


Please cite the Published Version

Oates, Rosamund  (2021) Martha or Mary? Clerical Wives and Hospitality in the English Reformation. *Journal of Religious History Literature and Culture*, 6 (2). pp. 1-24. ISSN 2057-4517

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16922/jrhlc.6.2.1>

Publisher: University of Wales Press

Version: Accepted Version

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Martha or Mary? Clerical Wives and Hospitality in the English Reformation

In 1575, someone in the Elizabethan government drew up a parliamentary bill designed to reform clerical hospitality. The author complained that ‘diverse of the clergy now being married, and having wife and children, do over much alienate their minds from the honest and careful duties ... of good hospitality’. The bill never made it beyond the draft stage, but it illustrates the importance of clerical hospitality to the Elizabethan regime, and fears about wifely influence in clerical households. The author attacked the fairly new practice of clerical marriage, claiming that wives exercised too much power in clerical households, particularly large episcopal households. Wives, he complained should not ‘intrude’ into the ‘worldly affairs of any such seat of government as now far otherwise at present is reported’. Instead, the bill proposed to increase hospitality by forbidding clerical wives to have anything ‘to do in any respect with the order, rule of government of the household’. Women were ordered to concentrate on educating children, and on ‘godly exercises’ such as ‘prayer, alms deeds and ministering to the poor’. In the 1575 act, the professional and pastoral aspects of the clerical household – namely hospitality - were to be restricted to the clergyman himself.¹

The bill of 1575 was not presented to parliament, but reflects both the influence that clerical wives could have in the Church of England and contemporary unease about it. Clerical marriage was one of the most significant innovations of the Reformation and historians have explored how contemporaries, from parishioners to Queen Elizabeth,

¹ National Archives, Kew (hereafter NA), ‘An act concerning good hospitality among the clergy’, State Papers (hereafter SP) 15/24/8 ff. 21-25.

responded to clerical marriage.² Little attention, however, has been paid to the how far clerical wives in England were agents of change. Marriage to clergymen offered women a degree of agency in the Church, allowing women to take an active, and influential, role in the ‘Protestantisation’ of England.³ Motivated by a genuine commitment to Evangelical reform, many clerical wives saw themselves as active participants in the establishment of the Church of England. Women could discharge their husband’s pastoral duties through the ‘public housekeeping’ of the household (most notably hospitality), and they wielded further influence through the soft power of convivial dining and networks of kin and friendship that shaped the post-Reformation Church in England. Historians have asked, ‘was there a reformation for women’, and at least part of that answer lies in the experiences of clerical wives in the vicarages, deaneries and episcopal palaces of early modern England.⁴

² Helen Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation* (2000) pp. 227-228. Helen Parish, ‘“It was Never Good World Sence Minister Must Have Wyves”’: Clerical Marriage and Anti-Clericalism in Reformation England, *Journal of Religious History*, vol 36 no 1 (2012), pp. 52-69. Eric Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol 13 no 1 (1992) pp. 1-31.

³ Discussions about continental Protestantism include P. Matheson, ‘A reformation for women: sin, grace and gender in Argula Von Grumbach’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol 49, (1996), pp. 1-17. Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer, ‘Partner in His Calamities: Pastors Wives, Married Nuns and the Experience of Clerical Marriage in the Early German Reformation, *Gender and History*, vol 20 no 2 (2008), pp. 207-227.

⁴ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 150-1720* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 30-31. Merry Weisner-Hanks, ‘Women and the Reformations: Reflections on Recent Research’, *History Compass*, vol 2 no 1 (2004), pp. 1-27.

This article demonstrates the influence of clerical wives in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church by focussing on networks of patronage around the two centres of the Church in northern England: Durham and York. The experiences of Frances Matthew *née* Barlow (1550/1-1629), married to archbishop of York, Tobie Matthew (c.1544-1628) highlights the influence of wives who had the resources of the clerical household at their disposal. Mary Prior has argued that bishops' wives had limited authority in the episcopal households of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, as Frances Matthew's experience shows the provision of hospitality – an important clerical duty - was a sphere which episcopal wives could, and did, control.⁵ This potentially gave them great influence, giving rise to the anxiety seen in the parliamentary bill drafted in 1575. This was particularly true for the families of senior clerics, who had inherited a medieval tradition of hospitality akin to that expected of the gentry and nobility. And hospitality was important in the success of the English Reformation. Felicity Heal and Kenneth Fincham have both shown that hospitality was a significant part of the episcopal role in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church.⁶

⁵ Mary Prior, 'Reviled and Crucified marriages: the position of Tudor Bishop's wives' in *Women in English Society 1500-1800* ed. Mary Prior (London, 1985), pp. 118-148.

Rosamund Oates, *Moderate Radical: Tobie Matthew and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 2019).

⁶ Felicity Heal: *Of Prelates and Princes: A Study of the Economic and Social Position of the Tudor Episcopate* (Cambridge, 1980). Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990).

This article is not just about the influence that women exercised through the households of their clerical husbands, but also about perceptions of the ideal clerical wife in the period. Discussions about clerical hospitality were a flashpoint for larger arguments about the role, power and status of clerical wives. Contemporaries like the author of the 1575 bill tried to argue that clerical wives could only be involved in household activities that had no professional element, restricting them to female activities including personal devotion and the education of children. Although it was the hospitality of senior clerics that came under the closest scrutiny, these debates had relevance for all clerical wives as contemporaries discussed whether wives should help husbands with their pastoral duties or withdraw into a private piety. Contemporaries used the biblical story of two sisters - Mary and Martha of Bethany – to contrast alternative models of female piety. When Jesus visited their home, Martha rushed around providing food and drink for their guest while Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, listening quietly. Even supporters of clerical marriage often shied away from celebrating wifely involvement in hospitality, aware of how contentious the topic could be. Although preachers praised Martha’s ‘good husbandry’, clerical and lay wives were told to aspire to Mary’s private devotions and to keep out of household affairs.⁷ For many clerical households, however the reality was very different.

I.

Clerical marriage was a significant innovation in early modern England, creating a new class of women who did not have a clear template of behaviour, at least for the first decades of Elizabeth’s reign. The earliest discussions about an ideal minister’s wife were focussed on her moral and sexual probity. After clerical marriage was legalised in 1559, a

⁷ Luke 10: 38-42. John 11: 1-33.

potential bride needed two letters testifying to her ‘good fame and name’ before bishops could issue a license to allow the marriage. The injunction was designed to avoid scandal, and as Anne Thompson has shown, the practice continued into the seventeenth century, sustaining a continued interest in the moral rectitude of clerical wives. This emphasis on sexual probity reflected polemical disputes about the value of clerical marriage, with the earliest Protestant writers justifying marriage as an alternative to clerical concubinage.⁸ In the bestseller, *De Christlich Eestand* by Heinrich Bullinger (translated as *The Christen State of Matrimonie*), Bullinger defended clerical marriage with the argument that: ‘the saying of Paul endureth unmoveable: it is better to marry than burn’. In his book defending clerical marriage, *An Apologie Fully Answering ... Thomas Martin* (1566), John Ponet expanded Paul’s dictum to argue that sexual corruption lead to spiritual error: he wrote ‘the first infectors of Christendom with erroneous opinions were unmarried priests’. Reading Ponet’s book in Elizabethan Durham, Bishop Tobie Matthew (himself married), wrote a note in the margins: ‘heresie and lecherie [are] ioyned together’.⁹ Clerical marriage was to stand as the opposite of both, and throughout the period there was a sustained interest in the sexual standing of clerical wives. In 1609, William Perkins stressed that ministers must not marry ‘a harlot ... though she be repentant’ because it ‘may prejudice the dignity and respect’ of the

⁸ Anne Thompson, *Parish Clergy Wives in Elizabethan England* (Leiden, 2019), pp. 72-86. Parish, ‘Clerical Marriage and Anti-Clericalism’, *Journal of Religious History*, pp. 52-69.

⁹ Heinrich Bullinger, *Der Christlich Eestand* (Zurich, 1540). Heinrich Bullinger, *The Christen State of Matrimonye* (trans.) Miles Coverdale (Antwerp, 1541), sig. D7r. John Ponet *An Apologie Fully Answering ... Thomas Martin ... against the godly marriage of priestes* (Strasbourg, 1556) sigs. A2r, B8v. Tobie Matthew’s copy is in York Minster Library (YML) shelfmark V/2.J.16(1).

ministry and successive Elizabethan and Jacobean visitation articles enquired if the clergy lived with women who were reported to be 'incontinent'.¹⁰

More positive templates of clerical marriage, however, were hard to find for the first generations of clerical wives. The Bible was an obvious source, and Protestant Reformers were keen to assert that clerical marriage was a biblical tradition. Bullinger reminded his readers that priests in both the Old and New Testaments were married.¹¹ Ponet repeated this in *An Apologie*, and his copy Tobie Matthew recorded that: 'Bishops and Priests in the Primitive Church had wives, who were called Episcopa and Presbyterae'. Further on Matthew wrote a note to himself that St Peter had had a wife. When Matthew Parker oversaw the publication of *A Defence of Priests Marriage* in 1567, he also reminded readers that the apostles were married. St Paul's letter to Timothy, in which Paul compared the Church to the house of God was a particularly useful source of inspiration for married ministers. Paul required clerical wives to 'be honest, not evil speakers, but sober and faithful in all things'. Furthermore, he drew parallels between the well-ordered household and the Church, ordering a bishop or deacon 'to rule his own house honestly, having children under obedience', asking, 'if any cannot rule his own house, how shall he care for the Church of

¹⁰ William Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie*, (London, 1609), p. 66. . *Articles to be Enquired of from the Diocesan Visitation of Tobie Matthew* (London, 1623), p. 17.

¹¹ Bullinger, *Christen State of Matrimonye*, sig. D7v. Carrie Euler, 'Heinrich Bullinger, Marriage, and the English Reformation: "The Christen State of Matrimonye" in England, 1540-53', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol 34 no 2, (2003), pp. 367-393

God?'.¹² What this meant in practice, however, was not always clear. Some believed that by promoting the household as a centre of faith, St Paul encouraged hospitality. In 1619, the clergyman John Favour praised Archbishop Tobie Matthew as being the ideal of the Pauline bishop, claiming that Matthew was 'diligent' in preaching and 'as affable in your entertainment'.¹³

Historians have recognised that in the earliest days of the Reformation, clerical marriage reflected Evangelical beliefs, and even when clerical marriage was legal, marrying a clergyman continued to be a powerful statement of religious intent. One of the first clerical wives in England was Agnes Wellesburn, married to Bishop William Barlow during the reign of Henry VIII. Her children included Frances Matthew, who praised her mother's dedication to Protestantism in a memorial erected after 1595, celebrating Agnes' suffering in exile under Mary for 'gospel sake' and noting that she 'died in the Lord, whom she daily served'.¹⁴ Clerical wives – particularly at the start of Elizabeth's reign – often had a deeply held commitment to Protestant reform. Bishop Richard Cox's second wife was a former Marian exile, Jane Turner, and Bishop Parkhurst's wife, Margaret, was in regular contact with

¹² Ponet, *An Apologie*, sig. I 5r-v, I 8 r. Matthew Parker (ed.), *A Defence of Priests' Marriage* (1567) pp. 32, 42, 156. 1 Timothy 3: 2-12.

¹³ John Favour, *Antiquity Triumphant Over Novelty* (London, 1619) sig. A3r.

¹⁴ Easton Church Winchester, many thanks to Professor Claire Cross for the transcription. Peter Sherlock, 'Monuments, Reputation, and Clerical Marriage in Reformation England: Bishop Barlow's Daughters', *Gender and History*, vol 16 no 1 (2004), pp. 60-64.

Henrich Bullinger.¹⁵ While clerical marriage became more normalised through Elizabeth's reign, it was still, however, one of the only ways in which women could exercise their Evangelical commitments. Into the seventeenth century, women continued to see marriage to clergy as offering a special position, it was reported that Elizabeth Gouge wanted to marry a minister: 'such respect did this gentlewoman bear to the Ministry of God's word'.¹⁶

When it came to fashioning the ideal clerical marriage, examples from the first decades of the European Reformation had a particular resonance, reflecting Evangelical ideas about clerical households. The most famous of these marriages was, of course, that of Martin and Katarina Luther, which was widely reported in pamphlets, letters, and publications of Luther's 'table talk'. Significantly, hospitality was at the heart of these family lives, with clerical wives providing the hospitality that sustained the early Reformation: Martin and Katarina Luther, and Martin and Elizabeth Bucer were renowned for playing host to students and supporters. In Edwardian England, English Protestants witnessed this vision of domestic Protestantism first hand, with many English Reformers marrying into Reformed families.¹⁷ Those connections were further strengthened during the Marian exile, when clerics and their

¹⁵ R. Basch 'The Changing Status and Identity of English Bishops' Wives, c. 1549-1625' University of London PhD thesis, 2016, pp. 83-87.

¹⁶ Nicholas Guy, *Pieties Pillar: A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of Mistress Elizabeth Gouge* (London, 1626), p. 41.

¹⁷ Prior, 'Reviled and Crucified', p. 121. Susan Karant-Nunn, 'The Emergence of the Pastoral Family in the German Reformation: The Parsonage as a site of socio-religious change', in C. Dixon and Luise Schorn-Schütte (ed.), *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe* (London, 2003), pp. 79-99.

wives (like the Barlow family) were forced to rely on the hospitality of their continental counterparts. As a result, hospitality – an ancient tradition – acquired a specifically Protestant legacy in which wifely involvement was often praised. It was a legacy recalled by Caleb Dalechamp in 1632, when he praised the role played by Peter Martry’s wife in providing hospitality for ‘persecuted and weather-beaten Christians’.¹⁸

From 1559, clerical marriage was an accepted feature of the Elizabethan Church. At the same time, hospitality – a medieval tradition – was recognized as an important duty of ministers, particularly the senior clerics who were responsible for establishing Protestantism. As hospitality became a key element in the proselytization of Elizabethan England, the clerical household came under increasing scrutiny – especially the households of deans, bishops and archdeacons who could afford the sort of hospitality that had political as well as charitable benefits. These households were often overseen by wives, many of whom were committed Protestants who could, and did, use their influence over the household to actively support their husbands’ professional duties. It was not however, a development that was universally embraced by contemporaries.

II

Hospitality had two elements in late medieval and early modern England: entertaining visitors and providing charity. Ideally, the two were combined, with food prepared for eminent guests later feeding the poor and needy. William Harrison portrayed a scene unchanged from the 15th century when he described a meal in a noble household. Harrison

¹⁸ Caleb Dalechamp, *Christian Hospitality*, (London, 1632), p. 50

wrote that after the nobleman, his family and guests had eaten their fill, the remaining food was ‘bestowed upon the poor, which lie ready at their gates’, and a similar pattern was expected to take place in episcopal palaces.¹⁹ Early supporters of the Church of England saw this powerful tradition of clerical hospitality as a way of winning support for the new regime. In 1559, the first Elizabethan Visitors of Durham Cathedral reminded the canons of the importance of hospitality in their efforts to establish a Protestant Church. Matthew Parker, Elizabeth’s first Archbishop of Canterbury, echoed these concerns. Writing to William Cecil in 1563, Parker worried that if bishops and ‘ordinary ministers’ could not provide hospitality they would be ‘brought to contempt for lack of reasonable necessities’. Cecil agreed, and throughout the period he supported hospitality as a powerful tool of persuasion. In notes written in 1585, Cecil wrote that bishops and clergy should ‘specially by hospitality and relieving the poor, win credit among the people’. Where the clergy did not provide hospitality, Cecil wrote that they were ‘rather despised than revered or beloved’.²⁰

In 1582, when Tobie Matthew was appointed to the deanery of Durham, his first and most pressing issue was securing enough income to provide hospitality. Convivial dining and charitable donations were, in his eyes, essential to gain supporters in what was still a relatively hostile diocese. In the summer of 1582, before he was transferred north, Matthew

¹⁹ William Harrison, ‘The Description of England’ in Ralph Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande* (London, 1577), sig. 94v. Felicity Heal *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 259-272.

²⁰ Dean and Chapter MS, Durham Cathedral (hereafter DCD) ‘York Book’ T/YB fos. 50-52. British Library (hereafter BL), ‘Matthew Parker to William Cecil’, Lansdowne (hereafter Lans) MS 7 fo. 153. NA Memorandum by Burghley’ SP 12/184/50, fo. 136r.

was anxious about crops belonging to the deanery, warning that ‘things there go to wrack’ and worrying about ‘provisions for the year following’. Later in August 1582, Matthew once again begged Cecil to let him move into the deanery before ‘the whole crop, as well of hay and corn, as all other fruits’ passed to the prebendaries, leaving him ‘no provision whereith to keep house and so less able to do good in preaching or government’. He warned Cecil that ‘many regard hospitality very much, who being lost at this first, will hardly be won a good while over’.²¹

When Matthew finally arrived in Durham in 1583, hospitality continued to pre-occupy him. The 1569 Northern Rebellion had revealed the extent of Catholicism in the diocese, and Matthew thought that hospitality would help him to win support among northerners and reconcile old enemies to the new regime. Tobie Matthew worked with the prebendaries to ensure that food and drink was provided for the poor from the dining hall in the cathedral, and he tried to enforce statutes which required cathedral clergy to provide their own charitable donations. Meanwhile, Tobie and Frances Matthew made up any shortfall through their own household, with Francis Walsingham praising the extent of the hospitality provided in the deanery. Matthew assured his political patrons that he had been keeping detailed receipts and expected – or rather hoped – for reimbursement.²²

All clerics shared the duty of hospitality, and the charity of parochial clergy was an important part of the local economy, particularly in times of need. Need was particularly acute in the 1590s, when a series of poor harvests led to widespread dearth and starvation.

²¹ BL Tobie Matthew to William Cecil’ Lans MS36 ff. 124, 126.

²² DCD/T/YB ff. 31. BL Lans MS 36 fo. 126. Oates, *Moderate Radical*, pp. 109-114.

In 1596 the government responded to the famine by issuing a nationwide appeal for alms as part of a campaign of fasting and prayers; a royal proclamation ordered ‘persons of ability’ to keep away from London and ‘to stay in their countries and keep hospitality’. The provision of food – and sometimes shelter – was often more valuable to starving men and women than money channelled through the poor box. Everyone, but particularly clergy, was encouraged to find food for starving neighbours.²³ ‘Is this not the fast that pleaseth?’ asked the author of homilies issued in 1596, ‘to deal thy bread to the hungry’? Some clergy struggled to provide extra food and felt it keenly. Bernard Gilpin, of County Durham, found it increasingly hard to continue his regular commitment of providing dinner for his parishioners. In 1597, Dean William James reported on the continued and devastating effect of the famine in the diocese of Durham, warning that ‘the poor are multiplied and hospitality, which was much regarded, [is] greatly decayed’. As a result, men and women were risking their lives by travelling to plague-ridden Newcastle to buy corn, ‘as it were through fire and water’. Without the corn which was imported from Europe, James warned that: ‘no man can express the misery that would ensue’.²⁴

²³ *Cal MS Sal.* vol. 14, Proclamation Against Engrossing and Transporting of Wheat’, p. 294. Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, ‘Gifts and Favors: Informal support in Early Modern England’, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol 72, no 2 (2000), pp. 295-338. Steve Hindle, ‘Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England’ *Past and Present* vol 172 (2001), pp. 44-86

²⁴ *Three Sermons or Homilies to Move Compassion Towards the Poor and Needy*, (London, 1596), sig. B2r. quoting Isaiah 58: 6-7. NA ‘William James to William Cecil’, SP 12/ 263/55 fo. 74. NA ‘Decay of the Borders’ SP 15/33/1 fo. 1. Thompson, *Parish Clergy Wives*, p. 193.

Many clergy increased their provision of hospitality in response to the famines of the 1590s. By the winter of 1596, the Dean and Chapter of Westminster were complaining to Robert Cecil that ‘the maintenance of daily hospitality is grown to be so great, as without further present provision we can not be well able to continue it’. Up in Durham, Tobie Matthew continued his drive increase clerical hospitality: as plague and starvation tore through the diocese, he wrote to William Cecil arguing that ministers who did not make ‘so much relief to the poor by hospitality’ should be thrown out of their livings and replaced by a ‘sufficient minister’. His concerns were widespread. A couple of months later, Convocation approved a bill which reminded ministers to provide regular hospitality. At the bottom of his copy of the bill, William Cecil wrote a note: ‘I have read and perused these constitutions and I think if they shall be well executed, the Church shall be well ordered’.²⁵ Throughout the period, clerical families were expected to provide the hospitality underpinning the social and economic interactions of the local community. In November 1649, after several years of bad harvests and war, the Essex minister Ralph Josselin and his wife decided to miss a couple of meals a week, so that they could give their food to poor neighbours.²⁶

²⁵ *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury ... preserved at Harfield House* (hereafter Cal. MS Sal.) (London, 1883-1976), ‘Tobie Matthew to William Cecil’, vol 7, pp. 451-3; ‘Copy of Ecclesiastical Bill’ vol. 8, p. 34.

²⁶ Alan Macfarlane (ed.), *The Diary of Ralph Josselin, 1616-1683* (London, 1976), p. 185. Joan Thirsk, *Food In Early Modern England: Phases, Fads, Fashions 1500-1760* (London, 2007) pp. 97-99.

Conviviality, as well as charitable giving, underpinned hospitality, and could be part of a strategy of building support for the Church in the community. Caleb Dalechamp, dedicated his book *Christian Hospitality* to the single, and famously gregarious, bishop of Lincoln, John Williams, writing that hospitality was ‘in a strict and accurate sense nothing else but the love that is born to strangers’, and included ‘the feasting of neighbours’ as well as ‘the relieving of the poor’.²⁷ Hospitality was used to reconcile local gentry opposed to the regime, many of whom were Catholics. When Matthew became bishop of Durham in 1595, he and his new dean, William James, started to invite ‘the better sort’ of Catholics into their households in an attempt to try and convert them. It was a well-recognised strategy, recommended by Peter Martyr Vermigli in his influential book, *Treatise of the Cohabitacyon of the Faithful with the Unfaithful* (1555). Matthew knew this book well, reading and annotating his copy, and reusing it in successive sermons. Although they had little success, elsewhere the strategy worked to heal old divisions. Promoting Martin Heton, dean of Winchester, to be the next bishop of Winchester in 1597, his supporters reported that Heton had ‘mollified the obdurate hearts of irreligious subjects’ through his ‘preaching, hospitality and the wise direction of his life’.²⁸ And hospitality had further benefits too. As we shall see, Tobie and Frances Matthew used hospitality to build up relationships with powerful local

²⁷ Caleb Dalechamp, *Christian Hospitality* (London, 1632), pp. 6,7, 10.

²⁸ NA SP 12/ 263/55 fo. 74. *Cal MS. Sal.* ‘William Sandys & co. to Robert Devereux’, vol. 14, p. 11. Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Treatise of the Cohabitacyon of the Faithful with the Unfaithful* (Strasbourg, 1555), York Minster Library, V/2.K.1. Alexandra Walsham, ‘Supping with Satan’s Disciples: Spiritual and Secular Sociability in Post-Reformation England’, in Adam Morton and Nadine Lewycky (eds.), *Getting Along: Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2012), p. 45.

figures in Northern England. Sometimes this helped to create a community of Protestants who shared the pastoral Puritanism of the Matthews, sometimes it built alliances with the local nobility who, with Matthew, were responsible for governing the North.

III

Hospitality was a flashpoint for arguments about the influence that wives could exercise through their ‘public housekeeping’ and social duties of the clergymen. Supporters of clerical marriage argued that wifely involvement could be of great help providing hospitality. Thomas Becon told his readers that ‘St Paul joyneth marriage and hospitality’ and reported that ‘the marriage of priests is no hindrance but rather a furtherance unto hospitality’.²⁹ Many ministers agreed that wives were crucial in providing hospitality. Long before it was legal in England, concubinage was accepted in much of the Celtic Church, and many prominent Welsh ministers were married and maintained large households. When Thomas Cromwell’s commissioners ordered them to put aside their wives, they refused. Petitioning Henry VIII, they complained that getting rid of their wives meant ‘giving up hospitality to the utter undoing of such servants and families as we daily keep’. When Elizabeth I later tried to ban clerical wives from cathedral closes and colleges in 1561, Archbishop Matthew Parker (himself married), asked, ‘alas, what policy is this to drive hospitality out of cathedral closes?’ Matthew Parker’s wife, Margaret Harleston, was

²⁹ Thomas Becon, ‘The Boke of Matrimony’, in Thomas Becon, *Collected Works* (John Day, London, 1564), sig. 614r.

recognised as an invaluable assistant to the archbishop, helping him with his ‘most splendid and noble buildings and feasting ... neither her will nor industry wanting’.³⁰

Supporters of clerical marriage argued that by taking on the household task of hospitality, wives freed up their husbands to do more important things (like preparing sermons). Writing in the early days of Elizabeth’s reign, Jean Véron argued that a wife was a great asset to a busy minister. He noted that single men, particularly those who ‘keep hospitality’, were forever being bothered by servants who wanted help solving minor domestic crises. In contrast, Véron imagined a wife handling all domestic matters, leaving her husband free to concentrate on his work. If a minister chose a ‘trusty yokefellow’, Véron wrote, then ‘he need not trouble himself with all, but [can] give himself quietly to his own book’.³¹

Elizabeth Gouge, married to the noted godly preacher, William Gouge, did just this. At her funeral, it was noted that Elizabeth had ‘providently ordered the affairs of her house, whereby he [William] had the more leisure to attend to his public function’.³²

It was generally assumed that women were more suited to the domestic sphere than their husbands. While William Perkins presented hospitality as the duty of ‘the Master of the family’, he accepted that women were central to its success, noting that the Prophet Elisha received hospitality from the ‘woman of Shunam’ as well as her husband. Buying and

³⁰ For example Robert ap Rhys and Hywel ap Dai, Glanmore Williams, *Renewal and Reformation, Wales c. 1415-1642* (Oxford, 1987), p. 131. Heal, *Hospitality* p. 252. John Strype, *The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker*, (Oxford, 1821), vol. 3 p. 51, vol. 12 p. 27.

³¹ Jean Véron, *A Strong Defence of the Marriage of Priests* (London, n.d. 1563?), sig. B3r.

³² Guy, *Pieties Pillar*, p. 44

cooking food were thought to come under the wife's aegis, with menus to be planned, shopping to be done and servants to supervise. William Perkins recognised that in the matter of feeding the family, women were usually in charge, advising husbands against 'challenging' or 'prescribing' their wives 'in all matters domestical, but in some to leave her to her own will and judgement'.³³ In the *English Housewife* (1615) Gervase Markham thought that women would be responsible for preparing and serving food for entertainments ranging from 'great feasts' to 'an ordinary proportion, which any good man may keep in his family for the entertainment of his true and worthy friends'.³⁴

Wives could improve the hospitality on offer through clever household management, with the ability to economize being highly praised. These skills were not only practical, but had a biblical pedigree. Good husbandry (or as the puritan writers John Dodd and Robert Cleaver renamed it, 'good housewifery') was a feminine virtue promoted in the bible and therefore suitable for clerical wives. In their household manual, Dodd and Cleaver argued that 'St Paul would have a woman a good home-keeper', and told their readers to emulate 'the good husbandry which the spirit of God teacheth'.³⁵ Furthermore, it had practical benefits too. William Harrison believed that uxorious housekeeping had definitely improved the quality and extent of clerical hospitality in Elizabethan England. Wives were better at keeping households and at economising: 'their meat and drink is more orderly and frugally

³³ Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie*, pp. 126-7, 171.

³⁴ Gervase Markham, *The English Housewife* (ed.) Michael R Best (London & Buffalo, 1994), pp. 121-4

³⁵ John Dodd and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Government* (London, 1598), pp. 68, 90, 95

dressed', Harrison wrote, and 'their furniture of household is more convenient and better looked to'. Harrison, a married priest, had first-hand experience of this household management.³⁶ Successive writers praised clerical wives for helping their husbands to provide hospitality in the most trying of circumstances. Caleb Dalechamp recalled that when Peter Martyr left Italy, he 'left his great riches and preferments' behind for a small income in Strasbourg. Thanks to the skillful economizing of Martyr's wife, however, Dalechamp reported that couple was still able to be 'bountiful to the poor and needy'.³⁷ Nicholas Guy praised Elizabeth Gouge's housekeeping skills and frugality at her funeral, she learned 'piety, modesty [and] good housewifery' in the minister's household where she grew up. When the chancellor of York, Phineas Hodson, erected a monument to his wife, Jane, in 1636 he praised his wife's household oeconomy. Jane had given birth to 24 children by her death at 38 (her husband noted she was '*mater foecunda*') so her astute financial management was perhaps particularly important.³⁸

Wifely involvement in the household economy of clerics was, however, a contentious topic. As well as concerns that wives were 'over reaching' their sphere of influence, there was a widespread fear that by administering household finances, clerical wives were depriving congregations of the charity they needed. The draft bill of 1575 complained that money intended for hospitality was now being used to support clerical families, raising important questions about how far clerical income – and therefore the clerical household –

³⁶ William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (Folger Library, Washington, 1967), p. 37

³⁷ Dalechamp, *Christian Hospitality*, p. 50.

³⁸ Guy, *Pieties Pillar*, p. 44. Drake, *Eboracum*, vol. 2 p. 508. 'foelix oecomoama'.

was part of a public sphere or a private family home.³⁹ It was a common trope that married clerics did not provide hospitality. John Harington paid William Overton, bishop of Coventry, a backhanded compliment when he claimed that Overton ‘keepeth good hospitality for the poor, which I have seldom heard a married bishop commended for’.⁴⁰ When William Cecil worried about the lack of clerical hospitality in 1585, he was sure that it was caused by the wives and families of ministers. He wrote that the ‘bishops and clergy’ who should be providing hospitality were instead: ‘covetous, [e]specially such as have wives and children’. Cecil blamed clerical poverty - used by ministers to justify poor hospitality - on the recent practice of clergy making ‘alienations of their liberties for their children’.⁴¹ There was some truth to the complaints. When Tobie Matthew arrived in Durham in 1583, he found that over £3500 of leases had been misappropriated by the cathedral canons, who used funds intended for alms and hospitality to bolster prebendal incomes. Matthew was forced into a long and ultimately unsuccessful legal battle to try and get lands back from Katherine Whittingham, the widow of a former dean of Durham, William Whittingham.⁴²

The thorny question of income and property reflected arguments about how far wives controlled the clerical household or its purse strings. It is significant that the 1575 bill which criticised senior clerics for spending money on their families, also ordered women to withdraw from ‘the order, rule or government of the household’. Discussions about

³⁹ NA SP 15/24/8 fos. 21-25.

⁴⁰ John Harington, *Nugae Antiquae*, (London, 1804) vol. 2, pp. 117-8.

⁴¹ NA SP 12/184/50, fo. 136r.

⁴² BL ‘Tobie Matthew to William Cecil’ Lans MS 39 fo. 24. DCD/T/YB ff. 2r-11v, 19v-31v.

hospitality – an activity that offered wives the greatest potential to discharge her husband’s clerical duties – highlighted this disquiet. This raised the larger question of how clerical wives should behave. Should the ideal wife model herself on the biblical Mary of Bethany – devoted to a quiet and private piety that could be emulated by any godly laywoman? Or instead, should she aim to be like Martha, taking advantage of the special status that her marriage gave her and maintaining a household open to all?

IV.

The earliest depictions of clerical wives ignored any special status conferred on to them through marriage, and instead promoted them as a model of female piety that could be emulated by anyone. Asked to preach at the wedding of a minister in 1625, Thomas Taylor found inspiration for his sermon in the biblical story of Elizabeth – mother of St John the Baptist and wife of a priest, Zachariah. Taylor told the bride: ‘Elizabeth, a priest’s wife, [was] yet commended by the Spirit of God for a holy and just woman’, so ‘therefore the wives of Ministers are set by God in the foremost ranks of Christ, holy, gracious and godly women’. Even though Taylor had chosen the story of Elizabeth *because* she was married to a priest (like the bride in front of him), Taylor ignored the exceptional position that Elizabeth’s marriage had placed her in. Rather than dwell on any special duties offered by clerical marriage, Taylor presented the ideal clerical wife as the perfect embodiment of female piety: ‘it was expected that Elizabeth should shine in grace and godliness above ordinary women, because she was Zachary’s wife, the priest’s wife’.⁴³ It was an increasingly common trope that the clerical household was a model for others to follow.

⁴³Thomas Taylor, *A Good Husband and a Good Wife* (London, 1625), pp. 6, 26.

Richard Bernard, a puritan minister warned readers of his clerical handbook that he had learned by experience that: ‘common people respect more a good teacher’s life, then his learning, and reverence the person and not his preaching so much.’ Preaching at a clerical synod in York, Archbishop Tobie Matthew warned ministers to conduct their home lives according to the ideals they set out in the pulpit, telling them: ‘a minister in the Church is as a light set upon a candlestick which if it burns clearly men do with comfort behold it, if it burn duskishly with smoke and stench, they that are in the house cannot but perceive it’.⁴⁴

This was a vision of female piety that was private and inward-looking. Advice manuals for the laity, many of them written by married clergymen, imagined the ideal wife occupied with private devotions and the religious observances of children and servants. John Dodd (married to the daughter of a clergyman) and Richard Cleaver thought that wives could be a ‘fellow-helper’ of their husbands, but only ‘indoors, touching godliness’. Writing in 1612, Richard Bernard imagined a wife as her ‘husband’s shadow’, representing his religious ideals ‘as the moon doth from the sun’. Mothers had a particular duty to bring up their children religiously as ‘the first that instructs the child’. It was a pattern echoed in *The Householder’s Help for Domesticall Discipline*, where the author noted that in the Book of Proverbs ‘Soloman presupposeth that all godly mothers will be helpers to their husbands in

⁴⁴ Bodleian Library, Oxford, (hereafter Bod.), ‘Sermon Notebook’, Additional MS, A 89 fo. 155r-v. Richard Bernard, *The Faithful Shepherd* (London, 1607 edn.), p. 10. Alexandra Walsham, ‘Holy Families: The Spiritualisation of the Early Modern Household Revisited’, *Studies in Church History*, (2014), pp. 122-160.

the religious and godly instruction of their children'.⁴⁵ This internal domestic piety was echoed in biographies of women in clerical households. Elizabeth Joceline— who learned the 'studies of piety' in the household of her grandfather, Bishop Chaderton —stressed the importance of private female devotions in a letter she wrote to her unborn child, published as *The Mother's Legacie*. Elizabeth Gouge, married to the puritan preacher William Gouge, reportedly devoted herself to the religious instruction of the household, including teaching her children Gouge's catechism. When she engaged in charitable works, she did so outside the household — rather than the traditional model of providing charity through hospitality at home.⁴⁶

Ministers explored the potential conflict between the public functions of the clerical household and the private duties of the wife through the story of Martha and Mary. Writers usually praised Mary, the sister who sat quietly at Jesus' feet, rather than Martha, who rushed around providing hospitality. In his book on household 'oeconomy', William Perkins contrasted the two sisters, praising Mary's behaviour as 'commendable'. The Puritan minister, Stephen Gere, praised Elizabeth Machell as the ideal of a godly gentlewoman in his sermon at her funeral in 1639. 'Whereas other women trouble themselves with many things like Martha', he told his congregation, Elizabeth Machell 'set her soul upon that one thing necessary, choosing with Mary that better part that could not be taken from her'. And

⁴⁵ Dodd and Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Government*, pp. 60-61. Richard Bernard, *Joshua's Godly Resolution* (London, 1612), pp. 32-33. R. R. *The Householders Help for Domestical Discipline* (London, 1615), sig. A2v.

⁴⁶ Guy, *Pieties Pillar*, p. 44-47. Elizabeth Joceline, *The Mother's Legacie to her Unborn Child* (London, 1632), sig. A5.

what was appropriate for godly women was also appropriate for the wives of ministers. Preaching at the marriage of a minister in 1625, Thomas Taylor used the story of Mary and Martha to encourage private female devotions. He told the newly married clerical wife that ‘it is the woman who feareth the Lord that shall be praised’, and that ‘if Christ commend a woman, it shall not be Martha for her good husbandry, but Mary for choosing the better part’.⁴⁷

There was, however, evidence that despite the praise heaped on them for private devotions, plenty of clerical wives were actively involved in their husband's household. Occasionally authors admitted that some wives were more inspired by Martha. When Nicholas Guy preached at the funeral of Elizabeth Gouge in 1625, he argued that Martha, not Mary, was the model of appropriate religiosity. While Mary ‘washed Christ’s feet with her tears, and dried them with her hair’, Martha was far more practical. Guy noted that Martha welcomed Jesus warmly, and likened Elizabeth Gouge to Martha, telling his congregation that there were: ‘few such Marthas who meet Christ coming towards them, we rather flee from him’.⁴⁸ The Gouges’ marriage highlight some of the tensions about roles within marriage, and indeed the disparity between what ministers might preach and their experiences. At Blackfriars, William Gouge famously preached a series of sermons justifying female submission in marriage that were so unpopular with women in the congregation he was forced to explain himself. Later, he argued that actually envisioned (or maybe just experienced) a household where the wife

⁴⁷ Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie*, p. 167. Taylor, *A Good Husband*, p. 5. Stephen Gere, ‘To the Truly Noble and Pious Sisters’, *The Ornament of Women* (London, 1639) sig. a3v.

⁴⁸ Guy, *Pieties Pillar*, pp. 2-6.

was 'a joint governor of the family', and in which the husband would 'refer the ordering of many things to her discretion'.⁴⁹

Many clerical wives saw themselves as playing an active part in their husbands' ministry. Joyce Featley felt able to advise two of the most well-known London preachers - her husband Daniel Featley and Thomas Gataker- on what they should be preaching about.⁵⁰ The household, however, was where women could discharge their husbands' pastoral duties. Anne Thompson has shown that ministers frequently relied on their wives - or rather widows - to distribute alms after their death, illustrating the extent to which clerical wives already had a charitable role within the community. The pattern was replicated by the wives of bishops and archdeacons, who were also often responsible for distributing charitable bequests. Thomas Becon imagined exactly this sort of role for clerical wives, hoping that they would do work that was profitable to the 'commonwealth'. Sometimes this was informal, with wives acting as intermediaries between their husbands and parishioners. Parishioners could confide things to a minister's wife they might not be able to say to his face, and of course, clerical wives were welcomed to a birthing chamber where men were not. It is clear that in these situations the minister's wife was regarded as having a special status, bestowed on her by marriage. Sometimes, however, clerical wives overstepped the mark, taking on more of their husbands' responsibilities than was thought appropriate. There are accounts of clerical

⁴⁹ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), sig., *3v-4*, pp. 269-273.

⁵⁰ Thomas Gataker cited in Eric Carlson, 'Funeral Sermons as Sources: The Example of Female Piety in Pre-1640 Sermons', *Albion*, vol 32, no 4 (2000), p. 586

wives baptizing children and even taking services on their husbands' behalves.⁵¹ More usual however, was the 'public housekeeping' – most notably hospitality – when clerical wives were responsible for some of their husbands' professional duties.

Contemporary recognition of this special status was, however, muted. Although some memorials and monuments to clerical wives celebrated their commitment to hospitality, it was not the norm. After her death in 1617, Elizabeth Rogers – married to the archdeacon of Chester – was celebrated for her 'love to her husband and children, liberalities to the poor' and her 'bountiful hospitality'.⁵² It was, however, fairly unusual to mention hospitality, even among those women who were renowned for helping their husbands entertain and feed the poor. The memorial to Frances Matthew celebrated her private 'virtues... above her sex', namely her 'beauty', 'piety' and 'wisdom'. It made no mention of the hospitality she had provided, with Tobie Matthew, over the previous decades. Instead, hospitality was portrayed as part of the professional duties of a cleric, recorded on the nearby tomb of Tobie Matthew. There the inscription noted that the archbishop's 'singular hospitality should be recorded: his house was a perpetual source of entertainment for the rich and charity for the poor'.⁵³ The

⁵¹ Thompson, *Parish Clergy Wives*, pp. 132-135. Michelle Wolfe, 'The Tribe of Levi: Gender, Family and Vocation in English Clerical Households, c. 1590-1714', Ohio State University PhD thesis, 2004, p. 45.

⁵² Peter Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2008), chapter 4.

⁵³ The original monumental brass was destroyed in a nineteenth-century fire, but an inscription can be found (along with a translation) in Francis Drake, *Eboracum* (York, 1788), vol 2, pp. 342-344 and p. 512.

same distinction was true for Cecily Sandys, another widow of an archbishop of York famed for his hospitality. Her memorial concentrated on her influence within the family: she ‘carefully educated’ her children with Archbishop Sandys; ‘wisely governed his family’; and ‘charitably relieved the poor’. She was, as the memorial concluded, ‘a true mirror of a Christian matron’.⁵⁴ While memorials to Elizabethan and Stuart clerical widows recognized the status given to them by marriage, these wives were portrayed as an example of private domestic piety that could be emulated by anyone. Cecilia Freake, for example, was recorded on her memorial as being the ‘relict’ of Edmund Freake, successively bishop of Rochester, Norwich and Worcester. Her qualities however, were limited to being a ‘good wife, and a pious widow’.⁵⁵ Memorials were some of the earliest attempts to describe what it meant to be a clergy man’s wife, and these often reflect the uneasy line that clerical wives trod between personal piety and the requirements of the professional clergyman’s household.

V.

Frances Matthew was responsible for several of these memorials, erecting monuments to her mother, sisters and brothers-in-law, all of which celebrated the place of women (in particular the Barlow sisters) in the English Reformation. Frances’ own experiences demonstrate the influence that clerical marriage could offer Evangelical women. However, the memorials that she commissioned also demonstrate a continuing uneasiness about celebrating the unique opportunities provided to clerical wives.

⁵⁴ Memorial on the North wall of the chancel in St Mary’s, Woodham Ferrers, Essex, erected in 1619.

⁵⁵ Basch, ‘English Bishops’ Wives’, p. 183.

Frances Matthew was well known for her commitment to Protestantism. Her son described her as ‘much more fervent towards the Puritanical sole-Scripture way’ than Archbishop Tobie Matthew, and complained that she was always ‘as busy with Scripture as if it had been some glove upon her fingers’ ends’. Frances’ reputation for godliness was well known and her son noted that ‘she was held in a mighty opinion’ by Puritans, lay and clerical.⁵⁶ Frances had an impeccable pedigree as a Protestant reformer. Her parents married in the reign of Henry VIII, long before it was legal, and then were forced into exile. After Elizabeth’s succession, William Barlow was made bishop of Chichester, moving his wife and seven children into the episcopal palace. During the first decades of Elizabeth’s reign, all five of the Barlow daughters married clerics, and it appears that their choices reflect a genuine commitment to Evangelical reform. Frances was embedded in a network of godly clerics, cementing relationships with Protestant allies through marriage and the connections offered by standing as a godparent. When Frances’s first son, Matthew Parker, was born in 1575, his godparents included her brother-in-law, William Day, the future bishop of Winchester. A few years later when, Frances gave birth to another son, John, at Christ Church in Oxford, she chose her sister Anne – married to Herbert Westphaling – to be a godmother, while Laurence Humphrey was one of John’s godfathers. Frances later asked Laurence Humphrey’s wife, Joan Inkforby – a former Marian exile – to be godmother to her

⁵⁶ Tobie Matthew, *A True historical relation of the Conversion of Sir Tobie Matthew* ed. A. H. Mathew (London, 1904), p. 131.

‘most dearly beloved son’, Samuel. And many of Frances’ own godchildren were clerical offspring, mostly the sons and daughters of bishops.⁵⁷

Frances Matthew was keenly aware of her inheritance as a child of one of the first Evangelical clerics and was eager to highlight the Barlow family’s place in the Protestant hierarchy. In 1595, a family tree was drawn up for Frances Matthew listing all her parents’ children – seven of whom survived into adulthood. All the daughters married clergymen, and by 1595 – when Frances commissioned the family tree – all five were married to bishops. In 1598, Frances once more stressed the Barlow legacy when she commissioned a memorial for her sister, Anthonine, who she described as a ‘daughter to Bishop Barlow and wife to Bishop Whickham ... two brethren of good name and place’. The memorial then noted that all of Anthonine’s sisters were married to bishops. Frances once again highlighted the Barlow’s influence in a memorial to another sister, Elizabeth Day, which noted that not only was Elizabeth married to a bishop, but that all her brothers-in-law were bishops. And these same facts – an episcopal father, an archbishop as a husband, and bishops as brothers-in-law - were repeated on Frances Matthew’s own memorial in York Minster.⁵⁸ The familial connections, the marriages and the friendships developed in these clerical households shaped the Church of England, and Frances was keen that her family’s contribution was recognised.

⁵⁷ YML, Frances Matthew, ‘A note of all my children’, Add MS 322. Borthwick Institute for Archives, (hereafter BIA) York, Probate Register 40, ff., 397r-398v. Oates, *Moderate Radical* pp. 59-60.

⁵⁸ Oates, *Moderate Radical*, pp. 175-177. Sherlock, ‘Monuments, Reputations and Clerical Marriage’, pp. 57-82

While the Barlow memorials celebrated these clerical matches, they were silent on the benefits that clerical marriage offered the women, perhaps reflecting a continuing unease about the influence of clerical wives. However, Frances was an important part of the households that Tobie Matthew oversaw in Oxford, Durham and York. He appointed her sole executor of his will: ‘relying with all confidence upon her care and providence (of which I have had good experience for the space of almost fifty years).’⁵⁹ She had extensive experience of clerical households when she married Tobie Matthew in 1577, bringing with her the knowledge of the influence that episcopal wives could exercise. In addition to growing up in an episcopal household, Frances’ first husband – Matthew Parker – was the son of Archbishop Matthew Parker, and after they married the young couple moved into Lambeth Palace. There Frances encountered Margaret Parker *née* Harleston who was renowned for her hospitality and for the help she gave to the archbishop. Margaret introduced new ordinances to reform the household, and a contemporary biography described her ordering her ‘housekeeping so nobly and splendidly ... that all things answered that venerable dignity’. Frances also experienced less prominent clerical households too. After Matthew Parker’s death, she lived with her sister, Elizabeth Day, and her husband (William) in Eton College.⁶⁰

The Matthews offered hospitality and accommodation to godly clerics, replicating the informal household seminaries which Tom Webster has identified as being so important in the emergence of Puritanism in the 1630s. An episcopal income offered a great deal of potential for patronage and support. One minister, John Favour, prepared large chunks of his

⁵⁹ BIA Probate Register 40 fo. 195r.

⁶⁰ YML Add MS 322. Basch, ‘English Bishops’ Wives’, p. 117.

history of the Church while staying in the Matthew's household, recalling energetic discussions with Tobie Matthew over breakfast. Another godly minister and author, Edmund Bunny, had his own rooms in the archiepiscopal palace in Cawood, dying there in 1618.⁶¹ Frances was sometimes responsible for initiating these relationships. Despite Tobie Matthew's reservations, Frances sent their son Samuel to study at Peterhouse in Cambridge under the guidance of Samuel Ward, and following her son's death, Frances continued to maintain close connections with Cambridge and Ward. It was Frances who asked Ward to find a godly tutor – Richard Garbutt- to live with and tutor her grandson, Josias. Garbutt was so taken with the community of northern puritans he met while with the Matthews, he decided to stay in Yorkshire. Frances also appears to have been behind the choice of John Scott to be the new dean of York Minster in 1624. Though Scott was a disastrous choice - he was imprisoned for his gambling debts - the appointment brought his wife Dorothy Scott (Frances' niece and goddaughter) and their children to live in the Minster Close. Dorothy shared a godly outlook with Frances and other clerical wives in the Minster Close, despite the growing enthusiasm for Laudianism among some of the Minster's clerics. Along with another prebendal wife, Jane Hodson, Dorothy secretly hosted a puritan conventicle in the deanery until it was discovered in 1627.⁶²

⁶¹ William J Sheils, 'Bunny, Edmund (1540-1618), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004). Favour, *Antiquity Triumphant Novelty*, preface. Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England : The Caroline Puritan Movement c. 1620-1643* (Cambridge, Cambridge, 1997), ch. 1.

⁶² Oates, *Moderate Radical*, pp 232, 237.

Frances was also a bridge between Tobie Matthew and the laity, providing hospitality that established powerful alliances and making friendships that sustained those connections. A recipe book compiled by a local minister and York prebendary, Henry Fairfax, in the 1620s and 1630s illustrates the networks of ‘soft power’ threaded through the northern Church. Fairfax, himself brother of the local nobleman, Ferdinando Fairfax, married local gentlewoman, Mary Cholmley in 1627. The recipe book that Henry and Mary compiled after their marriage, included several recipes passed on to them by Frances Matthew – some of which, in turn, had been passed on to her by noblewomen. One, a recipe for liquorice juice had come to Frances from Lady Bowes – married to a major landowner in Durham who was a key supporter of the Elizabethan regime. Another, for liquorice tablets, was designed to be used for either illness or for an after dinner sweet, reflecting the extent of Frances Matthew’s frequent entertaining.⁶³

The entertaining that Frances and Matthew did at their palaces in York and Durham was politically sensitive, and a key part of Matthew’s government. As well as hosting friends, the Matthews were expecting to win over enemies. Richard Bernard, a Puritan cleric and former Separatist dedicated one of his books to ‘the chief officers, the gentleman domestical, attendants and the rest of the family’ of Archbishop Tobie Matthew. ‘You are in an eminent place’, Bernard told them: ‘no way can you so glorify God as by practical profession, nor advance before the enemy the honour of the Most Rev your Lord and Master more, than by a holy conversation’.⁶⁴ Frances developed friendships that underpinned

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 106. George Weddell, *Arcana Fairfaxiana Manuscripta* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 1890), pp. 140, 145-6.

⁶⁴ Richard Bernard, *The Sinner’s Safetie* (London, 1609), dedicatory epistle.

Tobie Matthew's political alliances, using her household and hospitality. One such friendship was her relationship with Anne, wife of Francis Clifford, the earl of Cumberland and the most eminent nobleman in the north. The Cliffords visited the Matthews at Bishopthorpe palace, and when Lady Anne Clifford was in York the following month, Frances Matthew went to see her along with Lord Sheffield's daughters. They were clearly close, as Anne Clifford recorded in her diary that 'this night' Frances Matthew 'lay with me'.⁶⁵ In addition, Frances established her household as a centre of godly domesticity in imitation of local noble households, like that of the Earl and Countess of Huntingdon at York in the 1580s and 1590s. As one contemporary noted, northerners 'who had a desire to bestow good breeding upon their daughters thought themselves happy, and that they had more than half bred their daughters, if they could get them entertained into Mrs Matthew's service'.⁶⁶

Sometimes there was a chasm between the ideal of the harmonious clerical household and the reality, and Tobie and Frances Matthew's marriage was far from serene. Frances complained bitterly about moving north, and indeed was slow to follow her husband to Durham, choosing to stay near family in Oxford instead. There is also evidence that while in Durham, Tobie Matthew had an extra material affair with his chaplain's wife (possibly fathering at least one child with her). Frances sourly called her a 'hot arsed Queen', and the news blackened Matthew's reputation at court: Lady Elizabeth Russell complained to her nephew, Robert

⁶⁵ YML 'Tobie Matthew's Preaching Diary' Add MS 18 pp. 115-117. D. J. H. Clifford (ed.), *The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford* (Stroud, 2003), p. 44

⁶⁶ Durham University Library, Mickelton and Spearman MS 23 fo. 125r. Claire Cross, *The Puritan Earl: The Life of Henry Hastings, Third Earl of Huntingdon 1536-1595* (MacMillan, London, 1966).

Cecil, that Matthew was not an ‘upright’ man.⁶⁷ Although the injunctions of 1559 focussed on scandalous wives, husbands were as likely to stray and their sexual activities could be as damaging to the reputation of the clergy. Archbishop Edwin Sandys found his reputation damaged after he was reportedly found in bed with an inn-keeper’s wife. Sandys claimed this was an attempt to smear his reputation, and certainly it became a high profile case, eventually making it to the Star Chamber. Although Sandys was exonerated, the whiff of sexual impropriety hung around for the rest of his career. And bishops weren’t the only clergy to struggle with their marriages: violence, drunkenness, defamation and adultery afflicted clerical marriages like those of their lay counterparts.⁶⁸

John Harington described Frances Matthew as ‘the best reported and reputed of her sort I think in England’.⁶⁹ Throughout the period, Frances enjoyed a favourable reputation in lay and clerical circles. She excelled at the expected womanly skills (hospitality, embroidery, education) and yet also had an influence that extended beyond Archbishop Matthew’s household. She communicated with leading clerics like Samuel Ward, and local ministers including Francis Bunny dedicated books to her. Her monument likened her to the Queen of Carthage, noting the ‘rare example’ of her learning, and praising her donation of books to York Minster. Her gift brought widespread public benefits: ‘first derived upon this Church, and through it flowing upon the country’. Here was a woman actively shaping the post-

⁶⁷ Oates, *Moderate Radical*, pp. 101-2.

⁶⁸ Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage’, pp. 18, Thompson, *Parish Clergy Wives*, pp. 146-151.

Sarah Bastow, ‘An Abortive Attempt to Defend an Episcopal Reputation: The Case of Archbishop Edwin Sandys and the Innkeeper’s Wife’, *History*, vol 97 (2012), pp. 380-401.

⁶⁹ Harington *Nugae Antiquae* p. 265.

Reformation Church.⁷⁰ Yet, wifely involvement was not always appreciated by contemporaries who criticised overly-powerful wives and mocked their clerical husbands. In 1575, Richard Cox's wife was widely blamed for the bishop's refusal to hand over leases to the Queen, with Roger North warning him : 'let not your wife's shallow experience carry you too far, least she lay your honour and credit aground and haply make a shipwreck of the whole'.⁷¹ Bishop Edmund Freake was said to be afraid of his wife, claiming he had to do what she wanted or 'she would make him weary of life'. And indeed, Eric Carlson suggests that the 1575 bill restricting wifely involvement in the clerical household may have been a response to the efforts of Cecily Freake.⁷²

Despite ambiguity about the status and influence of clerical wives, it is evident that the public housekeeping required of early modern clerics offered an opportunity for their wives to have an impact. Hospitality was an important duty of the clergy, from parish priests to archbishops and as it was delivered from the household, it was also an area where clerical wives could – and did - exercise considerable influence. Contemporaries recognised this, and the arguments about clerical hospitality in this period were driven by criticisms of how far women were discharging their husbands' professional duties. The examples here illustrate how marriage offered an opportunity for Evangelical women to engage in the Reformation process, working alongside their husbands. The role that women could play in the household,

⁷⁰ Bod. 'Letter from Samuel Ward to Frances Matthew', Tanner MS 76, fos. 130-1. Francis Bunny, *An Exposition on the Lords Prayer* (London, 1602). Francis Drake, *Eboracum* (York, 1788), vol. 2, p. 344.

⁷¹ *Cal MS Sal.* 'Roger North to Richard Cox,' vol 2, p. 120

⁷² Carlson, 'Clerical marriage', p. 19

and the relationship between the clerical family and the wider community was fraught and often uneasy. Clerical wives, and increasingly clerical families, were held up as models of piety that the laity could emulate and as many of the memorials to the earliest clergy wives demonstrate, there was a concerted effort to ignore any special influence offered by marriage to ministers. However, as historians have shown, clerical wives were recognised as occupying a special status in early modern society seen in numerous interactions at parish level and beyond. Clerical wives, themselves, appear to have embraced these opportunities with women like Frances Matthew using the resources of the clerical household – and the hospitality that was expected – to pursue her own commitment to godly reform.

The lives of these women illustrate the powerful, yet often hidden, networks underpinning the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church. As Weisner-Hanks argues, it is imperative to trace the influence of individual clerical wives outside of the ‘private sphere’ to understand the complexities of the Reformation process.⁷³ Although clerical wives may have been encouraged to emulate Mary of Bethany, it is evident that many, instead, chose to follow in the path of Martha, using their household as a tool of the Reformation.

⁷³ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, ‘Beyond Women and the Family: Towards a Gender Analysis of the Reformation’ *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol 18 (1987), pp. 311-21. Merry Wiesner-Hanks, ‘Women and the Reformation: Reflections on Recent Research’, *History Compass* 2 (2004), pp. 1-27.

