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# ECONOMIC IMMORALITY AND SOCIAL REFORMATION IN ENGLISH POPULAR PREACHING, 1585-1625

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**ABSTRACT:** Popular preachers frequently attempted to reform the relationship between rich and poor in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Rather than accepting economic malpractice as part of the divinely-ordained social order, many tried to convince their audiences that the extortions of merchants, landlords and creditors were crimes which should be punished severely by England's earthly authorities. This paper demonstrates how the 'discourse of exhortation' opened up a space for plebeian action with concrete socioeconomic consequences. By analysing the connotative idiom of social complaint found in homilies and other widely-heard sermons, the important but historiographically neglected role of 'godliness' in the early modern 'moral economy' is revealed.

**Keywords:** England, preaching, moral economy, popular politics

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Thomas Adams, preaching in 1613 before a crowd assembled at Paul's Cross in London, described rich merchants who 'hoord vp' foodstuffs 'to procure a dearth' as 'rebels to God, trespassers to nature, [and] theeuves to the Common-wealth'. In equally vitriolic terms, he went on to condemn unjust magistrates, fraudulent traders, rent-racking landlords, enclosers, pawn-brokers, usurers and a handful of other 'secret robbers' who preyed on their neighbours and 'laugh[ed] at the law'. These men, according to Adams, were more dangerous to England than common criminals and, if only they 'were apprehended and punished, neither City nor Countrey should complaine as they doe: Meane time, the peoples curse is vpon them, and I doubt not but Gods plague will follow it'.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars studying the religious discourse of Elizabethan and Jacobean England have long recognized that the misuse of wealth was a common subject among clerical commentators – indeed, Thomas Adams's polemical rebuke was typical of a whole genre of homiletic literature. Much of the early scholarship on this issue was attuned to the debate over possible links between Calvinism and capitalism, which led to a sometimes blinkered reading of the sources. Historians sought to dissect the particular economic views of each theological group without considering the social implications of conventional preaching as a whole.<sup>2</sup> This debate seems quite disconnected from the many printed sermons touching on the sins of the rich, where doctrinal differences momentarily disappeared behind a unanimous denunciation of economic evils like enclosure and usury. More recently, historians like Patrick Collinson, Steve Hindle, John Walter and others have begun to move beyond treating sermons on economic issues merely as policy statements by various theological factions and started to read them as part of a powerful ‘discourse of exhortation’ with real social impact.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as Mary Morrisey has already pointed out, the ‘interventionist nature of preaching rhetoric’ in early modern Europe has often been underestimated, and English clergymen’s constant attempts to reform the economic practices of the rich are no exception.<sup>4</sup> Although only a handful of scholars have acknowledged this aspect of the genre, the sermon was a text with tangible social authority on issues of moral discipline and community regulation.

Any attempt to explore the implications of reform-minded homiletics must also take account of the vicissitudes of popular reception and appropriation. While this article emphasizes the texts themselves rather than their local contexts, it also

attempts to build on the audience-centered perspectives mentioned above by focusing on the many connotative possibilities of preachers' admonitions to the rich with an eye to their socioeconomic repercussions.<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, labourers and artisans of this period, unlike some of their self-declared 'betterers', left behind no extensive commentaries on the ideas they must have so regularly encountered, so discussions of popular interpretation are necessarily speculative. Nonetheless, by analysing the implications that might have been drawn by those who formed the preacher's undoubtedly broad audience, the potentially volatile way cultural power could erode the legitimacy normally granted to wealth is more clearly revealed. This article thus begins with a discussion of early modern economic relations in the context of the most obvious idiom in preaching – godliness and heresy. The second section centres on the dichotomous metaphors of nature and monstrosity, while the third highlights the imagery of law and criminality. Throughout, despite focusing on clerical demands for social reformation, I have also interspersed examples hinting at the popular hermeneutics of the plebeians themselves. In the moralized society proclaimed at the pulpit, even the poor had a part to play in calling their superiors to account.

The sermons and homilies analysed here were all preached during a period of relative ecclesiastical and political stability, at least when compared to the surrounding decades. However, this was also a time of immense economic hardship which elicited an unprecedented response from the paternalist state. In 1586, at the beginning of this period, the first of five major harvest failures occurred and the government responded with its first comprehensive set of 'dearth orders', along with an all-out attack on usurers in York by Archbishop Sandys.<sup>6</sup> The dearth of 1622/3

was dealt with in a similar fashion, but soon after this the legal framework underwent some important changes. The anti-enclosure Tillage Act of 1563 was repealed in 1624 and even James I's new usury law was essentially 'secularized' by the time it passed in the same year.<sup>7</sup> The years considered here were certainly not the only ones in which the English state reacted to economic crises with heavy-handed regulation, but the level of integration between religious and governmental responses during this period is particularly remarkable.

I have focused my attention on some of the most popular and widely distributed examples of homiletic literature. The published versions of Paul's Cross sermons have been a key source as they were heard by a large London audience, sometimes numbering in the thousands, and were often reused by county ministers in England's other parishes.<sup>8</sup> Also included are the government-sponsored homilies – particularly the *Three Sermons, Or Homelies, to Mooue Compassion towards the Poore* distributed during the dearth of the late 1590s – which were heard by far more people than even the most famous sermons in London. Overall, the preachers discussed below, while certainly united in purpose, represent a remarkable cross-section of Protestant theology from firm orthodoxy to the edge of conformity.<sup>9</sup> Given their evident willingness to denounce the rich's neglect of 'second table' duties in often fierce tones, it is hardly surprising to find that many shared an evangelical, disciplinarian leaning that sometimes brought accusations of 'puritanism'. However, this genre was not the exclusive property of any particular politico-theological group – it reflected the moralizing impulse common to all of them. Forcefully condemning

the sins of oppression, extortion and covetousness was a key element in even the most conventional pastoral agenda in late Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

Building on the social gospel that had been so forcefully proclaimed by their mid-Tudor predecessors, these preachers sharply and repeatedly rebuked the rich for their oppression of the poor. The words and phrases they employed, usually just quoted by historians as evidence of clerical disapproval, invite further investigation. When Thomas Adams described merciless profit-seekers as ‘rebels to God, trespassers to nature, [and] theeuves to the Common-wealth’, he was doing more than just scolding them – he was connecting the microcosmic struggles of consumers, tenants and debtors to the macrocosmic world of divinity and politics. This evocative language of moral danger conferred an importance on the petty conflicts fought out in the fields or at the market stalls that is difficult to appreciate in modern societies where – at least in theory – economic, political and religious issues are firmly compartmentalized.

## I. THE DISCOURSE OF HERESY

Thomas Adams’s concise phrase thus serves as a useful starting point for an examination of the imagery of religious exhortation; his use of the term ‘rebels to God’ points to one of the most obvious facets of preaching about the misuse of wealth – the discourse of heresy. Rhetorical links between self-interest and religious deviance were not particular to the late-sixteenth century, but the connection became officially established in the Elizabethan *Book of Homilies* and was reinforced by the many sermons which followed it. The homily against idolatry, for example, asserted

that ‘couetous persons’ routinely broke the first and second commandments by worshipping ‘not onely the images, but also the matter of them, golde and siluer’.<sup>10</sup> This was taken still further by Jeremiah Dyke who, in sermon at Paul’s Cross in 1619, decried ‘the covetous Mammonist’ for his ‘paganish religion’ in which ‘the number of his bags, nay of his pence, is the number of his idols’.<sup>11</sup> In a world where the iconoclastic impulse of the Reformation had not yet been stilled, these were dramatic accusations and preachers’ habitual representation of wealth as a dangerous idol draws attention to the decidedly ambiguous relationship between the assumptions of monotheistic religious culture and the profit-motive deemed to be inherent in market economies.<sup>12</sup> The danger of one’s love for the world overwhelming one’s love for God was ever present.

The persistent link between idolatry and material gain was elaborated more precisely by preachers targeting specific economic abuses. The well-known ‘silver-tongued’ London lecturer Henry Smith usually denounced sinners in fairly broad terms, but several of his sermons from the early 1590s singled out usurers and merchants for special condemnation because they kept ‘their cofers full of golden Gods’ by extorting the goods of the poor.<sup>13</sup> According to Smith, these men were ‘Heretikes, because after manie admonitions, yet they maintaine their errour, & persist in it obstinately as Papists do in Poperie’.<sup>14</sup> This allusion to Catholicism ought to remind us how deeply politicized the issue of idolatry was in early modern England, a place where clerical vestments and the communion service become the foci of national controversies. Popery, according to Peter Lake, was ‘an ideal type of deviance and evil against which all true Protestants should unite’ and, in this climate

of anti-papal iconophobia, representing a particular economic practice as idolatrous heresy was a call for immediate political intervention.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this is why William Loe, a Gloucester prebend who would later become chaplain to James I, called on ‘the Nobilitie and gentrie of this Land’ to cease their ‘racking of Tenants’ by characterizing it as a ‘iesuiticall deuice & popish practice’.<sup>16</sup>

Though its associations with popery were dire enough, some saw an even darker threat behind the unjust pursuit of wealth. The official homily for rogation week, when the parish boundaries were walked and when land issues came to the fore, asserted that ‘greedy men [who] plowe and grate vpon their neighbours lande [are] hatefull to almyghtie God’ and those who live ‘by vsurie, [or] by extortion ... become worshippers of the deuill’ who sin ‘at his bidding’.<sup>17</sup> It was widely acknowledged that Satan was an active agent in human affairs, and many preachers were not shy in pointing out that he had followers in the mansions and castles of England. In 1602, William Burton, a well-published minister with a devout following amongst the ‘godly’ sort, vividly described the working of the demonic economy:

[Satan] hath the most rich, not the most religious Merchants of the world to trafficke for him: he hath the cunningest and the cruellest vsurers and extortioners to exact for him: he hath a legion, yea a million of brokers to hunt for him, to buy and sell for him ... some pinching others and enriching themselues by false waightes and measures, and some by extreme prises, exacting vpon the buyers.<sup>18</sup>

Fourteen years later, according to the lecturer William Jackson, Satan remained active in the country’s marketplaces. ‘Who makes things deare now?’ he asked his audience at Paul’s Cross, ‘[N]ot God but deuils incarnate, infernall brokers: I meane, engrossing misers, that swarme about this, and other the like cities’.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, these demons had to be exorcised.

If the constant attacks from the pulpit were not enough, clergymen could resort to more formal forms of religious ostracization with the backing of scripture and popular sentiment. In the Elizabethan homilies, ‘couetous persons and extortioners’ were classed alongside drunkards, whoremongers and idolaters as necessary targets for excommunication, while the Geneva Bible annotators recorded that those who ‘taketh rewarde against the innocent’ should be ‘cast forthe of the Church as hypocrites’.<sup>20</sup> Henry Smith took this one step further and called on his fellow ministers to ensure that extortionate creditors were excommunicated, denied the sacraments and refused burial on church ground.<sup>21</sup> It seems that some other clerics must have agreed as at least a few usurers and others who were ‘hard to the poor’ were excluded from communion or forced to do public penance.<sup>22</sup> Whether or not these spiritual rebukes could dissuade those in search of a profitable investment is open for debate, but these were certainly consequences which could not be easily dismissed by those living in a self-proclaimed ‘community of believers’.<sup>23</sup>

Even people with no formal authority could draw on this conception of Christian brotherhood in their power struggles with perceived oppressors and John Walter has uncovered several examples of this phenomenon in his insightful work on ‘the politics of subsistence’. In 1621, for instance, when a group of tenants in Westmoreland wrote up a list of grievances against their landlord, they explicitly cited the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 27:17: ‘Cursed bee [he] that removeth his neighbour’s landmarke’. Moreover, when they were unsatisfied with the response, they staged a play in front of the local manor which included a depiction of ‘false landlordes’ burning in Hell after taking away the ‘ancient liberties’ of their tenants.<sup>24</sup>

A decade later, during the dearth of 1630/1, a Dorchester widow complained that a local clergyman and civic official ‘starve[d] the Cuntry & did ioyne with the divell for mony & would be a merchant and fearmer for his [own] profitt’.<sup>25</sup> The fact that the target for this accusation was a ‘godly’ minister ought to remind us that the idiom preached at the pulpit could be recycled by those with a very different conception of a truly Christian society. An extreme and spectacularly unsuccessful case is that of John Jenkins, the unfortunate Kentish labourer who was pilloried in 1598 for remarking that ‘yf the Queene did putt downe beginge she is worse than Nan Bennett [a local witch] which forsooke God and all the world’.<sup>26</sup> While his invocation of religious rhetoric is clear enough, Jenkins obviously crossed the threshold of acceptable speech when he targeted Elizabeth herself.

The overlapping images of economic oppression as witchcraft, Satanism, popery and idolatry were foils to the popular ideal of English society as a Christian community wherein the rich dedicated themselves to charity, justice and godly worship rather than material ambitions. With preachers regularly citing scripture to prove that ‘euery engrosser [of necessities] is an infidell’, tensions could emerge if those who profited at the expense of the poor were not punished for their apparent apostasy.<sup>27</sup> Under Elizabeth and James, official attempts to purge the realm of its covetous merchants and landowners were rather less severe than the deadly campaigns waged against Catholic missionaries and Anabaptists.<sup>28</sup> Yet, although those preachers who called for the rigorous persecution of these ‘rebels to God’ did not bring about the far-reaching social reformation which they demanded, their

condemnations undoubtedly influenced the evolving relationship between rich and poor in early modern England.

## **II. THE DISCOURSE OF MONSTROSITY**

Heresy and idolatry may have appeared profoundly threatening to the English in the years following the Reformation, but for sinners the possibility of repentance and reconciliation was always open. However, for those rich oppressors whose very existence was characterized as a threat to the divine order, mere penitence was not an option. In his condemnation of hoarders as ‘trespassers to nature’, Thomas Adams drew on this second evocative collection of images in the preacher’s repertoire – the discourse of monstrosity. To misuse the power that came with wealth was to transgress the laws of nature, and to flout these laws was to upset the very foundations upon which human society was built. In a world where macrocosm and microcosm were intimately linked, familial and corporal metaphors – whereby the monarch was the ‘father’ of his people and his subjects were ‘members’ of the ‘body-politic’ – became truths that shaped the course of public debate. Hence, it must have seemed obvious to both Charles Richardson and his London audience that oppression was ‘against nature, for every mans neighbour is his owne flesh’ and ought to be treated with ‘naturall compassion’.<sup>29</sup>

This idea of society as a corporal entity – unified in its purpose, but divided in its abilities – fit well with the early modern faith in hierarchy and inequality. While the particulars of the analogy were often debated, it was clear that each person or group was merely a part of the whole and the bonds of interdependence were

inviolable. In his Paul's Cross sermon of 1615, Richardson set out the matter succinctly: 'There is one body. As in the naturall body, there is no member more for it selfe, then for the whole; ... Those that are, as it were, eyes and hands, must not oppresse the feet.'<sup>30</sup> Although this metaphor was frequently used to justify kingly authority and exhort obedience, it simultaneously demanded reciprocity in economic dealings whilst excluding single-minded profit-seekers from the 'naturall' body-politic. For example, during the dearth of the late 1590s, the government issued a set of homilies intended to curtail wasteful gluttony and chide the rich for their uncharitableness.<sup>31</sup> They presented the poverty and dislocation of the period as a divine punishment which had been unjustly enhanced by the mercilessness of 'bad members' like the 'encroaching Monopolistes, who enhaunce and gather all commodities into their owne handes, not caring how many pinch for it, so they may reap the profite'. It was abominable, claimed one homily, for any of the 'members in the bodie' to pursue personal gain 'when the head, and hart, and bellie are ready to pine away with hunger'.<sup>32</sup>

Some preachers expanded on this assault on the avarice of particular 'bad members' by evoking the early modern dread of pestilence and disease. The regular visitation of deadly plagues made Elizabethan and Jacobean communities deeply anxious of the dangers that both literal and metaphorical contagion could pose, so allusions to the idea of social infection were frequent.<sup>33</sup> Henry Smith, for instance, complained that 'the disease which wee cal the Woolfe, that is alwaies eating, and yet keepes the body leane' was personified in the many men with 'coffers ful' who continued to extort riches from their neighbours.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, both Thomas Adams

and William Jackson described usurers and pawn-brokers as ‘the seede of vipers’ who swarmed through cities like the ‘vermine of the earth, the corruption of nature, and bred like monsters’. Although it had only been a short time ‘since this viperous generation sprung vp’, their covetousness was a ‘venimous infection’ that might spread through the entire body, so good Christians must ensure that ‘authoritie will take an order to cut them downe’ before it became too late.<sup>35</sup> Like the plague, these men ‘corrupt and taint all those which are neare vnto them’ with ‘their euill examples’; only the inoculation provided by swift and severe justice could protect the realm from danger.<sup>36</sup>

Usury was targeted for its unnaturalness on a more abstract level by clergymen who had read enough glosses of Aristotle and Aquinas to know that money was a ‘barren metal’ and therefore to make it breed was to violate its natural *telos*.<sup>37</sup> No right-thinking person would dare partake in such aberrant midwifery, noted Smith, for ‘he which saith to his money, increase & multiply, begetteth a monstrous birth’.<sup>38</sup> This unnatural copulation was clearly a practice which could not be tolerated by either God or man as its offspring was an affront to the entire macrocosmic order. Moreover, according to Adams, the creature spawned by this ‘prodigious birth’ was dedicated ‘wholly [to] deuouring’ and its predatory instinct was a threat to anyone who encountered it.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, this image of economic exploitation as a ‘deuouring’ beast was perhaps the most common allusion in the discourse of monstrosity. Most sermons that confronted the issues of enclosure, hoarding, usury or other forms of ‘hard dealing’ made reference to the supposed carnivorousness of their practitioners and the image

was used regularly in pamphlets and petitions as well. Verses from Isaiah, Mark and the fourteenth Psalm were invoked by Adam Hill to condemn the ‘Nimrodical oppressors of England’ who ‘with their wealth and might ... grind the face of the poore, and braye them as it were in a morter’, ‘devour widowes houses’ and ‘eate up the people like bred’. Similarly, for Andrew Willet and many of his fellow ministers, the words of the third chapter of Micah proved that covetous creditors and rent-racking landlords were ‘cruell wolues, that doe eat the fleshe, fle[y] off[f] the skin, breake the bones, & chop them as small as fleshe to the caldron’.<sup>40</sup> Given that these metaphors appeared with such constancy in the preaching of the period, it should hardly be surprising that they were drawn on by plebeians seeking to reinforce their arguments with scriptural authority. Perhaps this inspired the words of a Norfolk libel from the 1590s which complained that ‘the rich had fed on our flesh’ and had ‘set open shop to sell poor men’s skins’.<sup>41</sup> Whatever the context, the words of God and his prophets clearly implied that taking advantage of the poor was an act more bestial than human.

However, these direct scriptural citations formed just a fraction of the effusion of predatory imagery heard by audiences in London and elsewhere. For example, Jeremiah Dyke, preaching at Paul’s Cross in 1619, noted that God describes oppressors as ‘Lions’, but went on to conclude:

Beasts they are, beasts of prey, they live *ex rapto* ... [like] devouring wolves ... How fairely were this Iland blest, if it were as cleare rid of these as it is of other wolves? How happy were it if these Cannibals were amongst the savage Indians?<sup>42</sup>

This explicit plea for reformation through purgation is indicative of the way an allusion to monstrosity could serve as a powerful invocation of moralized social relations. This may be why the crowds that met James I in Northamptonshire on his

way to London in 1603 seem to have complained so fiercely of depopulating enclosures by local ‘woluish lords, that haue eaten up poore Husbandmen like sheepe’.<sup>43</sup> By representing their rich opponents as symbols of gluttonous inhumanity, those with no official authority turned a local grievance over land-use into a petition to set right a macrocosmic order upended by ‘savage’ cannibalism.

Perhaps surprisingly, the most common representation of wealthy oppressors in Elizabethan and Jacobean preaching was probably the image of the ravenous bird. For instance, in his plea for charitable dealings with the poor, Smith claimed the mercilessness of ‘vngodlie rich cormorants’ proved that his was an age when ‘man is most vnnaturall to man’.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, the government-sponsored *Homilies* written to assuage the dearth of the late 1590s condemned the ‘many greedy cormorants (I should have said cornemasters) who had rather keep their corne for vermine to feede upon, then bring it to the market for the foode of men’.<sup>45</sup> During this same troubled period, even the Queen herself and her Privy Council publicly proclaimed that monopolists and other ‘greedy cormorants’ ought to be ‘chastised with all severe punishment’.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, under James I, covetous landlords were denounced in the sermons of preachers like Jeremiah Dyke and William Loe as ‘Harpyes and cormorants ... ever fixing their kites clawes and their gryphons talants upon their poore brother Jacobs goods’.<sup>47</sup> The provenance of this particular image is unclear but, by the late sixteenth century, the link between carnivorous birds and the sin of insatiable gluttony was well-established. For those who felt threatened by the acquisitiveness of their wealthy countrymen, the imagery of ‘cormorancy’ must have seemed especially apt.<sup>48</sup> No doubt this is what spurred a group of amateur players in

Westmoreland to depict ‘greedy landlordes’ as ‘ravens’ who ‘poole & peele vs to the bare bone’ by imposing harsh leases on the ‘poore sheepe’ who were unlucky enough to be their tenants.<sup>49</sup> Carnivorousness and oppression were mentally inseparable.

This common thread linking depictions of wolves, ravens, cormorants and other rapacious creatures was precisely the source of their popularity among those seeking social reformation. By presenting particular practices as monstrous threats to the natural order, these accusations appealed directly to the political elites’ instinctive dread of disorder and set up an opportunity for them to prove their paternalist credentials. Moreover, although Thomas More’s famous man-eating sheep makes no appearance, many ministers were evidently more than willing to draw on fables and cheap print in their attempts to reform the rich.<sup>50</sup> Reciting the scholastic condemnation of usury as a ‘prodigious birth’, for example, would have been rather less thrilling if there had not been such a profusion of popular accounts portraying ‘monsterous chyldren’ and strange deformities as evidence of God’s providence.<sup>51</sup> Whether referring to their targets as ‘bloud-hounds’, ‘moths’, ‘Rats’, ‘Wesels’, ‘Fulmars’ or ‘snakes’, preachers consistently associated economic sins with a predatory bestiality that could not be suffered to exist in human society.<sup>52</sup> After all, during this period few would dispute that to ‘racke the poore with ouer-plus, all (but Deuils) hold monstrous’.<sup>53</sup>

### III. THE DISCOURSE OF CRIMINALITY

If accusations of heresy and monstrosity were not enough to dissuade the wealthy from greedy predation, preachers knew that the weight of the law might be enlisted in

their battle for social reformation; few of these sermons lack an allusion to what Thomas Adams called ‘theeues to the Common-wealth’. The underlying legal basis of their exhortations was a collection of severely worded statutes and proclamations, but clerical censure often went far beyond the parameters of these official decrees. In fact, most preachers derided the government’s prosecution of economic sin as insufficiently vigorous.<sup>54</sup> The poor, for their part, worked to draw attention to their grievances using the language of criminality, but were only occasionally able to overcome the distorting effects of money in conventional legal proceedings.

The popular conception of the law as a defender of economic equity drew much of its strength from the doctrine of Christian stewardship. In direct – but rarely acknowledged – contradiction to proprietarian notions of private property, the world’s goods were imagined as loans from God which might be revoked at any time by their true owner. According to both eminent theologians and popular lecturers, material inequality was divinely ordained, but the destitute still had a right to the necessities of life. ‘The bread of the poore is in the waies of the rich,’ claimed Henry Smith, and ‘hee that keepeth it from them, is a man of bloud’, because only ‘a robber’ would keep ‘an other mans substance, and to reckon it as [his] owne’.<sup>55</sup> The people of Elizabethan and Jacobean England would have regularly encountered these patristic formulations – first outlined by St Basil of Caesarea – at Paul’s Cross in sermons denouncing the ‘theefe’ who ‘steales away the corne that should make the poores-bread; not with the power of his arme, but by the strength of his purse’.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Ian Green has noted that these sins, according to most catechists, were as much a violation of the eighth commandment as picking pockets or even violent robbery.<sup>57</sup>

While these criminals might use the methods of merchants rather than highwaymen to pursue their goals, their disdain for the doctrine of Christian stewardship ensured them an outlaw status in the era's popular religious discourse.

More immediate inspiration for the rhetoric of criminality came from the law codes themselves. Few economic sins were ever persecuted with the zeal demanded by clerical commentators, but the government's public stance on the issues ensured that there was always some substance behind poor petitioners' accusations of illegality even if they could not afford a protracted court case. Tenants and cottagers, for example, were theoretically protected by an Act of 1563 which criminalized those who 'inclose their grounds' and 'do daily decay towns and houses of husbandry'.<sup>58</sup> In his sermon on hypocrisy, Adams included a long passage which engaged with the law quite directly:

[H]ee that incloseth Commons is a monstrous theefe, for he steales away the poore mans liuing and life ... [T]he law forbids such inclosures: yet when they are once ditcht in, say the law what it will, I see no throwing out: force beares out, what fraud hath borne in: let them neuer open their mouths to plead the Common-wealths benefit ... [for they are] the scourge of the poore: good only to themselues ... These are theeuers, though they haue inclosed their theft, to keepe the Law out, and their wickednesse in.<sup>59</sup>

Evidentially, Adams thought that he could use the government's official stance to push the magistracy into more vigorous action. Preachers could also cite several 'depopulation commissions' like the one established by James I after the anti-enclosure rising of 1607 in the Midlands. Even as he hanged a few of the rioters for their 'presumption to be Reformers' and pardoned the rest, the King ordered a large-scale inquiry into 'the abuses of Depopulations' in the region and commanded his judges to 'preceede against them with all severitie'.<sup>60</sup> That these attacks on

acquisitive landlords were both formal and public only served to reinforce the discourse of criminality in the sermons of social reformers.

Some preachers saw the oppression of one's tenantry as a crime worse than mere theft. For them, the practice of raising the rent so high 'that it straines the Tenants hart-blood to reach it' was akin to 'killing theft', 'rapine' or 'murther' and ought to be punished as such by the authorities.<sup>61</sup> Unsurprisingly, such sentiments reappear implicitly in the actions of poor people seeking redress against particular landlords, though their interpretations of the spirit of the law were scorned by their superiors. This understanding of justice was given direct expression in the late 1620s when attempts to drain and ditch a stretch of common fen land resulted in a group of protesters 'sett[ing] up a paire of gallowes' in addition to 'demolishing the work', destroying tools and assaulting the workmen. They claimed – albeit unsuccessfully – that their customary 'common of pasture' meant that they were not trespassing on the land and it was the encloser who needed to be punished.<sup>62</sup>

The relationship between creditors and debtors was similarly framed in a sometimes complex legal environment which had been continually refined since the Mosaic injunctions first set down in Exodus and Deuteronomy. In 1571, Elizabeth's parliament passed the statute that would define and punish usurious lending for over half a century wherein the government unambiguously declared that 'all Usurie being forbydden by the Law of God is synne and detestable', but the law only penalized loans at more than ten per cent and it was only haphazardly enforced.<sup>63</sup> These sorts of irregular bursts of legal activity were evidently not enough for the preachers of this era, who universally decried the many covetous lenders who escaped civil

punishment. Both Henry Smith and Andrew Willet, for instance, defined usurers and others who ‘wring and grieue the people’, as ‘theeues’ demanding punishment, while Adams proclaimed every usurer to be ‘a double thiefe’, for ‘theeues steale for necessity, vsurers without need’.<sup>64</sup> Here again the conventional equation of poverty with criminality is inverted by justifying the necessitous thief while condemning his rich counterpart to death.

While state interference in land-use and lending was undoubtedly significant, the authorities focused most of their regulative energy on the marketing of food, fuel, textiles and other necessities. From the poor harvest of 1586 to that of 1622, a total of five ‘dearth orders’ were issued to magistrates directing them to search out private stores of grain, bring it to market, and prosecute hoarders under the laws against ‘forestalling’, ‘regrating’ or ‘engrossing’.<sup>65</sup> In addition, over a dozen proclamations were issued to back up the government’s various initiatives.<sup>66</sup> Although the punishments meted out to grain dealers who took excessive profits were usually just fines, such fines could be harsh and were sometimes supplemented with a turn in the pillory. In a 1588 case, one Framingham of Norfolk was charged with the ‘destroying of husbandry’, renting cottages ‘at dear rates’, ‘forstalling’, and ‘inhancing the price of corne’ for which he was fined £500 in addition to being ‘ordered to pay 40*l* to the poore, and to stand upon a stoole in Cheapside with a paper on his head declaring his offence’.<sup>67</sup>

In light of this legal context, it is important to remember that it was frequently the local minister who conveyed the government’s stance on these issues, as when royal proclamations were read from the parish pulpit before the Sunday sermon. For

example, just one day after James I issued a proclamation against those who raise prices ‘through their greedy desire for unlawfull gaine’, William Jackson used his sermon at Paul’s Cross to declare that

Euery such engrosser, is a murtherer, not with a sword of steele, but with a sword of dearth; it is not his hands, but his crueltie that killeth; not his force, but his craft that wounds vnto death ... [M]any haue perished through their crueltie: whose blood they shall answer for.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, this judicial understanding of economics was clearly shared by many of those hearing the sermons and proclamations, evidenced in the 1595 case of the blacksmith Thomas Byndar who claimed that it was time to seize local hoarders’ grain and advocated hanging at least twenty of them by Christmas.<sup>69</sup>

The mindset that led these plebeians to volunteer as executioners hints at another aspect of early modern economic regulations: the fact that they so rarely met popular expectations. This led many religious commentators to set out a sometimes detailed critique of the justice system’s treatment of rich offenders. Charles Richardson, for instance, complained that poor thieves lay in prison while ‘City robbers’ are free to ‘domineir in gold and purple’ and ‘stretch themselves upon their beds of yvorie’. Thanks to magistrates who were either corrupt or remiss in their duties, ‘great theeves ... leade little theeves to the Gallowes’.<sup>70</sup> Of course, in retrospect, the rapidly evolving economic climate of early modern England meant that it was simply impossible for the government to prosecute all the commercial malpractices besetting the poor, especially given the complete lack of a professional police force and a legal structure which relied almost exclusively on expensive private prosecutions. Hence, few people could have doubted that, for every gang of highwaymen executed at Tyburn, there were ‘greater theeuves’ who escaped because

they were ‘too rich to be hanged’.<sup>71</sup> For preachers, the fault lay with those magistrates who failed to defend their flocks against the predations of wealthy wolves.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

The audiences at Paul’s Cross and elsewhere – bombarded with denunciations of ruthless profit-making as ungodly, unnatural and unlawful – must have looked at the actions of their affluent neighbours with a high degree of circumspection. However, the actual relationship between these sermons and the socioeconomic realities of daily life was not simply prescriptive. The intrinsic hostility of the words chosen by early modern preachers may have been clear, but the remedies they suggested were often vague or impracticable and this left considerable room for interpretation in the hands of the diverse auditors who assembled each week to hear them. This process of popular hermeneutics – interpreting God’s interpreter – is the fundamental problem with which this article is concerned, though the paucity of sources shedding light on popular reception also makes it the most difficult to study.

The intricate economic relationships to which these homiletics were applied could never have fit perfectly with the idealized forms represented in sermons by men like Henry Smith and Thomas Adams. Their tendency to reduce material distinctions to the two nebulous categories of ‘rich’ or ‘poor’ concealed the immense complexity of property relations during this period; in fact, this binary division was useful mainly because ‘it was a terminology of social simplification’ that separated the populace into ‘two broad camps’ which could then be instructed as to their particular moral duties.<sup>72</sup> Within these groups, however, it was sometimes difficult to separate the

virtuous from the sinful. Even Adams admitted that one can ‘not easily decerne’ between ‘an officer and a bribe-taker: betweene a seruitour and a parasite: betweene Farmers and poore-grinders: ... betweene a tradesman and a fraudesman: betweene a monied man and an vsurer; betweene an vsurer and the Deuill’.<sup>73</sup> Preachers thus sought to maintain a delicate balance between rebuking the villainous rich for their dangerous acts of covetousness and praising the virtues of the patriarchs who fulfilled their roles as equitable landlords, employers, or patrons.

These vagaries framed the space within which sharply divergent interpretations took shape and were fought out. Although everyone could agree that the divinely ordained social order could only be maintained by purging the realm of evils like oppression and extortion, the meanings assigned to such terms were constantly contested. As the examples outlined above have shown, plebeians could invoke the images of heresy, monstrosity and criminality with sometimes surprising eloquence, and their words might inflict real injuries on a rich opponent. By following the paths for supplication set out in sermons and homilies, those with no official power might successfully bring about a modest reprieve from the exactions of the wealthy, though they always ran the risk of offending the authorities with their assertiveness and finding their actions labelled seditious.

The rhetorical commonplaces discussed above were not unique to Elizabethan and Jacobean England, but their ability to influence everyday economic relations ought to draw attention to importance of religious discourse in the social history of this period. Historians studying the popular politics of food and enclosure riots have produced excellent analyses of the role played by persuasion, legitimation, and

custom in what E. P. Thompson famously called ‘the moral economy’ of the poor; however, they have tended to focus almost exclusively on the government and the criminalized rioter while largely excluding the role played by preachers and their audiences.<sup>74</sup> Given the centrality of popular Protestantism in early modern politics, it is hardly surprising to find villagers quoting scripture in their protests against perceived injustice and historians would do well to treat such tropes as more than just a superstructural veneer. Complex models of oppression, petition and redress were elaborated in the weekly sermons heard by the crowds at Paul’s Cross and in the thousands of parish churches which dotted the landscape. These preachers certainly did not advocate equality or revolution; in fact, they worked hard to reinforce the traditional hierarchy.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, in seeking to strengthen this seemingly ‘conservative’ order, they denounced the ruthless pursuit of profit by appealing to economic equity and social reformation. It was this constellation of beliefs that lent legitimacy to the complaints of the poor and shaped the way both plebeians and their wealthy neighbours behaved.

Historians must recognize that the words used by preachers to describe these conflicts were not mere platitudes or simple statements of theological policy, but rather vigorous attempts to reform the economic world through the power of the pulpit. Their struggles against commercial immorality demonstrably failed to bring about the utopian social harmony which they envisioned, but their discursive onslaught influenced the lives of tenants, landlords, consumers, merchants, debtors, and creditors well into the eighteenth century.<sup>76</sup> It is in this context that we must

examine the intersection of economics, religion and politics in Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Adams, *The white devil, or The hypocrite vncased ... Preached at Pavls Crosse* (1613), pp. 36-52. All primary sources were published in London unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926; repr. London, 1948), pp. 140-96; Christopher Hill, 'Puritans and the Poor', *Past & Present*, (2), (1952): 32-50; Charles H. George, 'English Calvinist Opinion on Usury, 1600-1640,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 18, (1957): 455-74; Millar Maclure, *The Paul's Cross Sermons, 1534-1642* (Toronto, 1958), pp. 122-35; Laura Stevenson O'Connell, 'Anti-Entrepreneurial Attitudes in Elizabethan Sermons and Popular Literature', *Journal of British Studies*, 15 (2), (1976): 1-20; Richard Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, 1981), pp. 547-647; Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 56-79. On the issue of 'usury', the debate over supposed theological factions has already been thoroughly exploded in Eric Kerridge, *Usury, Interest and the Reformation* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2002), esp. pp. 53-76.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Collinson, 'Christian Socialism in Elizabethan Suffolk: Thomas Carew and his Caveat for Clothiers' in Carole Rawcliffe, et al. (eds), *Counties and Communities: Essays on East Anglian History* (Norwich, 1996); idem, 'Puritanism and the Poor' in Rosemary Horrox and Sarah Rees Jones (eds), *Pragmatic Utopias: Ideals and Communities, 1200-1630* (Cambridge, 2001); Steve Hindle, 'Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England', *Past & Present*, (172), (2001): 44-86, esp. pp. 54-61; idem, 'Exhortation and Entitlement: Negotiating Inequality in English Rural Communities, 1550-1650', in Michael Braddick and John Walter (eds), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001); John Walter, 'Public Transcripts, Popular Agency and the Politics of Subsistence in Early Modern England', in ibid., esp. pp. 125-33; Mark Valeri, 'Religious Discipline and the Market: Puritans and the Issue of Usury', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 54 (4), (1997): 747-68; Juliet Ingram, 'Conscience of the Community: Clerical Complaint in Early Modern England', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Morrissey, 'Interdisciplinarity and the Study of Early Modern Sermons', *Historical Journal*, 42 (4), (1999): 1111-23, p. 1119.

<sup>5</sup> Several scholars have demonstrated the influence of religious ideals in the economic thought of educated elites, but they have focused on learned texts which few plebeians would have encountered: Joyce Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1978); David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York, 2001), esp. pp. 49-94; Whitney Jones, *The Tree of Commonwealth, 1450-1793* (Madison, 2000), pp. 85-143.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Slack, 'Books of Orders: The Making of English Social Policy, 1577-1631', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 5th ser., 30, (1980): 1-22, p. 3; idem, 'Dearth and Social Policy in Early Modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 5 (1), (1992): 1-17. The major proclamation of 1587 can be found in Paul Hughes and James Larkin (eds), *Tudor Royal Proclamations* (New Haven, 1969), III, pp. 532-34. The key dearth years were 1586/7, 1594/5-1597/8, 1608/9, 1613/4, and 1622/3 as recorded in the 'Annual Price of Wheat' in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* (Cambridge, 1967), IV, pp. 854-5. For Sandys's offensive in 1588, see Norman Jones, *God and the Moneylenders: Usury and the Law in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 110-13.

<sup>7</sup> Thirsk, *Agrarian History*, IV, p. 236; Jones, *God and the Moneylenders*, pp. 196-8.

<sup>8</sup> Maclure, *Paul's Cross Sermons*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Even Catholics and separatists seem to have denounced enclosing, hoarding and usury in very similar terms: Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England*, pp. 595-646. For unity regarding usury, see Kerridge, *Usury, Interest and the Reformation*.

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<sup>10</sup> All references to the homilies are taken from *The second tome of homilees* (1571 edn). The belief that ‘Couetousnes endeth in Idolatrie, and fitlie is so tearmed’ is also taken up by Lancelot Andrewes in his sermon on *The wonderfull combate* (1592), p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah Dyke, *A counterpoison against couetousnes ... preached at Paulls-Crosse* (1619), p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Eph. 5:5 and Jam. 4:4 were often cited as proof-texts, which is hardly surprising considering their annotations in the 1560 and 1602 editions of the Geneva Bible. See William Jackson, *The celestiall husbandrie ... in a sermon at Paulls Crosse* (1616), pp. 26-7.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Smith, *The poore mans teares opened in a sermon* (1592), p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Smith, *The examination of vsury in two sermons* (1591), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Lake, ‘Anti-popery: The Structure of a Prejudice’ in Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (eds), *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603-1642* (London and New York, 1989), p. 83. This argument has recently been expanded by Arthur Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, 2005), chs 2 and 5.

<sup>16</sup> William Loe, *The ioy of Ierusalem ... preached at Paulls Crosse* (1606), sig. G4r. For a direct association between greed, idolatry and the dark art of alchemy, see Dyke, *Counterpoison against couetousnes*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> This is perhaps what inspired Henry Smith to claim that the covetous ‘bowe vnto Baal’ because they are ‘enemies to God’ in his popular sermon on *The benefit of Contentation* (1590), sigs. A4r, B2v.

<sup>18</sup> William Burton, *Ten sermons vpon ... the sixt of Matthew* (1602), 202. For evidence of his ‘popular appeal’, see C. S. Knighton, ‘Burton, William (c.1545–1616)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Jackson, *Celestiall husbandrie*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>20</sup> ‘An Homilee agaynst gluttony and drunkennesse’ in *Homilees*. Annotation from Psalm 15:5 in the Geneva Bible (1560 edn).

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *The examination of vsury*, pp. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Jones, *God and the Moneylenders*, pp. 109, 114; Hindle, ‘Dearth, Fasting and Alms’, pp. 60-1.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Haigh discusses the seriousness of exclusion from communion in his ‘Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion in Post-Reformation England’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (2000): 721-40, esp. pp. 738-9.

<sup>24</sup> Walter, ‘Public Transcripts’, 131; ‘Kendal Stage Play’, *Star Chamber Records*, 29 April 1622, PRO STAC/8/34/4, printed in Audrey Douglas and Peter Greenfield (eds), *Records of Early English Drama: Cumberland, Westmoreland, Gloucestershire* (Toronto, 1986), p. 191.

<sup>25</sup> Walter, ‘Public Transcripts’, p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (London and New York, 2002), p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> Jackson, *Celestiall husbandrie*, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Maclure, *Paul’s Cross Sermons*, pp. 15-18.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Richardson, *A sermon against oppression ... preached at Paules Crosse* (1615), 4-5; Smith, *Examination of vsury*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., *Three Sermons, Or Homelies, to Mooue Compassion towards the Poore* (1596). For the context of this preaching campaign, see Hindle, ‘Dearth, Fasting and Alms’, pp. 54-61. See also, Jim Sharpe, ‘Social Strain and Social Dislocation, 1585-1603’ in John Guy (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Anon., *Three Sermons*, sigs. G2r-G2v.

<sup>33</sup> For a thorough discussion of the social consequences of pestilence, see Paul Slack, *The Impact of the Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1985).

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Benefit of Contentation*, sig. A5r.

<sup>35</sup> Jackson, *Celestiall husbandrie*, pp. 25-6, 30-1; Adams, *White deuil*, p. 49. The striking similarity between these two passages seems to indicate plagiarism on Jackson’s part as his was published three years after Adams’s well-known sermon.

<sup>36</sup> Loe, *Ioy of Ierusalem*, sig. F3r.

<sup>37</sup> Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, pp. 29-32; Jones, *God and the Moneylenders*, pp. 8-10.

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Examination of vsury*, pp. 15. Cf. Miles Mosse, *The arraignment and conuiction of vsurie ... in sixe sermons, preached at Saint Edmunds Burie* (1595), p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> Adams, *White deuil*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>40</sup> Adam Hill, *The crie of England ... preached at Paules Crosse [in 1593]* (1595), pp. 29-30; Andrew Willet, *A fruitfull and godly sermon preached at Paules crosse* (1592), sig. C1r-C2v; Adams, *White deuil*, 45-6. To ‘bray’ was to ‘crush’ or ‘beat’. The passages paraphrased are Isa. 3:15, Mark 12:40, Prov. 27:22, Psalm 14:4, and Mic. 3:2-3. For more examples of these phrases, see William Burton, *A caueat for suerties, two sermons ... made in Bristol* (1593), pp. 92-3; Richardson, *Sermon against oppression*, pp. 11, 15; Jackson, *Celestiall husbandrie*, pp. 31; Anon., *Three Sermons*, sig. G2v.

<sup>41</sup> Walter, ‘Public Transcripts’, pp. 140-1.

<sup>42</sup> Dyke, *Counterpoison against couetousnes*, pp. 55. See also, Smith, *Examination of vsury*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>43</sup> T. M., *The true narration of the entertainment of his Royall Maiestie* (1603), E4v-F2r. It is not entirely clear from the text whether it is the ‘the people there-about’ who used the term ‘woluish’ when ‘beseeching his Maiestie’ or just the narrator.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Poore mans teares*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Anon., *Three Sermons*, sig. G2v.

<sup>46</sup> Hughes and Larkin (eds), *Tudor Proclamations*, III, pp. 193-5 (no. 795); H. W. Saunders (ed.), *The Official Papers of Sir Nathaniel Bacon*, (Camden Society, 3rd ser., XXVI, London, 1915), pp. 140-1.

<sup>47</sup> Dyke, *Counterpoison against couetousnes*, pp. 40-1; Loe, *Ioy of Ierusalem*, sig. F3r.

<sup>48</sup> See ‘cormorant’, ‘cormorancy’ and ‘cornvorant’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989); Karen Edwards, ‘Cormorant’, *Milton Quarterly*, 39, (2005): 258-9. For a discussion of images of carnivorous vermin more generally, see Mary Fissell, ‘Imagining Vermin in Early Modern England’, *History Workshop Journal*, 47 (1999): 1-29, esp. pp. 4-11.

<sup>49</sup> Douglas and Greenfield, *Records of Early English Drama: Cumberland, Westmoreland, Gloucestershire*, pp. 191, 197.

<sup>50</sup> For a popular translation of More’s image of enclosers’ sheep ‘devour[ing] hole fieldes, howeses and cities’, see *A fruteful, and pleasaunt worke ... called Vtopia* (1551), sig. C6v.

<sup>51</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 194-203. For ‘unnatural’ imagery more generally, see Kathryn Brammall, ‘Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England’, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27 (1), (1996): 3-21.

<sup>52</sup> Richardson, *Sermon against oppression*, p. 11; Smith, *Examination of vsury*, pp. 21-2, 31; Dyke, *Counterpoison against couetousnes*, pp. 25-7. Under Charles I, the Cornish preacher Charles Fitz-Geffry branded them as ‘Horse-leeches’, ‘earth-wormes’, ‘Caterpillers and Locusts’ in his sermons on *The Curse of Corne-Horders with the Blessing of Seasonable Selling* (1631), pp. 33-5.

<sup>53</sup> Adams, *White deuil*, p. 51.

<sup>54</sup> Several points in the following discussion have been treated more fully by Juliet Ingram in her examination of social criticism in assize sermons: Ingram, ‘Conscience of the Community’, ch. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, *Poore mans teares*, 24. He cites 1 Cor. 4 and Ecc. 7 as proof-texts. The phrase ‘man of bloud’ (2 Sam. 16:7-8) also linked the offender to tyranny as in the famous epithet applied to Charles I.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson, *Celestiall husbandrie*, p. 23. See also, Richardson, *Sermon against oppression*, p. 17. Some of these preachers may have been borrowing from Thomas Becon’s well-known Edwardian polemics which often paraphrased Basil: e.g. *A fruitful treatise of fasting* (1551), sigs. E7r-E7v.

<sup>57</sup> Ian Green, *The Christian’s ABC: Catechism and Catechizing in England, c. 1530-1740* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 462-3.

<sup>58</sup> More detailed information on enclosure and government policy can be found in Thirsk, *Agrarian History*, IV, pp. 227-38; Edwin Gay, ‘The Midland Revolt and the Inquisitions of Depopulation of 1607’, *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, new ser., 18, (1904): 195-244. See also, Hughes and Larkin (eds), *Tudor Proclamations*, II, pp. 310-11 (no. 560); and Larkin and Hughes (eds), *Stuart Royal Proclamations* (Oxford, 1973), I, pp. 154-8, 161-2 (no. 71, 72, 73).

<sup>59</sup> Adams, *White deuil*, pp. 46-7 (citing Isa. 5:8-10).

<sup>60</sup> Larkin and Hughes (eds), *Stuart Proclamations*, I, pp. 154-8, 161-2 (no. 71, 72, 73).

<sup>61</sup> Adams, *White deuil*, pp. 45-6; Jackson, *Celestiall husbandrie*, p. 146.

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Gardiner (ed.), *Reports of the Cases in the Courts of the Star Chamber and High Commission* (Camden Society, 2nd ser., XXXIX, 1887), pp. 59-65. For similar symbolic allusions to

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hanging by tenants, see Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2000), p. 315; Keith Wrightson, ‘The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England’ in Paul Griffiths, et al. (eds), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), p. 23; and John Martin, *Feudalism to Capitalism: Peasant and Landlord in English Agrarian Development* (Hounds mills, 1986), p. 171.

<sup>63</sup> Jones, *God and the Moneylenders*, p. 63; Kerridge, *Usury, Interest and the Reformation*, pp. 53-76; Hughes and Larkin (eds), *Tudor Proclamations*, II, pp. 485-6 (no. 657). On the importance of credit more generally, see Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998).

<sup>64</sup> Willet, *A fruitfull and godly sermon*, sig. C1v; Smith, *Examination of vsury*, pp. 13, 26; Adams, *White deuil*, pp. 50-2. For ‘crimes of necessity’, see Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 81-92.

<sup>65</sup> Much has been written on the regulation of food distribution, most of it written in the Thompsonian ‘moral economy’ tradition. For two excellent pieces, see Slack, ‘Books of Orders’; John Walter, ‘The Social Economy of Dearth in Early Modern England’, in John Walter and Roger Schofield (eds), *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>66</sup> Hughes and Larkin (eds), *Tudor Proclamations*, II, pp. 532-4 (no. 686); III, pp. 28-31, 61-2, 169-72, 193-5 (no. 706, 726, 784, 795); Larkin and Hughes (eds), *Stuart Proclamations*, I, pp. 20-1, 86-7, 186-8, 242, 285-6, 297-9, 363, 416-22, 521-2, 563-5 (no. 10, 40, 85, 109, 133, 163, 182, 207, 219, 236).

<sup>67</sup> Gardiner (ed.), *Reports of the Star Chamber*, pp. 44-5. This is also a reminder of how interconnected various forms of economic malpractice might be; the hoarder, encloser, rent-racker and even usurer might all be the same person.

<sup>68</sup> Larkin and Hughes (eds), *Stuart Proclamations*, I, p. 363 (no. 163); Jackson, *Celestiall husbandrie*, p. 23, preached on 25 Feb 1616/7. For oppression as ‘a degree of murder’, see also Richardson, *Sermon against oppression*, 7-8.

<sup>69</sup> Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586-1660* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), p. 37.

<sup>70</sup> Richardson, *Sermon against oppression*, 7-8. See Isa. 1:17-23, esp. annotations (1560 edn). In frustration Henry Smith called ‘the vsurer a legall theefe, because before he steale, he tells the partie how much he will steale, as though he stole by law’: *Examination of vsury*, p. 5. For the commonplace that laws were merely ‘spiders webs, which do ... Hold the weaker creatures, but let the stronger passe through’, see Ingram, ‘Conscience of the Community’, pp. 128-9, 164-9.

<sup>71</sup> Jackson, *Celestiall husbandrie*, p. 23-4.

<sup>72</sup> Keith Wrightson, ‘Estates, Degrees, and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England’ in Penelope Corfield (ed.) *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 45-6.

<sup>73</sup> Adams, *White deuil*, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> E. P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past & Present*, 50, (1971), 76-136; idem, *Customs in Common* (New York, 1993). Recent contributions include Andy Wood, ‘The Place of Custom in Plebeian Political Culture: England, 1550-1800’, *Social History*, 22 (1), (1997): 46-59; Steve Hindle, ‘Persuasion and Protest in the Caddington Common Enclosure Dispute, 1635-1639’, *Past & Present*, 158 (1998): 37-78; Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics*, pp. 49-124. The chief exceptions to this secular focus are the chapters by Hindle and Walter in Braddick and Walter (eds), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society*; and Steve Hindle, ‘Dearth and the English Revolution: The Harvest Crisis of 1647-50 Revisited’, *Economic History Review*, forthcoming.

<sup>75</sup> John Walter and Keith Wrightson, ‘Dearth and the Social Order in Early Modern England’, *Past & Present*, 71 (1976): 22-42, pp. 28-29.

<sup>76</sup> For the eighteenth-century context, see Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd’ and, more recently, Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth (eds), *Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority* (London, 2000).