45; Acts 17:28–29.

52. On Ussher's hypothetical universalism, see Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 173–86; idem, "James Ussher's Influence on the Synod of Dordt," in *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 163–80; Richard Snoddy, *The Soteriology of James Ussher: The Act and Object of Saving Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52–92; idem, "The Sources of James Ussher's Patristic Citations on the Intent and Sufficiency of Christ's Satisfaction," in *Learning from the Past: Essays on Reception, Catholicity and Dialogue in Honour of Anthony N. S. Lane*, ed. Jon Balsarak and Richard Snoddy (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 107–29.

53. *Immanuel, or, The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Dublin, 1638), 38–41; Ussher, *Works*, 4:600–01. For discussion of this work, see Ian Hugh Clary, "'The Conduit to Conveigh Life': James Ussher's *Immanuel* and Patristic Christology," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 30 (2012): 160–76; Ford, *James Ussher*, 206.

54. Elrington, "Life," in Ussher, *Works*, 1:201–02.

55. Thomas Bradwardine, *De causa Dei contra Pelagium et de virtute causarum*, 1.3–4. See, for example, Henry Savile's edition (London, 1618).

56. I am grateful to Richard Muller and Michael Lynch for discussion of this point. They have seen nothing similar in the early modern sources.

57. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 35r–36r; with discussion of Matt. 23:19; Job 6:12.

58. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 37r–38r; cf. 1 Cor. 15:14, 17; 1 Pet. 3:21; John 2:19.

59. "The mysteres of Christ," fol. 38v. Other occurrences in this series can be found on fols 54r, 55r, 74v, 91v, 112 v; and elsewhere,

Now mark what our case is, when Christ comes to us he finds us utterly dead in sins and trespasses. Let the skillfullest physician come and apply the most precious and sovereign medicine to a dead man he will do us no good neither his skill nor the preciousness of the physic. What then? He that is to be our Redeemer when he comes to apply this salve, must be able to put life into us; how is that? By sending the spirit of God into our hearts.<sup>60</sup>

Here then is another reason Christ had to be an eternal spirit. What creature could send the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity? Christ has received the Spirit without measure, and just as Aaron the high priest was anointed with oil, from the head of our high priest “the self-same Spirit may drop and be conveyed to the lowest hem of his garment,” bringing life to the dead.<sup>61</sup>

Ussher now turns to the work done in Christ’s human nature? He offered himself a bloody sacrifice, an oblation “without spot” in our text, pointing to his active obedience, the purity of his nature and actions. But in the offering itself we see his passive obedience. As well of our debt of obedience, we owe a debt of penalty.

For still remember, we lie under a double debt, first the principal debt that Adam owed to God every day and hour and minute though he had not fallen, that was the debt of obedience, we are debtors not to the flesh but to the spirit, we are bound to the performance of good works. Besides that there is another debt that is accessory or accidental which we call *nomine pœnæ*, which comes by way of penalty, which by reason of Adam’s fall is come upon us; now though a man pay *nomine pœnæ* it doth not discharge him from the principal debt, and the payment of the principal discharges not from the penalty. Therefore they are over curious that will make one debt to swallow up another, as if he pay the main debt it is no matter for the penalty and if he pay the penalty it is no matter for the principal. The payment of the *nomine pœnæ* discharges not the principal, neither doth the payment of the principal discharge the other.<sup>62</sup>

The “principal” debt is the ongoing obedience Adam owed. *Nomine pœnæ* (“in the name of penalty”) is a term from the common law, denoting a penalty for non-performance, for example a fine for failure to pay rent (the rent itself still being owed), and here applies to the punishment for Adam’s failure to obey. Both these debts are owed, and Christ deals with both through his active and passive obedience, the obedience of his perfect life and the obedience of his sacrificial death. Some theologians, such as Johannes Piscator of Herborn, believed

that Christ’s active obedience was not vicarious. It was the obedience that he himself owed to the Father and simply qualified him to be our Mediator, “a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:19). What is imputed in justification is Christ’s passive obedience.<sup>63</sup> This type of position was later held by Thomas Gataker and Richard Vines, who both denied the imputation of Christ’s active obedience in justification, and this sparked a lengthy debate in the Westminster Assembly.<sup>64</sup> Ussher flatly disagrees, believing that such a view fails to provide a solution for the double plight of the human predicament: “he that must be my surety discharges both my debts.”<sup>65</sup>

No wonder Paul exclaimed, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). “That is,” says Ussher, “the foundation of our rejoicing.” He wants to linger on this topic, and he spends the remainder of the sermon at the foot of the cross, contemplating Christ’s work of oblation. “Give me leave therefore to press it, and let it cost you a little pains to hear and think of it.” He suggests that God created

Balliol College, Oxford, MS 259, II, fol. 227v (Sermon on 1 Cor. 11:28, c. 1624); Ussher, *Works*, 13:160–61 (Sermon on John. 1:12, c. 1640), 176 (Sermon on Eph. 1:13, c. 1640), 270 (Sermon on Rom. 5:1, c. 1640); Cambridge University Library, MS Mm.6.55, fols 53 r (Sermon on Phil. 2:8, 1648), 60 r–v (Sermon on Rom. 8:34, 1648). Ussher derives the analogy from Prosper of Aquitaine, *Pro Augustini doctrina responsiones ad capitula objectionum Vincentianarum*, 1: *habet quidem in se ut omnibus prosit; sed si non bibitur, non medetur*. See S. Prosper of Aquitaine ... *Opera Omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiæ Latina* 51 (Paris: Migne, 1861), col. 179A; for English translation, see “Answers to the Vincentian Articles,” in *Prosper of Aquitaine: The Call of All Nations*, trans. P. de Letter, *Ancient Christian Writers* 32 (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), 164.

60. “The mysteries of Christ,” fol. 38v.

61. “The mysteries of Christ,” fol. 39r; cf. John 3:34; Exod. 29:21.

62. “The mysteries of Christ,” fols 39v–40r.

63. Heber Carlos de Campos Jr., *Doctrine in Development: Johannes Piscator and Debates over Christ’s Active Obedience*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 107–75.

64. For the minutes of these sessions in September 1643, see *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, ed. Chad Van Dixhoorn, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2:48–107. On this debate and its relation to the stance subsequently adopted in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, see also Jeffrey K. Jue, “The Active Obedience of Christ and the Theology of the Westminster Standards: A Historical Investigation,” in *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn: Mentor, 2007), 99–130; Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 250–64; Alan D. Strange, “The Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ at the Westminster Assembly,” in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 31–51; de Campos, *Doctrine in Development*, 177–225.

65. “The mysteries of Christ,” fol. 40v. For further consideration of

the world in six days rather than in one act so that we would consider his work of creation piece by piece as we meditate.<sup>66</sup> He counsels that we should take the same approach as we reflect on the greater work of redemption. When we think of the cross we should not consider it “in general” nor Christ’s blood “simply,” but rather consider the “sorrow on sorrow, and we shall find it a marvellous means to extend our love to Christ, and to fasten our hearts to him.”<sup>67</sup>

Ussher is recommending a methodical process of meditation, and he walks his hearers through this process, elaborating how it was a “dolorous” or painful death, a “shameful death” beneath the dignity of a Roman citizen, and moreover, a “cursed” death on a tree, the highest degree of humiliation, “that God blessed for ever should of all deaths suffer a death on which the curse of God lay, and this he did that thou mightest not be cursed.”

Though thou hast an heart of adamant, if thou weighest the death of Christ aright it will make it melt not only in a natural kind of compassion to Christ, but considering that thou didst it, thy sins laid hold on the Lord of glory, hailed [dragged] him from heaven, prostrated him on the ground gasping even for life, and wrestling with his Father, that thou liftedst him up to the cross, and that thy sins pierced his side; if a man considered this rightly his heart would rise at it. It is the devil’s policy to draw a man’s heart away from consideration of this.<sup>68</sup>

Christ was charged with “foul capital sins,” as a traitor

Ussher’s stance on the imputation of Christ’s active obedience in his wider corpus, see Snoddy, *The Soteriology of James Ussher*, 116–20.

66. This idea is found in Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 78, 92.

67. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 40v–41r.

68. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 41r–42v.

69. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 43r–44v.

70. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 45r–46r.

71. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 46r–47v.

72. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 47v–48r.

73. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 49r, 50v.

74. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 50v–51r. For further discussion of Ussher’s view of the cry of dereliction, see Snoddy, *The Soteriology of James Ussher*, 47–48.

75. Horton Davies, *Like Angels from a Cloud: The English Metaphysical Preachers, 1588–1645* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1986), 167–68. Davies writes, “As for his powers of description, I know of no parallel passage which, refusing to play with paradoxes, reveals the agony of the Cross as memorably as Ussher . . . This was the vertebral quality of his Calvinism which saved him from baroque or rococo theatricality.” The sermon in question on Philippians 2:8 can be found in Ussher, *Works*, 13:140–59.

and “stirrer up of commotion,” and blasphemous against God, so he was regarded as one who had sinned against both the first and second tables of the law. He suffered outside of the camp; he was sold for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave; he had Barabbas preferred before him; he was crucified between two thieves, in front of the world as “a great company of every nation” was present for the Passover feast. In the end his own disciples deserted him.<sup>69</sup>

And Christ knew what would happen to him; from the beginning, every circumstance. “Therefore all his joys in this world were many times eclipsed with the consideration of it.” He knew the bloody baptism that would come to him: “this was a continual crucifixing to him, and dashed all the pleasures that might have given him content during his life.” He did this that these fears might be taken from us. For Ussher Christ’s passive obedience is not the work of a weekend: “he suffered before he suffered.”<sup>70</sup>

Ussher considers Christ’s parts stretched upon the cross, the fastening of his hands, the lifting up and dis-jointing, the six long hours that followed, his “sensible feeling . . . a full apprehension of the pain,” his laying down of his life.<sup>71</sup> But all of this “is the outside of the cross.” Ussher insists that “the main dolour [pain] of the cross stands in the apprehension of those unspeakable tortures that the soul of our Saviour did suffer.”<sup>72</sup>

He explains that “our Saviour received the sword of God up to the very hilts in his soul, not in the soul by sympathy with the body; but my soul is περιλυπός, beset with sorrow or sorrowful, even to the death.” It was this prospect more than anything else that explains his anguish in Gethsemane. The Christian martyrs, who did not have his strength, faced a bodily death; they went to it singing. What Christ faced shook him to his soul. “Christ made his soul an oblation for sin as much as his body, his soul had blows from the Father, he did break him, there was not only the hand of the Jews but the hand of God also.”<sup>73</sup>

Ussher closes this second sermon with a reflection on the cry of dereliction, contrasting “the speech of sense” (“why have you forsaken me?”), with “the speech of faith” (“My God, my God”). He reads out the first ten verses of Psalm 22 and concludes that “our Saviour Christ gasped for every thing that might sustain him.”<sup>74</sup> What Horton Davies says of an Ussher sermon on the cross from the early 1640s could equally be applied here: “Ussher has resisted all impertinent attempts at rhetorical effect; he is concerned only with the unvarnished horror of the cruelty of men and the anguish of the eternal Son of God.”<sup>75</sup>

### III. THE COURT OF CONSCIENCE

Ussher moves on to Felsted and the third sermon, in which the focus is on Christ's active obedience, on how that obedience is performed on our behalf and also serves as example to us, before turning to the intricate workings of the conscience.

He briefly summarizes the argument so far, choosing to foreground the medicinal analogy. The medicine is prepared but not applied. Why? Because people take such delight in sin they will not be cured. So Christ needs "a persuasive power, the tongue of the learned, the persuasions of the Spirit," to wean them from their corruptions and show them the vanity of their preoccupations.

Here again we see Ussher's hypothetical universalism show through a little:

it is not the shedding of our Saviour's blood on the cross barely that saves us *for then all the world should be saved*, but the blood of Christ shed on the cross *to the contentment of his Father's justice must be applied particularly* to the washing away of my sins; who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood; his blood as it was shed on the cross gives contentment to his Father's justice, there is *a way made thereby to God's mercy*, and his justice is no loser but thou are not washed from thy sins if it be not applied to thee, though there be in it *a faculty and power to cleanse yet it actually cleanses not*.

It is not Jesus' act of dying on the cross that takes away sin but the application of his work of redemption through the activity of the Holy Spirit. The redemption itself is couched in more universalist language, its application more particular. Christ "prepared a medicine ... so effectual that it hath appeased the wrath of the Father, that is, if any man will come and use the medicine and submit himself all his sins shall be done away." He can say of those who prefer to remain in the transitory pleasures of corruption, "a price was put into the hands of fools."<sup>76</sup>

That is as much as Ussher wants to say about Christ's passive obedience, his payment of the accidental debt that arises from our default. He now turns to Christ's active obedience which satisfies our principal debt of obedience to our Creator, and to this end Christ not only kept himself without spot from sin, but performed all duties to God and all duties to man. As Ussher begins a lengthy discussion of this point he considers the beauty of virtue. He cites "the Philosopher" on the point that "if virtue should be beheld with bodily eyes it would make all men, even its enemies, to be in love with it,

such is its beauty."<sup>77</sup> If we consider Christ in his purity it will make us love him. But we must not stop there, simply admiring him. Ussher urges us,

to listen after the motion of the spiritual match between thee and him, and know further, thou dost not only behold these virtues as in him, but if thou art matched to him thou mayest challenge them; when a woman is married the riches of her husband are hers.

In Christ, these virtues are reckoned ours. When we see the fullness of some particular grace in Christ there will be "an impression made in thee" of that same grace. He is "the wellhead, the spring, of a good nature."<sup>78</sup>

Ussher contrasts Christ's pure nature with the corruption of Adam's, "a fountain of troubled waters, a foul puddle," which conveys pollution to all who descend from him. How was Christ, as man, exempt from this taint? To prevent this, Christ had to be born in a special manner. The "ordinary means whereby Adam's sin was traduced" was circumvented. This traditional idea of natural generation or propagation being the means by which Adam's sin was passed to his descendants was still widespread in Reformed thought, though the view that Adam's descendants incurred the guilt of original sin through divine volition worked out in covenantal terms was becoming more widely adopted.<sup>79</sup> The Holy Spirit "frame[d] the human nature of Christ out of the Virgin Mary without the help of a man."<sup>80</sup> Beyond the natural holiness that Christ had at the beginning, there "was also as much holiness as a creature could be capable of, which Christ infused into himself ... Himself in one nature did infuse into himself, into his human nature all graces which a human nature could be capable

76. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 54r-55v, emphasis added; cf. Prov. 17:16.

77. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 56r-v. Whilst "the Philosopher" would generally denote Aristotle, in this case Ussher has Plato in mind. The original source is the discussion of wisdom in Plato's *Phaedrus*, 31/250D, but Ussher is likely thinking of the application of this passage to virtue in Cicero's *De officiis*, 1.5, where Plato is cited. See Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 484-85; Cicero, *On Duties*, trans. Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library 30 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 16-17.

78. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 56v-57r.

79. On this question, see Aaron C. Denlinger, *Omnes in Adam ex pacto Dei: Ambrogio Catarino's Doctrine of Covenantal Solidarity and Its Influence on Post-Reformation Reformed Theologians*, *Reformed Historical Theology* 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2010), esp. 245-80.

80. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 57v-58v.

of.”<sup>81</sup> Later Puritan theologians such as John Owen and Thomas Goodwin would shift the emphasis to the Holy Spirit’s role in Christ’s sanctification.<sup>82</sup>

Alongside teaching the doctrine of Christ’s active obedience, in his abstaining from evil and doing of good, in all his duties to God and to man, Ussher keeps pushing on application to Christ’s disciples. “He hath given thee a pattern,” says Ussher, “tread in his steps.” It is the way of our Saviour: “Must he glorify the Father on earth before he looks to be glorified in heaven, and dost thou wretched man think to be glorified in heaven, and yet hast no care to glorify God on earth? Deceive not thyself, it cannot be, it is impossible.” Christ himself insisted that he had not come to destroy the law and the prophets. On the contrary, “I am come to fulfil the law, to give grace to my followers, that they may do as I have done.” If we do not conform to his pattern we are not living under his kingship. We are traitors.<sup>83</sup>

Ussher moves on to the next point in his text: the purging of the conscience. The conscience is the ability that God has given the soul to reflect on itself, to reflect on particular actions, past and to be done. So if I am intending to do something the conscience should guide: shall I do it? And when I have done something, it tells me if I have done well or ill. If the conscience is straight it will be a true rudder for our actions:

when the conscience is right in things to be done it is a guide and director; for things that have been done

81. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 58v–59r.

82. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *Puritan Theology: Doctrine of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 341–45.

83. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 63r–64r; cf. John 17:4–5; Matt. 5:17; fol. 65v.

84. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 66r–67v. Although Aquinas did not deal with the subject of conscience at length, there are very clear echoes of his discussion as Ussher begins his description of the action of conscience. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 79, a. 13. For Latin text and English translation, see *St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae, Volume 11, Man: Ia. 75–83*, trans. Timothy Suttor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 repr. edn), 190–94. Given its importance in Puritan piety, it is remarkable that relatively little scholarship has been published on the conscience in the Puritan tradition. For a useful introduction, see Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 909–26.

85. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 82r–84r. The use of this extended metaphor is not unique to Ussher and can be found in the sermons of contemporaries such as Richard Sibbes. The idea goes back as far as Philo of Alexandria, for example in *De Decalogo* 17 (87). See *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 7 vols (Edinburgh: J. Nichols, 1862–1864), 3:210. Philo, *On the Decalogue. On the Special Laws, Books 1–3*, trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library 320 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 50–51.

86. “The mysteryes of Christ,” fols 67v, 84v.

the conscience keeps a court within a man, and takes all offices to itself, it is a register to note down all thy actions, it doth accuse or excuse and so is a witness, it is a judge to condemn or acquit thee, it is an executioner too, not only to give judgement but to torture and torment when God lets it loose, so that when a man’s conscience is most faithful, when the sting of it is taken out by the blood of Christ it shall lead thee in the ways of life and comfort thee, it shall guide well, shall accuse and excuse where it should and all things shall be straight.<sup>84</sup>

The image of a court within is taken up again and developed in the next sermon as Ussher explains these different functions, describing each personification in turn with a lively sketch of its role.<sup>85</sup> There are many striking images in these sermons, always clear and direct, as when the reflexive act of a man’s conscience is like “a musket” or “a piece overcharged,” and the recoil “blasts him back and turns him over and over.”<sup>86</sup>

Ussher describes the various ways in which conscience may fail or misdirect, how it can give us false direction, or no direction at all. He gives many examples of false direction given by the impure conscience. It is worth observing that the first he gives is of the conscience reasoning, “Sure I must be no odd person. And must I go against the stream? Will you have all the world wonder at me? That which is the ordinary course of the most, must be the safest course.... This was done before you were born and will be done when you are dead and rotten.” This would seem to speak to the singularity of the Puritans in visible godliness, mocked for their precise obedience to God’s law, and their aversion to “the traditions of the fathers” not prescribed in Scripture. The impure conscience may observe “dangerous rules,” “axioms of the Devil’s making,” such as “thought is free,” and “I may make as much as I can of mine own.” In matters of religion a false conscience is particularly dangerous and Ussher recalls Christ’s warnings that a time would come when those who killed his disciples would think they were doing God good service. The conscience should restrain them from such action, but instead “puts them on it.” He suggests that

it were better for a man to fall into adultery than into a smaller sin upon a false ground of conscience, for if he fall into adultery the light of conscience will help him out, it will tell him this is not well done. If I do that I shall never come to heaven, and so it is a means to help him out of the mire. If the fountain or vice of the action be a false principle it plunges him over head and ears

... and in this case the conscience makes a man to run galloping to hell.<sup>87</sup>

Sometimes the conscience gives light but not the kind of full direction where one has certainty and all objections are answered. Ussher explains that "every natural man hath some sparkles of divine truth planted in his mind, to enlighten his conscience, when the word of God comes it adds more light to it." Truths are "imprinted in the soul of a natural man." They should "sit as a queen" and command the obedience of the will. However, "my delight in unrighteousness imprisons that light of truth, that spark of divine verity." This impairs the soul's power to reflect on itself, a deficit which is in part corrected by the light of special revelation.<sup>88</sup> Although he does not use the technical language of synteresis, the imagery Ussher did use reflects a traditional discourse running back through medieval scholasticism to the patristic period. The image of the "spark" or "sparkle" has a long pedigree within the tradition, as does his use of the metaphor of "the candle of the Lord" elsewhere.<sup>89</sup> Of ourselves we can only see what is right before our eyes, "a little glimmering," if at all. Through the action of God's word and Spirit which "dispel all darkness," we can see "things afar off," not just present benefit, but future misery, so that our appetites shall not overrun our judgement.<sup>90</sup>

Ussher describes the two important cases of the "timorous" conscience, one "so scrupulous that it will make more commandments than God hath made," and the conscience that goes too far the other way and ventures on anything hastily. He organizes this discussion around Ecclesiastes 7:16–17: "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?" The one who rightly fears God will steer a course between these rocks.

#### IV. CONSCIENCE CLEANSED

The fourth sermon, presumably still at Felsted, runs with the theme of the power of Christ's blood applied to cleanse us. It goes further than moral virtue, unaided by grace, can take us. At the root of all our actions is the conscience and Christ will cleanse this. Ussher says:

by this means the things that are done by a Christian come out of a fountain that is purified, so that there is a difference between one and the same actions as they are performed by the Christian and the civil man, for as it is performed by a civil man it is a dead work, coming from a corrupt fountain.

This is not the outward washing wrought by the knowledge of Christ that might cause a man for a time to abstain from the corruptions of the world; because it is only an outward cleansing he returns to his corruptions, like a dog to its vomit or the sow wallowing in the mire, images from 2 Peter 2:22 that recur in Ussher's preaching. Christ's blood reforms not only our outward actions but cleanses our very nature, our conscience. Yes, Christians will fall in the mire, but there is a difference between falling in the mire and wallowing in the mire.<sup>91</sup>

Ussher re-treads some of the categories of the previous sermon and then develops the courtroom imagery at some length.<sup>92</sup> He adds some new cases, the "benumbed" conscience that is only troubled by more serious sins, and the "seared" conscience that passes over even these as nothing, and then he describes how the conscience will be "awaked" before the judgement seat of Christ. All of our sins are on record; they shall be remembered; "they shall be produced one after another":

if thou couldst consider (which I beseech you often do) that a day shall come when all the things thou now takest pleasure in, and all the world shall be on a flame before thee, and thou shalt be taken before the judgment seat of Christ, that then thou wouldest give a thousand worlds that thy conscience might speak a comfortable word to thee then it will be known what a good conscience is, then lift up your heads saith Christ for your redemption draweth near, a good conscience shall lift up his head, and look for Jesus Christ and rejoice when others shall hang down their heads wishing for the hills and mountains to fall on them, when they see the Lord Jesus whom they have crucified again, and of whom they have said, this man shall not be Lord over me I will be mine own master; the devil's policy is to keep us from having time to consider what need I shall have of a good conscience at that day when no other thing shall be admitted, and when Christ my only adversary shall be my judge.<sup>93</sup>

87. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 67v–70r; cf. John 16:2.

88. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 70r–71r.

89. Robert A. Greene, "Synderesis, the Spark of Conscience, in the English Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991): 195–219; idem, "Whicote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991): 617–44; cf. Cambridge University Library, MS Mm.6.55, fol. 46 r–v (Sermon on Rom. 8:16, 1647).

90. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 71v–72r.

91. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 74r–77r; cf. fol. 88v.

92. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 82r–84v.

93. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 85r–87v.

The works of the Christian are no longer dead works. Those that die in the Lord should know and be encouraged that their works shall follow them. Their friends will leave them at the graveside but their works shall follow them into another world. At judgment their works shall be brought in, and their evil shall not be spoken of.

Let the Papiſts think that at the day of judgment the archangel ſhall come with a pair of ſcales and ſhall put the good deeds in one balance and the evil deeds in the other balance, and the Virgin Mary may come and help to pull down the ſcales, theſe we know be toys, if you canſt turn to almighty God all thy tranſgreſſions ſhall not be mentioned, and though thy life hath been full of frailties yet thou mayeſt lift up thy head becauſe they ſhall not be mentioned.

But if you turn away from God? What then? The good you have done will not be mentioned and in the ſin you committed you will die. If your heart is false, if there is no love for Chriſt, your obedience is worthless. You will “loose the benefit of hearing ſo many ſermons, of making ſo many prayers, and of being at ſo much coſt.” Uſſher cloſes with a warning, “Therefore look to yourſelves that ye looſe not your full reward, and that cannot be had unleſs the conſcience be cleaſed.”

#### V. THE WAGES OF SIN

The fifth ſermon, at Biſhopsgate St. in London, takes up the theme of “dead works,” and how they defile, how they kill. Uſſher contraſts theſe “dead works” with the ſervice of the “living God,” who “quickens” ſinners, giving them new life and purging their conſciences ſo that they might ſerve him. Uſſher ſpends much of the ſermon on the ſinfulneſs of ſin, explaining how it makes us abominable in God’s ſight. It is a thing that is hard for the ſinful mind to graſp but Uſſher believes that “this doctrine ... is the very opening of life.” He adds “if there be any humiliation that makes a man fit for grace, and prepares way for juſtification it is that which is bred on the ſenſe of this, that ſin is a foul thing, that pollutes and defiles all the parts and powers of ſoul and body.”<sup>94</sup> This might appear to ſound notes of preparationism,

94. “The myſteries of Chriſt,” fol. 94r–v.

95. “The myſteries of Chriſt,” fols 97v–98r.

96. “The myſteries of Chriſt,” fols 99v–100r. On the etiquette of duelling and the “lie,” ſee Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness and Honour*, Ideas in Context 65 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), eſp. 59–64, 75.

97. “The myſteries of Chriſt,” fols 101v–102v.

98. “The myſteries of Chriſt,” fols 104v–105r.

99. Cf. Jer. 2:22, KJV.

but later in the ſermon Uſſher iſſiſts that “the Spirit of God muſt convince thee of ſin. It muſt open thy eyes that thou mayeſt reflect on thy ſelf and ſee the foul corners of thy ſoul.” To come to a knowledge of the ſinfulneſs of ſin is indeed a ſign of God’s work and “a token that God will waſh thee.” What before “thou countedſt a riddle, and to be ſpoken more for amplification than for truth,” merely the preacher’s rhetoric, is now believed and the ſelf loathed for its ſin.<sup>95</sup>

Some would rather brag of their ſin than confeſs it and thus “make their glory of their ſhame.” Uſſher thinks of thoſe who take pride in their “fantaſtical attire,” in their “rapping out of great oaths thinking it to be, as it were, a grace to their ſpeech,” and their maintenance of honour in refusing to “take the lie,” but rather “give a ſtab or challenge.” The “lie” was a challenge to a gentleman’s reputation, often an accusation of lying. In reply he could either iſſue a challenge to a duel, or retort with a blow and thus force the other party to iſſue the challenge. Uſſher therefore would ſeem to have gentlemen of the court in mind, but however high one’s ſtation, ſin makes one “baſe,” “vile.”<sup>96</sup>

Sin cries out to God, “pay me my wages,” and thoſe wages are death. Before we are cleaſed in Chriſt every evil deed “hath a mouth like the blood of Abel, that aſcended to heaven, and gave no reſt.” It will not be quiet. You might ſtop your ears, but “it fills heaven with the cry, and it cries day and night.” We do not look ahead and contemplate the conſequences of our ſins: “Thou art but acting a tragedy all the while thou art committing a ſin. Thou lookeſt not to the cataſtrophe, to the end. Will it not be bitterneſs in the end?”<sup>97</sup> There is a means to purge and cleaſe, a “bath,” “a fountain that is open for the houſe of David.” The means are provided, the blood of God’s own Son offered, but many would “rather go to the pollutions of the world, than be cleaſed.” Uſſher adds ruefully, “the committing of ſin is not half ſo heinous as thy refusing of the remedy.”<sup>98</sup>

The ſermon is, for the moſt part, taken up with ſuch ideas but then moves towards a cloſe in a ſtriking manner:

the Lord hath vouchſafed you a bleſſed miniſtry. You have had the miniſtry in a powerful manner above all the nations of the world, and this city above other cities. Now you are clean through that word which you have heard, that ſoap and nitre<sup>99</sup> of Almighty God whereby he cleaſes the ſpots of ſin. Haſt thou had that word ſhowering down on thee ſo long and art thou as foul as thou waſt before? Hath the Lord loſt ſo much labour and coſt on thee? Haſt thou been thus long awaſhing

and not yet clean? Well, the Lord hath his judgment, that is, a thing by which he means to break thee; many shall be purified and made white and tried, ... Art thou no whiter now then before the sickness came? Hast thou lost the great benefit thou mightest have made thereby? Consider that; I am afraid we continue as foul as ever we were; we may be thankful, but no thanksgiving pleases God but such as answers the intendment of his chastisements; his end was that thou mightest be purified.<sup>100</sup>

The "sickness" Ussher speaks of is the plague, the year just ended, 1625 (along with 1603 and 1665), being one of London's truly horrific plague years. The metropolis experienced somewhere in the region of 20% mortality, in a population of around 200,000. About 40,000 people died in the capital.<sup>101</sup> The plague year is the backdrop of Ussher's closing exhortations. The mention of "thanksgiving" should give us a high degree of confidence in attributing a date to this sermon, as 29 January was a day of public thanksgiving by royal proclamation for the abatement of the plague in London and the surrounding areas (19 February elsewhere).<sup>102</sup> Some of Ussher's hearers would only have recently returned to London after a lengthy absence. In the seventeenth century social distancing often meant flight to the country for those with the means to do so. The withdrawal of the city's big spenders added a significant economic dimension to the misery of those who remained and received more widespread condemnation than in previous plague years. It is worth noting that Ussher evokes the dark spectre of the plague only at the very end of his sermon. He neatly fits the theme in to the progression of his sermon series, rather than construct a whole sermon around it in departure from the text that he had been preaching on over the previous weeks and was not yet finished with.<sup>103</sup>

The Lord is sovereign in and over plague. There is an "intendment," an "end," to what has happened. God uses these trials to purify his people, to sanctify them, to make them "white." Ussher calls his hearers to sober self-examination. Have they experienced, or missed out, on the "benefit" of the trial? He continues to warn that if "these means the Lord hath used," the preaching of the word, the offering of the blood of his Son, and these outward trials "will not work on you, now is the axe laid to the root of the tree."<sup>104</sup> The trial of suffering is placed alongside the preaching of the word as a means of grace, assuming the status of what Ann Thompson calls a "quasi-sacrament."<sup>105</sup> It is right to be thankful that the plague has waned but the danger has not passed, and indeed the plague is not the worst of

the problems facing England. Security in sin is a more serious threat to the nation, and to be complacent is to invite destruction.<sup>106</sup>

The Lord is ready to strike and bring judgement on the fruitless tree. Ussher reminds his hearers of Leviticus 26:21, and a harsher judgment to come: "And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins." "That place of Leviticus," says Ussher, "perpetually sounds in mine ears." Ussher lights on a text which had become central in early modern discourse about plague, being ascribed explanatory power even in medical treatises written during the previous great plague year of 1603.<sup>107</sup> The warning continues with Leviticus 26:25, "And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy." England was now at war with Spain. There was genuine alarm about the

100. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 105r–106r.

101. Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 150–51; Stephen Porter, *Lord Have Mercy Upon Us: London's Plague Years* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), 142–43.

102. *A Proclamation for A Generall and Publike Thankesgiuing* (London, 22 January 1626).

103. Something more akin to a full-fledged plague sermon can be found in Ussher's notes in Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawlinson D1290, fols 62v–63r. This sermon, on the text Lamentations 3:40–41 ("Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens.") was preached on 2 October 1625 during a period of convalescence at Much Hadham, Hertfordshire, where bishops of London had maintained a country residence since the Norman Conquest. God's dealings with us in judgment are not for "our subversion but our conversion." Ussher laments that "thousands of our brethren fall at our right and left hand," and we witness the "execution" of God's threats "visibly upon others that are better than we." We are suffered to live this long to give us time to repent. He urges, "as therefore he hath given thee space, so entreat him to give thee grace to repent" (emphasis original). The notes speak of God's judgments, rather than plague specifically, but given the content and the date, the plague that was raging in nearby London would have been on everyone's minds.

104. "The mysteres of Christ," fol. 106r.

105. Ann Thompson, *The Art of Suffering and the Impact of Seventeenth-Century Anti-Providential Thought* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 45.

106. This a recurring theme in plague sermons of this period. Kirsty Rolfe, "Fatal and Memorable: Plague, Providence and War in English Texts, 1625–6," *The Seventeenth Century* 35, no. 3 (2020): 293–314. For wider discussion, see Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

107. See, for example, Thomas Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague* (London, 1603), sig. B3r; Thomas Thayer, *A Treatise of the Pestilence* (London, 1603), sig. B2r.

possibility of a Spanish invasion via the Netherlands, and 1625 had seen the beginning of a program of fortifying coastal defences. If the people continue to walk contrary to the Lord the plague will come again, but this time along with the sword: “when you are besieged, you shall not run into the country at your pleasure, but I will bring a plague upon you when you cannot stir out of your gates.” Leviticus 26:29 depicts the resulting social breakdown and descent into cannibalism in the besieged city: “You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters.”

It is best to “bow in time” and avert the judgment. “God hath done this before to others, and if thou repentest not he will do the same to thee.”<sup>108</sup> Historical consciousness is a feature of early modern plague literature. Ian Munro writes, “The plague city is always plural: London under plague is haunted by Florence, Rome, Jerusalem, Athens, Thebes, the cities of the plain.”<sup>109</sup> At this point in time, however, with Europe embroiled in conflict, the catastrophic fall of the Palatinate and the loss of cities such as Mannheim and Heidelberg to Habsburg forces was a sore point for English Protestants. Thomas Dekker lamented,

Oh *Germany!* what foundations of bloud haue thy Cities beene drowned in? what horrors, what terrors, what hellish inuentions haue not warre found out to destroy thy buildings, demollish thy Free States, and vtterly to confound thy 17. Prouinces? Gods three whips haue printed deepe markes on thy shoulders; the *Sword* for many yeeres together hath cut thy people in pieces; *Famine* hath beene wearied with eating vp thy children, and is not yet satisfied; the *Pestilence* hath in many of thy Townes, in many of thy Sieges and Leagers; plaid the terrible Tyrant.<sup>110</sup>

Ussher pleads with his hearers to repent, or worse afflictions may come. “Cast down thy weapons, come in to Christ and then thou art safe.”<sup>111</sup>

108. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 106r–108r.

109. Ian Munro, “The City and Its Double: Plague Time in Early Modern London,” *English Literary Renaissance* 30, no. 2 (2000): 241–61 (243).

110. Thomas Dekker, *A Rod for Run-Awayes* (London, 1625), sig. A3v (emphasis original).

111. “The mysteres of Christ,” fol. 108r.

112. Patrick Collinson, “Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as Forms of Popular Religious Culture,” in *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560–1700*, ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 32–57.

113. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 109r–112r.

114. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 112r–113r.

## VI. JOYFUL SERVICE

Ussher, now at Islington, in the sixth and final sermon continues on the theme of “to serve the living God,” “the main end” of Christ’s work. If the conscience remains unwashed our works are dead works, even if the works are good in their own kind. If we are without grace, without life, even our praying, hearing of God’s word, and receiving the sacrament are dead works, things to be repented of. “Notwithstanding thou give alms, art devout to hear the word, careful to repeat sermons, yet thou art reprobate to every good work; God accepts no service at thy hands so long as thou art unpure.” It is worth noting that the examples of activity Ussher chooses are closely associated with Puritan piety.<sup>112</sup> It is possible to be counted outwardly amongst the fellowship of the visible saints and yet be devoid of grace and spiritual life.<sup>113</sup>

Ussher reminds his hearers of Peter’s exhortation to crave the “sincere milk of the word” so that they might grow. But pollution hinders growth: “if thou hast heard ten thousand of the most powerful sermons that ever were preached by man as long as thou layest not aside these corrupt things, malice, guile, hypocrisy and the like, so long thy services are unacceptable to God and unprofitable to thee. Thou canst not grow by them.” At least not for any good. No, they will grow worse and worse as the word hardens them. What should be for their life becomes a means of death, “and so it were better thou hadst never heard.” The same can be said of public and private duties in prayer; to no purpose for the corrupt in conscience.<sup>114</sup>

As is typical of his more practical sermons there is some discriminating application with examples and cases. There is even a word for the ministers of the gospel:

foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they engender strife.... A man is given to question, and the minister may think it a disparagement to his learning if he answers not every idle question ... there be questions that do nothing but put countries into combustion and cause strife to God’s dishonour, that be of no other use but to satisfy curiosity and itching humours, and to set men together by the ears. And why shall not I answer them? Because the servant of the Lord must not strive. Art thou admitted into Gods service? Thou must not be a wrangler.... The servant of Christ must not strive but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, which is spoken particularly to the minister and proportionably to all others.

He advises a measure of restraint in theological controversy, alluding, no doubt, to the havoc wreaked by the actions of the Remonstrants in the Dutch provinces. This is all quite conventional, but then comes something more pointed:

Art thou the servant of God in the ministry? Thou must be apt to teach. If thou be the servant of idols, of Jeroboam’s calves, do as one that hath service; but if thou be the servant of Jesus Christ thou must be apt to teach.<sup>115</sup>

This would appear to be a good example of veiled speech, with all its benefits of plausible deniability. One could easily miss the point, but for those with ears to hear the ministers who serve idols, Jeroboam’s calves, figure a royally-instituted idol-worship which kept the people from the true worship of God. There is a contrast between a faithful word-centred gospel ministry and a focus on something more tangible. It is surely not reading too much into this to conclude that Ussher is speaking to the situation of the day given the innovations in worship seen, for example, in the royal chapels, where silver crucifixes and murals of the prophets and apostles were seen from the early 1620s, concessions to Catholic aesthetic preferences during a period when King James was still seeking an *entente* with Spain.<sup>116</sup> The ultra-conformists’ downplaying of preaching in favour of prayer and a greater focus on the Eucharist is also likely in view. Ussher makes his point, but in such a way that he is not clearly stepping beyond the bounds of decorum. The connections between Jeroboam’s ceremonial innovations and idolatry and contemporary England are easily drawn, but could there be further resonances in play here? Jeroboam rejected the true priests and Levites, who were then forced to flee to Judah.<sup>117</sup> For the fertile typological imagination this could find a parallel in the ejection of godly ministers from their livings, but perhaps a more obvious echo would be the division of the kingdom, about which Ussher sounded more explicit warnings in other sermons in this period.<sup>118</sup>

Ussher’s next main point is fruitfulness. It is not enough to be cleansed and refrain from outward sin. This is what Ussher calls “negative divinity,” when we stand like the Pharisee and say “Lord I am not as another man, no extortioner, no whoremonger, nor thief.” We must be fruitful, abounding in good works. We do not serve our master and bring him honour by standing idle. An imagined interlocutor responds with horror, “Oh, but if I be zealous of good works I shall be

counted a fool and a Puritan!” Ussher replies, “let not this thing evacuate the death of Christ,” the blood that he offered being offered to cleanse us and make us zealous for good works. This is the end of our creation.<sup>119</sup> It should be noted that Ussher does not wear the name “Puritan” as a badge. In his sermons it is a word of scorn on the lips of an adversary, and that is, of course, how the word came into use.<sup>120</sup> However the words “puritan,” “purity,” and “precise” keep cropping up and are used in such a way that Ussher is seen to be in sympathy with the godly cause and expects the piety that he is advocating to draw this kind of ridicule from the ungodly. He urges his hearers to serve the Lord with gladness, not with whining and “pewling” and complaining; this does not befit God’s servants. They should serve with joy, and this will bring credit to their master and invite men to God’s service, the most free and comfortable service.<sup>121</sup>

He moves towards a conclusion contemplating the “living God.” Men act as if he were dead, or able only to walk in the circle of the heavens; but one day they will know he is alive. For the brethren there is assurance that “in the midst of all confusion” we serve a living God.

“The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.” If we were left to subordinate reignings what might we fear? Could we look for anything but subversion, nay utter abolition? When we see how the sceptres of the world are swayed? No, thou servest a living God. When thou thinkest all shall be turned topside otherwise, yet God reigns. If he did not thou mighest howl and wail, but seeing God lives and reigns for evermore let the world rejoice, let the multitude of isles and most of all England be glad thereof and blessed be my strength.<sup>122</sup>

115. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 114v–115v.

116. Peter E. McCullough, *Sermons at Court: Politics and Religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31–35.

117. 2 Chr. 11:13–14.

118. For a discussion of Jeroboam and Rehoboam typology, focusing more on the 1640s and 1650s, see Kevin Killeen, *The Political Bible in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 135–55.

119. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 117r–v, 119r.

120. Patrick Collinson, “Antipuritanism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19–33.

121. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 119v–120v. “Pewling” or “puling” is a querulous crying or whining.

122. “The mysteres of Christ,” fols 123v–124r, with citation of Psalm 97:1.

And that is how Ussher ends the six-sermon series, having taken his hearers, at least some of them, from Essex to Islington, and from contemplation of mysteries beyond comprehension to the need for faithful, joyful service to the living God.

#### VII. CODA

This article has surveyed Ussher's sermon series on Hebrews 9:14, registering some key concerns and distinctive features of his preaching. The manuscript witness contains enough clues to act as a lens through which to see something of the context in which he preached these sermons, albeit darkly. He was addressing a group centred around Robert Rich, second Earl of Warwick, a group with grave concerns about threats to the Reformed identity of the Church of England. The events of the following months gave them little encouragement.

The disputation at York House took place on 11 and 17 February. The hoped-for repudiation of Montagu was not forthcoming and Buckingham refused to endorse the articles of the Synod of Dort. An unbridgeable gap began to open between Buckingham and his erstwhile moderate Puritan allies which would have profound consequences in national politics. Although it was not yet clear how fully the new king's sympathies lay with the ceremonialists who would become known as the "Arminian" party, the events at York House gave an early indication of the way the winds might be blowing.<sup>123</sup>

Ussher continued to sound the note of warning. On

27 March 1626, the first anniversary of King James's death, Ussher preached in St. Mary's, Cambridge on 1 Samuel 12:24–25: "Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."<sup>124</sup> This was one of a number of occasions on which Ussher was later deemed to have spoken prophetically of the national calamity which came in the 1640s.<sup>125</sup>

He preached before King Charles at Greenwich on 25 June 1626 on 1 Corinthians 14:33: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." He was able to hold up the case of the Netherlands as a country riven by religious faction and almost destroyed. It should serve as an example to England: "We see the prognostication of our ruin before our eyes." He felt aggrieved that "that odious and contemptible name of Puritans" was being foisted on conforming Calvinists in an attempt to taint them with sedition. They were not the fringe but the mainstream, holding to the doctrine of the established church which had been maintained by the late King James. Ussher proceeded to question the wisdom of the recent royal proclamation banning discussion of controverted points such as predestination.<sup>126</sup> He was well aware of the risk he was taking as he pushed beyond the bounds of decorum: "I need not make an apology for myself, my heart being upright, and it being the last time perhaps that I may ever speak unto you." His absence from England from 1626 until 1640, a period of marginalization, would seem to vindicate his fears of the consequences of such outspokenness at court.<sup>127</sup>

Just one week after the Greenwich sermon, shortly before his return to Ireland, Ussher preached on 1 Peter 4:17 at St. Bartholomew the Great, in Smithfield, London, and the caution that "judgement must begin with the house of God." This sermon is appended to the "Mysteries of Christ" sermon series and it is surely no coincidence that the parish of St. Bartholomew the Great had associations with the Rich family.<sup>128</sup> Warwick House lay nearby on Holborn, and the advowson along with family property in the parish had been settled on Warwick's younger brother, Henry, now Earl of Holland.<sup>129</sup> Ussher counselled that the godly should not be surprised at the "fiery trial" that they are experiencing, and worse was likely to come: "Take that for a rule, when God hath suffered the gospel to be preached to a nation and coming to look for fruit he finds none ... then it is the time." God has been patient and looked for fruit year and after year but soon the axe of judgement will fall.<sup>130</sup>

123. For the York House conference, see Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 164–80; Barbara Donagan, "The York House Conference Revisited: Laymen, Calvinism and Arminianism," *Historical Research* 64, no. 155 (Oct 1991): 312–30; and for a more theologically-nuanced account Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 141–69.

124. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawlinson D1290, fol. 63v.

125. Bernard, *Life*, 86. See also Ute Lotz-Heumann, "'The Spirit of Prophecy Has Not Wholly Left the World': The Stylisation of Archbishop James Ussher as a Prophet," in *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe*, ed. Helen Parish and W. G. Naphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 119–32.

126. *A Proclamation for the Establishing of the Peace and Quiet of the Church of England* (London, 1626).

127. The Greenwich sermon was not published in the seventeenth century. It can be found in Ussher, *Works*, 13:335–51, but there are good reasons to suspect that the text here has been redacted in line with the editor Charles Elrington's high-church sympathies. For a slightly punchier account based on two manuscript witnesses, see *James Ussher and a Reformed Episcopal Church: Sermons and Treatises on Ecclesiology*, ed. Richard Snoddy (Moscow, ID: Davenant Press, 2018), 97–117.

128. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 125r–144r.

129. E. A. Webb, *The Records of St. Bartholomew's Priory and St. Bartholomew the Great, West Smithfield: Volume 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 292–96.

130. "The mysteres of Christ," fols 125r, 137v–138v.



James Ussher (c.1641), Jesus College, Oxford, attributed to Cornelis Janssens van Ceulen.

Ussher returned to England in the much-changed circumstances of 1640. According to his first biographer Nicholas Bernard, he had “been invited over by some eminent persons, upon the occasion of the then differences between the late king and parliament.”<sup>131</sup> Ussher stayed with the Earl of Warwick whilst in London, and when Ussher was at Oxford Warwick travelled there specially for “a long conference” with him.<sup>132</sup> Ultimately,

the two men ended up on opposing sides as the country slid towards war. Ussher’s principled royalism, for a time, separated him from many with whom he shared a bond of spiritual kinship. These dark years would witness the destruction that he had foretold. ■

131. Bernard, *Life*, 93.

132. Ford, *James Ussher*, 227–28.