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## The culture of fasting in early Stuart Parliaments\*

### Abstract

The fasts, proposed and observed by parliament in the first half of the seventeenth century, have always been defined as opportunities for propaganda. This article focuses instead on their cultural and religious meanings: why MPs believed that the act of fasting itself was important and what they hoped it would achieve. It argues that fasts were proposed for two reasons: to forge unity between parliament and the king at a time of growing division, with the aim of making parliamentary sessions more productive and successful, and to provide more direct resolution to the nation's problems by invoking divine intervention. Fast motions commanded widespread support across parliament because they were rooted in the dominant theory of causation – divine providence – and reflected the gradual conventionalisation of fasting in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. However, this consensus seemed to wane in the early 1640s as divisions between Charles I and some of his most vocal MPs widened, while the fast day observed on 17 November 1640 was used by some MPs to express their opposition to Charles's religious policy, especially regarding the siting of the communion table/altar and the position from where the service was to be read. The article concludes by reflecting on how a study of parliamentary fasting can contribute to wider debates on commensality and abstinence.

**Key words:** parliament; fasting; religious practice; divine providence; Charles I; commensality; abstinence.

On 28 January 1629, the houses of parliament jointly petitioned Charles I for a general fast to effect a 'perfect and a most happy Union and Agreement' with the king and to promote the 'happy Success' of the parliamentary session. They argued that 'the Divine Majesty is, for our Sins, exceedingly offended with us', as was demonstrated both by the recent 'Jealousies and Distractions' between the king and his subjects and the 'continued and increasing Miseries of the Reformed Churches abroad'. The following day, Charles I gave his answer. He disputed the reasons parliament had given for the fast, arguing that their 'chief Motive' was to elicit divine intervention for their protestant brethren abroad fighting the Habsburgs. While he acknowledged that 'the deplorable State of the Reformed Churches abroad, is too true', he argued that 'Fighting will do them more Good than Fasting'. He agreed to order a fast, even though he was 'not so well satisfied with the Necessity of it at this Time, as you are'. But, he pointedly reminded parliament that their custom of petitioning for general fasts at the start of every session was 'but lately begun' and that he expected that his agreement this time 'shall not hereafter be brought into Precedent'.<sup>1</sup> Charles had reason to feel aggrieved. Unlike any of his predecessors, he had received petitions for a general fast in every parliamentary session since his accession (1625, 1626 and during both sessions of the parliament of 1628–29). And, though some MPs argued to the contrary, there were no precedents for opening parliamentary sessions with either a parliamentary or a general fast.<sup>2</sup> Even after the hiatus of the personal rule, the Commons continued to petition the king to begin the parliamentary session with a fast.<sup>3</sup>

Since the publication of Hugh Trevor–Roper’s seminal article on the fast sermons of the Long Parliament, fasting has been defined as a weapon in the propaganda armoury of either parliament or the king.<sup>4</sup> This is, perhaps, unsurprising considering, on the one hand, the rich body of texts produced for fast days, particularly the fasts sermons preached before the Commons, and, on the other, early modernists’ attention to representations of power.<sup>5</sup> Much less consideration has been paid to the meaning and function of fasting as a religious practice and as a valuable and efficacious exercise in its own right, despite both the long–standing interest in the relationship between politics and religion by historians of the Civil War and the recognition of the centrality of providential ideas (which were fundamental to fasting) to early–modern religious belief and practice, social policy, politics and culture.<sup>6</sup>

This article re–examines MPs’ motions for parliamentary and national fasts from the perspective of religious practices and providential ideas. Its aim is not only to challenge existing orthodoxies but also to reflect on how a study of fasting can contribute to our understanding of early Stuart parliaments and, beyond the history of parliament, to consider what it can tell us about wider cultures of commensality and abstinence. It focuses on the period between 1624 and the outbreak of civil war when parliament first began to petition the king for national fasts.<sup>7</sup> It suggests that these motions grew out of the conventionalisation of fasting in the early seventeenth century, the centrality of providential ideas of causation, and the revival of religious practices in parliament after the Break with Rome. It demonstrates that the principal reasons for fasting were to establish unity between king and parliament

at a time of growing division over supply, religion and foreign policy, and to invoke divine assistance in remedying the nation's problems. Though, as Charles recognized, there remained potential for propaganda – in terms of defining what provoked providential warnings and which problems or issues required divine assistance, as well as in the production of accompanying texts (orders, liturgies and sermons)<sup>8</sup> – this function was of secondary importance until 1640–41 when political differences had hardened so much that the Commons prohibited certain categories of cleric from preaching<sup>9</sup> and some MPs used the accompanying service to protest against Caroline religious policy, particularly the positioning of the communion table/altar at the east end of the church, the recent practice of reading the service from there, and the passing of seventeen new canons by Convocation in 1640.

## I

Fasting had been a problematic activity in 16th-century England. On the one hand, it was associated with Catholicism, works-righteousness (the claim that salvation could be earned or sustained by good works), and superstition, and was regarded by many as irksome. On the other, protestants could not – and, in the case of the two earliest evangelical writers on the practice, William Tyndale and Thomas Becon, did not – deny that there was significant scriptural support for it.<sup>10</sup> Protestants were also well aware how quick Catholics were to criticize them for neglecting such a staple of the scriptures.<sup>11</sup> In the early decades of the Reformation, fast-breaking was a way of both demonstrating one's commitment to evangelicalism and attracting others. But, from the middle of the century, fasting slowly became a more accepted part of protestant practice.<sup>12</sup> From as early as 1548, the crown made

fasting less onerous to the unzealous by relaxing prohibitions on abstaining from dairy products and eggs;<sup>13</sup> it defended fasting against accusations of works-righteousness, and it explained the continuation of Friday fish-days in the Elizabethan homilies.<sup>14</sup> Assimilation of fasting into protestant practice accelerated from the early 1560s when the state began to order nationwide fasting at times of crisis: during outbreaks of plague (1563, 1593, 1603), heightened fears of catholic conspiracy (1586), and periods of dearth (1596).<sup>15</sup> More controversially, private fasting was also organised, by puritans, as additional days to national fasts,<sup>16</sup> to supplement other occasions of nationwide special worship where fasts had not been ordered,<sup>17</sup> for other crises or events for which nationwide special worship had not been ordered at all,<sup>18</sup> and for individual or collective reasons.<sup>19</sup>

By the mid-1620s, when MPs began to petition for fasts, there was a well-established literature that defended and provided guides to private and public fasting, even though the welcome absences of war, plague, and famine had meant that there was little in the way of nationwide fasting in practice.<sup>20</sup> This literature had two important aspects. Most significantly, it underlined that fasting was not a puritan preserve. Though many works were written by the godly, including Henry Holland,<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Bownde (a member of the Dedham conference, which held monthly fasts),<sup>22</sup> William Perkins,<sup>23</sup> George Downham,<sup>24</sup> and the Oxfordshire combination member, Henry Scudder (a lengthy section in the fourth edition of his very popular, *The christians daily walke*),<sup>25</sup> there were also treatises like Henry Mason's *Christian hvmiliation*, first printed in 1625 and reissued in 1627.<sup>26</sup> Mason was an important figure in Arminianism and his treatise diverged surprisingly little

from those by puritans. Indeed, he could be more extreme than his godly peers on occasions: he advocated a strict line on abstinence and rejected the practice of taking moderate evening suppers.<sup>27</sup> Second, contemporary writers, from Mason to Scudder, condemned the relative neglect of fasting and encouraged the 'better vse of this holy discipline, then of late yeeres men haue bin accustomed to doe.'<sup>28</sup>

These advocates recommended fasting for multiple reasons. Most obviously, it was considered to be a valuable preparative to prayer, hearing God's word, taking the sacrament, and as 'a necessary companion' to repentance.<sup>29</sup> But, crucially, it was also regarded as essential in what might nowadays be termed more secular contexts. For individuals, it was, in Mason's words, a 'good Exercise to begin our Callings & all important businesses withall', such as work as a magistrate or beginning a new trade or profession, because, through it, 'we might hope for his [i.e. God's] blessing to direct vs.'<sup>30</sup> For communities and nations, public fasting was used to ward off God's imminent or threatened wrath, to alleviate existing judgements (such as war, dearth or disease), to seek the relief 'of our brethren, neighbour Churches', and when a nation 'did enterprise or execute any speciall thing which did highly concerne Gods glorie, and the generall good of all Gods people.'<sup>31</sup>

Belief in the efficacy of fasting became conventional partly because it was rooted in both scriptural authority and in the principal early-modern theory of causation: divine providence. There were two types of providence. First, it was widely believed that God had mapped out all events on earth, large and small, at the time of Creation (general providence) and, second, that he intervened in, and disrupted,

everyday life in response to the realm's collective godliness or sin (special or particular providence).<sup>32</sup> Peace, plentiful harvests and military victories were signs of God's blessings, while droughts, floods, famines, plagues and military defeats were believed to be divine warnings about the nation's collective sins.<sup>33</sup> While the most straightforward strategy to ensure national peace and prosperity was to avoid sin, human weakness and the existence of the devil made this impossible. Periodic fasting was, therefore, essential as it effected the humiliation and repentance necessary to assuage the divine anger provoked by people's sins. It stirred people to prayer, helped give themselves 'more seriously to holy meditations', removed the 'pamperedness and pride of the flesh', and brought the body 'into subjection to the soule, and both body and soule to the will of God more readily, then otherwise they would be.'<sup>34</sup> Fasting made people's petitions more pleasing to God than prayer alone, and so, more likely to succeed.<sup>35</sup> In Becon's famous phrase, fasting provided the 'wynges of prayer', by which 'prayer flieth vp vnto y<sup>e</sup> throne of the diuine maieste, & is the better accepted in Gods presence'.<sup>36</sup>

Invoking divine assistance for the benefit of the realm was a well-established and familiar exercise in parliament long before the mid-1620s. Pre-Reformation parliaments had traditionally opened with votive masses and a sermon and, although these practices waned or stopped during Edward VI's reign, analogous exercises gradually revived. Intercessory prayers, that appealed to God for his protection and petitioned him to preserve the queen, were said daily in the Commons from at least Elizabeth's first parliament; from 1581, prayers were also said before the election of the Speaker.<sup>37</sup> As John Cooper has emphasized, these



prayers were participatory rather than passive exercises, requiring MPs to acknowledge and affirm each appeal.<sup>38</sup> Finally, in 1581, the puritan MP, Paul Wentworth called for a parliamentary fast 'for the Assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to the Furtherance of his Glory, the Preservation of her Majesty, and the better Direction of the Actions of this House', though his motion was quickly quashed by the queen.<sup>39</sup>

As political difficulties increased in the decade before the first parliamentary call for a nationwide fast (1624), MPs' use of religious exercises to facilitate parliamentary business intensified. At the start of the parliaments of 1614 and 1621, the godly MP, Sir James Perrot, successfully proposed that the house of commons should take communion collectively.<sup>40</sup> This was a response to growing tensions between James and parliament over crown finance, supply, redress of grievances, and religion; suspicion and mistrust of the king, especially about 'undertakers'; and a lack of consensus within the house itself over crown finance, supply, and war.<sup>41</sup> For Perrot, collective communion provided a practical means of addressing these divisions.<sup>42</sup> It would establish harmony between the king and the house and within the house itself ('be a parliament of love between the King and us').<sup>43</sup> It would create unity in the house, partly through the expectation that communion was only taken when personal differences had been reconciled, but primarily because it would expose and exclude Catholics and recusants ('keep the Trojan horse out of the House') while 'free[ing] those that shall take it' (especially godly MPs) from the 'unjust suspicion' that they were troublemakers who obstructed the royal agenda.<sup>44</sup> Finally, it would

simply put 'A Blessing ... upon all other Consultations' because 'Humane affaires' prospered best 'when Gods service is ioyned with them'.<sup>45</sup>

## II

Within days of James's final parliament opening in February 1624, Perrot made his now customary proposal for collective communion. Invoking a phrase from James's star chamber speech of 1616 — '*A Jove principium*' — and well aware that the previous parliament had ended in acrimony,<sup>46</sup> Perrot argued that collective communion would effect (and be a sign of) 'Unity in Mind and Religion, and of our Charity', as well as act as 'a Thanksgiving, for our Meeting, and for the Prince his safe Return [from Spain]'.<sup>47</sup> Immediately after the motion was passed, another godly MP, Sir Edward Cecil, argued they should follow the 'pious course' of the Low Countries 'who in all weighty causes do seek a blessing of God' and proposed a general fast for both the house and the nation at large.<sup>48</sup> His motion met with little opposition among MPs; it was quickly passed and the house agreed to petition the king.<sup>49</sup> James responded immediately, stating that he would consult with the bishops, but, thereafter, it sunk without trace, either because it was opposed by James (or the bishops) or because it was simply overtaken by more pressing matters.<sup>50</sup> Why did Cecil think a fast was necessary? Why did it gain so much support in the house? And why, even though it failed, did MPs continue to call for fasts in Charles's first three parliaments?

Cecil shared Perrot's and others' belief that parliament should begin with communion as a means of effecting unity and charity: he was 'Glad that we have fallen upon the right beginning'.<sup>51</sup> But, he argued, 'an act of greater humiliation' – prayer and fasting – was 'necessary in these times'.<sup>52</sup> James's strategy to regain the Palatinate was in tatters and, as he was unwilling to back officially the 'patriot' coalition that Charles and Buckingham had developed, English policy seemed rudderless.<sup>53</sup> There were deep anxieties about Spain's ambitions, and abilities, to dominate the continent, the fate of protestant brethren abroad, and, indeed, of England itself.<sup>54</sup> Anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish feelings were running high; Catholics and recusants were perceived to becoming more brazen in their actions, and rumours of plots and secret societies abounded.<sup>55</sup> Faced with addressing, and solving, these problems, communion alone was insufficient: it would only create and signal unity. It was necessary to petition for more direct divine assistance: a fast would be 'a preparative with God for his blessing' on the 'great business' or 'great enterprise' on which they were embarked.<sup>56</sup> It would also:

cheer up the languishing spirits of all the well-affected to religion, who of late time did faint under the fears that the state of our religion did begin to change, and it would confirm and encourage them in the hope and expectation of a blessed issue of an enterprise begun so happily.<sup>57</sup>

James's consistent rejection of demands for harsher treatment of Catholics; high profile conversions to catholicism, notably by Buckingham's mother and father-in-law, and the growing prominence of Catholics at the Jacobean court had left many puritans feeling beleaguered.<sup>58</sup> Opponents of the Spanish match had been labelled seditious puritans who were as dangerous as Jesuits; some even feared they would

be tried for treason.<sup>59</sup> For Cecil, a fast would rally these long-suffering and much maligned subjects; subjects who were, he believed, the king's best and most loyal servants.

The principal purpose of the fast, therefore, was to invoke divine assistance to help parliament address the realm's problems; the more propagandistic function, of rallying despondent puritans, was supplementary. Cecil's motion gained widespread support because it tapped into well-established understandings of fasting – articulated by the likes of Scudder and Mason – and into more immediate assessments of the role parliament should play in the current crisis, and how that role should be played. In the months leading up to the beginning of the session, not only was parliament seen as the sole means by which the realm's problems could be solved, but also that such a solution was dependent on invoking divine assistance. Thomas Taylor, one time chaplain to Secretary Conway, argued that, '(next to his Majestie, the breath of our nostrils, and that Higher and honourable house) the care of all our safetie is now laid' on parliament.<sup>60</sup> Thomas Scott prayed 'the God of euerlasting happinesse so to direct and prosper all your [parliament's] proiects and consultations', while a fictitious country gentlemen in a pamphlet concluded, 'by the assistance of God and by the wise ordering of our affayres, we shall quickly make him [James] see as well our injury as his owne error.'<sup>61</sup> Reporting to William Trumbull when it was probably apparent that the fast would not take place, Jean Beaulieu, secretary to Sir Thomas Edmondes (MP for Chichester), thought the proposal had been 'a very seasonable & necessary motion ... for I think never any

had greater, nor more important & pressing business in hand. I pray God to guide & assist them with His blessed spirit.'<sup>62</sup>

Though Cecil's motion ultimately failed, it set a precedent. In 1625, and in the absence of both Perrot and Cecil, Sir Miles Fleetwood proposed that there should be a private fast 'among ourselves' (i.e. a parliamentary fast) while Sir William Strode proposed they should petition the king for a national fast; both motions were passed and the Lords joined in the petition for the latter.<sup>63</sup> After this, all calls were for national fasts: by Perrot in 1626;<sup>64</sup> by William Strode claiming 'the former laudable customs of the House' in 1628;<sup>65</sup> and by Sir Robert Phelips in 1629.<sup>66</sup> Common to all these motions was the conviction that fasting was necessary for creating, in Fleetwood's words, a 'good correspondence between the King and the people'; for obtaining 'a blessing from God upon the King ... [and] ... for the good success of the parliament', and for securing direct divine intervention in the realm's affairs as a whole – indeed, in the affairs of the protestant church across Europe.<sup>67</sup> As John Hare, MP for King's Lynn, reported to Framlingham Gawdy in 1628, as 'We have all need to pray for the happy success of this parliament ... we have petitioned a day for fasting and prayer'.<sup>68</sup> In 1628, Phelips argued that a fast was necessary because 'this state [n]ever stood in more danger'. 'If we will prevent dangers and divert God's judgments,' he continued, 'we must use humiliation, and repent of our sins.' 'If we expect from God his protection, as he protected us the last parliament ... let us labor to preserve the service of God'.<sup>69</sup> A year later, the godly MP, Robert Barrington, wrote on the day before a house of commons' debate on religion that, 'I pray God direct us in this soe waighty business, the success whereof is and wilbe the

foundation of our happiness or misery.<sup>70</sup> Earlier, in 1625, Fleetwood had proposed a fast to alleviate 'the miseries of the Christian churches beyond seas; ... for blessing upon our navy ... [and] in respect of the grievous visitation now upon us by the plague.'<sup>71</sup> MPs believed that they could not resolve the problems that the realm, and the protestant church, faced solely through human efforts. As both Francis Rous in 1626 and Sir William Bulstrode in 1628 asserted, 'there be some devils that will never be cast out but by prayer and fasting.'<sup>72</sup>

Unsurprisingly, motions for fasts (and communion) were proposed, and vocally supported, by the godly: not just by Cecil<sup>73</sup> and Perrot,<sup>74</sup> but also Sir Edward Giles,<sup>75</sup> Nicholas Fuller,<sup>76</sup> Sir William Strode and his son,<sup>77</sup> John Pym,<sup>78</sup> Francis Rous,<sup>79</sup> Sir Robert Harley,<sup>80</sup> and Sir Walter Earle<sup>81</sup> and others. But, crucially, fast motions quickly gained widespread support. The motions in 1628 and 1629 were carried immediately. Few expressed reservations or criticisms. In 1625, the only 'opposition' came from Sir Francis Goodwin who feared that petitioning for a general fast might jeopardise MPs holding a parliamentary one.<sup>82</sup> In 1626, there were concerns that Perrot had not justified why a fast was necessary and left the reasons to be settled by a conference with the Lords.<sup>83</sup> As one MP grumbled, 'In all places abroad, they used first to set down the reasons whereupon they shall appoint a fast'.<sup>84</sup> Fast motions also cut across factional lines: supporters included members of the factions of both Buckingham (e.g. Fleetwood) and Pembroke (e.g. Perrot, Coryton), as well as those, like Sir Nathaniel Rich<sup>85</sup> and William Strode, who shifted from support to outright opposition to Buckingham from late 1625.

Fast motions appealed to a broad range of MPs because providential beliefs were widely held and deeply embedded in political culture and the realm continued to face a range of problems and dangers. Though contemporaries might dispute what, precisely, provoked divine judgements, they could all agree that such events as war and plague, which England experienced in the second half of the 1620s, were signs of such judgement. Moreover, concerns about finance and domestic religion, which had exercised MPs in James's reign, continued to do so under Charles and were joined by new issues: the duke of Buckingham as a 'bad counsellor' and an incompetent military and naval commander, as well as his support for anti-Calvinists, like Montagu, Wren, Neile and Laud; the influence of the duke's Catholic entourage, such as his mother, at Court, and the perceived threat posed by Arminianism and of arbitrary government, particularly regarding non-parliamentary taxation and revenue-raising. Fasting was an accepted means to remedy such crises: assuaging God's judgements and seeking his assistance in solving the realm's problems required repentance and humiliation, both of which could only be achieved by the kind of spiritual reflection gained by physical abstinence and affliction. As Phelips argued in 1628, 'If we will prevent dangers and divert God's judgments, we must use humiliation, and repent of our sins.'<sup>86</sup> In addition, fast motions were able to draw on popular and pervasive anti-Catholic attitudes both for the problems they sought to resolve – war, domestic religion – and because they were also usually coupled with motions for collective communion, which MPs used partly to expose and exclude Catholics and recusants from the house.<sup>87</sup>

Although Charles grumbled at the Commons' proceedings in 1629, he was not opposed to nationwide fasting.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, even in 1629, Robert Barrington could comment that 'we make no doubt of [the petition for a fast] being granted.'<sup>89</sup> Charles believed in divine providence and the power of repentance to sway God's judgements.<sup>90</sup> He expected the church to support the state in times of crisis.<sup>91</sup> He responded quickly to parliamentary petitions for national fasts, even in 1629.<sup>92</sup> Nor did he stand on ceremony if he thought it would delay proceedings. In 1626, he was 'indifferent' to whether the Commons presented their petition directly to him or to the Lords and, in 1628, when it transpired that public fast days clashed with both parliamentary ones and local fairs, he dismissed MPs' arguments that only he could change the days, telling bishops to authorise any required changes in their own dioceses.<sup>93</sup> However, as the events of 1629 showed, Charles became frustrated when the Commons' motions seemed to delay proceedings, particularly regarding the granting of supply. More particularly, he resented how, in calling for fasts, the Commons could, or could appear to, assume control over the debate on the war. His letter to George Abbott, archbishop of Canterbury in 1626 – a letter which he ordered to be circulated to the bishops and used as a basis for their guidance to ministers and preachers on conducting the fast and its attendant services – is particularly revealing. It was a lengthy defence of his actions and a criticism of parliament and the wider divisions in the realm. He stressed that the war had been undertaken specifically on the advice of parliament in the latter years of James's reign; that parliament had expressly sought Charles's 'ayde and assistance' to persuade (or 'worke') James into agreeing to war; and had promised sufficient supply to fund it. Now, such supply was not forthcoming, which shamed the king



and endangered both England and the fate of its protestant brethren abroad: 'if wee supply not presently, our Allies and Confederats in this Case, it is likely to prove the extirpation of true Religion and the replanting of Romish superstition in all the neighbouring partes of Christendome'. The failure to grant adequate supply was also the cause of 'the breache of vnity which is growne too Great and Common among all sortes of men.' The purpose of nationwide fasting was to repair this damage that parliament had caused:

Wee have, by all means, endeavoured vnion, and require of you to preach it ... frequently ... Wee knowe their [his subjects'] loyall hearts and therefore wonder the more what should cause distracted affections. If you call vpon them (which is your duty) wee doubt not butt that God will blesse them with that love to himselfe, to his Church and their owne preservations, which alone wilbe able to bynd vp the Scatteringes of devided affections into Strength.<sup>94</sup>

England required God's assistance, not because of any fault of the king's or moral failings of his subjects, but to dig the realm out of the hole into which the Commons' actions had led them.

### III

Within three days of parliament gathering for the first time in eleven years in April 1640, MPs made a motion for a national fast and collective communion for the house. Sir Henry Mildmay 'thought it fit to beginne with God, *A Iove Principium*, [and] advised after the manner of the house to thinke of a tyme for a fast and receiving of the communion'.<sup>95</sup> Further motions were made by Fleetwood at the

start of the Long Parliament in November 1640, by Francis Rous in April 1641, and by Isaac Pennington in August 1641.<sup>96</sup> But, only one of these – Fleetwood’s – was ultimately successful: Mildmay’s motion stalled in conferences between the Commons and Lords;<sup>97</sup> Rous’s motion provoked some opposition and what enthusiasm there was seems to have fizzled out,<sup>98</sup> while Pennington’s motion in August 1641 was supplanted by the public thanksgiving required under the terms of the treaty of London which, some (rightly) argued, was incompatible with a fast.<sup>99</sup> Why had the consensus over fasting apparently broken down and why, when the monthly fasts would assume such an importance for parliament after 1642, were fast motions suddenly so problematic?

Fasting (and communion) continued to be regarded by the Commons, the Lords and the king as important ways of ensuring parliamentary unity and seeking divine assistance to resolve the realm’s problems.<sup>100</sup> The joint petition to Charles in April 1640 justified the call for a fast because of ‘the great and weighty Affairs now in Agitation of both the Houses of Parliament, concerning the Welfare of the King, and this whole Kingdom’; both houses ‘believ[ed] the principal Way and Means to attain to a happy and prosperous Conclusion in the same, is, to beg the Divine Assistance, and Direction of Almighty God, in all their Consultations’.<sup>101</sup> The following November, MPs told the Lords that, ‘having taken into consideration the weighty occasions of this assembly of parliament concerning the true [worship] of almighty God, the safety and welfare of the King [and his whole realm]’, they acknowledged that ‘the right way’ to address these problems was to ‘[implore] the divine assistance, the fountain of all wisdom and unity, to direct them [parliament] in all

their consultations by one day's solemn humiliation in fasting and prayer'.<sup>102</sup>

Opposition was limited, and tended to reflect, either internal politics – in November 1640, Harley objected to re-appointing the committee involved in the abortive motion in April<sup>103</sup> – or more general assumptions about the appropriateness of fasting, as in November 1641.<sup>104</sup> The exception was Rous's proposal in April 1641 that was 'opposed by some and seconded by diverse', though the identity of the opponents, and their reasoning, is unknown.<sup>105</sup>

However, as the fate of Rous's proposal indicates, growing divisions between some MPs and the king, and within both houses, meant that fasting could no longer act – and increasingly may not have been conceived to act – as a way of uniting disparate groups and opinions. When parliament assembled in April 1640, many MPs remained profoundly concerned about the unresolved problems of the parliament of 1629 (including religion, taxation and parliamentary privileges), how the king had dissolved it, and his failure to call another for over a decade. Conversely, Charles's priority was to secure substantial supply for his army against the Covenanters and, as it had been in the 1620s, his policy was to seek supply immediately and promise to redress the Commons' grievances in a later session; grievances for which he had little sympathy.<sup>106</sup> Equally, both houses of parliament were themselves internally divided. Some, but by no means all, MPs were increasingly unwilling to grant Charles any supply until their grievances had been readdressed, while some Lords were sympathetic to the Covenanters' demands. It may also not have helped that many leading lights from the 1620s, who could have provided leadership, were no longer

in the Commons, either through death, elevation to the Lords, or because they did not stand for election.<sup>107</sup>

While these divisions made the practice of collective communion and fasting all the more necessary, it also made it more difficult for motions to succeed. Sometimes this was because they fell victim to political tactics. Mildmay's motion in April 1640 was derailed by Charles's strategy of persuading the Lords to pressure the Commons into giving priority to supply. This initially delayed a joint conference between the two houses after the motion had been approved by the Commons: Charles's attendance on the Lords prevented the Commons' delegation from organising a meeting.<sup>108</sup> The attempts of the upper house – itself internally divided, especially over the Commons' conduct – to intervene in the issue of supply and to broker a reconciliation failed and delayed the conference further. Their interference was perceived by the Commons as a breach of privilege – which the Lords strenuously denied – and the lower house continued to distrust Charles's promises. On 1 May, the Commons resolved to delay celebration of the communion (due on 3 May) until the matter of the fast had been settled, but Charles dissolved parliament four days later.<sup>109</sup>

The case of Rous's motion a year later suggests that fast motion may have become more problematic because consensus within both houses, either about fasting or about the reasons for fast days, was breaking down. As already noted, Rous's motion was initially 'opposed by some' in the Commons, though neither journals nor diaries indicate by whom or why. Holles reported that the joint conference with the

Lords, held despite some MPs' opposition,<sup>110</sup> 'was very long and the report intricate and that therefore they could not yet make it ready'. No further mention of it was made in the journals and diaries and the motion was abandoned. Though Holles's report is opaque, it is hard not to read into the use of 'very long' and 'intricate' that there were significant (and perhaps irreconcilable) political differences between the parties.

Fasting seems, instead, to have been used to demonstrate the continuing opposition of some godly MPs to Charles's domestic religious policy. In November 1640, Fleetwood's motion for a fast was quickly and smoothly carried by both houses and accepted by the king. Far from signalling that the conflict of the previous parliament had been settled, however, some MPs deliberately used the fast and the communion to protest against key features of Caroline religious practice. During the Commons' service at St Margaret's on the fast day, some MPs, along with the parish clerk, attempted to prevent ministers from reading the 'second service'<sup>111</sup> by drowning them out with the 34th psalm ('I will bless the Lord at all times').<sup>112</sup> The practice of reading the service at the communion table was ordered by the BCP but it had been uncommon until William Laud, Richard Neile and Launcelot Andrewes had reintroduced it in places from 1625.<sup>113</sup> MPs also protested against the location of the communion table: two days after the fast – and the first day that parliament had reconvened – Sir Robert Harley, Denzil Holles, Sir John Wray and Sir Gilbert Gerard all requested that, for the celebration of collective communion on 22 November (the first time that the fast and communion had not been celebrated on consecutive days), the communion table 'might be brought down into the church' 'according to

the rubric [i.e. the canons of 1603/4]'. Indeed, according to Thomas Knyvett, some MPs even refused to attend the service until these changes had been made.<sup>114</sup>

Both the siting of the communion table and where ministers read the service were long-standing grievances that had been reinforced by Charles's actions at the end of the Short Parliament. He had forced Convocation to remain in session and pass 17 new canons (overturning those of 1603/4), one of which dealt with the position of the communion table. Underlining their opposition to Charles's actions, MPs had not only agreed that, on the fast day, 'No Convocation man to be troubled to be a preacher' but delegated two MPs to instruct the dean of Westminster to conduct the communion from a 'table standing in the middle of the church, according to the rubric', i.e. the canons of 1603/4 which, thanks to Charles's action at the end of the Short parliament, were no longer in force.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, their opposition to how services were performed at St Margaret's and their continuing desire to register disapproval of Caroline religious policy, may account for the decision to hold the Commons' services celebrating the national thanksgiving for peace between England and Scotland (7 September 1641), at Lincoln's Inn.<sup>116</sup>

When parliament assembled after Charles's eleven-year 'personal rule', general consensus remained on the value and purpose of fasting. But, the divisions between the king and his most vocal MPs that had been evident in the 1620s had widened further. While these divisions made fasting all the more necessary, they also made fast motions more vulnerable to failure and, in the case of November 1640, introduced a more overt propagandist element to their observation. Even so, there

were limits to how far MPs were willing to use fasting to make partisan political points. Two of the Commons' actions during the nationwide thanksgivings in September 1641 could be interpreted as attacks on episcopacy and set forms of prayer, issues which provoked growing hostility among some godly MPs: the Commons' insistence that the order for the public thanksgiving be distributed by civic authorities, not the bishops, and the prohibition on the distribution and use of a form of prayer, composed by John Williams, bishop of Lincoln and dean of Westminster, in parishes under his jurisdiction on the thanksgiving day. However, though it was usual for bishops to distribute order for special worship, because the thanksgiving had to be ordered by parliamentary ordinance in Charles's absence, the bishops had no authority to act in this capacity on this occasion.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Williams had no authority to commission a form of prayer or order its use because, on the insistence of the Scots, no official form of prayer had been agreed during the treaty negotiations, only the more generic 'Prayers, Reading, and Preaching of the Word'.<sup>118</sup>

#### IV

In his *Christian hvmiliation*, Henry Mason argued that 'we haue oftentimes so little comfort in the execution of our places because we vse so little Religion in our entrance to them.'<sup>119</sup> After the outbreak of civil war, the monthly fasts did provide parliament with regular opportunities to articulate publicly both short-term shifts in policy and their long-term aims. But, the origins of the fasts in the 1620s lay more in consensus. Jacobean and early Caroline calls for parliamentary and national fasts were initiated primarily by godly MPs who believed that both communion and

fasting were effective means of creating unity and eliciting divine assistance at a time when there were growing, but not necessarily insurmountable, differences between both kings and MPs, and between MPs themselves, over key issues. Changing attitudes towards fasting, notably its acceptance by a wider spectrum of protestants, meant that parliamentary motions generally garnered widespread support in both houses. While it is difficult to assess James's precise attitude to these calls, Charles was not opposed to the motions *per se*, but he did get increasingly frustrated that, in his mind, they delayed proceedings and took attention away from more practical and, in his opinion, more effective solutions. He also resented how fast motions could enable parliament, particularly the Commons, to assume control over the public debate on royal, especially foreign, policy. After the 'personal rule', parliamentary motions for national fasts continued to be conceived primarily as religious exercises to solicit divine assistance to resolve the realm's problems but increasingly fractious relations between Charles and the Commons over a series of both long-standing and new issues meant that these motions were either unsuccessful or were used by some godly MPs to protest against royal policy.

Reasserting the centrality of religion in parliamentary calls for national fasts raises wider questions about the nature of early Stuart parliaments and the relationship between political actions and contemporary public discourse in the early modern period. It demonstrates the importance of 'providential politics' in the early modern period: a widespread belief, based on dominant ideas of causation (divine providence), that national politics was about managing subjects' sins, beliefs and



practices and that exercises that sought to elicit divine assistance were essential to political success.<sup>120</sup> It also challenges the emphasis, since the 1990s, on the representation and articulation of power, exemplified by works like Kevin Sharpe's trilogy.<sup>121</sup> By reconceiving parliamentary fasts as contemporaries did – as religious exercises – it shifts their principal 'political' purposes, at least before 1642, away from 'propaganda' and towards being 'tools' through which to seek divine assistance. Moreover, they were 'tools' that required genuine commitment and implementation if they were to be successful.<sup>122</sup>

Reassessing fasting in early Stuart parliaments also helps scholars to look beyond the immediate environs of parliamentary history and contributes to wider debates on commensality and abstinence from food. The arguments presented here challenge the emphasis on communal *eating* as a means to create and sustain communities by demonstrating that communal *fasting* operated in similar ways.<sup>123</sup> Though their principal reason was to solicit divine assistance, fasts were also proposed to bring MPs together to create unity; a unity that was underlined both by the related practice of collective communion, which aimed to create unity among protestants and exclude Catholics and recusants, and MPs' custom of meeting at the house on the fast day and going to St Margaret's together.<sup>124</sup> Corporate fasting by MPs underlines the need to think beyond the *social* boundaries that most studies of commensality emphasize were transcended or sustained by communal eating. MPs strove to impose theological boundaries, consistently and, from 1640, increasingly, excluding Catholics and recusants from services.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, after civil war broke out, alms collected during Commons' fasts were often distributed along confessional

lines.<sup>126</sup> Early Stuart general fasts also challenge one of the key characteristics of common sociological concepts of fasting: that they were voluntary.<sup>127</sup> In doing so, they complicate the role of agency in fasting, largely represented in simple terms of ‘choice’: the power (of elites) to choose when and how to fast and/or from what foods to abstain.<sup>128</sup> On the one hand, general fasts negated agency because fasting was imposed on all subjects, rich and poor, and ordered to be observed on designated days. On the other, they located it in resistance to state orders and the zeal of over-observance. Both of the latter can help map out the socio-cultural boundaries of fasting, defined by the state and popularly.

Finally, broader sociological studies of commensality and abstinence can help move forward historical perspectives of early modern fasting. Some sociologists, notably Jack Goody, have argued that practices of abstaining from food can ‘only exist in the wider context of indulgence’; that is, the rejection of food or certain types of food, whether for religious, medical or moral reasons, can only be practiced by those, and by those in societies, where there is plenty.<sup>129</sup> Yet, early-modern England was not a society of plenty: most of the population lived at or below subsistence levels. While it became common from the late eighteenth century to satirise nationwide fasting – contrasting fat, gluttonous clerics with the thin, starving poor<sup>130</sup> – early modernists’ focus on parsing the differences between Catholic and protestant theologies of fasting and treating fasting as a tool of propaganda has meant we have little sense of how fasting was understood socially and culturally in a society where many rarely had enough to eat. As fasting became more frequent in the 17th-century, largely as

a result of parliamentary motions, it provides a potentially fruitful field to explore these issues.

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<sup>1</sup> *LJ*, iv, 15 and see the report of Charles's speech in Sir Francis Nethersole to Elizabeth, queen of Bohemia, 28 Jan. 1629, TNA, SP16/133/24, fos 35r–37v.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. *Proceedings in Parliament, 1625*, ed. Maija Jansson and W.B. Bidwell (New Haven, CT, 1987), 217.

<sup>3</sup> *Proceedings of the Short Parliament of 1640*, ed. Esther Cope with W.H. Willson Coates (Camden Society, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., xix, 1977), 143.

<sup>4</sup> For parliament see: H.R. Trevor–Roper, 'The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament', in *Essays in British History: Presented to Sir Keith Feiling*, ed. H.R. Trevor–Roper (1964), 85–138; J.F. Wilson, *Pulpit in parliament: puritanism during the English civil wars, 1640–1648* (Princeton, NJ, 1969), ch. 2; Christopher Hill, 'Fast Sermons and Politics, 1640–1660', in *The English Bible and the Seventeenth–Century Revolution*, ed. Hill (London, 1993), pp. 79–108; Stephen Baskerville, *Not Peace but a Sword: The Political Theology of the English Revolution* (London, 1993); T.C. Doumaux, 'Fast Days and Faction: The Struggle for Reformation, Order, and Unity in England, 1558–c.1640', Vanderbilt University D.Phil., 2008, ch. 6; Tom Webster, 'Preaching and Parliament, 1640–1659', in *The Oxford handbook of the early modern sermon*, ed. Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington and Emma Rhatigan (Oxford, 2011), 404–20; Lori Anne Ferrell, 'Preaching and English Parliaments in the 1620s', *Parliamentary History*, xxxiv (2015), 142–54. For Charles, see: Thomas Cogswell, 'The Politics of Propaganda: Charles I and the People in the 1620s', *Journal of British Studies*, xxix (1990), 187–215, esp. 195–200; Lloyd Bowen, 'Royalism, Print, and the Clergy in Britain, 1639–1640 and 1642', *HJ*, lvi (2013), 297–319, esp. 300–308; Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and*

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*Commonwealths in England, 1603–1660* (New Haven, CT, 2010), 144–150. On fasting more generally in the civil war: Christopher Durston, “For the Better Humiliation of the People”: Public Days of Fasting and Thanksgiving During the English Revolution’, *Seventeenth Century*, vii (1992), 129–49; William Sheils, ‘Provincial Preaching on the Eve of the Civil War: Some West Riding Fast Sermons’ in *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain : Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, 1994), 290–312; Lucy–Ann Bates, ‘Nationwide Fasts and Thanksgiving Days in England, 1640–1660’, Durham University PhD, 2012; Ann Hughes, ‘Preachers and Hearers in Revolutionary London: Contextualising Parliamentary Fast Sermons’, *TRHS*, xxiv (2014), 57–77.

<sup>5</sup> *Fast Sermons to Parliament: Reproductions in Facsimile with Notes*, ed. Robin Jeffs (34 vols; 1970–1). The literature on representations of power is vast but see two seminal articles and some of the work by Kevin Sharpe: Sydney Anglo, ‘Image-making: The Means and the Limitations’ in *Images of Tudor Kingship*, ed. Anglo (1992), 98–130; R. Malcolm Smuts, ‘Art and the Material Culture of Majesty in Early Stuart England’, in *The Stuart Court and Europe: Essays in Political Culture*, ed. Smuts (Cambridge, 1996), 86–112; *Remapping Early Modern England: The Culture of Seventeenth–Century Politics*, ed. Kevin Sharpe (Cambridge, 2000); *Reading Authority and Representing Rule in Early Modern England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe (2013); Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth–Century England* (New Haven, 2009); Sharpe, *Image Wars*; Kevin Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule: The Restoration and Revolution Monarchy, 1660–1714* (New Haven, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> For instance: John Morrill, ‘The Religious Context of the English Civil War,’ *TRHS*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., xxxiv (1984), 155–78; Johann Somerville, *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–1640* (1999); D. Alan Orr, ‘Sovereignty, Supremacy, and the Origins of the English Civil War,’ *History*, lxxxvii (2002), 474–90; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), 12; John Walter and Keith Wrightson, ‘Dearth and the Social Order in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present*, lxxi (1976), 22–42; Steve Hindle,

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'Dearth, Fasting and Alms: the Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England', *Past and Present*, clxxii (2001), 44–86; Natalie Mears, 'Public Worship and Political Participation in Elizabethan England', *Journal of British Studies*, li (2012), 4–25.

<sup>7</sup> The puritan MP, Paul Wentworth, petitioned for a parliamentary fast in 1581; MPs voted in favour by 115 to 110 but the motion was quashed by Elizabeth who, quite rightly, regarded it as an infringement of her authority to order national special worship. (Interestingly, neither James nor Charles cited the royal prerogative as a reason for rejecting parliamentary petitions for fasts). There were no other calls for either a parliamentary or a national fast between 1581 and 1624. T.E. Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, ed. T.E. Hartley (3 vols, 1981–95), i, 526–7; *CJ*, i, 118–19.

<sup>8</sup> Though note that orders and liturgies were produced by the state and not parliament.

<sup>9</sup> Specifically those who had continued to sit in Convocation after the dissolution of the Short Parliament. See below, p. 000.

<sup>10</sup> Alec Ryrie, 'The Fall and Rise of Fasting in the British Reformations', in *Worship and the Parish Church in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Natalie Mears and Alec Ryrie (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2013), 89–95.

<sup>11</sup> For example, BL, Lansdowne MS. 6, fos 166r–166v: Edmund Grindal to William Cecil, 21 Aug. 1563.

<sup>12</sup> Ryrie, 'Fall and Rise of Fasting', 89–95.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 103–107

<sup>14</sup> One homily was to be read out every Sunday in parishes where there was no licensed preacher. There were twenty homilies, with a twenty-first (on obedience) added in 1571, and longer homilies were to be split between morning and evening prayer. Thus, parishioners could expect to hear the homily on fish days at least twice a year. *The Seconde Tome of Homelyes of Such Matters as were Promised and Intituled in the Former Part of Homelyes, Set Out by the Auctoritie of the Quenes Maiestie: and to be Read in Euery*

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*Paryshe Churche Agreablye* (1563; STC 13663), sigs. Aaaiv<sup>r</sup>–Dddii<sup>r</sup> and see the 1571 edition, with the same title, STC 13669.

<sup>15</sup> *National Prayers: Special Worship Since the Reformation. Volume 1: Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533–1688*, ed. Natalie Mears, Alasdair Raffe, Stephen Taylor and Philip Williamson, with Lucy Bates (Church of England Record Society, xx, Woodbridge, 2013), 56–79, 172–3, 203–205, 219–21, 240–53. Though note that the state also expressly prohibited fasting during the Armada crisis, probably because of Whitgift’s hostility to puritans with whom fasting was largely associated at this time: *Ibid.*, 177–78.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps most famously, Lady Margaret Hoby’s enthusiastic foray into fasting during the outbreak of plague in 1603: Ryrie, ‘Fall and rise of fasting’, 99–100. See also *Conferences and Combination Lectures in the Elizabethan Church: Dedham and Bury St Edmunds, 1582–1590*, ed. Patrick Collinson, John Craig and Brett Usher (Church of England Record Society, x, Woodbridge, 2003), 76 (though, because the letter is undated, it is difficult to identify to which fast Tye refers.)

<sup>17</sup> For instance, the fast organised by Richard Rogers during the summer of the Spanish Armada: Ryrie, ‘Fall and Rise of Fasting’, 99.

<sup>18</sup> *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, ed. Collinson, 32, 35, 36, 39; Ryrie, ‘Fall and Rise of Fasting’, 99.

<sup>19</sup> For example, *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, ed. Collinson, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 26, 31, 33, 40–1, 45, 46.

<sup>20</sup> Prayers and services, rather than fasts, were ordered in England and Wales in 1611 (probably in response to drought) and 1613 (heavy rain). In contrast, nationwide fasts were ordered in Scotland in 1588, 1591, 1592, 1593 (twice), 1594 (twice), 1595, 1596 (twice), 1601, 1621, 1622, and 1623, for a variety of reasons, reflecting a much stronger tradition of fasting under the Scottish Kirk. *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, xvii, cxv–cxvii, 172–274.

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Holland, *The Christian Exercise of Fasting, Private and Pvblike* (1596; STC\_13586).

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Bownde, *The Holy Exercise of Fasting ...* (Cambridge, 1604; STC 3438);  
*Conferences and combination lectures*, ed. Collinson, 188–9.

<sup>23</sup> William Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition of Christs Sermon in the Mount ...*  
(Cambridge, 1608; STC 19722).

<sup>24</sup> George Downname, *The Christians Sanctuarie ...* (1604; STC 7113). Note that there is a remarkable similarity in structure and content between both Bownde's and Downname's treatises and Thomas Cartwright's *The Holie Exercise of a True Fast, Described Out of Gods Word Seene and Allowed* (1580; STC 24251.5 and [Scotland?: s.n., c. 1582?; STC 24251.6) which was reprinted in the early seventeenth century: T.C., *Two Treatises. 1. The Holy Exercise of a True Fast, Described Out of Gods Word...* (1610; STC 4314). This is most noticeable in the similarity in examples cited and similar phrasing between Cartwright and Bownde: Bownde, *Holy Exercise*, 24–5, 191–2, 208–53. Note also that *The Holie Exercise* is also attributed to William Wilkinson (c.1551–1613), who wrote the dedication in STC 24251.3, but it is generally thought to have been written by Cartwright (see the description of the woodcut monogram in the full citation of STC 24251.5 on Early English Books Online and C. Marsh, 'Wilkinson, William (c.1551–1613)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. The text is the same as the later reprint by T.C. (STC 4314). Note STC catalogues the texts under Wilkinson's name.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Scudder, *The Christians Daily VValke in Holy Secvritie and Peace* (1631; STC 22117).

<sup>26</sup> Henry Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation, or, A treatise of Fasting* (1625; STC 17602).

<sup>27</sup> J.D. Alsop, 'Mason, Henry (1575/6–1647)', *ODNB*; Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, sig. A3v; Scudder, *The christians Daily VValke*, 79.

<sup>29</sup> Perkins, *Godly and Learned Exposition*, 329–31; Holland, *Christian Exercise of Fasting*, 32–3, 19–22; Scudder, *Christians Daily VValke*, 70–6; Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, 10–12, 20–1, 37–45.



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<sup>30</sup> Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, 87–8.

<sup>31</sup> Holland, *Christian Exercise of Fasting*, 67–71 (quotations from 69–70); Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, 17, 69–79; Perkins, *Godly and Learned Exposition*, 330–1.

<sup>32</sup> Walsham, *Providence*, 12; Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth and the Social Order', 22–42; Hindle, 'Dearth, Fasting and Alms', 44–86.

<sup>33</sup> Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, 17, 69–79; Holland, *Christian Exercise of Fasting*, 67–71; Perkins, *Godly and Learned Exposition*, 330–1.

<sup>34</sup> Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, 18, 13; Scudder, *Christians Daily VValke*, 73.

<sup>35</sup> Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, 70.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Becon, *A Newe Pathway vnto Praier Ful of Much Godly Frute and Christen Knowledge* (1542; STC 1734), sig. M2v.

<sup>37</sup> Note that, in 1571, Speaker Wray had to renew the motion for daily prayers, as well as for the daily litany to be read and for fines to be levied on MPs who did not attend. Philip Laundry, 'Prayers in Parliament', *Parliamentary Affairs: the Journal of the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government*, xi (1957–8), 425; Donald Gray, *Chaplain to Mr Speaker: the religious life of the House of Commons* (House of Commons Document, xix, 1991), 11–12; *Parliamentary Texts of the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Nicholas Pronay and John Taylor (Oxford, 1980), 71, 84; J P D Cooper, 'The Elizabethan House of Commons and St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster', *Parliamentary History*, xxxviii (2019), 55–7; *CJ*, i, 54, 64, 83; *Proceedings ... Elizabeth I*, ed. Hartley, i, 524.

<sup>38</sup> Cooper, 'The Elizabethan House of Commons', 55–6.

<sup>39</sup> *CJ*, i, 118–119; *Proceedings ... Elizabeth I*, ed. Hartley, i, 526–7.

<sup>40</sup> *Proceedings in parliament, 1614 (House of Commons)*, ed. Maija Jansson (Philadelphia, PA, 1988), 37; *CJ*, i, 457, 508; *Common debates, 1621*, ed. Wallace Notestein, R.H. Relf, and H. Simpson (7 vols., New Haven, CT, 1935), ii, 16, iv, 11; Andrew Thrush, 'Perrot, Sir James

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(c.1572–1637)', *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1604–1629*, ed. Andrew Thrusch and John P Ferris (6 vols, 2010), v, 646–62.

<sup>41</sup> *Proceedings ... 1614*, 14–19; *Commons debates, 1621*, v, 425–9; *CJ*, i, 508–10; Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621–1629* (Oxford, 1979), 85–144; Conrad Russell, *King James VI and I and his English Parliaments*, ed. Richard Cust and Andrew Thrusch (Oxford, 2011), 105–122.

<sup>42</sup> For similar views expressed by other MPs see Nicholas Fuller's comments in 1614 (*Proceedings ... 1614*, 37) and Sir Thomas Wentworth's in 1621 (*Commons Debates, 1621*, v, 432).

<sup>43</sup> *Proceedings ... 1614*, 37; *CJ*, i, 457.

<sup>44</sup> *Proceedings ... 1614*, 37, 99; *CJ*, i, 457, 508, 514–17, 671, 676; *Commons Debates, 1621*, ii, 53, 103; iv, 11; v, 432. For the accompanying measures to tighten procedures to exclude Catholics and recusants from the House, including demanding that all MPs prove that they had sworn the oath of allegiance 'totally and audibly' or swear again, see *CJ*, i, 457, 514–17, 676; *Proceedings ... 1614*, 42; *Common Debates, 1621*, ii, 53, 103. Note also that it was agreed that the communion would be held at St Margaret's Westminster, rather than the Abbey, because the latter did not use bread in the communion. It thus failed to conform to the 20th canon or the Book of Common Prayer and might undermine claims about MPs' conformity (see *CJ*, i, 463).

<sup>45</sup> *CJ*, i, 508, 671; *Commons Debates, 1621*, iv, 11. In this, Perrot echoed James's speech in Star Chamber in 1616, when the king had argued that 'GOD will blesse euery good businesse the better, that he and his Church haue the precedence.' (James VI and I, *His Maiesties Speach in the Starre-Chamber, the XX. of Iune. Anno 1616* ([1616]; STC 14397), sig. G1<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>46</sup> i.e. 'to begin with God', from Virgil's Eclogues. *CJ*, i, 671; James VI and I, *His Maiesties Speach ... Anno 1616*, sig. B2r; *HPC, 1604-1629*, v, 650; Russell, *Parliaments and English*

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*Politics*, ch. 2; Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621–1624* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> *CJ*, I, 671. Turning the Commons' communion service into a thanksgiving exercise was nearly unprecedented. The pre-Reformation votive masses held in parliament, which were the precursors of Perrot's communion, had always been petitionary exercises, though communion was included in the services for discovery of the Gunpowder Plot and the monarch's accession day: Gray, *Chaplain to Mr Speaker*, 11; *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 262–5.

<sup>48</sup> Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston, MS Eng. 980, 5–6: Diary of Sir William Spring, 23 February 1624, in *Proceedings in Parliament, 1624: The House of Commons*, ed. Philip Baker (2015–18) at <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/proceedings-1624-parl/feb-23#h3-0018>>; *CJ*, i, 671; Mason, *Christian Humiliation*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> The only points of contention were whether parliament had the power to order a national fast (which it did not) and whether Usher, or Isaac Bargrave, should be appointed preacher for the communion. *CJ*, i, 671.

<sup>50</sup> *CJ*, i, 671

<sup>51</sup> Parliamentary Archives, HC/CL/JO/1/13, fo 1, in *Proceedings in Parliament, 1624* at <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/proceedings-1624-parl/feb-23#h3-0018>>.

<sup>52</sup> Spring diary, 5–6 at <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/proceedings-1624-parl/feb-23#h3-0018>>.

<sup>53</sup> Cogswell, *Blessed Revolution*, 74–5, 77–105, 107–28, .

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 67–70, 138–41.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 138–42.

<sup>56</sup> *CJ*, i, 671; Spring diary, 5–6 and PA, HC/CL/JO/1/13, fo 1 both at <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/proceedings-1624-parl/feb-23#h3-0018>>. The differences in reporting Cecil's words – 'business' or 'enterprise' – make it a little unclear exactly to what

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he referred. 'Business' might suggest parliamentary proceedings while 'enterprise' could have meant war, especially considering his past military and parliamentary career, his support for the war in the Palatinate, his fears of another Spanish Armada, his criticism of James's lacklustre policy, and his subsequent service in the Netherlands and at Cadiz. See P. Watson, 'Cecil, Sir Edward (1572–1638)', in *HPC, 1604–1629*, iii, 470–81; Thomas Scott, *Speech Made in the Lower House of Parliament, Anno. 1621. By Sir Edward Cicill, Colonell* (1621; STC 22087); 'The Parliamentary Papers of Nicholas Ferrar 1624', ed. David R Ransome, *Camden Miscellany XXXIII* (Camden 5th ser., 7, Cambridge, 1996), 41; TNA, SP14/166, fo. 36: diary of Edward Nicholas, 1 March 1624.

<sup>57</sup> Spring diary, 5–6 at <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/proceedings-1624-parl/feb-23#h3-0018>>.

<sup>58</sup> Bodleian Library, Carte 77, fos 145–46: The King's Speech to both Houses of Parliament, in *Proceedings ... 1614*, 14–15; *Commons Debates, 1621*, v, 426.

<sup>59</sup> Cogswell, *Blessed Revolution*, 42–51

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Taylor, *Tvvo sermons the one A Heavenly Voice, Calling all Gods People out of Romish Babylon. The other An Everlasting Record of the Utter Ruine of Romish Amalek* (1624; STC 23853), sig. A2v.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Scott, *Boanerges. Or the Humble Supplication of the Ministers of Scotland, to the High Court of Pariament [sic] in England* (Edinburgh [i.e. London], 1624; STC 3171), 33; Somerset RO, DD/Ph 227/16: 'A discourse ... betweene a counsellor of state and a country gentleman', quoted in Cogswell, *Blessed Revolution*, 137–8.

<sup>62</sup> BL, Add. MS 72255/152, fos 125r–125v: Jean Beaulieu to William Trumbull, 8 Mar. 1624.

<sup>63</sup> *Proceedings, 1625*, 204, 208, 210. The motion was successful and, on 24 July, Charles assented. The fast was celebrated by MPs on 2 July and communion was held the day after: *Proceedings, 1625*, 204–5, 208, 210, 217, 221–2, 44, 238–9, 257–9, 504. London also observed the fast on 2 July and Westminster on 4 July (because its two churches,

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Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's, were used by the Lords and Commons on 2<sup>nd</sup>). The nationwide fast was originally ordered for 7 July but, as this date was subsequently found to be too soon for organisation throughout the kingdom, it was changed to 20 July because 7 July. See *National Prayers ... volume 1*, ed. Mears, 274–84.

<sup>64</sup> *Proceedings in parliament, 1626*, ed. W.B. Bidwell and Maija Jansson (4 vols, New Haven, CT, 1991–96), iii, 100.

<sup>65</sup> Charles consented to the motion immediately, ordering the fast to be held on 5 April in London, Westminster and environs and on 21 April elsewhere. *Commons debates, 1628*, ed. R.C. Johnson et al (6 vols., New Haven, CT, 1977–83), ii, 32–5, 46–7, 94; *CJ*, I, 923; *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 309–14.

<sup>66</sup> *Commons debates for 1629*, ed. Wallace Notestein and F.H. Relf (Minneapolis, MN, 1921), 16–17 On Charles's consent see: *ibid.*, 16–17, 28–9; *National prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 348–9.

<sup>67</sup> *Proceedings, 1625*, 204, 208, 210; *Proceedings, 1626*, ii, 100.

<sup>68</sup> *Commons debates, 1628*, vi, 204.

<sup>69</sup> *Commons debates, 1628*, ii, 32–3. And see his reasoning in 1629: *Commons debates, 1629*, 16–17, 28–9

<sup>70</sup> *Barrington family letters, 1628–1632*, ed. Arthur Searle (Camden Society, 4th ser., xxviii, 1983), 51–52.

<sup>71</sup> *CJ*, I, 457, 508; *Proceedings, 1625*, 204, 208, 210.

<sup>72</sup> *Proceedings, 1626*, iii, 410; *Commons Debates, 1628*, ii, 33. Also reported in TNA, SP16/98/63, fo 130r: John Millington to Gilbert Millington, [26 Mar.?] 1628.

<sup>73</sup> *HPC, 1604–1629*, iii, 470–81; Roger Lockyer, 'Cecil, Edward, Viscount Wimbledon (1572–1638)', *ODNB*.

<sup>74</sup> *HPC, 1604–1629*, v, 646–62; *ODNB*.

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<sup>75</sup> T. Venning and Paul Hunneyball, 'Giles, Sir Edward (1566–1637)', *HPC, 1604–1629*, iv, 365–73.

<sup>76</sup> Andrew Thrush, 'Fuller, Nicholas (1544–1620)', *HPC, 1604–1629*, iv, 324–33.

<sup>77</sup> Sir William seconded Cecil's motion for a fast in 1624; his son proposed both communion and a general fast in 1628: *CJ*, I, 671; *Commons Debates, 1628*, ii, 32; T. Venning and Paul Hunneyball, 'Strode, Sir William (1562–1637)' and 'Strode, William (?1594–1645)', *HPC, 1604–1629*, vi, 473–82, 469–73.

<sup>78</sup> Pym argued in favour of a general fast in 1625 (*Proceedings, 1625*, 204) and was on the committee to draw up the petition in 1628 and 1629 (*Commons debates, 1628*, ii, 30; *CJ*, I, 922).

<sup>79</sup> *Proceedings, 1626*, iii, 410. Rous was also appointed to the committee to prepare the draft petition in 1629: *CJ*, I, 922.

<sup>80</sup> On 9 June 1626, Harley announced the reasons for the fast established by the committee (*Proceedings, 1626*, ii, 410); on 20 March 1628 he said in the House, 'I joy to see the sense of this House to join to humble ourselves to God; if the King grant it, the House, and this city, may have a set day and the kingdom another day afterward' (*Commons debates, 1628*, ii, 35). He was appointed to the committee to prepare the draft petition in 1629 (*CJ*, i, 922).

<sup>81</sup> He was also appointed to the committee to prepare the draft petition in 1629 (*CJ*, I, 922).

<sup>82</sup> *Proceedings, 1625*, 204.

<sup>83</sup> *Proceedings, 1626*, iii, 100.

<sup>84</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, the motion had mixed success. Charles attempted, unsuccessfully, to hurry proceedings along, but the committee worked slowly throughout May and June, only to be replaced by a second committee, while the Lords refused to join the Lower House, 'because they comprehended not *causa causarum*'. The proposal disappears from the Commons' journals and diaries after 15 June and, on 30 June, the crown itself ordered a general fast in response to the plague and war. See *Proceedings, 1626*, iii, 100, 139, 145,

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377, 383, 386, 405 (and n 9), 407–8, 410, 444; *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 290–304.

<sup>85</sup> G. Yerby and Rosemary Sgroi, 'Rich, Nathaniel (1585–1636)', *HPC, 1604–1629*, vi, 32–45.

<sup>86</sup> *Commons Debates, 1628*, ii, 32–3

<sup>87</sup> *CJ*, i, 457, 514–17, 676; *Proceedings ... 1614*, 42; *Common debates, 1621*, ii, 53, 103; *Proceedings, 1625*, 259; *Proceedings, 1626*, ii, 9; *Commons debates, 1628*, ii, 35.

<sup>88</sup> James's attitude is difficult to deduce because it is unclear why his consultation with the bishops in 1624 yielded no results. It is possible that, if he believed that Cecil's motion was part of a drive for war, he deliberately neglected the motion so as not to fan hawkish flames. Alternatively, he or the bishops may have considered that parliament's petition infringed the royal prerogative but chose not to state this, again in case it provoked disquiet.

<sup>89</sup> *Barrington family letters*, 51–52.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Royal proclamation, 30 June 1626, STC 8834, and Lambeth Palace Library [LPL], Abbot's Register, Part II, fos 218v–19v: Letter missive from Abbot to [a bishop], 21 Sept. 1626, both printed in *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 290–1, 304–307.

<sup>91</sup> LPL, Abbot's Register, Part II, fos 218v–19v; *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 304

<sup>92</sup> *Commons debates, 1628*, ii, 46, 51, 53, 66, 68, 71, 78–9, 83, 88, 94, 144–5; v. 86, 89–92, 95–9; vi. 59; TNA, SP16/98/63: John Millington to Gilbert Millington, [26 Mar?] 1628.

<sup>93</sup> *Proceedings 1626*, iii, 100; *Common debates, 1628*, v, 197–8, 206, 208.

<sup>94</sup> LPL, Abbot's Register, Part II, fos 218v–19v; *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 304–7.

<sup>95</sup> Mildmay's previous involvement in fast motions had been limited: he was a member of the committee deputed to confer with the Lords on Cecil's proposal in 1625. Andrew Thrush, 'Mildmay, Sir Henry (c. 1594–1668)', *HPC, 1604–1629*, v, 326–34; *Proceedings ... Short parliament*, 143.

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<sup>96</sup> *Proceedings in the Opening Session of the Long Parliament: House of Commons*, ed. Maija Jansson (7 vols, Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, 2000–2007), i, 20, 29, 64–65; iii, 605–6; vi, 571, 577, 658.

<sup>97</sup> *Proceedings ... Short Parliament*, 69, 241–2; *CJ*, ii, 10–11.

<sup>98</sup> There appear to have been no further discussions after the motion was made on 17 April. *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, iii, 604–6.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 570–1, 577. The treaty of London ratified the peace agreed between England and Scotland after the battle of Newburn, ending the Second Bishops' War.

<sup>100</sup> *Proceedings ... Short parliament*, 143; *Proceedings ... Long parliament*, I, 29; vi, 571. For the continuing emphasis on using collective communion to exclude Catholics and recusants from the house, now extended to those whose family and/or servants were Catholic, see *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, i, 64, 206, 217–18, and, for some of the context of their concerns, *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, i, 97.

<sup>101</sup> *CJ*, ii, 4

<sup>102</sup> *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, i, 29. Note that the words in square brackets are supplied by the Commons Journal and are not modern editorial additions.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 20.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 571; *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 377–80.

<sup>105</sup> *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, iii, 604–6.

<sup>106</sup> *LJ*, iv, 66–67.

<sup>107</sup> Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1639–1642* (Oxford, 1991), 97–102.

<sup>108</sup> *Proceedings ... Short Parliament*, 69, 143, 241–2 ; *CJ*, ii, 9, 10–11; *LJ*, iv, 65, 67. The joint conference may have been to agree to a date for the fast as the journals differ on whether this had been settled. *LJ* states that 'the Committees of the House of Commons came without any Order or Commission to treat of a Day certain, and so returned to acquaint the



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House, and to return an Answer as this Day' (iv, 65) while *CJ* makes clear that 2 May had been settled on already (ii, 9; *Proceedings ... Short Parliament*, 169, 241).

<sup>109</sup> *CJ*, ii, 9–19; *LJ*, iv, 66–81; *Proceedings ... Short Parliament*, 69–80; *Proceedings ... Short Parliament*, 241–2. The nationwide fast did proceed on 8 July: *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 368–73.

<sup>110</sup> *CJ*, ii, 122; *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, iii, 604–606, 608.

<sup>111</sup> i.e. the first part of the communion service which was read after morning prayer on Sundays and other holy days when there was no actual communion.

<sup>112</sup> *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, i, 161. On noise and disorder in parliament, see Jason Peacey, 'Disorderly Debates: Noise and Gesture in the 17th-Century House of Commons', *Parliamentary History*, xxxii (2013), 60–78; Cooper, 'Elizabethan House of Commons', 44–6.

<sup>113</sup> Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: the Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c.1700* (Oxford, 2007), 178–82, 228, 230, 236–7, 249–50.

<sup>114</sup> *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, i, 207–8; *CJ*, ii, 32; HMC, *Report on various collections, Volume II* (1903), 259–60: Thomas Knyvett to John Buxton, 24 Nov. 1640. Ultimately, the MPs' demands came to nothing because the communion service was postponed after Mr Heywood, a JP, was stabbed by a Catholic, 'as he was showing to a friend of his a schedule of such suspected and notorious papists as were about Westminster': *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, i, 233

<sup>115</sup> *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, i, 64, 207; Fincham and Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, ch. 6; Russell, *Fall of the British Monarchies*, 136–9; TNA, SP16/474/60, fo. 102: Injunctions given by the King's most Excellent Majesty concerning Divine Service, [undated; 1640?].

<sup>116</sup> Andrew Thrush, *The history of parliament: the House of Commons, 1604-1629: an introductory survey* (Cambridge, 2016), 176; John N Wall, 'Situating Donne's Dedication Sermon at Lincoln's Inn, 22 May 1623', *John Donne Journal*, xxvi (2007), 168–9, 203–205, 221; Zola M Packman and John N Wall, 'Worship at Trinity Chapel, Lincoln's Inn, London, 22

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May 1623', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, lxi (2012), 118, 123–4; Emma Rhatigan, 'John Donne's Lincoln's Inn Sermons', University of Oxford DPhil, 2006, pp. 42-4, 62-5 and passim.

It should also be acknowledged that there was a close relationship between Lincoln's Inn and the Commons, partly have been because the former had the largest representation of lawyers in parliament of all the Inns (though this ascendancy declined in the 1620s) and partly because it had been cultivated by some of the Inn's preachers – John Preston (1622-8), Edward Reynolds (1628-31) and Joseph Caryl (1632-48) – the latter two of whom also preached frequently for the Long Parliament: Thrush, *Introductory Survey*, 167–8, 172–7.

Note that *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 377 mistakenly states that the Commons celebrated the thanksgiving at St Margaret's.

<sup>117</sup> *CJ*, ii, 273, 275–6, 278; Bates, 'Nationwide Fasts', pp. 88–90.

<sup>118</sup> *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, vi, 649, 658, 675, 685. This contrasts with the interpretation given in *National Prayers ... Volume 1*, ed. Mears, 377, and reflects the further research conducted for this article since the edition was published.

<sup>119</sup> Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation*, 88.

<sup>120</sup> Mears, 'Public Worship and Political Participation', 4–25, especially 24–5.

<sup>121</sup> See above, fn 5.

<sup>122</sup> On this, see also Mears, 'Public Worship and Political Participation', 4–25.

<sup>123</sup> For sociological and anthropological works see, for example, Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Case Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge, 1982). For historical works, see, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA. and London, 1987); Gervase Rosser, 'Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, xxxiii (1994), 430–46, and Adam Fox, 'Food, Drink and Social Distinction in Early Modern England', in *Remaking English Society: Social*

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*Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard and John Walter (Woodbridge, 2013), 165–88.

<sup>124</sup> Like communal feasts, fasts were also opportunities for almsgiving. See *Proceedings, 1625*, 67, 69, 79, 81, 111, 175, 242, 266; *Commons debates, 1628*, ii, 275; v, 97, 115, 117.

Though note that, not only were the preachers' fees deducted from the charitable collection, but that the Lords decreed how much bishops and lords respectively should contribute, while those who did not attend were expected to pay fines which were added to the charitable collection. For MPs gathering together before going to St Margaret's, see *Commons debates, 1628*, ii, 151–2; v, 148.

<sup>125</sup> *Proceedings ... Long Parliament*, i, 64, 97, 206, 217–18. Note that, at the beginning of the Long Parliament, the Commons ordered that a list of recusants living in and around London be compiled and submitted to a committee headed by Pym; Pym also suggested that Catholics wore a distinguishing badge (*CJ*, ii, 34; Russell, *Fall of the British Monarchies*, 177).

<sup>126</sup> *CJ*, ii, 506, 686. See also *CJ*, ii, 790, 885, 918; iii, 352, 435.

<sup>127</sup> Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, 108, 113, 116–18, 129, 144, 147.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 116–17.

<sup>130</sup> E.g. William Holland, 'Fast Day!' (London, 1793), Thomas Rowlandson, 'Fast day' (London, 1812), and 'Fasting by proclamation. Fasting by necessity', in *Figaro in London*, i:xiv (London, 1870), British Museum 1896,1118.102; 1938,0613.21, and 1870,1008.1481.1–3.