CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE LOVE-SICK SPOUSE:
JOHN STOUTHON'S 1624 PAUL'S CROSS SERMON IN CONTEXT

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The Love-sick Spouse, a Paul's Cross sermon by John Stoughton first printed—posthumously—in 1640, has received very little scholarly attention. In part, this neglect is due to Millar MacLure's dating of the sermon as 'ante 1640' (when it was first printed), thus rendering invisible its more precise religious and political features as a sermon preached in 1624. However, the sermon bears more detailed examination in light of the two manuscript forms in which it exists. The manuscript witnesses allow us to date the sermon and also enable a more exact understanding of how at least one preacher, in this case an alleged nonconformist, negotiated the rhetorical challenges of preaching high-profile, public sermons in that year. Moreover, the temper and effect of The Love-sick Spouse, preached early in 1623/4, are intimately entwined with a sermon, The Happinesse of Peace, preached by Stoughton ten months later in Cambridge, and comparison of the two yields evidence of the pressures exerted on preachers by their public sermon performances. The extant manuscript evidence, then, allows this sermon to be understood within three contexts: the sermon's delivery at Paul's Cross, likely in March 1623/4; a sermon delivered by Stoughton ten months later in Cambridge; and the sermon's publication in 1640.

Stoughton's early biographer described him as 'a Puritan preacher of exceptional eloquence,' adding that 'it is difficult to believe that greater pulpit orator ever jewelled a sentence to more curious beauty than Stoughton.' Despite these gifts, however, Stoughton is remembered primarily as

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2 J.C. Whitebrook, 'Dr John Stoughton the Elder,' Congregational History Society Transactions 6 (1913–15), 83, 91. Additional biographical information on Stoughton can be gleaned from the following sources: Benjamin Brook, The Lives of the Puritans (London: J. Black, 1813), vol. 3; J.T. Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry: The Great Puritan Families of Early Stuart
a graduate and then fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (that great crucible of Puritans and nonconformists) and incumbent of St. Mary Aldermanbury, London (have for some of the most famous nonconformist preachers of his day) who shared in the persecutions authorized by Archbishop Laud on suspicion of being a collector of funds for New England ministers. Brook notes that, although he was a ‘laborious and orthodox preacher,’ he was investigated at the instigation of Laud because he ‘touched upon’ the Popish and Arminian controversies. At various times, incriminating letters were intercepted, his study raided, and he was investigated by the High Commission, although he enjoyed the patronage and protection of such Puritan leaders as Sir Robert Harley and the Earl of Holland. He was one of five lecturers [the others were John Viner, John Goodwin, Andrew Molen, Sydrach Simpson] examined by William Juxon, Bishop of London, for ‘inconformity.’ All five preachers, according to Laud, ‘promised amendment for the future, and submission to the Church in all things, [and] my lord [Juxon] very moderately forbore further proceeding against them.’ Stoughton, accompanied by Harley, was the only one of the five to be brought before the High Commission. Although suspected of channelling funds to nonconforming ministers in the new world, however, Stoughton was eventually acquitted and died in 1639. There is reason to believe, then, that he was sympathetic to the views of nonconforming ministers, but that he managed to cover his activities sufficiently within the bounds of conformity to satisfy both his patrons and the authorities.

Stoughton’s alleged nonconformist activities of the 1630s are anticipated, to some extent, in the sixteen-twenties. He preached at least twice in 1624: first at Paul’s Cross (The Love-sick Spouse) and then before James at

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3 Stoughton was preceded at St. Mary Aldermanbury by Robert Harris (a future member of the Westminster Assembly) and Thomas Taylor, and succeeded in 1639 by Edmund Calamy who wrote the history of nonconformists after the Restoration.

4 Brook, Lives, 3: 527.

5 Eales, Puritans and Roundheads, 63.

6 Seaver, Puritan Lectureships, 256–58.

7 Whitebrook, ‘John Stoughton,’ 93.