

Doubt, Anxiety and Protestant Epistolary Counselling: The Letter-Book of Nehemiah

Wallington

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This essay focuses on a surprisingly underexplored manuscript of the London puritan woodturner, Nehemiah Wallington. His 'Copies of profitable and comfortable letters' anthologizes printed correspondence of martyrs and Reformed clergy alongside Wallington's own pious exchanges with ministers, neighbours and friends. Since Wallington's agonies of doubt about his religious estate are well known to early modern historians, his piety provides a particularly valuable lens through which to explore how clergymen and laypeople attempted to address the pastoral obstacle of religious uncertainty. This remarkable manuscript provides insights into clerical status within puritan spirituality, shedding light on the role of Protestant ministers as physicians of the soul, who conceived of themselves as indispensable experts in the diagnosis and cure of the spiritual afflictions of their lay devotees. Wallington and others, seeking resolutions for their doubts and scruples, affirmed the particular authority of these clergy as pastoral specialists. This essay presents evidence of sustained clericalism within Protestant piety, a tendency which acted in tension with a concurrent trend of spiritual individualism. Furthermore, it advances an argument for the significant role which epistolary counselling played in Protestant pastoral ministry to those afflicted by religious doubt.

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The piety of the London Presbyterian woodturner, Nehemiah Wallington (1598–1658), is a natural subject for an investigation of religious doubt. Thanks to seven extant manuscript notebooks which he penned between 1618 and 1654, Wallington has become a favoured exemplar of popular Protestantism for early modern historians.¹ He devoted great energy to documenting his unremitting pursuit of evidence of his election to salvation, regarding the maintenance of this record as an important spiritual obligation. Wallington's frequent bouts of melancholy and despair, which ultimately resulted in multiple suicide attempts, have led historians to depict him as an archetypal victim of the emotional turmoil which experimental Calvinism could engender.² His notebooks have proved conducive to conventional explanatory narratives of a Reformation-era shift away from clerical mediation towards heightened trends of individualism and subjectivity in Protestant spirituality. The recent historiography of puritan devotional culture has, however, witnessed an increasing backlash against traditional interpretations of the rise of spiritual self-writing as a key trigger in the emergence of the modern individual. Scholars have underscored the limited manifestation of autonomous selfhood in spiritual memoirs, as well as the significant communal dimension of both diary-writing and wider godly religious culture.³ Nonetheless, historians continue to

¹ Four are in the British Library: MS Sloane 1457, 'A Memoriall of Gods judgments upon Sabbath breakers, Drunkerds and other vile livers'; MS Sloane 922, 'Coppies of profitable and comfortable letters'; Add. MS 21935, 'A Bundel of Marcys'; Add. MS 40883, 'The groth of a Christian'. The remaining three are: London, Guildhall Library, MS 204, 'Record of Gods Marcys, or a Thankfull Remembrance'; Cheshire, Tatton Park, MS 68.20, 'A Record of marcys continued or yet God is good to Israel'; Washington DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a.436, 'An Extract of the passages of my life or the Booke of all my writting [*sic*] books'.

² David Booy, 'Introduction', in idem, ed., *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618–1654: A Selection* (Aldershot, 2007), 1–28, at 19–20, 24.

³ See Andrew Cambers, 'Reading, the Godly and Self-Writing in England, circa 1580–1720', *Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007), 796–825; J. C. Davis, 'Living with the Living God: Radical

regard Wallington's writings as epitomizing a puritan focus on personal self-scrutiny as the chief tool by which the believer could interrogate his own experiences and triumph over his doubts.⁴ He has, in short, become a byword for Calvinist introspection. Yet Wallington's manuscripts also reveal alternative illuminating insights into the importance which early modern Protestants placed on obtaining clerical assistance in resolving their religious uncertainties.

Wallington's writing took a distinctive form in the collating of correspondence, of overwhelmingly religious content, in a duodecimo letter-book of over two hundred folios. British Library manuscript Sloane 922, 'Copies of profitable and comfortable letters', appropriates this genre in a unique manner. Wallington's own epistolary exchanges with neighbours, friends and ministers are anthologized alongside exemplary manuscript letters which circulated amongst the godly community and excerpts from the printed correspondence of martyrs and clerics such as Edward Dering, Richard Greenham, Joseph Hall and Paul Baynes. This manuscript has, however, received surprisingly modest attention. In his excellent monograph, *Wallington's World*, which initiated a wave of interest in the notebooks, Paul Seaver exploited the considerable biographical potential of Wallington's own letters. David Booy has also made reference to these documents in his overarching exploration of

Religion and the English Revolution', in Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby, eds, *Religion in Revolutionary England* (Manchester, 2006), 19–41, at 31–5.

⁴ Amongst many, see Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Farnham, 2012), 94–5, 97, 104–6, 115–21; James S. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, CA, 1998), 34–5; Susan Doran and Christopher Durston, *Princes, Pastors and People: The Church and Religion in England, 1500–1700*, 2nd edn (London, 2003), 97–8; Ian W. Archer, 'Religious Identities', in Suzanne Gossett, ed., *Thomas Middleton in Context* (Cambridge, 2011), 135–43, at 137–8. A strong emphasis on individualism remains characteristic of broad overview treatments such as Jeffrey L. Forgeng, *Daily Life in Stuart England* (Westport, CT, 2007), 230–1.

how Wallington constructed an ‘image of the self’ through his writings.⁵ However, a paragraph-length outline by James Daybell constitutes the only scholarly discussion of the manuscript as a whole.⁶ By exploring the role of Wallington as reader and compiler of key examples from the interesting and underexplored genre of printed religious correspondence, as well as drawing more broadly on the wider devotional context of his letter-book, this essay will offer fresh insights into the way in which early modern clergy and laypeople addressed the pastoral obstacles of religious doubt and uncertainty. Contributing to an already increasingly nuanced understanding of puritan individualism through the illuminating perspective of lay-clerical relations, I will underscore the significant status and authority which Protestant ministers could acquire through their expertise in handling the scruples of the laity. Most notably, this essay will demonstrate the important role which epistolary counselling played in Protestant pastoral ministry to those afflicted by religious doubt.

Wallington commenced his letter-book by copying edifying excerpts from the correspondence of Marian martyrs featured in John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*. Their epistles represent the initial forays into a genre of religious epistolary counselling which was to assume a significant place in both Elizabethan and seventeenth-century England. However, the vast majority of the printed materials on which the collection draws reveal an exclusively

⁵ Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (London, 1985); Booy, ed., *Notebooks*, 12–14. Booy has even reproduced twelve of Wallington’s own letters in his abridged edition of the notebooks.

⁶ James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke, 2012), 208–9. This material is reproduced in idem, ‘Early Modern Letter-Books, Miscellanies, and the Reading and Reception of Scribally Copied Letters’, in Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith, eds, *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2014), 57–72, at 65–6. The most recent large-scale assessment of Wallington’s writings makes no reference to correspondence: Robert M. Oswald, ‘Death, Piety and Social Engagement in the Life of the Seventeenth-Century London Artisan, Nehemiah Wallington’ (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012).

clerical model of spiritual direction, reflecting the wider shift which occurred within Protestantism, as it moved away from its more revolutionary origins and settled down into the hierarchical model of the established Elizabethan Church. Representative of Elizabethan epistolary counselling are the passages which Wallington transcribed from the *Certaine godly and verie comfortable letters* of the puritan divine Edward Dering (c.1540–76). Posthumously published in Middelburgh in 1590, this text is one of the earliest examples of a single-author printed letter collection in English. It formed the basis of a short study by Patrick Collinson, who characterized Dering as ‘the archetype of the puritan divine’.⁷ Dering attended Christ’s College, Cambridge, and later became preacher of St Andrew’s, Norwich, a city lecturer and chaplain to Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk. He adopted the epistle as an alternative vehicle for his preaching ministry, particularly during the years of ill-health which preceded his untimely death.⁸ Amongst Wallington’s transcriptions are letters addressed to individuals struggling to maintain an assurance of God’s love and of their elect status in the face of many ‘crosses’ and divine ‘chastisements’.⁹ In response to a ‘case’ presented by the gentlewoman Catherine Killigrew, who was faltering under the burden of bodily suffering, Dering offered repeated encouragements to ward off doubt. Evoking a habitual Protestant theme of the trial of the faithful through tribulation, he reassured his troubled correspondent ‘that this is the lot of Gods saints to enioy his blessings with afflictions so that the more you bee sorrowfull the more you be sure that the liuing God hath giuen you your portion’.¹⁰

Dering’s wider works reveal a lofty conception of the pre-eminence of the clerical office which sat somewhat awkwardly alongside strict predestinarianism; for Dering, the

⁷ Patrick Collinson, ‘A Mirror of Elizabethan Puritanism: The Life and Letters of Godly Master Dering’, in idem, ed., *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), 289–324, at 290.

⁸ Ibid. 294–8, 316.

⁹ Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fols 27^r–30^v, at 27^v, 29^r.

¹⁰ Ibid., fol. 29^v.

minister is the one ‘by whom the people do beleeeue’.¹¹ Collinson argued that ‘few English Protestants have held such a “high” doctrine of the ministry’.¹² However, the notion of the minister’s indispensability, as God’s very mouthpiece, was an orthodox Reformed understanding,¹³ which was regularly evoked amongst puritan proponents of a pastorally sensitive ministry with spiritual counselling at its core. Dering’s pastoral correspondence is underpinned by this awareness of his own spiritual authority. Although Jason Yiannikou has suggested, from his frequent use of the homiletic first-person plural to address his devotees, that Dering’s letters reflect an ‘intense reciprocity’ and ‘fellow-feeling’, they are certainly not lacking in authoritative pastoral exhortation.¹⁴ In one letter, Dering invoked the apostolic model of St John, who could likewise ‘see in the people to whom hee wrote’ the marks of God’s election.¹⁵ Importantly, this pastoral authority is also conveyed through Wallington’s selected transcriptions, which include firm pronouncements of ‘the blessed life, which God shall giue vnto you and to all his saints’, calculated to soothe his correspondent’s anxieties about their own salvation.¹⁶ Wallington similarly drew on the printed correspondence of Richard Greenham (*fl.* early 1540s, d. 1594), the Elizabethan minister of Dry Drayton, Cambridgeshire. Greenham has been recognized, both in his own time and amongst modern historians, as an exemplary godly pastor. A graduate of Pembroke College, Cambridge, he is particularly remembered for having established a prototype Protestant seminary in his rectory

¹¹ Edward Dering, *M. Derings Workes: More at Large then Euer Hath Heere to-fore Been Printed in Any One Volume* (London, 1614), sig. A3^v. Here Dering probably alludes to 1 Cor. 3: 5.

¹² Collinson, ‘Mirror’, 299.

¹³ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s Preaching* (Edinburgh, 1992), 41–4.

¹⁴ Jason Yiannikou, ‘Protestantism, Puritanism and Practical Divinity in England, c.1570–1620’ (PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1999), especially 42–3, 48, 51.

¹⁵ Edward Dering, *Certaine Godly and Verie Comfortable Letters, Full of Christian Consolation* (Middelburgh, 1590), sig. C8^r.

¹⁶ Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fol. 28^v.

where students could reside to gain practical pastoral training.¹⁷ He devoted himself to ministering to troubled and doubting laity and was renowned for his ‘singular dexteritie in comforting afflicted Consciences’.¹⁸ According to his editor and ministerial disciple, Henry Holland, this was a most expert skill, lacking in even the majority of Greenham’s clerical contemporaries. It was on account of his learned and ‘certaine rule of art’ that Greenham might be accounted a ‘spirituall Physition’. Holland contrasted his practice with the spiritual quackery of the ‘blinde Empyrikes’ who, relying exclusively on experience, ‘gesse vncertainlie’ at cures with potentially perilous consequences for the afflicted.¹⁹ Although Greenham’s pastoral ministry has been the focus of several scholarly studies, the role of epistolary counselling within it has largely been overlooked. Historical focus has centred chiefly on Manchester, Rylands Library English Manuscript 524, a collection of Greenham’s sayings and records of his practical pastoral care and counselling composed by a student during the 1580s.²⁰ In their study of Greenham, Kenneth Parker and Eric Carlson did not

¹⁷ John H. Primus, *Richard Greenham: Portrait of an Elizabethan Pastor* (Macon, GA, 1998), 12, 24, 42–3.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Holland, ‘To the High and Mightie Monarch, James’, in Richard Greenham, *The Works of the Reuerend and Faithfull Seruant of Iesus Christ M. Richard Greenham* (London, 1612), unpaginated.

¹⁹ Henry Holland, ‘Preface to the Reader’, in Greenham, *Works*, unpaginated. The word ‘empiric’ refers here to an unqualified medical practitioner who rebuffs formal learning and theory: OED Online (March 2014), s.v. ‘empiric, n. and adj.’, Oxford University Press, online at: <<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2277/view/Entry/61340?redirectedFrom=empiric>>, accessed 20 March 2014.

²⁰ Primus, *Richard Greenham*, 9–11; Kenneth L. Parker and Eric Josef Carlson, ‘*Practical Divinity*’: *The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot, 1998), 34–5.

quote at all from his letters, although these provide practical and detailed case studies of Greenham's dealings with doubting laity, as well as being amongst his most popular works.²¹

The passage which Wallington chose to include in his compilation is not a true example of the letter form, but rather a series of 'Short Rules', 'Sent by M^r Richard Greenham to a Gentelwoman troubled in minde for her direction and consolation', and subsequently published in 1612 as a broadsheet.²² It commences with the comforting reassurance that no sin can be attributed to a believer who 'giue not consent in heart'. Evidently, encouraging the scrupulous with this sentiment was one of Greenham's characteristic pastoral strategies, for Samuel Clarke highlighted it in his short biography of the divine.²³ From similar statements, Karen Bruhn has observed a striking flexibility within Greenham's theological system; she notes that he regularly tempered predestination in order to extend much needed solace to godly doubting souls.²⁴ Greenham followed up this reassurance with further aids to achieving certainty for one overcome by 'feare of falling away', advocating meditation on the Scriptural promise that 'whom God loueth he loueth (to the ende) for euer' as a remedy against doubt. Indeed, Greenham exhorted his correspondent to regard 'your present estate to be none other then the estate of Gods children', declaring 'yet are you sure and secure', for Christ will bring you 'to the shore of saluation, without all perill of perishing'.²⁵

²¹ The letters were frequently reproduced in partial collections of Greenham's works and other anthologies: Parker and Carlson, *Practical Divinity*, 362–6.

²² Wallington, 'Coppies', fol. 31^r; Richard Greenham, *Short Rules Sent by Maister Richard Greenham* (London, 1612).

²³ Wallington, 'Coppies', fol. 31^r; Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of Thirty-Two English Divines* (London, 1677), 13.

²⁴ Karen Bruhn, "'Sinne Unfoulded': Time, Election, and Disbelief among the Godly in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century England", *ChH* 77 (2008), 574–95, at 592–3.

²⁵ Wallington, 'Coppies', fols 32^v, 31^v, 33^r.

Interestingly, however, it is a further letter of Greenham's, addressed to one burdened by relentless doubts about their election, which, despite not having been compiled by Wallington, actually displays the most striking parallels with correspondence that the puritan woodturner later sent to his ministerial acquaintances. Berating his addressee for forgetting former mercies, Greenham strove to provide an 'assurance of the loue of God towards you'.²⁶ As would subsequently be characteristic of Wallington, this anxious correspondent evidently had recourse to clerical counsellors over a sustained period of time; Greenham highlighted the 'innumerable' number of 'excellent Physitions of the soule' who had offered 'great comforts ... by word in presence, and by letters in absence'.²⁷ It was through an assurance of the authority of their counsel that Greenham attempted to assuage his friend's crippling doubt. He noted that, because so 'many of the faithfull and expert seruants of Christ haue examined your estate ... & haue found all signes vnto health and saluation ... [their] testimonie ... must bee as the voyce of God himselfe'.²⁸

An initially apparently incongruous inclusion is Wallington's transcriptions from the *Epistles* (1608–11) of Joseph Hall (1574–1656), an exemplar of Calvinist episcopacy who would become bishop of Exeter and then of Norwich. Hall was a vocal advocate of theological moderation who is remembered especially for his writings on the practice of meditation and his attempt to integrate a long Catholic devotional heritage into Protestant piety.²⁹ In his youth, he experimented with various genres, including seeing into print sixty religious epistles in three volumes.³⁰ His churchmanship sits rather awkwardly with

²⁶ Greenham, *Works*, 871–80, at 877.

²⁷ Ibid. 876–7.

²⁸ Ibid. 877–8 (my emphasis).

²⁹ Richard A. McCabe, *Joseph Hall: A Study in Satire and Meditation* (Oxford, 1982), 151.

³⁰ T. F. Kinloch, *The Life and Works of Joseph Hall, 1574–1656* (London, 1951), 191. It is important to observe that these carefully crafted epistles were very likely composed with publication in mind. Hall presumably always intended them to speak to a wider audience than merely their original

Wallington's own anti-episcopalian sentiments: Wallington's personal letters and various notebooks include numerous references to the 'wicked Bishops', and in one memorable passage he actually commemorated Parliament's 1641 impeachment of thirteen bishops, including Hall, and their imprisonment in the Tower.³¹ Nonetheless, Hall's letter collection can be firmly located within an emerging Protestant tradition of spiritual counselling, which took inspiration from the pastoral works of godly Elizabethan divines and paved the way for developments in seventeenth-century casuistry. Although Hall was evidently a prolific letter-writer, as well as the first Englishman to publish an extensive collection of his own correspondence,³² Peter Lake and Kenneth Fincham are amongst the few scholars to have utilized his *Epistles*, as evidence of his ideological agenda and fierce opposition to papistry, separatism and the anti-Calvinism of William Laud and his associates. However, they passed over Hall's many letters of spiritual counsel, from which Wallington made his selection, dismissing their content as 'general moral nostrums'.³³ Yet these epistles are equally revealing about Hall's confessional colouring, exposing his undoubtedly puritan style of piety. Through them, we see the future bishop in the role of physician of the soul.³⁴ In the context of Nehemiah Wallington's letter-book, the ease with which the godly could embrace Hall's practical divinity is especially well illuminated.

addressees: see Frank Livingstone Huntley, *Bishop Joseph Hall, 1574–1656: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1979), 67.

³¹ Wallington, 'Coppies', fols 106, 142^r–144^r; idem, 'The groth of a Christian', fol. 24^v; idem, 'A Bundel of Marcys', fols 9^v, 39^v.

³² Alan Stewart, 'Letters', in Andrew Hadfield, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose, 1500–1640* (Oxford, 2013), 417–33, at 426.

³³ Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, 'Popularity, Prelacy and Puritanism in the 1630s: Joseph Hall explains Himself', *EHR* 111 (1996), 856–81, at 861.

³⁴ McCabe has suggested that certain letters might owe a debt to the methods of Greenham: *Joseph Hall*, 210.

Of particular interest to Wallington was the counsel which Hall addressed to a ‘Mistris A. P.’, who had apparently confided to him her fears that she lacked ‘true Faith’. Hall’s response construed her doubts in positive terms, as a necessary accompaniment to Christian certainty. He reassured his anxious correspondent that ‘you belieue whiles you complaine of vnbleefe[.] That man neuer beleueed that neuer doubted ... Those doubts are but to make way for assurance’. Hall summed up his counsel in comforting, albeit rather condescending, terms, concluding of her spiritual condition: ‘To be happy, and not know it, is littel aboue miserable[.] Such is your state’.³⁵ Wallington also compiled an epistle which Hall had addressed to his sister, ‘Mistris B. Brinsly’, in which he praised her anxious ‘lamentation’ of being unable to ‘enough grieue’ for her sins. According to Hall’s diagnosis, her very doubts about the sufficiency of her sorrow stood as tangible evidence of true penitence.³⁶ This pastoral trope recurs frequently in epistolary source material; Protestant devotional writers, seeking to draw positive comfort from the doubts which pious self-examination often generated in believers, regularly asserted that such unsettling qualms could never beleaguer the cold formalist numbed by false assurance of salvation. Outside of Wallington’s letter-book, this line of reasoning appears in a copy of a 1631 manuscript letter penned by the puritan divine Thomas Gataker (1574–1654), who attempted to dispel a scrupulous correspondent’s fears of hypocrisy by discerning numerous signs of their election. Gataker wrote: ‘But you doubt, you say, of the sincerity & soundnes of thease yo^r purposes & desires’. ‘Thease very feares & doubtings ... thoe infirmities & weakenesses of themselvs, yet they argue a good soul’.³⁷

Alongside this theological defence of doubt, many of Hall’s letters are concerned with soothing and alleviating the spiritual anxieties of his correspondents. He highlighted

³⁵ Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fol. 44.

³⁶ Ibid., fols 38^r–39^v, at 38^r.

³⁷ Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Dd.3.83 (19), ‘A letter of Thomas Gataker to a friend concerning his spiritual state’, 6, 11.

personal deathbed instruction as an essential duty of the faithful pastor and expected that ministers would ‘priuatly prepare men for death, and arme them against it’, composing ‘comfortable letters’ to ‘stir vp their fainting harts’.³⁸ Wallington transcribed one such epistle to a ‘Master I. B.’, which commenced, ‘You complaine, that you feare deathe ... If you would learne the remidy, knowe the cavse ... our feare is from doubt and our doubt is from vnbleefe, and whence is our vnbleefe, but chiefly from ignorance’. Hall then urged the acquisition of ‘true knowledg and true faith’ through contemplation of the assured delights of heaven. He concluded his letter with a comforting pledge which echoes the earlier assurances of election given by Dering and Greenham: ‘Take but these, and I dare promise you securitie’. This rhetoric reveals the authoritative expertise which Hall assumed to impart pastoral counsel and which can be observed in Wallington’s transcriptions from his *Epistles*.³⁹

The radical puritan cleric Paul Baynes (c.1573–1617) is the final Reformed divine whose letters were anthologized by Wallington. Baynes is a minister of whom few biographical details are known with any certainty, and his works have received little historical attention. Like Dering, he was educated at Christ’s College, and he then took up a lectureship at St Andrew the Great, Cambridge, succeeding William Perkins in this role. Baynes was banned from St Andrew’s in 1605 on account of his unlicensed preaching, but he was soon back in the pulpit and was only finally suspended from his position during Archbishop Bancroft’s 1608 metropolitanical visitation.⁴⁰ His *Christian Letters* were printed posthumously

³⁸ Joseph Hall, *Epistles, The Second Volume: Conteyning Two Decads* (London, 1608), 201–2.

Epistolary counsel was especially fitting when contagious disease prevented the minister’s personal presence.

³⁹ Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fols 50^r–51^v.

⁴⁰ Although the details surrounding this event have been variously reported, an article by Andrew Atherstone has cleared up much confusion: ‘The Silencing of Paul Baynes and Thomas Taylor, Puritan Lecturers at Cambridge’, *Notes and Queries* 54 (2007), 386–9. One letter in the collection makes reference to this ‘great businesse’, with Baynes reporting that he had been ‘warned to preach’ at the

in 1620 and were amongst his most popular writings, being reproduced in three editions by 1637. The preface to the work claims that some of the letters were also transcribed during Baynes's lifetime, 'full many a time; yea, hundreds of times, or nearer a thousand times, if some godly persons haue not misreckoned', implying a significant manuscript circulation of correspondence.⁴¹ Baynes too was famed for his practical divinity. Samuel Clarke particularly associated his activities as an 'excellent *Casuist*' with the period after he was prohibited from exercising a preaching ministry. But he also identified Baynes's pastoral care of troubled and perplexed individuals as a trigger for his suspension, stating that because so 'many doubting Christians repaired to him for satisfaction in cases of Conscience' the bishops accused him of keeping conventicles.⁴² In addition, Baynes's letters hint at the copious amount of time he devoted to fulfilling his pastoral duties on an epistolary level.⁴³

A key theme of Baynes's collection is the necessity of maintaining faith and assurance in the face of divine afflictions. In one interesting letter, which Wallington copied, Baynes addressed a man weighed down with doubts because of the great sufferings 'visited' upon his wife. He declared: 'if I had sooner knowen of your heauines, I would before this haue written vnto you'. Whilst Baynes recognized that such sorrows had left his friend 'shaken in beleefe', he assured him that afflictions could 'confirm faith' for, amongst great tribulation, 'many precious graces are discerned'.⁴⁴ Similar comforts were addressed to others struggling with religious uncertainties in the face of the death of loved ones. Baynes exhorted another grieving correspondent: 'we must looke to Christ that he would not let our faith hope and meeknesse of minde bee shaken'. Wallington, who was himself tragically affected by numerous bereavements, collected three of these epistles together in his letter-book, using

upcoming 'Metropolitans visitation': Paul Baynes, *Christian Letters: of Mr. Paul Bayne. Replenished with Diuers Consolations, Exhortations, Directions* (London, 1620), sig. G2^v.

⁴¹ Ibid., fols A3^v–4^r; see his request at sig. R5^r.


⁴² Clarke, *Lives*, 23–4.

⁴³ Baynes, *Christian Letters*, sig. F11^r.

⁴⁴ Wallington, 'Coppies', fols 64^r–65^r.

manicules⁴⁵ to highlight the ‘motiues’ for patiently bearing grief which Baynes recommended.⁴⁶ Throughout his letters, Baynes employed medical imagery to compare healing ‘afflictions’ with bitter ‘potions’ and purges. In a phrase which Wallington transcribed, ‘the physicke must make vs sicke that that [*sic*] doth vs any good’.⁴⁷ For Baynes, God was the supreme spiritual physician, a frequent designation amongst godly writers. However, ‘the Minister of the Gospell’, as mediator of God’s heavenly physic to the laity, was himself ‘a wise Physitian’ and healer of souls.⁴⁸ In a parallel with Dering, Baynes referred to ministers as God’s ‘blessed instruments to save their [people’s] soules’, the ultimate channels of grace.⁴⁹ It is in this expert, professional capacity that Wallington’s letter-book presents Baynes. In one epistle, penned to bolster a troubled correspondent’s faith, the puritan cleric pressed for details of his friend’s spiritual condition with the warning that, since he could ‘easily ... procure that which would refresh you seasonably’, Baynes’s addressee ought not to ‘neglect a good meanes which Gods prouidence doth shew you’.⁵⁰ In another, Baynes spoke of the need to determine a precise spiritual diagnosis before profitable counsel could be prescribed.⁵¹

Amongst the works of the clerical dispensers of epistolary counsel featured in Wallington’s manuscript, a recurring discourse affirming the dignity of the ministerial office

⁴⁵  A symbol consisting of a pointing hand, used to identify passages of interest or importance.

⁴⁶ Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fols 58^v–63^v, especially 60^v–61^r.

⁴⁷ Ibid., fols 54^r, 59^r, 62^r, 63^v, 67^r–68^v.

⁴⁸ Ibid., fols 54^r, 57^r; see also, for example, Greenham, *Works*, 794; Paul Baynes, *An Entire Commentary vpon the Whole Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians* (London, 1643), 194. See David Harley, ‘Spiritual Physic, Providence and English Medicine, 1560–1640’, in Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham, eds, *Medicine and the Reformation* (London, 1993), 101–17, at 109–10.

⁴⁹ Paul Baynes, *A Commentarie vpon the First and Second Chapters of Saint Paul to the Colossians* (London, 1635), 143.

⁵⁰ Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fol. 54^v.

⁵¹ Ibid., fols 57^v–58^r; see also Baynes, *Christian Letters*, sig. B8.

emerges, with clergy encouraging troubled and doubting laity to have recourse to their expertise, and conveying these pastoral ideals through their practical performance of spiritual counselling. Interestingly, these sources appear to support Rosemary O'Day's assertion that, deprived of their elevated sacramental status and seeking 'a new *raison d'être*', the post-Reformation English clergy placed particular emphasis on their commitment to the exercise of their duties of pastoral care and oversight.⁵² Wallington's reading of this printed advice literature shaped his own approach to spiritual direction. As the final section of this essay will demonstrate, Wallington seems largely to have internalized these contemporary models of pious practice, so that his own experience of epistolary counselling served to affirm rather than undermine ministerial authority.

James Daybell has recently concluded that despite his lay status 'Wallington's own correspondence represents him in the role of spiritual counsellor'.⁵³ In addition to engaging in some essentially reciprocal edificatory correspondence with several godly companions,⁵⁴ it is certainly true that Wallington penned several letters, dating from the 1640s, in which he fiercely rebuked neighbours and relations for their transgressions. Thus, Wallington addressed an old friend, Master Wade, 'louingly reproving him for his sinnefull life' and reflecting on the divine retribution awaiting those who indulge in the 'sinnes of Drvnkennesse and Hordome'. He wrote also to his 'Cozen Iohn Wallington' that 'I here intend to deale plainly and louingly with you shewing you your woefull and miserable condition that you are in'.⁵⁵ As Paul Seaver has noted, these letters display a conviction of the necessity of reproving fellow believers, although Wallington did feel the need to accompany these interventions with repeated justifications of his authority to reprimand. He frequently employed the biblical

⁵² Rosemary O'Day, *The English Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558–1642* (Leicester, 1979), 126.

⁵³ Daybell, *Material Letter*, 208.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Wallington, 'Coppies', fols 107^r, 121^r, 139, 144^v–145^r.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, fols 148, 160^r–162^v.

command of Leviticus 19: 17: ‘Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thine heart But thou shalt plainly rebuke thy Neigh[b]our and suffer him not to sinne’.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, it is also true that most of these letters were composed either subsequent to, or around the time of, Wallington’s election as a ruling elder for St Leonard Eastcheap in the fourth London Classis in 1646. It therefore seems fair to assume that this appointment heightened his already existing sense of his religious obligation to admonish and correct sinners. Most significantly, though, Wallington’s own letters display an ideal of fraternal admonition which fundamentally differed from the paternal, pastoral model of detailed consideration of intricate cases of conscience, which Wallington encountered through his reading of epistolary advice literature. The main body of his letters of reproof often constituted little more than extensive quotations from Scripture, copied out for his addressees’ easy reference, followed up with recommendations to read various printed texts and sermons.⁵⁷ A few brief references in his notebooks do reveal Wallington in the role of spiritual counsellor to the doubt-ridden and disturbed. During the 1640s Wallington twice mentions that he had been called on to advise godly women who were troubled in conscience. This was presumably as a result of his significant personal experience in battling with doubt and despair, a qualification which ministers recognized as particularly fitting an individual to assist others. Despite his high sense of the clerical office, even Richard Greenham acknowledged that the most effective comforts might be those proffered by a believer who had suffered similarly.⁵⁸ Wallington reported of the first occasion: ‘I could not fasten any comfort on her, but the other woman th^t I went vnto I myselfe did recieve good by’ and of the other, he stated, ‘I did the best I could’, again noting that ‘I receiued much comfort from her’. In 1654 he reported that he had successfully related ‘such counsell as I Received of the Lord’ to two afflicted believers. However, it does not appear that he actively sought out opportunities to assume this

⁵⁶ Ibid., fols 134^v, 148^r, 155^r, 160^r; Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 145–6.

⁵⁷ For example, Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fol. 137^v.

⁵⁸ Greenham, *Works*, 871.

authoritative role, and he seems rather to have valued these experiences primarily for the potential they presented for mutual spiritual growth.⁵⁹

By contrast, when plagued with doubts and insecurities for which he sought resolution, it was to ministers of the gospel that this scrupulous artisan turned. Seaver notes that the clergy were ‘in an obvious sense the technical experts’, to whom Wallington looked for aid. Furthermore, Booy observes the importance which ‘ministerial guidance’ exerted over Wallington’s writing throughout his various notebooks. Yet Seaver also asserts that Wallington’s godly community were not a ‘priest-ridden people’, playing down the striking degree of deference towards pastors and dependence on their guidance which frequently emerges from Wallington’s letter-book.⁶⁰ Amongst his personal correspondence are several letters which Wallington exchanged with his brother-in-law, Livewell Rampaigne, rector of Broxholme in Lincolnshire, between 1625 and 1632. One such, ‘concerning consoling [*sic*] and Instructings’, conveys the strong impression that Rampaigne was intimately acquainted with Wallington’s turbulent religious state. From his position of trust and respect, he berated his brother-in-law for giving free rein to creeping doubts about his election, repeatedly warning him against dwelling excessively on grief, sorrows and knowledge of his ‘corruptions’, ‘least you be ouerwhelmed and swallowed vp of it’.⁶¹ Rampaigne hoped to quieten Wallington’s anxious qualms that he had fallen out of divine favour, urging him to reflect rather on the many ‘causes of comfort the Lord reacheth out to you’ and ‘from them conclude a continuance of his kindnes’.⁶² These letters strongly suggest that Wallington was the instigator of their pious conference. He applied to his brother-in-law in a way analogous to that of the spiritual patients recorded in the epistles of Hall, Baynes and others, voicing a ‘complaint’ or ‘grievance’ against his own religious behaviour, and, in return, expecting

⁵⁹ Wallington, ‘The groth of a Christian’, fols 169^r, 172; Booy, ed., *Notebooks*, 336.

⁶⁰ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 187–8; Booy, ed., *Notebooks*, 17–20.

⁶¹ Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fol. 75, cf. 79^r, 82^r–83^r.

⁶² *Ibid.*, fol. 83.

Rampaigne to supply lists of ‘rvles’ for his consolation and direction. For his part, Rampaigne sometimes failed to offer prompt responses, complaining of the many other duties which consumed his time. At one point he even had, rather remorsefully, to thank Wallington ‘for putting me in minde of my great and weaighly charge’.⁶³

Such evidence sits awkwardly alongside Kate Narveson’s recent portrayal of Wallington’s confident spiritual self-sufficiency and her assertion that he did ‘not need a minister to explain how to regard and respond to any particular occasion’.⁶⁴ Further revealing exchanges, dating from 1638 to 1643, also survive between Wallington and the curate in his own parish, Henry Roborough. In one letter, prompted by the lesson of Malachi 2: 7, ‘that the prest lips shall presarue knowledg and thou shalt seeke it at his mouth’, Wallington made ‘bould to write my mind vnto you desiering you to helpe me in this my temptations’.⁶⁵ Through this letter, Wallington bared his soul to his pastor, pouring out a personal and particular confession. He justified his address by evoking a gendered image, that of a woman in time of spiritual trial having recourse to her husband as the one set in loving authority over her. Tormented by the potential consequences of having broken a vow of spiritual ‘reformation’ made during a life-threatening sickness almost fifteen years previously, as well as overcome by fear that he might have profaned the sacrament by receiving it not ‘with cherefulnes and delight’ but out of ‘costom, or for feare to offend my Father’, Wallington besought Roborough: ‘I pray you do not bauke with me in anything but deale as a faithfull dispenser of the truth’.⁶⁶ In a later letter, doubting the authenticity of his own faith, Wallington frantically sought confirmation of ‘whither my trouble and sorrow were a right trouble and sorrow and my ioy a true and right ioy’. Labelling Roborough ‘a skilfull phis[i]tion for my soule’, the only occasion on which he employed this precise terminology of

⁶³ Ibid., fols 80^v, 76^r.

⁶⁴ Narveson, *Bible Readers*, 119.

⁶⁵ Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fol. 118^r.

⁶⁶ Ibid., fols 118^r–119^v.

spiritual direction, Wallington implored: ‘take some paines to studdy and finde out ... whether my graces and comforts be of the right stamp or no’.⁶⁷ Paul Seaver has remarked of this letter that Wallington ‘somehow believed Roborough could correctly diagnose’ his spiritual condition.⁶⁸ From a holistic examination of his letter-book, such a request appears entirely unsurprising, corresponding to the kind of aid to intricate emotional self-scrutiny which Baynes, Hall and others were regularly called upon by perplexed and doubting laity to provide.⁶⁹

Wallington’s remarkable text provides a window onto the wider genre of spiritual letter-writing and its importance in relation to Protestant practical divinity. The role of epistolarity in post-Reformation pastoral ministry offers significant scope for further historical investigation. As Gary Schneider has recently noted, the study of religion and letter-writing in the early modern period is a rich field of enquiry which is only now beginning to receive the historical attention it merits.⁷⁰ Further research is also required into the phenomenon of spiritual direction within English Protestantism; a thorough investigation of the role and status of the ‘physician of the soul’ offers potential for a re-evaluation of conventional understandings of the nature of contemporary lay-clerical relations.

As a contribution to these broader enquiries, this essay has offered a fresh perspective on the experience of religious doubt at the level of the individual believer and the ways in which both clergy and laity attempted to overcome it. A reassessment of the piety of Nehemiah Wallington, as the archetypal Calvinist ‘doubter’ and the archetypal godly ‘individual conscience’, has uncovered a significant and far-reaching counter-narrative of puritan religious experience. For many in a post-Reformation age, agonies of doubt could not

⁶⁷ Ibid., fols 122^r–123^r.

⁶⁸ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 105.

⁶⁹ See the analogous epistolary request from Hall’s sister and Baynes’s offer to diagnose a correspondent in this way: Wallington, ‘Coppies’, fols 38^r–39^v, 57^v–58^r.

⁷⁰ Gary Schneider, ‘Introduction’, in Anne Dunan-Page and Clotilde Prunier, eds, *Debating the Faith: Religion and Letter Writing in Great Britain, 1550–1800* (Dordrecht, 2013), 1–15, at 11–12.

be combated merely through introspection and personal self-examination, charting a lone course of spiritual progress through to a final assurance of salvation. An alternative tendency to regard the resolution of salvation anxieties as hinging on expert interpretation of signs and evidence is prevalent in the source material. Scrutiny of the printed letters and wider works of prominent exponents of spiritual counselling has uncovered a recurring discourse of the authoritative expertise of the Protestant clergy, who regarded themselves as spiritual physicians, adept in diagnosing and curing lay devotees. Whilst Rosemary O'Day's contention that the period following the Reformation witnessed a professionalization of the clergy has not met with universal acceptance, the writings of these pastors certainly suggest their desire for the clerical office to be viewed in these terms.⁷¹ Moreover, Wallington and other godly laity, seeking practical instruction in their uncertainties and scruples, affirmed the particular authority of ministers as the spiritual experts on whom the welfare of souls primarily rested.

⁷¹ O'Day, *The English Clergy*; eadem, *The Professions in Early Modern England, 1450–1800: Servants of the Commonweal* (Harlow, 2000), 50–110. See critiques in Michael Hawkins, 'Ambiguity and Contradiction in the "rise of professionalism": The English Clergy, 1570–1730', in *The First Modern Society: Essays on English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, ed. A. L. Beier, David Cannadine and James M. Rosenheim (Cambridge, 1989), 241–69; John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560–1640* (Cambridge, 1988), 79–81.