
Samuel Rutherford and the Theology and Practice of Preaching

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A familiar anecdote about Rutherford recorded by Robert Wodrow reveals an intriguing snapshot of the preacher fully engaged in the pulpit. ‘One day when preaching in Edinburgh, after dwelling for some time on the differences of the day, he broke out with – “Woe is unto us for these sad divisions, that make us lose the fair scent of the Rose of Sharon,” and then he went on commending Christ, going over all his precious styles and titles about a quarter of an hour; upon which the laird of Glanderston said, “Ay, now you are right; hold you there”.’¹ For many, especially A. Taylor Innes, this incident demonstrates signally that there was an ‘inward schism’ both ‘strong and startling’ within Samuel Rutherford. ‘It looks sometimes as if there were two men in him. One was the man whom all know in his letters – ardent, aspiring, and unworldly . . . rapt into the continual contemplation of one unseen Face. . . . The other man was the intellectual gladiator, the rejoicing and remorseless logician, the divider of words . . . the incessant and determined disputant.’² This assessment, however, manifests a modern difficulty in reconciling earnest disputation with passionate devotion. Post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy believed that the work of thorough scholastic theology was the necessary basis for practical

¹ Wodrow, *Analecta*, MS iv, quoted T. McCrie, *The Story of the Scottish Church* (Glasgow, 1988), p. 250.

² A. T. Innes, ‘Samuel Rutherford’, *Studies in Scottish History, chiefly Ecclesiastical* (London, 1892), pp. 15-16 and p. 48.

divinity. Piety and scholarship could be mutually supportive rather than opposed to one another.³

This alleged duality of scholasticism and spirituality reveals itself in attitudes to Rutherford's preaching. It is supposed that Rutherford leaps from deep to deep in his sermons, combining the scholastic with the ecstatic in unmitigated measures. Critics believe that he is always apt to soar away from the congregation in a scholastic disputation upon a controversial point. This assumption depends upon identifying *The Tryal and Triumph of Faith* and *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself* as representative and authentic examples of Rutherford's preaching. Although these treatises originated in serialised sermons, they are not a verbatim record of what was delivered in the pulpit but were subsequently much expanded and annotated in the process of publication. Rutherford responds at length to Antinomian claims in these treatises in what the title page to *Christ Dying* calls 'necessary digressions for the times, touching divers errors'.⁴ Rutherford references large quotations from various writers such as John Saltmarsh, Tobias Crisp and Robert Towne and interacts with them in a way that patently digresses from the nature of preaching. These treatises were published in London while Rutherford was battling with the flood of sectarian opinion then engulfing the press, and the sermons in these books were evidently prepared for publication with a particular polemical purpose in view. James Walker correctly groups these works with *Covenant of Life Opened* and *Influences of the Life of Grace* as 'partly scholastic, partly practical'.⁵ Taylor Innes observes that 'the contrast between Rutherford in his letters and Rutherford in his other books was not nearly so visible to the men of his own time – it was bridged over by the Rutherford of his sermons.'⁶ In Rutherford's sermons proper, however,

³ Compare for instance Gisbertus Voetius, professor at the Academy of Utrecht where Rutherford was offered a post. The breadth of the theological contribution made by Voetius is comparable with that of Rutherford: cf. J. R. Beeke, 'Gisbertus Voetius: Toward a Reformed marriage of Knowledge and Piety', in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, eds. C. R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle, 1999), pp. 227-43; esp. p. 231 and p. 235.

⁴ P. G. Ryken, 'Scottish Reformed Scholasticism', in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, eds. C. R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle, 1999), pp. 196-210, p. 208.

⁵ J. Walker, *Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560-1750* (Edinburgh, 1982 from 2nd edn. 1888), p. 12.

⁶ Quoted R. Gilmour, *Samuel Rutherford: A Study Biographical and Somewhat Critical in the History of the Scottish Covenant* (Edinburgh, 1904), p. 21.

polemic is generally no more than a mere aside.⁷ Philip G. Ryken asks ‘Did Reformed preachers feed scholasticism to their congregations undigested, bones and all?’ He proceeds to demonstrate that they did not and Rutherford was clearly no exception to this.⁸

No assessment of Rutherford’s life, work and influence can ignore the importance that he placed upon preaching. His frequent laments concerning his removal from the pulpit of Anwoth, together with his resistance to taking up the chair of Divinity at St. Andrews, make it clear that Rutherford regarded preaching as the very centre of his vocation. This essay seeks to outline the developments in homiletics during the seventeenth century as the context within which the theology and practice of Rutherford’s preaching must be understood. In connection with this, it is also asserted that Reformed orthodoxy and Puritanism primarily regarded preaching as necessarily popular and plain. After touching upon controversies relating to preaching method amongst Covenanters in the mid-seventeenth century, the essay proceeds to demonstrate the way in which Rutherford’s sermons employ particular domestic metaphors in a homely and plain but also highly affective manner.

Rutherford’s sermons were, as William G. Blaikie notes, ‘by no means rhapsodical. They are mostly conversational in tone, familiar, easy to understand, easy to follow; using the most common similitudes, they are homely, sometimes even to the verge of vulgarity.’⁹ Unfettered by these Victorian literary tastes, the editor of some of Rutherford’s sermons published in 1713 gives his estimate that ‘[h]e is plain and easy, especially in this discourse. In his controversial writings, he is sometimes more obscure to ordinary readers. Yet, when he falls on a practical head [section of the discourse], he is often within the reach of the lowest form of Christians, and in one sentence he will make a truth more clear than others – and those great writers too – can do in some pages.’ The same

⁷ By Rutherford’s sermons I refer almost exclusively to *Quaint Sermons* and *Communion Sermons* since these appear to be the most accurate record of what was preached. J. H. Thomson speaks of the ‘apparent correctness’ of these sermons. ‘There is no sign of abridgement throughout,’ he says, and the ‘student of Rutherford’s letters and his other works will recognize in them a full transcript of what he must have said’, *Quaint Sermons*, pp. v-vi.

⁸ Ryken, p. 205.

⁹ W. G. Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland, From the Sixth to the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 2001 from 1st edn. 1888), p. 115.

writer continues: ‘His style is savoury to a spiritual taste, and also moving. As he was pious and devote [devout], without affectation, he had a particular talent of handling divine things so as to fix the attentions and affect the heart. This *gustus pietatis* [taste of piety] that is so discernible in his writings, and for which he was so famous, is a clear evidence of a rich stock of grace and a large unction from the Holy One.’¹⁰ Rutherford’s plainness is commended to the reader: ‘Our author is more intent upon the matter than the style.’ Wodrow (who appears to have known some of Rutherford’s contemporaries) expresses this combination of scholasticism and affective preaching ability more accurately than Taylor Innes when he states: ‘Such who knew him best were in a strait whether to admire him for his sublime genius in the school, and peculiar exactness in matters of dispute and controversy, or his familiar condescension in the pulpit, where he was one of the most moving and affectionate preachers in his time.’¹¹

Rutherford’s language was, to some extent, a contemporary point of interest and even perplexity. In bringing the *Letters* forth, Robert McWard was uneasily aware that in a ‘carping, criticizing, profane, & prejudicat age’ not everyone would respond enthusiastically to the way that Rutherford expressed himself. ‘[M]alicious mutterers . . . against the apparent coarseness of some phrases, and commonness of some words made use of by the Author’ could be anticipated since Rutherford ‘all along sets himself, to make use of the most ordinary expressions, which are in use among the common sort of people.’¹² Surprisingly perhaps, there immediately follows a defence of this kind of language in the terms of Renaissance humanism. The critics are referred to the classical orator Plautus ‘who made use of the most common words that were in use, amongst the most common sort of people in Rome.’ McWard proceeds to take up the maxim that he is ‘the best preacher to a people (and consequently writer too)’ who teaches most popularly ‘as to words, & phrases.’ Continuing to correlate the preacher and the orator, McWard asserts ‘that the most common words & ordinary phrases, in use amongst a people, may, by the greatest Oratour, be very pertinently used, for

¹⁰ *The Power and Prevalency of Faith and Prayer evidenced in a practical discourse upon Matth. 9. 27-31*, first pub. 1713, rpt. *The Power of Faith and Prayer* (Stornoway 1991), p. xi-xii.

¹¹ *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution* (Glasgow, 1828), Vol. 1, p. 205; Quoted Coffey, p. 113.

¹² *Joshua redivivus or Mr Rutherford's Letters divided into two parts* (Rotterdam, 1664), p. c2v-c3.

illustrating & pressing his purpose,' 'they are so far from being a blemish to a discourse, that they seem to give a kinde of life, & adde a certain lustre to the whole frame.' The best 'Oratour' 'can with the least noise, cast fire into the affections of these to whom he speaks or writs, & bring down the highest mysteries in religion, to the capacity of the meanest hearer and reader.' In any case many of the letters were not written to scholars and McWard informs us that Rutherford's 'designe being to make affection, or to move it in the hearts of these to whom he wrote, there was a necessity to suit his stile to their capacity.'¹³ This crucial passage from the pen of Rutherford's secretary permits valuable insight into the mainsprings of Rutherford's preaching since McWard is clearly borrowing his arguments from the field of oratory as articulated within the Scottish rhetorical tradition that David Allan has identified as 'Calvinist humanism'.¹⁴

1. The development of Reformed homiletics

There is nothing unusual, in fact, about the terms in which this defence is made: the Reformation theology of preaching had been expressed in the language and principles of Renaissance humanism. Calvin stressed usage, purpose, and living efficacy rather than bare intellectual knowledge in his views on preaching: it was 'not enough for a man to be eminent in profound learning if he has no talent for teaching.'¹⁵ As William J. Bouwsma notes in his biography of Calvin, the Renaissance humanist 'preference for persuasion over rational conviction was associated with a view of human being as passionate, active, and social rather than intellectual.'¹⁶ Erasmus stated this preference rather definitively in his influential *Paraclesis* (which means exhortation):

To me he is truly a theologian who teaches not by skill with intricate syllogisms but by a disposition of mind, by the very

¹³ *Joshua redivivus*, p. c3v.

¹⁴ D. Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 177.

¹⁵ Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:2, quoted W. J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York, 1988), p. 127. See also T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 114-28.

¹⁶ Bouwsma, p. 114.

expression and eyes . . . life means more than debate, inspiration is preferable to erudition, transformation is a more important matter than intellectual comprehension.¹⁷

The Covenanter minister James Durham restates the Renaissance position in his commentary on the book of Revelation in a way that compares well with the Preface to Rutherford's *Letters*. McWard's continual emphasis upon what he calls Rutherford's 'dexterity' in phrasing, is particularly interesting in comparison with Durham's assertion that the truly learned minister is versatile and fully rounded in character, he has an intellectual and verbal agility towards persuasion. In short he is defined as 'he who can inform, convince; or edifie others with most dexteritie . . . though, it may be, the lesse knowing man.'¹⁸

This emphasis also, however, married closely with the Scholastic distinction between popular and academic or scholastic preaching prevalent in the first expressions of Reformation homiletics.¹⁹ Two of the most influential treatises, in the English context especially, were *The Preacher or Methode of Preaching* by Niel Hemmingsen and *The Practis of Preaching* by Andreas Gerardus or Hyperius of Marburg. The English translations of both texts appeared in the 1570s.²⁰ Niel Hemmingsen (or Nicholas Hemminge as he appeared in English) was a Dane who had studied under the Lutheran Reformer Melanchthon and Hyperius was a Flemish Protestant. Both works distinguished between two types of sermon depending upon the type of 'hearers': didactic or persuasive. The first was scholastic, following the traditional divisions of a classical oration together with heaped logical proofs. The other was popular and affective in which the preacher could use all kinds of rhetorical devices in order to move the hearer. According to Hemminge, the best and most appropriate option was proverbial or metaphorical speech,

¹⁷ Quoted P. Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), p. 499.

¹⁸ *Joshua redivivus*, p. c3. Durham, *A Commentarie Upon the Book of Revelation* (Glasgow, 1680), p. 173.

¹⁹ The distinction was not new; medieval homiletical manuals divided parish preaching as 'popular interpretation' from university preaching that required 'scholastic interpretation'; cf. E. C. Meyer, 'The First Protestant Handbook on Preaching: An Analysis of the *De formandis concionibus sacris seu de interpretatione scripturarum populari libri II* of Andreas Hyperius in Relation to Medieval Homiletical Manuals' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Boston University, 1967).

²⁰ A. Gerardus, *The Practis of Preaching*, trans. I Ludham (London, 1577).

parables and sentences. This ‘dothe not onelye serue the affections, but also (yf I may so tearme yt, maketh the oration more sharpe and wyttye, to the ende it may altogether pearce into the myndes of the hearers; and so possesse the whole harte it selfe.’²¹ Hemminge appends a continuous discourse devoid of explicit divisions but full of exclamations, questions, and analogies which is intended to serve as an example of the ‘perswasible sermon’.

Andreas Hyperius likewise emphasised the way in which the scholastic style picks up every detail of the text in an unemotive and non-rhetorical manner, whereas the popular sermon ‘selects only certain commonplaces from the proposed argument, those that he perceives to be more suited than others to the time, place and persons.’²² ‘In sum, he [the preacher] omits nothing that in any way has the power to persuade and impress the mind. Since this is his intention, his whole effort aims to entice all people to acknowledge their sins, believe, devoutly call upon God and correct their lives, and if possible, to transform them into entirely new people.’²³ Although Hyperius spoke of first explaining the meaning of the text in a few words, he emphasised that the commonplaces drawn from the text should be applied as well as explained. Application was not a part of the sermon distinct from the exegetical, but was characteristic of the whole sermon.²⁴

The distinction made between the two types of teaching derives from certain Renaissance principles to which Hemminge’s teacher Philip Melanchthon gave particular emphasis. Melanchthon distinguished between theology in its academic aspect (what the text meant in its historical context), and in its kerygmatic aspect (what it means for the contemporary Church).²⁵ It is clear that Renaissance principles and preferences in communication could marry well with the scholastic-popular distinction which was able to make room for the Renaissance

²¹ N. Hemminge, *The Preacher or Methode of Preaching*, trans I.H. (Menston, 1972 from 1574 edn.), p. 54v.

²² On Hyperius see D. Sinnema, ‘The Distinction between Scholastic and Popular: Andreas Hyperius and Reformed Scholasticism’, in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, eds. C. R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle, 1999), pp. 127-44 and E. C. Meyer.

²³ Quoted Sinnema, pp. 131-3.

²⁴ Cf. Sinnema, p. 131.

²⁵ Cf. R. P. Scharlemann, Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard, *Yale Publications in Religion* 7 (New Haven, 1964), pp. 23-27.

emphasis upon rhetorical eloquence.²⁶ Hemminge distinguished between logical, grammatical, and oratorical interpretations of the Scriptures. In this he was followed by Richard Bernard in *The Faithful Shepherd* (1607) who especially emphasised the concealment of erudition such as scholarly interpretations, e.g. ‘logically, grammatically, and rhetorically’. Hemminge also defined a ‘mixt kinde of interpreting’ exemplified by the ‘orator’, which is profitable for both ‘churches’ and ‘scholes’.²⁷ The structure outlined for this type of discourse was simply that of the classical oration.

The most influential model during the seventeenth century for preaching in the English language was, however, proposed by William Perkins in his treatise *The Arte of Prophesying, or a Treatise Concerning the Sacred and Only True Manner and Method of Preaching* (1592, Latin, & 1606, English). After opening the text by explaining it in its context, the preacher was to state the doctrine that was to be extracted from the text and support the truthfulness of the doctrine with a list of reasons. After this, the doctrine could be applied by means of various ‘uses’. Perkins seems to have retained the medieval scholastic structure of the sermon with its opening of the text, followed by a statement of the doctrine, supported by heaped proofs or ‘reasons’, concluding with the ‘uses’ of the doctrines. The medieval scholastic structure may be witnessed in the classic thirteenth and fourteenth century preaching manuals that were designed to support the Latin preaching of the universities. These textbooks liked to think of the sermon as a tree with its root in the text, its theme as the trunk, its divisions and subdivisions the branches and twigs, and finally the fruit of practical application. Divisions had to be buttressed by heaped proofs from Patristic and biblical sources.²⁸ It is also possible, however, that Perkins was simply tidying up Hemminge’s recommended oration with its classical rhetorical structure, in which the exordium opens the sermon and the treatise gives the topic or doctrine and its reasons. The digression proceeds to apply this doctrine and the conclusion provides the peroration in rehearsing ‘the summe of the thinges handled’ together with the ‘use’ of the doctrine.²⁹

²⁶ Sinnema, p. 142.

²⁷ Hemminge, p. C6.

²⁸ Cf. T. M. Charland, *Artes Praedicandi: contribution à l’histoire de la rhétorique au moyen âge* (Ottawa, 1936), p. 136, cited E. Clowney, ‘The preacher as pastor: The Shepherd’s care’, in *When God’s Voice is heard: Essays on preaching presented to Dick Lucas*, eds. C. Green and D. Jackman (Leicester, 1995), pp. 107-20, p. 100.

²⁹ Hemminge, p. C7v-D.

Like Hemminge and Hyperius, Perkins placed emphasis upon suppressing unnecessary learned discourse from the sermon in the interests of simplicity and clarity.³⁰ Although useful in preparation: ‘Humane wisdom must be concealed, whether it be in the matter of the sermon, or in the setting forth of the words: because the preaching of the word is the Testimonie of God, and the profession of the knowledge of Christ, and not of humane skill;’ a preacher therefore must ‘observe an admirable plainesse and an admirable powerfulness’ and employ speech that is ‘simple and perspicuous’ suited to ‘the peoples understanding’.³¹ Perkins substantially weighted the structure of the sermon to explanation and teaching as opposed to application. He considered the latter to be important but apparently not of the essence of preaching: a preacher should ‘apply (if he have the gift) [note the qualification] the doctrines rightly collected, to the life and manners of men in a simple and plaine speech.’³² Thomas Fuller, the seventeenth-century historian, supports the perception that Perkins had a strongly didactic goal in preaching: ‘our Perkins brought the schools into the pulpit, and unshelling their controversies out of their hard school terms, made thereof plain and wholesome meat for his people.’³³ No doubt Perkins had higher goals than mere instruction as his writings testify. It appears, however, that his emphasis was more upon didactic explication than affective application. Perhaps it is this influence that partly explains Robert Harris’ later complaint that in the cities and university towns, preachers were prone to ‘too large insisting upon the Doctrinal parts of their Point, whereby they left little or no room for Application.’³⁴

2. Rutherford and affective preaching

In 1596 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland outlined what they expected from ministers, emphasising a zealous and popular yet

³⁰ Gerardus, p. 15; Hemminge, p. 18.

³¹ Quoted O. C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London, 1972), p. 7.

³² Quoted R. Pooley, ‘Plain and Simple: Bunyan and Style’, in ed. N. H. Keeble, *Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus: Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 91-110, p. 92.

³³ Quoted P. R. Schaefer, ‘Protestant “Scholasticism” at Elizabethan Cambridge: William Perkins and a Reformed Theology of the Heart’, in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, eds. C. R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle, 1999), pp. 147-64, p. 150.

³⁴ Quoted in S. Clarke, *A Collection of the Lives of Ten Eminent Divines* (London, 1662), pp. 312-3.

studious manner of preaching while carefully maintaining the distinction between the scholastic and the popular. Discipline was to be applied to ‘such as shall be found not given to their book and studie of Scriptures – not carefull to have bookes – not given to sanctification and prayer – that study not to be powerfull and spirituall – not applying the doctrine to his corruptions, qwhilk [which] is the pastorall gift – obscure and too scholastick before the people – cauld and wanting zeall.’³⁵ Judging from published sermons, Scottish preaching may well have been plainer than the English Puritan plain style that took its cue from Perkins. In *The Last Battell of the Soule in Death* (1628) for instance, Zachary Boyd refuses to build upon the stubble, hay and wood ‘of humane words or worldlie eloquence’.³⁶ Noted preachers of the generation after John Knox, such as John Welsh and Robert Bruce, manifest a popular and affective mode of preaching.³⁷ These popular sermons usually involved numbered divisions in a continuous discourse, arguably a less restrictive structure than that which Perkins advanced. Samuel Rutherford’s contemporary and friend, John Livingstone, reveals the importance that he placed upon procuring the printed sermons of men such as Bruce, Welsh, and Robert Rollock. If Rollock (Professor of Divinity at University of Edinburgh) may have been regarded as something of a role model, it is significant that his publisher invokes the epithet ‘halie [holy] simplicitie’ upon his printed sermons which obviously eschew scholastic complexity. This preface to the 1599 edition of the sermons on the epistles of Paul continues, ‘And suppois [suppose] art had taucht [taught] him weil aneuch [well enough] to go heich [high] in his style, and be exquisite in his termis, zit [yet] in this cace of preiching ze sall [case of preaching you shall] see him set all that kind of art aside.’³⁸

³⁵ *The Booke of the Universall Kirk of Scotland*, ed. A. Peterkin (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 427.

³⁶ Quoted D. W. Atkinson, *Selected Sermons of Zachary Boyd*, ed. D. W. Atkinson (Aberdeen, 1989), p. xxxiii.

³⁷ James Melville provides several well-known descriptions of John Knox’s affective preaching. ‘In the opening vpe of his text he was moderat the space of an halff houre; bot when he enterit to application, he maid me sa to grew and tremble, that I could nocht hald a pen to wryt.’ Even in his weakened condition towards the end of his days, Melville heard him and ‘or he haid done with his sermont, he was sa active and vigorus, that he was lyk to ding that pulpit in blads and flie out of it.’ *The diary of Mr James Melvill, 1556-1601*, ed. G. R. Kinloch (Edinburgh, 1829), pp. 21 and 26.

³⁸ R. Rollock, *Select Works*, ed. W. M. Gunn (Edinburgh, 1844-49), Vol. 1, p. 294.

John Livingstone records that the preaching of Robert Bruce ‘made always an earthquake upon his hearers and rarely preached but to a weeping auditory.’³⁹ Livingstone states that he heard Bruce several times, and in speaking of the effectual force of such affective preaching he gives his opinion that ‘never man spake with greater power since the Apostles dayes.’⁴⁰ Welsh’s preaching was equally affective according to Livingstone and indeed the remains of his sermons corroborate this opinion, as in the following appeal:

O that the Lord would fill my heart, with this truth, that I might eat it and drink it, and feed upon it continually, and that he would fill me with the spirit of exhortation, that I might exhort you to meditate on this truth day and night, that the remembrance of that Day (the day of judgment) might never go out of your hearts! O that you would do it, even for his sake, that left you His heart’s blood to slocken that fire that will burn both the heavens and the earth! O hear, hear!⁴¹

When it came to discussion on the nature of preaching at the Westminster Assembly, Rutherford made a strong defence of keeping erudition out of the content of the sermon. His remarks are in characteristic language: ‘the pot may be used in the bilyng but not brought in with the porridge.’⁴² Although of course this communicates much the same thing as William Perkins’ maxim *Ars est celare artem* [It is the essence of art to conceal art], the difference in form between such a homely image and a sententious Latin pun reveals much concerning a disparity in approach in respect of the art of preaching. Inadvertently perhaps, the porridge pot actually reflects the homely language and metaphors of Rutherford’s own sermons.

From general considerations, the Perkinsian model manifestly prevailed as the established sermon type in both England and Scotland. This can be demonstrated from a wide selection of sermons as well as in

³⁹ Quoted P. Collinson, ‘Puritanism as popular culture’, *The culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, ed. C. Durston and J. Eales, Themes in focus (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 55.

⁴⁰ *John Livingstone’s Diary, The Diary of a Covenanting Minister, 1626-1667* (Wigtown, 1993), pp. 5-6.

⁴¹ Sermon on Revelation 20:11 *Sermons* (1605) p. 8, quoted Blaikie, p. 87.

⁴² Quoted R. S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 365.

later homiletic textbooks such as John Wilkins' *Ecclesiastes* (1646) or the *Officium Concionatoris* (Cambridge, 1676). *The Art and Method of Preaching*, authored by William Chappell in 1656, called it 'the only legitimate order of the sermon'.⁴³ The Westminster Assembly demonstrated this consensus in approving it amongst the guidelines of the *Directory for the Publique Worship of God*. The recommendation was qualified, however, with implicit recognition of competitors, since it was offered with the reservation that the 'method is not prescribed as necessary for every man, or upon every Text; but only recommended, as being found by experience to be very much blessed of God, and very helpfull for the peoples understanding and memories.'⁴⁴

Approximately a decade later, Robert Baillie complained of the new style of preaching that marked some of the Protester party. Speaking of Andrew Gray he says 'He hes the new guyse of preaching which Mr Hew Binning and Mr Robert Leighton began, contemning the ordinary way of expounding [expounding] and dividing a text, of raising doctrines and uses; bot runs out in a discourse on some common head, in a high romancing, unscripturall style, tickling the ear for the present, and moving the affections in some, bot leaving as he confesses, little or nought to the memorie and the understanding.'⁴⁵ The same arguments that the *Directory* offers in defence of the Perkinsian model are revived, but it is perhaps more significant to note that Baillie appears to distinguish between the didactic and the affective in the midst of this, albeit that the latter in his scathing representation is almost frivolously popular or 'romancing'. Baillie's remarks appear to disregard the older affective tradition of Bruce and Welsh, to which Rutherford may well have belonged. This tradition had generally taken a sizeable portion of Scripture and given a running exposition without stating doctrines and uses. Gray appears to have abandoned the Perkinsian method for the general practice of developing a topical theme upon a particular verse with only various enumerated divisions, practically the same method as Binning and Leighton.⁴⁶ David Dickson, friend of Rutherford, although

⁴³ Quoted Turnbull, p. 36.

⁴⁴ *Directory for the Publique Worship of God Throughout the three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1645), pp. 29-34.

⁴⁵ *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. D. Laing, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1841-2), Vol. 3, pp. 258-59.

⁴⁶ *The Works of Andrew Gray* (Morgan, PA, 1992); *The Works of the Rev Hugh Binning* (Morgan, PA, 1992).

he was firmly of the Resolutioner side, also referred disparagingly to Binning's 'new-fangled conceit in preaching' commenting that 'tricks of rhetoric did not save many souls.'⁴⁷

The whole controversy is not easy to understand, particularly since men such as Alexander Henderson did not appear to use the doctrines, reasons and uses method in a rigid or consistent way.⁴⁸ Henderson's record of the mode of preaching generally employed in the Church of Scotland does, however, support the Perkinsian model. 'The Doctrine deduced, is explained and confirmed by Scripture, and fitly, and faithfully applied, all in such methode, manner, and expression as may most edifie the hearers.'⁴⁹ There is no real evidence that Rutherford was strongly wedded to structuring his sermons according to the Perkins model. In the two sermons that were published during his lifetime there is no obvious announcement of doctrines, reasons or uses. The same can be said of some of George Gillespie's sermons to Parliament.⁵⁰ Furthermore, a preacher like Zachary Boyd, who almost always followed the well worn path of doctrines, reasons and uses, can also at times turn aside to a topical discourse such as 'Zions Teares'.⁵¹ Most strange of all is the fact that sermons recorded by David Dickson (so keenly opposed to deviations from this methodology) in 'Communion Sermons Preached at a Communion in Irvine' have no explicit mark of this mode of sermon structure.⁵² The party differences were also more apparent than real since Resolutioners such as Robert Leighton and most notably Robert Douglas also abandoned the methodology of doctrines, reasons and uses. According to Wodrow, Douglas was in this habit that some referred to as 'skimming the text', implying that it was topical rather than fully expository.⁵³

⁴⁷ Blaikie, p. 106 and p. 134.

⁴⁸ *Sermons, Prayers and Pulpit Addresses by Alex Henderson 1638*, ed. R T. Martin (Edinburgh, 1867).

⁴⁹ *Government and Order of the Chvrch of Scotland* (London, 1641), p. 16.

⁵⁰ *A Sermon preached before the Right Honourable the Lord and Commons Assembled in Parliament* (London, 1644) on Matthew 14:21; *A Sermon preached to the Honourable House of Commons at their late solemne Fast* (Edinburgh, 1644) on Ezra 7:23; *A Sermon preached before the honourable House of Commons at their late solemn Fast Wednesday March 27 1644* (London, 1644), on Ezekiel 43:11.

⁵¹ *Selected Sermons of Zachary Boyd*, pp. 87-106.

⁵² *Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature*, ed. C. Coldwell (Dallas TX, 1992), Vol. 5, pp. 294-328.

⁵³ R. Wodrow, *Analecta or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians* (Edinburgh, 1842-3), Vol. 1, p. 166, quoted Blaikie, p. 106.

Innovations in preaching style may have been linked to the controversies concerning some of the liturgical practices that had characterised what David Stevenson calls ‘the radical Kirk party’, to which Rutherford belonged. Stevenson has highlighted these as a rejection of set forms of public prayer in favour of extempore prayer, neglect of the minister’s bowing or private prayer in the pulpit before preaching, and omission of the Gloria at the conclusion of singing a psalm.⁵⁴ The abandonment of the Perkinsian model may have been regarded as an equally subversive practice that had popular appeal. Baillie’s remarks, which are really a sideswipe at his Protester opponents (predominantly the continuation of the so-called ‘radical Kirk party’) seem to suggest this possibility. The difference of approach and outlook was summed up in the fact that Baillie could dismiss his opponents as a ‘few headie men’.

Baillie had a certain anxiety that transgression of order could develop towards separatism: this may be best seen in his vehement attack upon the London sectarians, *A Disswasive from the Errours of the Time* (1645). Any digression from the forms of the status quo was undoubtedly the thin end of the wedge as far as Baillie was concerned. He admits that he opposed passionately the small alterations that the Westminster *Directory* would mean for the Scottish Kirk, but to his amazement the 1645 General Assembly received it entirely with no real resistance. Baillie also records a confrontation between himself and ‘thrie or four yeomen of my flock who refused to sing the conclusion,’ that is the Gloria. Baillie records his stern rebuke, ‘I forewarne yow the rejecting of the conclusion is on of the first links of the whole chain of Brunisme.’ It would lead them to reject metrical psalms ‘and then to refuse our prayers, then our sacraments, then our preching, ye at last our church, our covenant and all.’⁵⁵

Perhaps it was the affective dimension as much as the supposed novelty that was deemed subversive because it was reckoned to lead to fanaticism. Baillie seems to complain at the idea of simply ‘moving the affections’ or at least doing so without apparently impacting the intellect. Baillie reckoned that in their public praying and preaching the Protesters

⁵⁴ D. Stevenson, ‘The Radical Party in the Kirk, 1637-45’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 25 (1974), pp. 135-65; D. Stevenson, ‘The General Assembly and the Commission of the Kirk, 1638-51’ *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 19 (1975), pp. 59-79.

⁵⁵ Quoted Stevenson, ‘The Radical Party in the Kirk, 1637-45’, p. 142.

affected ‘a strange kind of sighing, the like whereof I had never heard, as a pythonising out of the belly of a second person.’⁵⁶ Rutherford was more noted for a kind of shrill voice in his preaching. One of Rutherford’s students told Robert Wodrow that he ‘had a strange utterance when preaching, a kind of screech which he had never heard the like.’⁵⁷ Perhaps Baillie would have identified both phenomena closely together. It was also maintained at the time that Andrew Gray’s preaching could make men’s hair stand on end.⁵⁸

Rutherford stressed the primacy of the affections: in ‘natural’ ineffectual conviction the ‘conscience of the natural man may convict him of sin, but for his will and his affections they are mere patients and join not at all in the work.’⁵⁹ ‘The conscience is slow, the heart is quick and swift. The affections are like dry timber, any spark of fire casten in upon them makes them soon to burn; the conscience is like green wood that burns not soon, yet keeps the fire durable.’⁶⁰ Rutherford himself makes much of the necessity of spiritual heart-burnings: ‘heavenly heart-burning goes along with the Scriptures. . . . With the Scriptures so opened and applied by the spirit of Jesus as by a strong power, burning coals are cast into the heart.’⁶¹ McWard similarly comments on Rutherford, ‘if thou wilt but converse with him a little, it may be thou find thy heart burn within thee while thou talkest with this warm soul, whose words seem, as they drop, to cast fire into the affections, and set the heart in a flame.’⁶²

The excellence of the affections in Rutherford’s conception consists in their being

⁵⁶ Baillie, Vol. 3, p. 245.

⁵⁷ Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 3, pp. 88-9.

⁵⁸ Quoted Blaikie, p. 135.

⁵⁹ *Quaint Sermons of Samuel Rutherford*, ed. A. A. Bonar (Morgan, PA, 1999 edn.), p. 49.

⁶⁰ *Fourteen Communion Sermons by the Rev Samuel Rutherford*, ed. A. A. Bonar (Glasgow, 1877), p. 316. Rutherford qualified this emphasis on the affections by warning that affections such as sorrow and visible signs of conviction such as weeping should not be depended upon. While ‘in true repentance there is meikle [much] sorrow’, there is also a false sorrow which was ‘without love toward the Him whom you have offended’. ‘Do not think to but God’s kindness with tears, as if sorrow were a fat feast to God’. ‘When many tears go out, a windy conceit comes in: “I am sure God cannot but be pleased now. He is in my debt now’, *Quaint Sermons*, pp. 94-97.

⁶¹ *The Influences of the Life of Grace. Or a Practical Treatise concerning the way, manner, and means of having and improving of Spiritual Dispositions, and quickning Influences from Christ the Resurrection and the Life* (London, 1658), p. 248.

⁶² *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, ed. A. Bonar (Edinburgh, 1891), p. 22.

. . . like the needle, the rest of the soul like the thread; and as the needle makes way and draws the thread, so holy affections pull forward and draw all to Jesus. The affections are the lower part of the soul, and when they are filled they set all the soul on work; when there is any love in the affections, it sets all the rest of the faculties of the soul on work to duty, and when there is any corruption in the affections, it stagnates the soul, will, mind, and conscience. Affections are the feet of the soul, and the wheels whereupon the conscience runs. When a man is off his feet he cannot run or walk; so when the affections are lame, the soul moves on crutches.⁶³

Characteristically, Rutherford tells us that it is the voice of Christ alone that stirs the affections and in the sermon on Mary weeping at the Tomb of Christ, Christ himself is spoken of as the master-preacher, preaching with but one word. ‘Christ may learn us all to preach; for one of his preachings is worth a horse-load of our preachings; he has the tongue of the learned indeed. With his mouth he can blow up iron doors. Well kens he all the back-springes and double locks of the soul . . . Christ has the way of it, and can draw the bolt with his voice.’⁶⁴ Rutherford compares the sinner in conversion to a fish hooked by the angler.

As when a fish is taken there are two actions, the bait alluring and beguiling the fish with hope of meat. This is like the working of the word which is Christ’s bait; but when He wins us to dry land, then, when the fish is hooked, there is a real action of the fisher, drawing and hauling the fish to land; it leapeth and flighting [fluttering] and wrestling while it bleeds with the hook. And this answereth to the Holy Spirit’s powerful hauling and drawing of the soul in all the affections, that the soul feeleth joy, comfort, delight, desire, longing, believing, nibbling and biting Christ’s bait.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Communion Sermons*, p. 316, cf. Archbishop Ussher, “Now faith is the legs of the soul, the feet that carry us to Christ.” *The Whole Works of . . . James Ussher . . . With a Life of the Author*, by C. R. Elrington, 17 vols. (London, 1847-1864), Vol. 13, p. 217, quoted H. Davies in *Like Angels from a Cloud: The English Metaphysical Preachers 1588-1645* (San Marino, 1986), p. 17.

⁶⁴ *Communion Sermons*, p. 189.

⁶⁵ *Quaint Sermons*, pp. 92-3.

3. Restoration controversy

In later decades, the popular, affective type of language used by preachers such as Rutherford and others was still being disparaged as subversive in a tract such as *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence*. The author, going under the name Jacob Curate, reproduced fifty-nine quotations from Rutherford's *Letters* for ridicule and complains of Covenanting preachers, that 'when they speak of Christ, they represent him as a Gallant, Courting, and kissing, by their Fulsome, Amorous Discourses on the mysterious Parables of the *Canticles*.'⁶⁶ The question of such language was also a controversial topic in England during the Restoration where homespun metaphor was seen as part of an essentially dangerous nonconformist mode of language, in contrast to a plain, rational and 'scientific' use of words. These issues were rising to the surface in the 1660s during the time that Rutherford's *Letters* were published (1664).

The end of the decade witnessed the publication of one of the most notable attacks on nonconformist style: Samuel Parker's *Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1671). Parker dismissed the 'melting Tones, pretty Similitudes, riming Sentences' of the nonconformist preachers as mere 'Puppet-play' designed to move the 'Senses and Imaginations' of the audience rather than their 'Reason and Judgement'. The requirements of oratory had shifted ostensibly towards logic away from rhetoric. The roots of this affective discourse were identified as irretrievably populist and historically located in the attempts of pre-Civil War Puritans to appeal to 'the rude and undiscerning multitude'.⁶⁷ Parker went so far as to recommend 'an Act of Parliament to abridge Preachers of the fulsom and luscious Metaphors' which 'might perhaps be an effectual cure of all our present distempers . . . were Men obliged to speak Sense as well as Truth, all the swelling Mysteries of Fanaticism would immediately sink into flat and empty Nonsense; and they would be ashamed of such . . . when they want the varnish of fine Metaphors and glittering Allusions.'⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence, and the foolishness of their teaching discovered* (London, 1692), p. 23.

⁶⁷ Parker, *Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie* (London, 1671), pp. 307-9.

⁶⁸ Quoted Keeble, p. 249. John Owen acutely countered this: 'what if the things condemned as "fulsome metaphors" prove to be scriptural expressions of gospel mysteries?', quoted Keeble, p. 250.

Ironically, some of these Puritans seem largely to have placed primacy on persuasion by means of reason, albeit engaging occasional illustrations. Thomas Goodwin counselled: ‘the more rationally the preacher discourseth out of the word, and lays open the meaning thereof in a rational way, so much the better, because it is suited to the minds of men.’ Richard Sibbes regarded imagery or illustration as about the least useful means of instruction, but preferred to stir the affections as well as persuade logically: ‘there are four ways of teaching’, he said, ‘rule, reason, similitudes and examples. The two former enjoins, but works not upon the affections. Similitudes are but slight; only examples conform us in a most sweet and alluring manner.’⁶⁹

A Scottish minister in London, Robert Ferguson, who was an assistant minister to John Owen, undertook to respond to Parker, in *The interest of Reason in Religion, with the Import & Use of Scripture-Metaphors*. Ferguson notes the accusations of ‘turning Religion into unaccountable Phansies and Enthusiasm’s, drest up with empty Schemes of speech; and for embracing a few gawdy Metaphors & Allegories.’ He responds by pointing to biblical precedent and emphasising the plain didactic purpose of metaphorical language: ‘Metaphors are not used to impregnate our Minds with gawdy Phantasms, but to adjust the Mysteries of Religion to the weakness of our Capacities.’⁷⁰ The theological aspect to the preaching style that the radical Covenanters adopted is likewise clear in Hugh Binning’s implicit quotation of Calvin’s doctrine of the accommodation of divine revelation to the human understanding, when he states that God ‘speaks in our terms, and like nurses with their children, uses our own dialect.’⁷¹ The motivation behind the use of metaphorical language by such preachers was towards transparent doctrine rather than opaque mysticism. Thus Frank Gatter finds a ‘theology of the people’ in the ‘simplicity and transparency of their idiom’.⁷²

⁶⁹ T. Goodwin, ‘Of the Objects and Acts of Justifying Faith’, *Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh, 1863) Vol. 8, p. 264. R. Sibbes, ‘The Christian’s Work’, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, D.D.*, 7 vols., ed. A. Grosart (Edinburgh, 1862-4), Vol. 5, pp. 122-3.

⁷⁰ *The interest of Reason in Religion, with the Import & Use of Scripture-Metaphors* (London, 1675), p. 278.

⁷¹ *The Works of the Rev Hugh Binning* (Morgan, PA, 1992), p. 74, cf. Calvin, *Institutes* I.13.1

⁷² F. Gatter, ‘On the literary value of some Scottish Presbyterian writings in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment’, in D. Strauss and H. W. Drescher, eds. *Scottish Language and Literature, Medieval and Renaissance* (Frankfurt, 1986), pp. 175-92, quoted Coffey, p. 110.

4. Homely imagery in Rutherford's sermons

In his preface to Rutherford's *Letters* McWard vehemently reproaches anyone that cavils contemptuously at the language of the *Letters*: 'thou mayest eat grass; and let alone this bread, which is only designed for children.'⁷³ It is an appropriate retort since Rutherford makes continual use of metaphorical language relating to children or bairns in his sermons. Another favourite source of imagery and illustration is found in the marriage relationship.⁷⁴ Rutherford's seven sermons on the Forlorn (or Prodigal) Son, which interpret the father of the parable as Christ, naturally abound in familial references but they are scattered throughout the recorded sermons. It is a significant type of imagery given the nature of popular preaching and its conventional justifications (see Binning above). At the beginning of the Forlorn Son series of sermons he outlines the appropriateness of this type of imagery. 'Ye know it is ordinary for the Lord in his word to resemble His Kirk or the kingdom of grace to a house or a family; for Christ our Lord He holds a house wherein all the bairns of the house are free to the table, for there is a difference even here between the bairns of the house, and those who are only servants, and goers and comers as it were.'⁷⁵

Rutherford made much of distinguishing the covenant in its external or visible and internal or invisible aspects. This allowed for two corresponding types of membership: those who had merely partaken of the outward benefits of being part of the church in the Word and Sacrament and those that had received the inward grace that was communicated by means of such elements. In this sense God might be said to have two types of children. Rutherford speaks of the visible church as 'the office-house of grace', 'where the word is preached to children, who are to be taught, and the Lord reckons it among the favors that he bestows not on every nation, but only on his own covenanted Israel, that the word of the gospel to gather them and their children'.⁷⁶

⁷³ *Joshua redivivus*, p. c4v.

⁷⁴ According to Hans Meier's study of Rutherford's *Letters*, the predominant metaphors are love, law and money or financial transactions, H. H. Meier, 'Love, Law and Lucre: Imagery in Rutherford's Letters', in *Historical and Editorial Studies in Medieval and Early Modern English*, eds. M. J. Arn *et al.* (Gröningen, 1985). In his sermons imagery related to love and childhood clearly predominates.

⁷⁵ *Quaint Sermons*, p. 198.

⁷⁶ *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh, 1655), pp. 77-8.

This use of metaphors relating to children contrasts with Rutherford's anti-Episcopal rhetoric. In this, Episcopal forms were characterised as 'bastard', literally fatherless, being without authority from God himself through the Scriptures. It was a term that had been used in *Ane shorte and generall confession* published in 1581 (commonly referred to as the King's Confession or the Negative Confession). Whereas the *Confession* of 1560 had set out a positive statement of belief this declaration aimed at complementing that document by asserting that 'wee abhorre and detest al contrarie Religion and doctrine', explicitly denouncing Roman Catholic teachings and protesting against the Roman Church's 'fyve bastard Sacraments, with all his rytis, ceremoneis, and fals doctrine added to the minstration of the trew Sacraments without the word of God'. David Calderwood and Johnston of Wariston made much of this confession in opposing Episcopal innovations in the 1620s and 1630s.⁷⁷

Rutherford referred to the bishops in such terms: 'the Lord take the keys of his house from these bastard porters': although he speaks of them as the 'sons of my mother, that were angry at me and have thrust me out of the vineyard,' they have no father. The mother church is proportionately in fact, a 'harlot mother' and a 'whorish mother'. In a letter of 1637 from exile in Aberdeen, Rutherford counsels his congregation at Anwoth against cooperating with Episcopal innovations. 'Forbear in any case to hear the reading of the new fatherless Service-Book, full of gross heresies, popish and superstitious errors, without any warrant of Christ. . . . You owe no obedience to the bastard canons; they are unlawful, blasphemous, and superstitious.' Rutherford argued in these terms that the bishops as illegitimate were driving away Christ who was not their father [prodigal son]. 'When Christ will not marry a Church, and beget sons and daughters, it is a token that he is going away. . . . The power and life of preaching is away, His servants banished to other lands; our bishops complain that there are so many in the land that have Bibles.'⁷⁸

When Rutherford describes his congregation as children, he is necessarily relegating them to a radically humble position. It is, however, also a more simplified position where experience and spiritual realities may be categorised with far less attendant complexity. The imagery that

⁷⁷ W. R. Foster, *The Church Before the Covenants* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 156.

⁷⁸ *Communion Sermons*, p. 318.

Rutherford combines focuses upon the emotional volatility of children, a factor that may connect with the affective goal of his preaching. Rutherford is also very touching and tender in his descriptions of children and childhood and one wonders whether this has any relation to his own family life and experience. It is doubtful that any of Rutherford's own children, which could be estimated at about six in total, lived beyond childhood.⁷⁹ The significance of a sermon such as *Christ's Napkin* (preached in 1633), is that the child metaphor is introduced immediately at the sermon's opening as the crucial image that explains the text.

. . . we see that the sufferings and tears of the saints shall be wiped away and removed, but not fully, until the world to come; for then is Christ's welcome-home to poor sinners. They come all to him with wet faces, and bleared with tears for sin and the manifold troubles of this life; and Christ meets them in the door, with a fair soft napkin in his hand, and puts up his hand to their faces, and says, 'Hold your tongues, my dear bairns; ye shall never weep again'. And indeed, in my judgement, it is a speech borrowed from a mother that has a bairn with a broken face, all bloody and all bleared with tears, and it comes to her (and woe's her heart to see him so), and she sits him down and wipes the tears from his eyes, and lays her hand softly on the wound, and his head in her breast, and dights away the blood, and lays her two arms about him and there is no end of fair words.⁸⁰

Elsewhere, Rutherford uses the same image to depict the relationship between Christ and believers. 'God's bairns that can now mourn for their own sins, and the sins of the land, rejoice in heaven; there are never seen greeting bairns there; God has a napkin to dight their faces,'⁸¹ 'O strange! we long not to be in heaven, to see this comely glorious one (if I may so speak), a darling indeed, and to play God's bairns in heaven.'⁸² 'I think the saints, in their way to heaven are like rash children, who get many a fall, and break their face twice a day.'⁸³

⁷⁹ Cf. Coffey, pp. 40 and 53.

⁸⁰ *Communion Sermons*, p. 177.

⁸¹ *Communion Sermons*, p. 227.

⁸² *Communion Sermons*, pp. 18-9.

⁸³ *Communion Sermons*, p. 37.

The metaphor could even be used in the way of reproof: ‘Dauted [caressed] bairns, you must learn to go your alone, howbeit your mild nurse Jesus be not at the bairn’s back to hold you by the two shoulders.’⁸⁴ The imagery has a touching homeliness and highlights the emotional expressiveness and vulnerability of children in connection with Christian experience. Rutherford is able, as with almost all of the word pictures that he reuses, to draw the picture in a slightly different but similarly affective way. In order to illustrate the covenantal union between Christ and his people he depicts a father carrying his children. ‘Think now (if we may make the supposition) ye see a poor man with one or two bairns on his back, wading a deep water; he is like to drown, and the bairns crying for fear, and he cries to them, Hold your tongue, my bairns, and I shall warrant you; and then when he comes out, he wipes all their faces. So Christ in the grave had all the children that His Father gave Him legally hanging about His neck, and in His arms. Our heaven, and all our writs and charters, all our salvation, was in the grave with Him.’⁸⁵

Rutherford places great emphasis upon the Christian’s affections, which are a spiritual mark of a healthy child and relationship: ‘God has not a pleasanter sight in the world than the face of a child of God. No music delights Him more nor [than] the sighs and tears, complaints and prayers of His children.’⁸⁶ Believers are also like children that are emotionally expressive of their dependence upon their parent and full of demanding cries. ‘The bairn in Christ’s house that is most cumbersome, and makes most din for his meat is the best bairn that Christ has. . . . Na, he loveth the bairns best that have no shame, and are aye crying, “Alas! Black hunger, dear Lord Jesus; I am burnt with thirst”. . . . Oh, it is a sweet thing aye to be whinging, and crying, and seeking about Christ’s pantry doors, and to hold aye an eye upon Christ when he goes into the house of wine . . . and bout in at Christ’s back.’⁸⁷ ‘It is Christ’s will that His bairns get their fill and that they grow. Christ never had an hungry house, nor His Father before Him.’⁸⁸ Rutherford also compares Christians to ‘the bairn when his father gives him a hearty handful of

⁸⁴ *Quaint Sermons*, pp. 135-6.

⁸⁵ *Communion Sermons*, p. 177.

⁸⁶ *Communion Sermons*, p. 259.

⁸⁷ *Communion Sermons*, p. 8.

⁸⁸ *Communion Sermons*, p. 278.

sweetmeats, his little hand and short fingers let the half of them slip from him and skail [scatter] upon the ground.’⁸⁹

Children can be emotionally and behaviourally fickle, however, and this is not without its parallel in the experience of the child of God. ‘There is this in God’s children, after they seem to have taken their leave of Christ, they look eagerly after Him.’⁹⁰ ‘He is not a Christ to play bairns with. So after we would have joy and comfort in Christ for our pleasure, is often as bairns that would have a painted hat to play with.’⁹¹ In our spiritual problems: ‘We are like fools and spilt [spoilt] bairns, taking offence at our Lord, and like Jacob [Gen. 37:35], will not be comforted.’⁹² Like children who have a limited idea of what is best for them, the believer that longs for the unbroken peace and presence of God fails to understand that ‘presence and comfort is sweet meat, and not for Christ’s bairns ordinary food’.⁹³

Unbelievers on the other hand are more than fickle; they are like disobedient and insolent children. Rutherford draws upon the Old Testament history of Israel in which the Jews rejected the covenant provisions of God which were like a prepared meal. ‘There was a fair, and rich table covered for the Jews, God’s fair high board, and He called them to the first mess: but they like daft bairns, ran to the play, and had more mind of their play than of their meat.’⁹⁴ God therefore ‘shut out the misleared [rude, unmannerly] bairns’. ‘Learn a lesson of the Jews,’ Rutherford warns, ‘and be not spoilt bairns. Eat your meat and grow thereby;’ they ‘like daft bairns, ran to the play and had more mind of their play than their meat.’⁹⁵ There is a childish folly and absurdity in the attitudes and behaviour of the unbelieving. They are like ‘bairns holding the water at a river side with their hands. They think (daft things) they hold the water, while in the meantime it runs through their fingers.’⁹⁶ Unbelievers are wholly reluctant in their dealings with God and eternal matters, concentrating on the immediate here and now,

⁸⁹ *Quaint Sermons*, pp. 93-4.

⁹⁰ *Communion Sermons*, p. 40.

⁹¹ *Communion Sermons*, p. 192.

⁹² *Communion Sermons*, p. 292.

⁹³ *Communion Sermons*, p. 182.

⁹⁴ *Communion Sermons*, pp. 133-4.

⁹⁵ *Communion Sermons*, pp. 133-4.

⁹⁶ *Communion Sermons*, p. 234.

‘while the bairn eateth an apple the book is laid by’; they ‘seek truth as a wanton child doth his book, wishing he may not find it, and fearing the finding of his book cost him the loss of his pastime’.⁹⁷

Rutherford’s use of childhood imagery reveals the popular, homely and affective character of his preaching and demonstrates the contention of this essay that it was popular rather than scholastic and polemical. Rutherford’s intimate observations confirm Blaikie’s opinion of his sermons that they are ‘conversational in tone, familiar, easy to understand, easy to follow; using the most common similitudes, they are homely’.⁹⁸ Wodrow’s evaluation of David Dickson’s sermons is equally fitting in relation to Rutherford’s preaching: they are ‘in a very familiar style, not low, but exceedingly strong, plain and affecting’. ‘It is somewhat akin to Mr Rutherford’s in his admirable letters,’ he adds significantly.⁹⁹ The theology and practice of Rutherford’s preaching are very much in the Covenanting tradition of popular and affective sermons. John Livingstone is the only Covenanter who has left anything significantly in addition to the guide to preaching included within the Westminster *Directory for Publique Worship*. The ideal for Livingstone is preaching that results in a powerful influence upon the affections. ‘There is sometimes somewhat in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to the matter or expression, and cannot be described as to what it is or whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence it pierceth into the heart and affections and comes immediately from the Lord.’ Livingstone goes on to commend a golden mean in terms of the content of sermons: ‘The matter should not be too exquisite and fine, with abstruse learning and quaint notions which go beyond the capacity of ordinary people, and also savours of ostentation, nor yet too common and such as most of the auditory might themselves devise.’ There was also a balance to be struck in illustrating a sermon: ‘Neither too many similitudes, nor none at

⁹⁷ *Quaint Sermons*, pp. 98 and 120.

⁹⁸ There are, of course, many biblical instances of the use of metaphors relating to children. The model of a father giving good gifts to his children is applied to the relationship between the child of God and their Heavenly Father (Matt. 7:11). In 1 Pet. 1:14 Christian behaviour is described in terms of obedient children. The Psalmist uses the weaned child as a metaphor for humility (Ps. 131:2). Similarly, conversion requires us to become as children (Matt. 18:2-4). There are also warnings, however, such as ‘be not children in understanding’ (1 Cor. 14:20) and against manifesting a fickleness such as that of children at play (Luke 6:35).

⁹⁹ Blaikie, p. 105.

all.’¹⁰⁰ While Rutherford acknowledged himself to be a man of extremes, and did not always adhere to Livingstone’s ideal balance, his preaching was both highly accessible and greatly valued; a fact that has not always been fully appreciated by his commentators and critics.

¹⁰⁰ *Select Biographies*, ed. W. K. Tweedie, Wodrow Society (Edinburgh, 1845), Vol. 1, pp. 287-9.