

Engines of Tyranny: The Court Sermons of James II

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Abstract

This article considers the sermons preached by royal chaplains at the court of James II and the organisation of the chapel royal by James as a Catholic organisation. In doing so, it addresses the question of where James's assurance and certainty came from that he was ruling as God wished him to do. The evidence presented here is that James organised his Catholic chapel royal to be a conscious source of guidance and support. His chaplains reciprocated by addressing him as a Catholic king whose duty was to bring to heel a recalcitrant and stubborn people. His chaplains used historical precedent and theological argument to press on James his determination to bring his Protestant subjects to obedience. This is a study of the Catholic milieu of James's court and of the theological impetus behind his rule.

Keywords: James II; Catholicism; chapel royal; sermons; preaching

James II's reign was one of the high watermarks of the influence of religion on politics and constitutional development. The Revolution of 1688 saw the English nation choose their church over their King. It was a choice that had aftershocks in British politics for decades. James II is not one of Britain's best-loved kings; indeed he must be very low on that list. Equally, he must have felt that his subjects were among the most sullen and stubborn that a king had to face. For historians also, despite some implausible attempts to rehabilitate James as a paragon of religious toleration, he remains a problematic figure. If we consider his political and constitutional methods, it is difficult to contest the Whig view of his reign advocated by Macaulay in 1848.¹ James used the *Godden v. Hale* spurious legal case to extract a judgment endorsing his right to suspend laws; he exploited the *quo warranto* proceedings to rig elections to Parliament; he used wholesale dismissals of lords lieutenant, magistrates and militia commanders to punish those who disagreed with him, and evicted all the fellows of Magdalen College, Oxford as punishment for following the statutes of their College.²

In short, his methods were those of a tyrant who would brook no opposition. But if James's methods were unprincipled, no one could challenge the sincerity of his aim. James's conversion to Catholicism in 1668 was genuine and he was undoubtedly a pious believer –notwithstanding his persistent predilection for mis-tresses and the fathering of illegitimate children. It was from his faith that James derived a determination to return England from Anglicanism to the Roman Catholic Church. This was his providential mission. Yet he was singularly unsuccessful in doing so; rather than being greeted with the adulation he expected, his subjects were uncooperative. The nobility grudgingly accepted their expulsion from the county militias, lieutenancies and magistracy rather than convert; the universities risked expulsion and deprivation of fellows rather than concede; and the poor seemed much more attracted by anti-Catholic sermons than by the propaganda of his Jesuit clergy.

In addition James's wife, Mary of Modena, repeatedly experienced miscarriages and stillbirths – between 1674 and 1688 she had ten such pregnancies. As time went on, James became more splenetic and less tolerant. After his army deserted him on Salisbury Plain in November 1688, he suffered a complete mental breakdown with physical symptoms including crippling headaches and severe nosebleeds.

What sustained James during the repeated disappointments of his reign? Undoubtedly, inner conviction played a central part. James certainly believed that he had been chosen by God for a special purpose: why else had he survived the exile of the 1650s, the attempts to exclude him from the throne in the 1670s, the assassination attempt of 1683, and later the Monmouth rebellion of 1685? Surely the hand of Providence was protecting him for a special purpose. A report on the Rye House assassination attempt that he commissioned in his first months as king said as much. The account included the claim that James had been saved 'by God's Providence continually watching over his Majesties and these Nations safety . . . many of the Traytors soon after fell into the Hands of Justice'. James himself was 'deeply sensible he has been now once more preserv'd by the immediate hand of God; and therefore looks on himself afresh obliged to manifest his gratitude to Heaven, by promoting the Glory of his Preserver'. James regarded himself as the recipient of 'divine favour'.³ More significantly, perhaps, he wanted those who opposed him to 'be convinc'd by that very Providence which used to be their own principal and best-loved argument'.⁴ One aspect of James's motivation which has not been fully explored is the influence of the sermons that he heard in the chapels royal, converted in his reign to Catholic chapels. Twenty-eight of the sermons preached before James survived the Revolution and were reprinted, probably as Jacobite propaganda, in 1741.⁵

The sermon culture of the seventeenth century was very strong and, despite repeated injunctions from successive rulers, preachers frequently spoke about the political issues of the day. Indeed, the pulpit was one of the sources for guidance for rulers and ruled. By the time of the Restoration, sermons had become a key part of the burgeoning print culture of the late seventeenth century, supported in part by the right of bishops and the universities to license publications.⁶

The Coronation and the Chapels Royal

Before turning to the Catholic sermons, however, it is important to note that James took the coronation oath to protect the Church of England, but he regarded many Anglican sermons as entirely unacceptable. He often railed at the anti-Catholic preaching of Anglican clergy – and suspended Bishop Henry Compton of London for failing to discipline anti-Catholic preachers. In March 1686, James ordered Anglican bishops to suppress anti-Catholic sermons. A few months later, he established a Licensing Office to sell certificates of dispensation from penal legislation to Protestant Dissenters and Catholics.⁷ This seemed to observers to be the start of James ignoring his coronation oath and suspending the Test Act illegally. Tony Claydon claimed that James had a serious problem with sermons. On the one hand he attended few Anglican services during his reign; on the other, he had a large Anglican ecclesiastical

household with a full complement of chaplains and preachers, but they delivered their sermons in the chapels royal in which the sovereign's pew was empty.⁸

At James's coronation, his former chaplain, Bishop Francis Turner of Ely, preached an extraordinary sermon which cannot have been welcome to the King. The sermon grappled with a problem that affected many Anglicans: whether James would abuse his power and whether this damaged the nature of the Anglican doctrine of passive obedience to the King.⁹ Turner's text for his sermon was the coronation of Solomon in the Book of Chronicles. Turner compared James's and Solomon's coronations because, like Solomon's, James's title was 'firm and good', and 'his people were an obedient people'. But Turner's sermon struck some discordant notes. He asserted that no usurper could expect to 'reign prosperously' and that any questioning of James's claim was dangerous 'else there will be competitors'. Turner went on with discordant similes: he suggested that 'management of the sceptre' had to be as strong as the King's claim, and pointed to the precedents of 'the second Edward and Richard' as kings who had indisputable claims to their thrones but lost them through misgovernment. Drawing attention to these precedents seemed infelicitous. On the issue of the loyalty of subjects, Turner came close to contract theory when he claimed: 'since the wills of men are free, tis confest their leaves must be asked, whether they be happy or no; whether they will obey . . . For want of a people obedient and willing to be ruled by a gentle hand, the best of kings was most vilely cast away.' Turner also argued that people ceased to be good and religious when they rebelled.

He then turned to the issue of James's claim and said that, having been at Charles II's deathbed, he could attest that the King had wanted to be succeeded by his brother. He spoke of the deliverance 'from that abominable Excluding Bill', and warned those who would challenge James: 'take heed of destroying your country to build your own house'. At the end of the badly conceived sermon, Turner's audience must have felt that James's title to the throne was questionable, his peace dependent on his subjects' compliance, and his own success dependent on his wise rule. This cannot have been James's intention in choosing his former chaplain to preach his coronation sermon.¹⁰

Turner's coronation sermon may be one reason why James so quickly turned to Catholic priests as preachers in the chapels royal. From early in 1685, the chapel royal in St James's Palace was converted to a Catholic place of worship. James continued to hear Anglican sermons there, usually from Tory Anglican clergy who could be relied on to be uncontroversial, including Thomas Ken.¹¹ But, having dismissed the Bishop of London, Henry Compton, as dean of the chapels royal in September 1685, he instituted Catholic masses in the chapel and appointed Catholic priests to preach. The old Whitehall Chapel remained in Anglican use by Princess Anne, but James usually attended Catholic services at St James's Palace, where his Queen, Mary of Modena had her chapel. The chapel royal at St James's Palace, though used by both James and Mary, was principally the Queen's chapel.¹² However, its role was greatly expanded and it was used for sermons, masses, and later for the consecration of Catholic bishops for England. James also worshipped sometimes at Somerset House, where his sister-in-law the dowager Queen, Catherine of Braganza, had a

chapel. The provision of Queen Catherine's Catholic chapel at Somerset House, had been agreed in her marriage treaty. As part of this, she established a Benedictine community with priests drawn from various European religious houses. There was also a Franciscan friary next to the chapel which, though technically not part of her household, was overlooked by most and treated as if it was included in the marriage treaty. She also had three Portuguese Catholic chaplains in her service.¹³ Queen Catherine's chapel was 'targeted by the Jesuits as a ready way to influence the King and Queen at first hand . . . the Chapel thus became a tool in their struggle to re-convert the nation from the top down'.¹⁴ On occasion, James also attended mass at Windsor, at the Spanish ambassador's chapel, or those of Catholic peers, such as Lord Petre at Ingatestone Hall, northeast of London.¹⁵

James also built a new Catholic chapel at Whitehall Palace in 1685 close to the existing Tudor chapel royal. John Evelyn commented when he saw James's new elaborate Catholic chapel at Whitehall with six or seven Jesuit priests attending and a tabernacle on the altar that he came away 'not believing I should ever have lived to see such things in the K[ing] of England's palace'.¹⁶ James's new chapel royal established a second ecclesiastical hierarchy, including Father Edward Petre as clerk of the closet.¹⁷ James, as Duke of York, had already established a corps of about thirty Jesuit missionaries in London; from 1685 this number grew dramatically.¹⁸ The new chapel royal at Whitehall was unmistakably a political statement of James's restoration of a Catholic monarchy.¹⁹ James was forced to disguise the costs of the building and fitting out of the chapel as secret service money to avoid political opposition to it.²⁰ James also established a Catholic chapel in the Palace of Holyrood House in Edinburgh and spent £8,000 on plate for the celebration of the mass.²¹

Philip Ellis

The first sermon James heard in the chapel royal at St James's was a fortnight after the death of Charles II. The preacher was Philip Ellis, brother of Sir William Ellis who was appointed Secretary of State by James. Ellis was a Catholic convert who had entered the Benedictine order at Douai and had a reputation as a brilliant preacher. He had come to England as preacher-general a few weeks before James's accession. He was soon appointed chaplain by James and came to play an important part in his Catholicising policy. Ellis preached frequently before the King and seven of his sermons were printed at the King's command. In particular he preached an important sermon in November 1686 reassuring English landowners that James had no intention of taking back former monastic lands; Ellis had also persuaded James to appoint the Catholic John Massey as dean of Christ Church, Oxford.²²

Ellis's sermon on 24 February 1685 was on the three types of sin: sins of ignorance, inadvertence and obduracy. But his specific theme was the preaching of Jonah to convert the Assyrians. It was a parable adapted for the circumstances of the time: Jonah had converted the King of the Assyrians and the King bound his people to comply with Jonah's preaching. But the people were obdurate and in the end Nineveh was destroyed. Ellis was explicit in his meaning: 'But where is it that I speak? Is it not

to a Christian Assembly, to a Christian Town, an ancient Theatre of Religion? People will not believe daily experience, will not credit their common sense, will not hearken to their own reason and conviction; but despite of sense, reason, conscience and experience, will still persist in a vain and groundless presumption'.²³ His conclusion was that James should 'not be ashamed to correct and blot out this errata'.²⁴ This was a clarion call to the King to press on with his Catholicising policies, and the use of Jonah seemed to endorse the right of preachers to address political issues to a monarch. The dangers of a stubborn people who refused to follow their king was the centrepiece of his sermon and it must have been clear that Ellis intended to point out that the alternative to obeying James was national destruction.

A year later, at Easter 1686, Ellis returned to the topic of what should be done about wayward apostates from the Catholic Church. He said the biblical example was to break down idols, in the Old Testament they had 'banish'd the artificers, demolish'd the altars, but also cut down the groves, to efface even the memory of idolatry'.²⁵ Effacing the memory of the existence of the Church of England was an alarming prospect for the majority of the country. Nevertheless, James ordered that the sermon should be published by his printer, Henry Hills, so that his Anglican subjects could read Ellis's comments.²⁶ The sermon coincided with an intensive period of prayer and reflection by James, during which he spent many hours with the priests of his chapel and there were reports of conferences with the priests after the prayers.²⁷ Moreover, James was troubled by the recalcitrant Anglicanism of his people. When touring the country in 1686 and 1687, he sometimes bent to local feeling and allowed the Anglican liturgy to be used when he worshipped because he was told that public opinion would not tolerate the use of the Catholic liturgy.²⁸

The tendency of preachers, of all religious denominations, to preach by analogy and parable was a very common practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and so it was with the Catholic sermons preached before James.²⁹ On 25 October 1685, two months after the Duke of Monmouth met his grisly end in a badly botched beheading, the Jesuit John Pearsall preached before James in the chapel royal at St James's Palace.³⁰ Pearsall preached on the episode from St John's Gospel of a young nobleman who was sick. Pearsall might well have brought Monmouth to the mind of his audience when he referred to 'a rich, noble, young dying prince who lies groaning at death's door . . . I wish that the followers of sensuality, who make pleasures their God, live as they were never to die, imagine time to stand and laugh at discourses of another world . . . would turn their thoughts hither a little while.' If they were in any doubt, Pearsall added that wealth and position often led to 'restlessness and dissatisfaction'. It led to a sickness of the soul that he warned his audience to avoid.³¹

Ellis's sermon on 1 November 1685, also preached at St James's Palace, was perhaps intended to stiffen James's resolve. It coincided with James's exasperation at the refusal of Parliament to repeal the Test Act, which led to the proroguing of Parliament. Ellis's theme was the invocation of saints, a useful opportunity to advance a distinctively Catholic practice that was often attacked by Anglican preachers. Ellis pointed out that some of James's forebears were among the company of saints: 'many of your Royal Ancestors and mighty predecessors inherit a never fading crown

of glory and possess a Kingdom which they do not transmit'. In such a company of saints, Ellis said, 'the red and white roses are twisted in the same garland, the Edwards and the Henrys embrace and the fierce Briton rejoices that the Royal Blood of Scotland runs in English veins'. Ellis emphasised that James's reward for his religion would come in heaven.³² The sermon seemed designed to enable James to cope with setbacks and to focus on the reward he would receive in heaven rather than the obstructions he faced on earth.

The sermons preached a month later, during Advent 1685, addressed James's political agenda even more explicitly. On 13 December, Ellis preached on the idea of liberty. He said of people that they, 'stand in need of a strong rein to keep you from rushing into an endless series of irregularities and transgressions. And therefore you must be often warned that the rod is upon your back . . . God is in the midst of us . . . but that we know him not is the specific crime of man, an apostasy that discriminates you from all other creatures.' The demand for liberty, claimed Ellis, led to 'blood revenges, scandalous reflections, black calumnies, shameless commerces and unbridled liberties'.³³ On Christmas day, Thomas Godden preached at the chapel royal at Somerset House on the idea of the law.³⁴ According to Godden, the law of God required men 'to conform our wills to His, quickly whilst we are in the way of this life, lest at any time . . . He delivers us to the judge and the judge to the officer and we be cast into prison.' But God had left a body on earth to guide people in the form of the Church, and the Church's teaching was 'Learn of me to be obedient to your superiors'.³⁵ The warning was underscored by Ellis on New Year's Day 1685/86 at St James's Palace when he emphasised that humankind was sinful and his particular sin was to disobey God. Godden and Ellis were normalising James's experience: he would naturally face demands for liberty from fallen and sinful men and women and had to rely on the authority of the Church.

Five days later, at Somerset House before Queen Catherine, John Bentham, another Douai alumnus who was a doctor of the Sorbonne, preached on the arrival of the wise men in St Matthew's Gospel.³⁶ The theme of Bentham's sermon was the rebellious nature of the Jews and their apostasy of the golden calf. Many of his observations were as apt for the case of Anglicans as for Jews: 'To indulge such as once faithfully served him [God], though so unhappy as sometimes to run astray; to bless that race whose ancestors have been loyal, to preserve a country which never wanted some true servants of God, although many failed in their duty, seems worthy a divine bounty.' Bentham went on to suggest that if two servants were equally negligent and undutiful: one who had been turned out of your house but the second who had been part of your family, you would regard the second 'as infinitely more criminal'.³⁷ It seems unlikely that many in the chapel royal would have regarded this as equally applicable to Anglicans as to Jews.

Obedience from the Pulpit

By Whitsun 1686, Catholic royal chaplains were getting into their stride and politics became even more explicit in their sermons. William Hall, a Carthusian who had

studied at Lisbon and was said to be the best preacher in England, addressed politics in a sermon at Somerset House, in which he made an aside that beasts revolt against their owners because they lack reason.³⁸ Soon after he was made a chaplain in ordinary to James. But it was Ellis who took these bat-squeaks and amplified them in an explicit attack on those who might oppose James. Obstinacy was, said Ellis, an 'execrable crime', though he indicated that God would forgive those who were rebellious: 'He hath a tender compassion for the most rebellious sinner; and in spite of all provocations, acts of hostility and defacing the beauty of a heart . . . the print of his finger still remaining on the creature.' But, he continued: 'If a people should depose their prince, they would commit the foulest, the most unjust and most unchristian action in the world . . . but if the giddy multitude proceed to a new election and put up the mortal enemy of their lawful sovereign then 'tis a contempt of [the Holy Ghost].'³⁹

The drum of obedience was sounded at almost any opportunity in chapel royal sermons. Thomas Codrington, a particularly well-connected priest who had been secretary to Cardinal Howard in Rome and was personally commissioned by Inno-cent XI to return England to Catholicism, preached before James in November 1686 on the importance of confession. Codrington recounted the story of the Emperor Charles V who confessed his sins, to which his confessor replied: 'You have confessed the sins of Charles, now confess the sins of Caesar.' Codrington emphasised that while rulers were only accountable to God, 'the subject [was responsible] for his behaviour to those in authority'.⁴⁰ Codrington's sermon clearly placed the onus of obedience on both James and his subjects. A week later Philip Ellis touched on the theme of the monarch's duty in a sermon on Herod's imprisonment of John the Baptist. Ellis denounced Herod's corrupt ministers, but his wrath was aimed at Herod's assertion that the time was not right to proclaim Christ because it might cause some disturbance in the state.⁴¹ This was a veiled attack on James's ministers who had counselled the same and argued that James should temper his Catholicising policies with time for people to accommodate them.⁴² Ellis was in no doubt that this was the same advice that had corrupted Herod.

The most full-throated sermon of James's reign was preached by the Jesuit Edward Scarisbrike, at the Whitehall chapel on 30 January 1687, on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Charles I. Scarisbrike had been educated at the English College at St Omer and had been named by Titus Oates as a conspirator during the Popish Plot. In 1687 he left his mission in Lancashire to join a new Jesuit establishment in the Savoy, founded by James. His 30 January sermon was published under the title 'Catholick Loyalty: Upon the Subject of Government and Obedience'. Scarisbrike made a clear statement of the divine right of kings: kings ruled by God's commission and were only bound to obey Him. The death of Charles I was a 'treasonable and barbarous regicide; a regicide committed in face of the sun, in cold blood, and under a pretext of law; nay and to consummate the wickedness, by the hands of rebellious subjects . . . a diabolical violence upon the person and dignity of a lawful, a just, a merciful and most excellent prince'. He argued that it would not have happened if the people had understood the biblical injunction to obey rulers, and that divine authority and

subjects' obedience to their rulers were not conditional: 'It is not in the power of the person to un-king the office; and much less in the power of the people to call God's immediate minister to an account . . . there is no room for intruders betwixt the King of Kings and his Vice-gerents.'

Indeed, Scarisbrike seemed as keen to instruct James in his duties as to demand obedience from his subjects; he said to the King that God's teaching was: 'you hold your commission at My will and pleasure; there is no other power that hath any thing to do with you. I have placed you in the throne of my greatness; invested you with the robes of dignity. I have armed you with the sword of justice, I have deposited all the ensigns of majesty in your hands, not for yourselves to alienate or dispose of, but in truth as you shall answer for them at my tribunal. Who then shall dare to oppose you?' If this was not clear enough, Scarisbrike ended by making a direct comparison between the start of the rebellion against Charles I with the complaints and demands for liberties under James.⁴³ It was an astonishingly political sermon which can have left James and his subjects in no doubt about the nature of the divine right that the Catholic Church expected of James. It was followed a week later by Thomas Codrington who claimed that those who had opposed Charles I had suffered from 'spiritual blindness'.⁴⁴

The frailty of human understanding was a theme taken up by other preachers. James Ayray, chaplain to the Spanish ambassador, preached at Somerset House, on 10 April 1687, on the importance of obedience. Ayray claimed that since men and women have 'veiled' judgement, they should be led by the Church through mysteries 'which do surpass the reach of human understanding'.⁴⁵ The most advanced form of this position was adopted by Bonaventure Gifford. Gifford came from an old English Catholic family and in January 1687 was consecrated bishop at St James's Palace and appointed vicar apostolic for the Midland District of England. He had also criticised James for having the Countess of Dorchester as his mistress, which the King took in good part. On the fourth Sunday after Easter 1687 he preached before the King at Whitehall. His theme was the infallibility of the Church and the warnings in the Bible to those who refused to hear it. But his argument was also designed to propel James to action; he said, 'I am persuaded, and not without good grounds, that there are many in this nation who . . . would most willingly embrace the Catholick faith, and who wish nothing more, than that things were brought to that pass, that they might do it without danger of reproach from their friends and acquaintances.'⁴⁶ He went on: 'I appeal to all you, that have been converted to our Church, whether you have not found its doctrine and practice very different from what it was represented to you? You therefore that are yet kept out of the Communion of this Church by the like misrepresentations, you owe this justice and charity both to us and yourselves.'⁴⁷ With the nation's leading convert sitting in his congregation, Gifford went on to compare Anglicans who would not convert to 'Turks and Jews'.⁴⁸ The alignment of political obedience to James with spiritual obedience to the Catholic Church was one which was clearly a powerful theme in the sermons James heard.

Promoting Catholicism

In the second half of James's reign, court sermons advanced a strong defence of the Catholic Church. On 24 August 1687, Sylvester Jenks preached a sermon before James on his visit to Worcester. Jenks was a Douai professor who recalled that Worcester had played an important part during the Civil War. Jenks used that example to claim: 'we shall always be ready to expose our lives and fortunes in your Majesty's service. It is not in the power of subjects to give their prince a more convincing assurance that they will always be loyal, that they always have been so. I only wish with all my heart that we had ever been as loyal to the Church as to the State; and that we had as zealously opposed the Reformation.'⁴⁹ But his central thrust was to denounce attacks that had recently been advanced by Anglican clergy on the doctrine of transubstantiation. Jenks saw this as an example of human pride and dismissed Anglicans as the latest in a line of schismatics.

Jenks clearly impressed James as he was asked to preach before the King on the theme of transubstantiation, on 14 June 1688 and 26 August 1688, at Whitehall and Windsor. In the first sermon, preached four days after the birth of James's son, Jenks argued that enemies of transubstantiation were the enemies of the Church.⁵⁰ The second sermon was a much stronger attack on the Church of England, decrying its 'pretended reformation'. He argued that transubstantiation was a 'Mystery . . . above their small capacity; their weak imaginations could not reach it. See here an ancient model of the modern Reformation!' He called on Anglicans to: 'acknowledge the injustice of the Reformation; return home joyfully to their old Mother church and full of admiration of God's mercy to them shew forth the praises of him, who call'd them out of darkness into his wonderful light'.⁵¹ These sermons came as James's reign was approaching its crisis, with the trial of the seven bishops in June and the imminent threat of invasion from William of Orange.

In an extraordinary melodramatic performance on 13 April 1688, Angel Bix, a Franciscan and chaplain to the Spanish ambassador, who was installed at James's new friary near Lincoln's Inn Fields, preached a blood-drenched sermon on rebellion and treason against God. The sermon included numerous mentions of bloodletting and frequent ejaculations such as 'Ha!' The printed version included all these as well as many exclamation marks. Bix argued that Judas was the chief rebel, who abused the kiss, the sign of peace, for his treachery. He railed at those who betrayed Christ and compared them to Adam's rebelliousness. His only comforting words were for his Catholic listeners, to whom he said: 'at least you Catholicks, you the faithful children of my Church, you that so often eat the flesh and drink the blood of the lamb, do not you increase my pains.'⁵² Of course, such sermons were of little comfort to James when William invaded. Father Edward Petre had already packed his goods and left in November and abandoned James.⁵³ Other preachers, including Gifford and Ellis were briefly imprisoned, as Catholic bishops, but were released and fled with the others to France.

When James left Britain at the end of 1688, there was of course the question as to what would happen to his Catholic chapels. Those which had been Anglican chapels

were simply returned to their former use and Catholic items removed. William of Orange's decision to hold a number of meetings at the end of 1688 and early 1689 in the Queen's chapel at St James's was clearly a signal that the Catholic use of the building was ended. William also granted James's new Catholic chapel at Whitehall to the French Protestant congregation in London for their use.⁵⁴ The fires at Whitehall Palace in 1691 and 1698 meant that James's Catholic chapel was destroyed.⁵⁵

Other than the horror and distaste of many of James's Protestant ministers and other observers, there is little evidence of the direct impact of the court sermons on James or his policies. Lord Ailesbury, a gentleman of the bedchamber, complained of James that 'too much of his time was taken up at holy exercises'.⁵⁶ It cannot be said that James followed one or other policy directly because of the impact of the sermons. Nevertheless, the sermons preached at the chapels royal created an ambient expectation of James's Catholicising policies. They provided a theological and socio-political justification for James. If he experienced moments of faint-heartedness or loss of confidence, the sermons reminded him that he was doing what the Church and God held to be right. Those who opposed him were overturning the natural order by their resistance to an anointed king to whom they owed obedience. None of these ideas were new to James, but the consistency with which this message was broadcast from the pulpit with the sanction of divine authority may have had an effect on him.

Certainly to contemporaries and historians, the influence of his priests on James has been regarded as strong. In particular, historians have detected James's strong commitment to the Jesuit Order. Moreover the Jesuits themselves saw the significance of their position at court. By 1687, they were exasperated by the apolitical position of James's confessor, Father Mansuet, and forced him out, replacing him with the Jesuit John Warner. Father Petre admitted to Father La Chaise, confessor to Louis XIV, that the Jesuits exerted a considerable influence over James.⁵⁷ The Jesuits were only one of a number of Catholic influences on James; Benedictines and Dominicans also seemed to urge James along the same path.⁵⁸ The Catholic clergy preaching before James also knew that their sermons were potent. Father Lewis Sabran's letters back to his provincial in 1688 acknowledged that his repeated preaching about the time of the birth of the Prince of Wales were consciously controversial sermons.⁵⁹ Moreover, by October 1688, politicians like Lord Sunderland realised how much political clout James's Catholic priests exerted. At that time it was he, as minister, who had to seek out and beg for the support of Lord Melfort and Phillip Ellis, now a bishop.⁶⁰ Even Nathaniel Crewe, Bishop of Durham, who collaborated with James for most of his reign and sat on the Ecclesiastical Commission, found himself unable to tolerate the Catholic priests' influence. When Father Petre was appointed to the Privy Council in November 1687 Crewe refused to attend meetings as a result.⁶¹ The impact of the priests on James was not lost on the lowly members of the royal household. Mr Dixie, James's coachman, said as he drove the King to exile: 'God damn Father Petre! But for him, we had not been here!'⁶²

The sermons preached before James were a potent expression of the Church's expectations of the King. It is not possible to establish a direct line between each sermon and a course of action. Nevertheless, James's serious attention to preaching and the timing of some sermons to coincide with political events is suggestive. If Mr Dixie saw priests as responsible for James's problems, perhaps that was a view shared more widely in Britain. What can be asserted is that the court sermons of James II created a theological matrix closely attuned to the Catholicising policies that triggered his downfall.

Notes

- 1 Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second* (London: J. W. Lovell, 1848).
- 2 William Gibson, *James II and the Trial of the Seven Bishops* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), chapters 2 and 3.
- 3 At the same time, James was tormented by the failure of his Queen, Mary of Modena, to carry a baby to term. She repeatedly miscarried, and this seems to have been associated by James with his failure to re-establish Catholicism in England. David John Peter Baldwin, 'The Politico-Religious Usage of the Queen's Chapel, 1623–1688' (Durham University, MLitt thesis, 1999), p. 140.
- 4 Thomas Sprat, *A True Account and Declaration of The Horrid Conspiracy against the late King, His Present Majesty and the Government* (London: Thomas Newcomb, 1685), pp. 19, 158–9.
- 5 Christoph Ketterer's *To Meddle with Matters of State: Political Sermons in England, c.1660–c.1700* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2020) discusses court sermons preached before James II in the context of public sermons before Charles II and James II. Ketterer argues that the principal purpose of the sermons was to resist anti-Catholic preaching. He does not examine them from the viewpoint of their impact on James II himself.
- 6 For the sermon culture, see Hugh Adlington, Peter McCullough and Emma Rhatigan (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon, 1689–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Joris van Eijnatten, *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century, A New History of the Sermon 4* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
- 7 Bernard and Margaret Pawley, *Rome and Canterbury Through Four Centuries* (London: Mowbray, 1974), pp. 46–7. Even the Pawleys, who were sympathetic to Catholicism, called James's policy 'a fork-tongued policy of universal toleration, intending in this way to bring in justice for his fellow-religionists by a side-wind'.
- 8 Tony Claydon, 'The Sermon Culture of the Glorious Revolution: Williamite Preaching and Jacobite Anti-Preaching, 1685–1702', in Adlington, McCullough and Rhatiga (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, pp. 487–8.
- 9 James Ellesby, *The doctrine of passive obedience asserted in a sermon preach'd on January 30, 1684* (London: William Crooke, 1685).

- 10 Francis Turner, *A Sermon Preached Before their Majesties K. James II and Q. Mary at their Coronation in Westminster Abby, April 23. 1685* (London: Richard Clavell, 1685), passim. James's problems with Turner's sermon must have paled in comparison with those with his chaplain Thomas Jones ('sometime Domestick and Naval Chaplain to his R. Highness the Duke of York'), who wrote *Elymas the Sorcerer: Or, a Memorial Towards the Discovery Of the Bottom of this Popish-Plot, And How Far His R. Highness's Directors have been Faithful to His Honour and Interest, Or the Peace of the Nation. Publish'd upon Occasion of a Passage in the Late Dutchess of York's Declaration for Changing Her Religion* (London: H. Jones, 1682).
- 11 Gibson, *James II and the Trial of the Seven Bishops*, pp. 42–3.
- 12 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson 978 details the costs of provisions for the Queen's chapel at St James's.
- 13 Baldwin, 'Queen's Chapel', pp. 144, 148, 159. The pulpit in Queen Catherine's chapel was said to be one of the tallest in London with seven steps up to the platform.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- 15 Such new chapels were highly controversial and the creation of a Catholic chapel in the City of London led to a riot in 1686. Ernest Testa, *James II: Bigot or Saint?* (Lewes: Book Guild, 1987) p. 57.
- 16 Patrick Dillon, *The Last Revolution: 1688 and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), pp. 73, 74.
- 17 London, The National Archives, LS/13/255, Lord Steward's warrants of appointments for the chapel royal.
- 18 Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, 7 vols (London: Burns and Oates, 1879), vol. 5, p. 215. James had ignored the 1674 Order in Council which banished all Catholic clergy then in England and which led most secular priests to withdraw to the Continent.
- 19 Arthur T. Bolton and H. Duncan Hendry, *The Seventh Volume of the Wren Society, 1930: The Royal Palaces of Winchester, Whitehall, Kensington, and St James's* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), pp. 73, 120.
- 20 Baldwin, 'Queen's Chapel', p. 157.
- 21 Duncan Thomson *et al.*, *Dynasty: The Royal House of Stewart*, ed. Rosalind K. Marshall (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 1990), p. 84.
- 22 Geoffrey Scott, 'Ellis, Philip (1652–1726)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Early in 1688 Ellis was appointed the first vicar apostolic of the Western District, and was consecrated on 6 May 1687 by Ferdinand d'Adda, Archbishop of Amasia *in partibus*, at the chapel royal in St James's, where the King had founded a monastery of fourteen Benedictine monks. Baldwin suggested that Ellis's sermon on monastic lands must have been the product of close negotiation with James to attempt to ameliorate anti-Catholic sentiment among the landowning classes, although there is also evidence that it troubled James who once again ascribed his wife's miscarriage to his failure to establish Catholicism in England. Baldwin, 'Queen's Chapel', p. 142.
- 23 *A Select Collection of Catholick Sermons, Preach'd before their Majesties, King James II, Mary Queen-Consort and Catherine Queen-Dowager*, 2 vols (London: n.p., 1741), vol. 1, pp. 306–8.

- 24 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 296.
- 25 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 53.
- 26 Worldcat does not have a record for the publication of the sermon, but it may be one of those recorded in the Bielefeld Academic Search Engine (BASE).
- 27 Testa, *James II*, p. 54.
- 28 Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine and Sin*, Royal Historical Society Studies in History: New Series (London: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2015), p. 116.
- 29 One of the religious works that had most offended James while Duke of York was Samuel Johnson's work on Julian the Apostate, which was a thinly veiled attack on James as an apostate from Anglicanism, and which endorsed the legitimacy of resistance to him. Samuel Johnson, *Julian the Apostate: Being A Short Account of his Life, the Sense of the Primitive Christians about His Succession, and their Behaviour Towards Him, Together with A Comparison of Popery and Paganism* (London: Langley Curtis, 1682).
- 30 Pearsall was one of the Jesuits attached to Queen Catherine's chapel. Baldwin, 'Queen's Chapel', p. 183.
- 31 *Catholick Sermons*, vol. 2, pp. 463–9.
- 32 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 6–7.
- 33 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 74–84.
- 34 Godden was almoner of Queen Catherine of Braganza and had achieved some notoriety during the Popish Plot when he was one of the falsely accused. In 1686 Godden was one of the Catholic priests who defended the Real Presence at a conference before the King against William Jane and Simon Patrick. *Catholic Encyclopedia* online edition www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5224 (accessed 29 April 2018).
- 35 *Catholick Sermons*, vol. 1, pp. 136, 154.
- 36 It is unclear whether sermons preached at Somerset House were solely before the Queen Dowager. The chapel was reserved for her use but it seems likely that on some occasions the Queen, Mary of Modena, and James himself were present. Two months later Bentham was to preach before James in a highly defensive sermon which emphasised 'The Catholick Church was always careful to put just bounds and limits to that honour which her children paid to the Virgin Mother' and seemed designed to answer Anglican concerns about Mariology. *Catholick Sermons*, vol. 2, p. 22. A similar sermon by the Jesuit Henry Humberstone – delivered at Worcester – defended the Catholic practice of making the sign of the cross. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 71.
- 37 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 200, 212.
- 38 James Hogg, 'Hall, William (1655–1718)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. *Catholick Sermons*, vol. 2, p. 107. The Jesuit Edward Scarisbrike in a sermon on the third Sunday after Pentecost made the same point: that those who suffered from 'spiritual leprosy' 'tend to mutinies or rebellion, they are presently check'd and forced to remain in due subordination to reason, and to follow the train of princely virtues'. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 346–7.
- 39 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 239, 249.
- 40 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 49–50.
- 41 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 70.

- 42 Paradoxically, Ellis was sceptical when, in June 1687, Lord Sunderland converted to Catholicism; he did not believe Sunderland's was a genuine embrace of Catholicism and was simply a political expedient to retain the King's favour. John Philipps Kenyon, *Robert Spencer, Earl of Sunderland, 1641–1702* (London: Longman Green & Co., 1958), p. 198.
- 43 *Catholick Sermons*, vol. 1, pp. 228, 231, 237, 240, 251.
- 44 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 263.
- 45 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 107.
- 46 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 172.
- 47 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 174.
- 48 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 176.
- 49 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 346.
- 50 At the same time, Father Petre had dissuaded James from granting a general pardon for refusal to read the Declaration of Indulgence. Testa, *James II*, p. 85. It was soon after this that Nottingham and Clarendon refused to attend Privy Council meetings at which Petre was present. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 51 *Catholick Sermons*, vol. 2, pp. 282, 335, 342.
- 52 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 427–8.
- 53 Stuart Handley, 'Sir Edward Petre, 3rd Baronet', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
- 54 Edgar Sheppard, *Memorials of St James's Palace*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1894), vol. 2, p. 237.
- 55 The sculptures from the chapel were taken to Westminster Abbey and in 1820 relocated to Burnham-on-Sea, where the dean was also rector: Robert Dunning (ed.), *Somerset Churches and Chapels: Building, Repair and Restoration* (Tiverton: Halsgrove, 2007), p. 67.
- 56 Chandos Sydney Cedric Brudenell-Bruce Cardigan, *The Life and Loyalties of Thomas Bruce, a Biography of Thomas Earl of Ailesbury and Elgin ...* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 110.
- 57 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson letters 62, fos 5–8.
- 58 John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England, 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 235–6.
- 59 Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, vol. 5, p. 292.
- 60 Kenyon, *Robert Spencer, Earl of Sunderland*, p. 222.
- 61 Charles Edwin Whitting, *Nathaniel, Lord Crewe, Bishop of Durham (1674–1721) and His Diocese* (London: SPCK, 1940), p. 167.
- 62 Cardigan, *The Life and Loyalties of Thomas Bruce*, p. 139.