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***Ralph Thoresby and Individual Devotion in late seventeenth-
and early eighteenth-century England***

Historians of early modern religion have in recent years become increasingly interested in the ‘lived experience’ of English parishioners, successfully exposing the significance of religious belief for the everyday lives of the laity. Reformation scholarship has taken a distinctively pastoral approach, investigating how new ideas were disseminated in the localities, and focusing on the reception of protestantism at the level of the individual.¹ In contrast, whilst scholars of the later seventeenth-century recognise religion as a driving force of history, this interest has rarely been extended to the everyday repercussions of belief for people’s lives. Whilst the importance of religion after 1660 has been increasingly emphasised, the tendency has been to focus on its role in constitutional structures and political life as successive crisis gripped the nation.² Beyond this, John Spurr paid close attention to the religious provision offered by the clergy of the Restoration Church, and more recently he drew attention to the continued ‘glaring omission’ of the lay perspective from this history.³ Though Jeremy Gregory and Donald Spaeth have offered important studies of the social fabric of the later seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Church of England in the parishes, these institutional histories tend to focus on personnel and administration, rather than on the religious experience of the laity.⁴ Yet on one of the rare occasions that the personal piety of the second half of the seventeenth century is reconnected with that of the early Stuart past,

Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe demonstrated the strong influence of earlier decades on the creation of confessional identities, illustrating the potential fruits of a longer term, comparative perspective.⁵

We therefore know less than we should about the ‘lived experience’ of religion around the turn of the century, about the way that belief fostered ways of behaving, giving structure and rhythm to individual lives. In this article I therefore provide a detailed account of one individual’s personal devotional life which provides a chronological point of comparison with the early seventeenth century. Ralph Thoresby was a merchant, antiquarian and topographer who was born at the end of the Interregnum in 1658, and who died in 1725. He is a particularly appropriate subject for a study of lived religion, because in 1677, when he was nineteen, he began to keep a diary. The diary contains some details relating to Thoresby’s business activities and personal life, but is for the most part focused on his spiritual life.⁶ Thoresby continued this practice of life-writing right up to 1724, when he suffered the stroke that heralded his final decline. Thoresby’s archive therefore allows us to explore the minutiae of private devotion not only over the entirety of an individual’s adult life, but also across the artificial historiographical subdivisions of the Glorious Revolution or the end of the seventeenth century.

In focusing on the solitary devotional life of the antiquarian I am to an extent artificially separating aspects of his experience that were undoubtedly interrelated. There is much more to be said about Thoresby’s antiquarian studies, family devotions, and his membership of both nonconformist and Church of England congregations, all of which will form part of a larger study of Thoresby’s life that I am currently undertaking. Here I provide a summary of the institutional and denomination background to Thoresby’s experience, before focusing specifically on patterns of individual devotion, since this speaks to ongoing debates about early modern religious cultures: on the role and nature of reading and writing

practices; about the nature of and relationship between public and private forms of worship; and about the relationship of both to the creation of religious identities. In order to assess the significance of Thoresby's experience I endeavour to place it in context by comparing his life-writing with other contemporary examples. This goes beyond prescriptive literature to think about the reception of religious instruction and the process of internalising protestant teachings, revealing what someone thought and felt about their religion. This also focuses our attention on the religious energy that cannot be revealed by diocesan or parish records, an approach that Mark Goldie recommended as a means to escape the confines of 'church history'.⁷ At the core of this discussion are three interconnected arguments. I argue that individual devotion was highly *personalised*, that is to say it was fundamentally shaped by Thoresby's friends and associates and the local geographical context in which his life was embedded. Yet beyond this distinctive local flavour, strong similarities existed between Thoresby's personal devotions, other devout contemporaries, and early Stuart forms of personal piety – I suggest that consideration of generational experience can aid our understanding of these continuities. Although Thoresby's writing is particular, it connects to the general in ways that illustrate both change and continuity. Finally, Thoresby's example signals that the legacies of puritanism after 1660 were to be found as much within the Church of England as within dissent.

I. Ralph Thoresby's Religious Allegiance

Though focus of this article is on individual devotion, a brief overview of the local and national context is needed in order to set Thoresby's personal preferences in context, since his relationship with the Church of England was not straightforward. Leeds had become an incorporated borough in 1626, its position as a regional trading centre sustaining a growing and relatively prosperous population. The town underwent a godly reformation overseen by the corporation in alliance with successive reform minded ministers in the early seventeenth

century, whilst during the Civil Wars it was the scene of sporadic fighting which embedded political and religious divisions. Ralph Thoresby was born in 1658, the son of respectable Leeds wool merchant John Thoresby, who had been an important figure in the local nonconformist community and who fought for Parliament in the 1640s. During the Restoration era, there was a strong nonconformist presence in Leeds - the first Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 resulted in the granting of ten licenses to ministers to preach in houses in the town. The Thoresbys were moderate nonconformists with a stake in the dissenting Mill Hill Chapel, built in 1674. Although Thoresby went to the local grammar school, his presbyterianism kept him out of university and he was brought up to trade, inheriting the family business after his father's death in 1679. In 1685 he married Anna Sykes, another nonconformist from a prominent local family, and the couple went on to have ten children, three of whom survived to adulthood. Thoresby claimed that he was never particularly successful in his commercial ventures, and he retired from his business concerns when he was in his forties, around 1704. From then on he dedicated his time entirely to his longstanding topographical and antiquarian pursuits in which he experienced more success, publishing the first history of Leeds in 1715, becoming a member of the Royal Society, and amassing an impressive collection of antiquities and curiosities in a museum attached to his house that drew a wide variety of visitors from all walks of life.⁸

John Thoresby and his son were sober nonconformists who were on good terms with the Church of England, despite their commitment to dissent. Both regularly attended public worship at their local parish church, and were part of a grey area of religious allegiance that was widely recognised at the time. It is such parishioners that have prompted historians to acknowledge the fluidity of contemporary lay religious impulses, which did not divide neatly into 'Church' and 'chapel' but which could encompass dissenters who were 'semi-separatists', or who partook in 'occasional conformity' or 'partial conformity'.⁹ Rejecting an

earlier teleological denominational history, historians now stress that until the late seventeenth century the emergence of Church and dissent as rival ecclesiastical blocs was not the object of most contemporaries, nor was it inevitable.¹⁰ Ralph Thoresby himself therefore fits into a long standing concern in some puritan circles to avoid open and permanent schism with the Church. Whilst for the early part of his life he refrained from taking communion in the Church of England, he did attend sermons regularly and in the late 1690s he actually took communion in the parish church for the first time, before gradually giving up his nonconformist connections altogether.

In a national context, Thoresby's decision to conform at this time was surprising. The 1689 Act of Toleration meant that dissenters could meet and worship openly, without the threat of prosecution, and elsewhere it appeared that the weight of nonconformist opinion was shifting reluctantly away from the idea of an inclusive national Church.¹¹ Indeed, even when faced with persecution for his nonconformity in the 1680s Thoresby did not mention the possibility of conformity, suggesting that the official status of dissent was not a defining influence on his allegiance. In fact, Thoresby's diary indicates that his shift was motivated by a wide range of factors rooted in both national and local religio-politics.¹² It is not possible to do justice to the complexity of his choice here, but a summary of the significant influences is instructive. As already mentioned, Thoresby's puritanism was moderate, and he always felt that there were 'proper' limits to dissent. This belief was informed by a keen attention to universal issues of conscience, duty, and obedience to authority, matters that he mentioned in his writing, discussed with his friends, and read about in his closet.¹³ Thoresby's position was that too rigorous imposition of the Book of Common Prayer and the admission of scandalous parishioners to communion were the chief obstacles to his own full conformity. However, he considered himself 'obliged in conscience' to 'pretty frequently' attend Church of England sermons, since he agreed with Richard Baxter that compliance with the established Church

was acceptable as long as with was 'without sin'.¹⁴ Throughout his life, Thoresby therefore acknowledged that when it came to the essentials of faith, he was in agreement with the established Church, a position that made conformity to it a possibility.

Thoresby was also well versed in other national circumstances that influenced his decision to conform. Following the Act of Toleration and the defeat of the last comprehension bill in 1689, moderate Presbyterians were forced to embrace their religious freedom and to give up on hopes of reunion with the Church of England. Thoresby, like others, was concerned about what would follow. The antiquarian identified with contemporary concerns that the Church was weakened by religious pluralism, and threatened by vice and atheism. The latter he took particularly seriously, since his involvement with natural philosophers and members of the Royal Society exposed him to heterodox ideas.¹⁵ Given the events of the 1680s Thoresby was also sensitive to the threat that Catholicism posed, and his concerns were fuelled by sermons he heard in Leeds on the plight of French Protestants, facing significant persecution under Louis XIV.¹⁶ Together, these anxieties hardened into a conviction that those English protestants who agreed on the 'essentials of religion' were duty-bound to unite and mount a defence against the many enemies that threatened them. Since he was of the opinion that the established Church was 'the strongest bulwark against popery' it was not surprising that he eventually concluded that a union of protestants was 'absolutely necessary'.¹⁷

Whilst these broader concerns undoubtedly helped to determine Thoresby's shift to full conformity with the Church of England, his friends and acquaintances in Leeds also appear to have played a crucial part in his decision. As he became more involved in intellectual spheres Thoresby's circle expanded to include prominent figures in the fields of antiquarianism, natural history and natural philosophy. In some cases, these acquaintances matured into intimate friendships and it is evident that Thoresby was advised on religious

matters by these men, many of whom were firm conformists. For instance, in 1690 Thoresby met local lawyer Richard Thornton when he visited Thornton's well-stocked library and 'curious collection of manuscripts'.¹⁸ Thoresby came to greatly value this 'dear friend and counsellor', since he was 'a man of peace and piety' whose deportment in prayer he found very moving. Thornton later became godfather to Thoresby's son Richard, and Recorder to the city of Leeds, and Thoresby described their frequent conferences about spirituals, saying 'we discoursed with freedom about the sacrament, and particularly about communicating at the church'.¹⁹ The first time that Thoresby took communion in his parish church, Thornton also helped Thoresby to deal with his concerns about the presence of 'unsuitable communicants' by retiring to a private corner of the quire with him, where the vicar administered to them both.²⁰

Another more eminent acquaintance was the Archbishop of York, John Sharp, who Thoresby came to know in 1693 because they were both keen numismatics. In his only published work, a pamphlet of 1684 titled *A Discourse Concerning Conscience*, Sharp had argued that continued separation from the Church was permissible where a dissenter felt it would be sinful to join, but education, friendship, occasional conformity (to make one eligible for office holding), or force of habit were inexcusable.²¹ Thoresby admired Sharp's preaching and when he decided to undergo 'a more full and distinct study of the points in dispute betwixt the Church of England and the Dissenters' he read up on the current literature, including Sharp's 'judicious treatise'.²² There was a regular correspondence between the two men, and since Thoresby was a frequent visitor to Bishopthorpe, Sharp also had ample opportunity to discuss Thoresby's allegiance with him directly. For instance in 1699, Sharp sent Thoresby one of his own Books of Common Prayer, and wrote several pages explaining why Common Prayer was, in his own personal experience, superior in its effect to any other form of religious exercise.²³ Thoresby's life-writing affirms that Sharp's

guidance powerfully pulled Thoresby towards full conformity.²⁴

On the other hand, disagreement within Thoresby's dissenting circle over the issue of conformity seems to have pushed the antiquarian away from the chapel. Around 1693 a new minister arrived at the Mill Hill. Although initially impressed by Timothy Manlove, Thoresby went on to have a fractious and unhappy relationship with the minister, which he later described as a 'fatal grudge'. This was mainly because Manlove was one of a number of Leeds dissenters who were fiercely critical of partial conformity and anyone who practiced it. Thoresby was often disturbed by his fellow dissenters' 'bitter reflections' on the topic, and evidently Manlove in particular took many opportunities to express his indignant 'disgust' at those who attended Church of England worship.²⁵ Thoresby found Manlove's uncompromising manner 'too warm' and his resentment 'too passionate', and eventually he felt unable to approach him to discuss his wavering allegiance.²⁶ Thoresby therefore seems to have become increasingly marginal in his dissenting circle, and he felt aggrieved about the 'uncharitable reflections and censures' of the group, particularly since he was supporting Manlove financially.

The antiquarian's decision to move to full conformity was therefore a complicated process. It is not surprising that in his own life-writing Thoresby emphasised the need for protestant unity as well as the uncharitable behaviour of his dissenting circle as motives, since this retrospective account is as much a justification of his decision as a description of it. Reading between the lines, Thoresby was also flattered by the attentions of Archbishop Sharp, whose 'catholick' behaviour contrasted strongly with the 'passion' of Manlove. Thoresby's intellectual pursuits provided an additional incentive for him to join the Church. His observation that 'the more I was respected by his Grace, the more I was insulted by the Dr' indicate the particular circumstances that led to his decision – Thoresby had always prevaricated about the issues of conscience and duty when it came to conformity, but it was

only the hostility of Manlove and the friendship of Sharp forced him to confront these issues head-on.²⁷

Whilst the remainder of this article focuses on Thoresby's individual patterns of devotion, these should be understood in this broader denominational and institutional context. If Thoresby's involvement with Church and chapel was marked by wavering and discontinuity, as will be seen his individual devotional life was by contrast remarkably constant, which provided a firm foundation which served to ease the transition from partial to full conformity. Thoresby's diary is the main source of evidence for his personal devotional piety, but he also wrote a shorter, retrospective review of his life, which drew on his diary material.²⁸ He began writing this in 1710, and continued to update it until 1714, when it abruptly ends, mid-sentence. In this article I will refer to this volume as the 'memoir' – the term that Thoresby himself used – to differentiate it from the diary proper. In the seventeenth-century Thoresby was one of a growing number of contemporaries who put pen to paper to record events or occurrences drawn from their own experience. The genre of autobiography was not well defined at the time, but was slowly emerging from other regular writing habits.²⁹ Life-writing focused around spiritual aspects of a person's experience was particularly prominent, and as will be discussed, Thoresby's own writing habits fit into, and were shaped by the practices and expectations around this form of writing and reflection. Throughout I will therefore compare Thoresby's life-writing with a variety of his contemporaries, demonstrating that although his experience was characterised by its own unique configuration, it can help us to think in general terms about common 'lived experiences'.³⁰ In what follows, I begin by examining Thoresby's conversion, the spiritual awakening that he experienced during his early twenties. This was a process that provides the framework for understanding the pattern of his subsequent devotional life. I then consider the practical realities of the antiquarian's solitary devotions, exploring when and where Thoresby

undertook secret prayer, before concluding with an exploration of the content of this devotional activity.

II. Ralph Thoresby's Early Conversion

The codification and replication of the protestant conversion narrative took place in the seventeenth century and Thoresby's life-writing exhibits many of the hallmarks of puritan sensibility.³¹ For most of his life, Thoresby's diary indicates that he structured his time around his religious devotions, attending church daily and beginning and ended each day with family and solitary prayer. This pattern of religious exercises had its roots in Thoresby's early adult conversion. He was evidently a devout and sober youth, yet despite outwards signs of piety, it appears that Thoresby's more profound spiritual awakening came only after his father's death in 1680, when Thoresby was twenty-two. Indeed, the demise of his father prompted a period of extended spiritual crisis and melancholy that was vital in his journey towards a more mature faith.

In his memoir, Thoresby described the physical and spiritual desolation he sank into after his father's passing. He confessed that 'had it not been for the fear I was not rightly prepared for so great a change, I could most willingly have relinquished the world'.³² Fortunately he found that through a combination of a newly devised devotional regimen, many rousing sermons, and the support of relatives and friends he was able to come to terms with his father's death.³³ Ultimately, it brought him to a more urgent sense of his own sinfulness and a genuine hope that God's mercy might be extended to him – it was the means by which Ralph Thoresby was called to God. Yet in contrast, the evidence of the diary suggests that the process of Thoresby's spiritual awakening was not quite as straightforward as the tidy narrative in his retrospective memoir. The diary entries stop abruptly around the

time of John Thoresby's death towards the end of October, and a blank page precedes the next entry on November 5, a physical break in the volume representing the abrupt and sudden change in Thoresby's worldly and otherworldly circumstances.³⁴ The November 5 entry began as usual with a summary of a recent sermon Thoresby had attended, but quickly shifted into a meditation on the heavy dispensation that he now faced. The prose is coherent but desperate, pressed down into 'the very pitt', Thoresby pleaded for God's assistance and lamented the 'heinous provocations' that had brought down such a terrible judgement on his family. In the entries that follow the depth of Thoresby's distress is painfully apparent as he struggled to make sense of the removal of his 'greatest comfort'. He was in no doubt that his father's death was a divine castigation for his own, continued unregenerate state, and he begged God to show him 'the misery of his natural estate, how frail, weak, blind and naked' his 'dead drowsy soul' was as the first step towards repentance. Although in the memoir Thoresby suggested that his new, sustaining, daily spiritual regimen began closely following this sad event, the diary shows that he only began regularly rising early to read and pray over a year later. In the interim Thoresby was very troubled in his mind and was often overcome with weeping as he examined and mourned his aggravated and innumerable sins. Six months later in April 1680 he was still beseeching God to work his gracious effects on his heart as the person 'most culpable' for the calamitous providence, and he continued to implore God to punish him more severely if his heart was still unbroken and there were yet more sins still 'unrepented of'.³⁵

The sermons that Thoresby attended and made notes on around this time seemed particularly, even suspiciously, well suited to his predicament, providing an insight into the reception of preaching at the level of individual devotion. Thoresby was particularly affected by those lectures delivered by the dissenting minister Mr Sharp. For instance at the second sermon Thoresby attended after his father's death, Sharp's topic was the hopeless condition

of mankind, and the sad truth that although some startling providence might affect the spirits of men temporarily, they soon they returned to their ‘cold and formall’ condition.³⁶ Thoresby marked several parts of the entry recounting this sermon, and put a series of accentuating dots beside several of the passages. The initial effect of this attendance at public worship was to intensify Thoresby’s misery. In January 1680 his sense of loss seized deeply upon his spirits, and he ‘went to bed with wet cheeks and sad heart’, only to dream ‘troublesomely and somewhat remarkably about following my dear father to his long home’.³⁷ Towards the end of April Thoresby again felt the uncomfortable sensation that a preacher was singling him out, when Mr Kay, the minister at the parish church ‘shewd very wel the necessity of singing Psalms... and reproved the General neglect of it in publick’. Thoresby reflected that though psalm singing had previously been the constant practice in his family he now neglected it, seeing as it bought too sharp a sense of remembrance. In the memoir Thoresby added that it was two years before he reluctantly attempted singing in family prayer.³⁸

Yet being brought to a sense of your own helpless depravity was of course an important part of the conversion process, a stage that was common to the experience of numerous earnest puritans in particular.³⁹ Gradually Thoresby’s writing began to change as his spiritual condition shifted. On the 18 April he reflected that his ‘melancholy dejected condition’ might owe something to ‘too much sitting and want of action’, but that it was mainly due to his ‘*excessive* sorrow’ and troubled mind. After weeping bitterly for an hour, ‘til I had no more moisture left in that part of my body’, Thoresby implored God to convert his ‘*too extream* sorrow into a right channel’. Following these small but important breakthroughs he was finally ‘somewhat affected in duty’, ‘earnestly begging’ God from the bottom of his heart for power against his sins in the future.⁴⁰

Thoresby was coming to appreciate that his acute sorrow for his father’s death was the final sin that he must repent for. It was his duty to accept, as Mr Sharp insisted, that ‘God

removes those that are useful in their places, those that are as stakes in the hedge', and to come to a better sense of his own faith by doing so.⁴¹ At this point Thoresby also began to express greater, and less formulaic concerns about his 'misspence' of time. Thoresby's concerns to improve his time were a persistent feature of his diary, yet they became more urgent, and more bitterly lamented in the spring and summer of 1680 as these concerns began to work a change in the young man. One Sunday at the beginning of May he regretted that he had spent 'too much of the day in vain frivolous visits and discourse' not fit for the Sabbath, but in the evening he happily lit upon a sermon of Mr Sharp's that he repeated. Afterwards he retired into the garden, to spend half an hour contemplating and meditating, and with tears begging God's forgiveness. Following these exercises he first came to a sense that he was 'not yet out of the reach of mercy', being 'sweetly employed in that solitary place in the contemplation of those eternal joys and pleasures in heaven', his first glimpse of the delights of the celestial mansions.⁴² The language that Thoresby used to describe this and later ineffable experiences bears the hallmarks of his religious upbringing: he felt that he was 'somewhat awakened' and 'at Liberty in his spirit', acknowledging the 'sweetness' of the experience and the 'elevation' of his soul. These are all terms that recur frequently in earlier puritan spiritual writing and which typify attempts to express the experience of being called to God.

Indeed, Thoresby's description of his conversion shares many characteristics with other 'spiritual autobiographies' of the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, which typically describe a long process comprising of patterns of adversity followed by slow elevation to a new spiritual height.⁴³ For instance, though the puritan lecturer Richard Rogers (1551-1618) was writing much earlier and though he only irregularly added entries to his diary, his reflections bear a strong resemblance to Thoresby's. Near the beginning of his diary in July 1587, Rogers considered the cyclical nature of his progress that month: 'though I

began well, yet I by litle and litle fell from the strength [sic] which I had gotten and became unprofitable in study, and praier and med[itation]'.⁴⁴ Other diaries that display similar preoccupations include those of the puritan clergyman Samuel Rogers (1613-43?); Northamptonshire lawyer Robert Woodford (1637-41); and the reluctantly conformist Church of England minister Isaac Archer (1641-1700).⁴⁵ Each of these examples of life-writing exhibit a high level of spiritual introspection, a rigorous 'watchfulness' over the condition of the writers' soul, and they are focused on the individuals' relationship with God.⁴⁶ Most provide details of patterns of private and public devotion centred on prayer, meditation, reading, hearing and repeating sermons, just as Thoresby does.

Such diaries were shaped by religious and generic conventions, and in most circumstances they were evidently expected to serve a pastoral function. This was certainly the case with Thoresby, who occasionally mentioned explicitly that a passage was intended to be instructive to his children, his anticipated audience. Indeed, Thoresby was part of a circle of religious friends who exchanged diaries and commonplace books as a matter of routine, and Thoresby often noted contemplating on the contents of other diaries in his own life-writing.⁴⁷ Life-writing intended for the consumption of the family, and the lending and borrowing of diaries amongst friends was a well-established and widespread practice. For instance Richard Rogers willed his papers to his son; puritan woodturner Nehemiah Wallington (1598-1658) was tempted to destroy some of his darker life-writing but refrained since he believed it might benefit the generation to come; Robert Woodford showed his book to his religious 'brothers'; and clergyman John Rastrick (1650-1727) dedicated his life-writing to his children, noting also that it should be edited if it was to be published.⁴⁸ Thoresby's most important role model in this respect was undoubtedly his father, whose own diary Ralph perused many times. John Thoresby was also responsible for prompting Ralph to

begin his own diary, for bound into the memoir is a letter from 15 August 1677.⁴⁹ In it, John Thoresby urged his son to make

a little journall of any thing remarkable every day principally to your self, as suppose Aug: 20 I was at such a place (or) such a one preached from such a text and my heart was touched, (or) I was a negligent hearer, (or) otherwise, etc.

Thoresby's diary was therefore part of a communal religious tradition of life-writing. The circulation and publication of diaries provided exemplary models for life-writing and conventions which dictated the form, and to a certain extent even the content, of the diaries produced at the time. This makes Thoresby's diary more valuable because of its capacity to reveal wider strands of religiosity in contemporary culture. It allows us to recognise that although solitary devotions were performed in 'private', they were shaped by a number of different influences, from public worship, to associates who shared a similar churchmanship, to close family members. With regard to Thoresby's transformative religious conversion, his education provided the language and conceptual models to make sense of his spiritual experiences. His father's death was a trigger, a renewed focus for his spiritual meditations and a spur to greater faith. The sermons he attended were a vital part of the gradual process of conversion, stirring him to greater repentance and framing his spiritual journey. On their own, in the first hearing, these sermons could be emotional occasions, but it is Thoresby's private meditations on their content, revealed in his diary, where they really came into their own. In the solitude of his closet or garden, Thoresby was free to reflect on the message of the sermons and to apply the doctrines to his own life, in the process coming to a conviction of his own 'great' sin, the idolization of his father.

Although there are hints of this revelation in the diary entries, it appears that Thoresby

only subsequently came to a more complete spiritual self-knowledge over time, hence it is in the memoir that Thoresby summarised and gave full expression to the process of his conversion. There he rearranged his experiences, changing the sequence of events and telescoping them to more neatly depict his growing awareness of his own sinfulness, to warn against the snares of excessive affection, and as a reminder of the necessity of repentance as well as the rewards of strict discipline and perseverance. The neatness of the hand-writing and lack of errors or alterations in the text strongly suggest that Thoresby's life-writing was compiled from notes and written up, as was the case with many contemporaries. The diary is therefore a record of the process and methods of Thoresby's spiritual awakening, and in initiating the review and contemplation of his experiences, it served as an instrument of the process as well. If the memoir misrepresented or reshaped the timeline of Thoresby's conversion, this tells us much about Thoresby's sense of self and the way that autobiographical writing had provided meaning to his life. Taken together, the diary and memoir therefore allow understanding of the ways in which Thoresby retrospectively understood and took meaning from his formative experience. But what was the significance of this formative experience for Thoresby's life? Indeed, how, and why should it be considered formative?

III. Thoresby's Patterns of Piety

The first change initiated by Thoresby's new sense of faith was his assertion of greater independence from the world and worldly ways, and his more determined resolution to improve his time. In May, June and July of 1680 Thoresby repeatedly expressed his guilt at spending too much 'precious time' 'idly if not sinfully'.⁵⁰ At the same time Thoresby drew consolation from his pursuit of godly learning, so for example in June he found 'considerable

advantage' at home, writing and abbreviating the life of Lady Mary Rich, the Countess of Warwick, and reading other religious texts.⁵¹ On the anniversary of his father's death in October Thoresby spent two days in retirement, overwhelmed by his unspeakable loss, but he rose at four o'clock on the morning of the third day, dedicating time reading his father's diary. It was then that Thoresby entered into what was to become a long enduring resolution:

to redeem more time, particularly to retrench my sleeping time, and getting an alarm put to the clock, and that set at my bed's head, to arise every morning by five, and first to dedicate the morning (as in duty obliged) to the service of God, by reading, and prayer; to spend some hours in writing and collecting remarks upon the lives and deaths of the saints and servants of God in most, or all ages.⁵²

This was a significant turning point in Thoresby's devotional regimen, no doubt also inspired by the comfort he had taken from his religious studies that summer. By the beginning of December he had procured an alarm for his clock and he began to regularly note the hour he got up and the amount of time he then spent in meditation, prayer and study: 'January 11 1681, up before 4, writing till 8'; 'January 13, lay till 5, writing until 8'; 'January 20, lay too long, till near 7, but as a voluntary penance, stirred not out until evening'.⁵³ Though Thoresby continued to express anxiety over his failure to improve his time sufficiently, he now had a regular and beneficial duty that took him out of the world and sanctioned his continued religious education, providing relief and easing his troubled mind. His morning devotions were repeated in the evening after family prayer, though it seems likely that he spent considerably less time in reading at the end of the day. Not that this new regimen was all plain sailing. On 25 March Thoresby 'lay sluggishly to almost seven', on the 28 March he wasted time watching the activity of a tumbler, which somewhat 'disordered' him, whilst in

November he admitted that he was ‘up rather *too* early, about two, writing and perusing some books and papers’. The waxing and waning of daylight hours could also prove problematic, for in March of 1684 he noted with pleasure that the vernal equinox had returned, allowing him to once again rise before four, to his satisfaction.⁵⁴ This pattern of regular daily devotions was the ideal, recommended by protestant divines in devotional guides and urged on parishioners by ministers in the pulpit.⁵⁵ However, it is rare to find a record of such strict adherence to the ideal over such a long time period. The diaries of parliamentary soldier Adam Eyre (1614-1661) and puritan woodturner Nehemiah Wallington are two of the few that bear comparison in this regard, each striving to maintain twice daily prayers as a minimum, though it might be the case that for many others, daily devotions were too commonplace to be mentioned in their writing.⁵⁶

Yet despite its demanding nature, is clear that this form of early morning devotion provided a pattern that was to last the rest of Thoresby’s life. After two years he was less meticulous in recording the time and length of daily devotions, but it appears that this was because he achieved a relatively settled regimen, thus he became more likely to record a deviation from his pious practice than the activity itself. That said, the advent of a new year and the annual anniversary of his birthday were usually occasions when he took a moment to reflect on time unprofitably consumed. In August 1697 he was much dejected in spirit and blushed to think he was entering his fortieth year, in 1702 he regretted that he had lived so long, having ‘done so little to any good purpose’, whilst in August 1721 he reviewed his sixty-five year pilgrimage, and also took the value of the coins in his collection, thereby ensuring that both his spiritual and worldly affairs were in order.⁵⁷ This practice of annual reckoning was relatively common – Richard Rogers, minister Samuel Ward (1571-1642) and Isaac Archer all mentioned reviewing their life-writing on the anniversary of their births and at the beginning of the year.⁵⁸

Thoresby's daily devotions in secret were central to his daily devotional regime. They entailed solitary, individual prayer, which could take place in a variety of locations. Thoresby mentioned his bedchamber, an upstairs study and his 'closet' which appears to have been a space devoted entirely to secret prayer, distinct from his bedchamber. Although it was relatively unusual, Thoresby occasionally sought solace in a church, so when his wife was seriously ill with a fever in 1699 his only diversion was in 'walking down to the Church, wherein some remote seat (the most private I could find) I poured out my heart in strong cries & tears abundant for this dearest comfort of my life'.⁵⁹ This was presumably a useful consolation to Thoresby, for until his wife's recovery he seldom failed to visit the church less than six times a day. And there are other, more opportunistic visits to the church for secret prayer, such as in London in 1708, when an open church early one morning provided 'a convenience for retirement that the Inn afforded not'.⁶⁰ Privacy was essential to these secret devotions – Thoresby often sorrowfully noted that when visiting friends he was too frequently prevented from prayer for want of 'convenient privacy'. Travel, and the likelihood of sharing a room or even a bed with a companion, also disrupted Thoresby's regular devotion, so one evening he was keen to rise before his chamber-fellow in order to carry out secret prayer, but he rose two hours too soon, and after performing his religious exercises he was constrained to lay down again until five.⁶¹

The outdoors also provided ample opportunity for reading and meditation. Thoresby's garden, as we have already seen, was an essential part of his devotional geography, and he was often to be found walking there, reading and meditating. Perhaps predictably, there are occasions when he spied a worm in the dirt, prompting reflection on the sinful and polluted state of his soul, feeling himself to be a mere worm in the eyes of God.⁶² Thoresby seems to have been a master at walking and reading at the same time. He regularly reported his perusal of texts on all manner of journeys: while on the way to visit friends in Leeds and the

surrounding townships; on his walks to his rape-seed mill; and as he went to see friends in Kensington, a four mile ‘pleasant way’, when he had an opportunity of solitary contemplation and was ‘not altogether unaffected in singing part of the 139th Psalm’.⁶³ Although it is sometimes hard to be sure whether Thoresby is reading religious texts there are enough references to suggest that he often is. Perhaps his most surprising literary journeys are the regular trips that he makes to visit his good friend John Sharp, the Archbishop of York. For instance in December 1701 Thoresby enjoyed ‘the company of a book over the moors’ on his way to the archbishop’s residence at Bishopthorp – from Thoresby’s house in Kirkgate that was a walk of twenty-two miles.⁶⁴ As the antiquarian aged, there were less references to such feats in the diary, though in 1721 he noted that on a four mile walk to see to business he was weary, so sat down to finish the book that he had in his pocket.⁶⁵ His age could also prohibit him from his usual habits of devotion in other ways, such as in 1723, when he dejectedly ‘made a poor shift to kneel at family prayer’, and he was subsequently ‘forced to offer up my private supplications upon my weary bed’, an indication that kneeling was his usual stance in prayer.⁶⁶

IV. Thoresby’s Devotional Reading and Writing

The evidence of the practicalities of Thoresby’s personal piety supports Alec Ryrie’s conclusions that solitary prayer was a touchstone of English protestantism, which could take place anywhere, at any time, the overriding requirement being the need for privacy.⁶⁷ The evidence also suggests that reading and writing were pious activities that were just as important as praying when it came to solitary devotion. Thoresby’s ability and willingness to pick up a book whenever he could help to explain how he was able to work his way through such an enormous amount of written material over his lifetime. In this final section I will

address the nature and content of this devotional reading and writing in more detail.

A survey of Thoresby's reading habits reveals that the staple element of his literary diet – as you would expect – was scripture. Daily readings of the bible were supplemented by a variety of aids that allowed him to navigate the more opaque sections of the text, and to apply its teachings to his own life.⁶⁸ The scriptural aids that Thoresby referred to most often were Joseph Hall's *Paraphrases* (first published 1633), John Deodati's *Annotations* (1643), Matthew Poole's *Annotations* (1683), and Samuel Clark's *Survey of the Bible* (1693).⁶⁹ These texts were well suited to Thoresby's puritan outlook. Hall's Calvinist *Paraphrases* was a book that Thoresby used in both solitary and family prayer, and along with Deodati's *Annotations* it is a reminder that the exploration of personal devotion through the lens of contemporary bestsellers risks obscuring the sustained use of older books many years after they first appeared on the market. Thoresby first encountered Hall in family worship when he was growing up, and after his father's death Thoresby evidently continued the tradition. The diary also contains references to other works which Ralph had inherited from his father, an indication of the fact that early modern books had a long shelf life and were often read and used by successive generations. Lending and borrowing books amongst like-minded protestants was a practice also mentioned by other diarists too – Isaac Archer actually noted in August 1670 that his father 'wished mee to keepe the old Puritan books'.⁷⁰ These books were familiar and in a sense 'safe' – successive owners could be sure that the religious and ideological positions contained within these texts reflected their own allegiances.⁷¹

Of the more recent works that Thoresby evidently acquired himself, both were written by men from a nonconformist background. Matthew Poole's *Annotations* was to later become a standard aid. Poole was a nonconformist theologian whose work provided verse by verse exposition, summaries for chapters and books, questions, information on historical context and cross references – in other words he offered a practical, readable and applicable guide to

the scriptures. Samuel Clark's *Survey* was a similar work that garnered praise from both Richard Baxter and John Owen when it was published. Thoresby's usual practice in secret seems to have been to read a chapter from scripture in the morning and another in the evening, though he did occasionally admit to failing to maintain this demanding schedule. Though his bible navigating aids were evidently useful, they did have their drawbacks, thus in 1710 Thoresby made a renewed commitment to his scripture, conceding that he was perhaps spending too much time reading other treatise and books, which though adding to his knowledge of the 'nicer points', yet were not so moving and effecting as the 'inestimable treasure' itself.⁷² Notwithstanding this, Thoresby's dedication to scripture was strong. In 1706, when he still had nearly twenty years ahead of him, he noted in his diary that he had 'now read over the entire Bible with notes 8 times' since his marriage.⁷³ This type of intensive reading and rereading of scripture was designed to deeply internalise the text, so that it might form the basis of his standards of conduct in daily life. Thoresby's ultimate aim was to make scripture the 'rule of his life', and his orderly reading of the bible conformed to the standards and expectations of the early modern Church, and he often petitioned God for divine assistance to improve the Ordinances that he encountered there.

Thoresby's scriptural diet was supplemented by numerous devotional texts. What really stands out is the range and variety of works that Thoresby encountered, as well as that the authors he made the most use of were almost without exception adherents to a similar churchmanship to himself. Whilst some of these books had a long shelf life, others seem to have made a less lasting impression. An example of a text that was a perennial favourite in Thoresby's closet is Stephen Charnock's lengthy and meticulous treatise on providence that the antiquarian described as 'incomparable'. Thoresby began his first reading of it in 1683, then revisited in 1684 when he was disordered by a proposed marriage contract that had fallen through, finding it 'most suitable' to his condition. Much later in 1719 he began

another perusal of the text, and he was still apparently leafing through in 1723. Charnock was a man after Thoresby's own heart, a nonconformist minister that Thoresby had seen preach in London in 1680.⁷⁴ Thoresby also consulted manuals and guides, such as Elizabeth Burnet's *Method of Devotion* from 1708, which provided prayers and meditations to be used in secret, as well as rules for study, dressing, for business, work, eating, conversation and silence. Burnet was the wife of the Bishop of Salisbury, and Thoresby was 'much affected' in reading her work, which made him ashamed of his own 'unprofitableness and stupidity'.⁷⁵ Similar works provided rules to guide thoughts, words and actions during it, whilst John Wilkins' 1653 *A Discourse concerning the Gift of Prayer* was a lengthier text that went through numerous editions, Thoresby noted that he had read it two or three times.⁷⁶

A final devotional category are those works that assisted Thoresby in educating his children and servants, explications of the catechism or Richard Baxter's 'plain practical books' whose direct style, intimacy of address and effective imagery was particularly appropriate to such an audience. Baxter was a mainstay of Thoresby's library. The antiquarian made reference to at least seven of Baxter's devotional texts, including the wildly popular best sellers *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, first published 1650, and *A Call to the Unconverted* of 1658, both classics of puritan evangelism.⁷⁷ Notably, after conforming in the late 1690s, Thoresby's literary tastes did not change dramatically – the implications of this continuity are considered in more detail in the concluding section below. That said, Thoresby did become increasingly preoccupied with his preparations for communion, seeking out writing on the topic. He noted that he read Richard Vines treatise on 'right receiving' of the sacrament, and he evidently found Baxter's 1696 treatise on the same very useful, one evening being 'extremely affected in singing the first Sacramental hymn' in the book.⁷⁸

Thoresby often read both manuscript and printed sermons and he appears to have preferred the former, many of which had been given or sent to him by the authors. Whilst

many seventeenth-century diarists made an effort to record this central feature of protestant piety, Thoresby's sermon notes are extensive and take up a large part of the overall content of his life-writing.⁷⁹ Thoresby painstakingly recorded the heads of the hundreds of sermons that he attended in his diary, and when he was diverted from doing so he unflinching noted this too, lamenting that he 'lost the advantage' of the sermon as a result. He also complained when 'confident young fellows would usurp the best places that were most convenient for hearing and writing'.⁸⁰ In combination, this suggests that Thoresby would take brief notes during the sermon itself, which he then wrote up and expanded upon shortly afterwards in private. In the memoir, he explained this regular and time consuming practice of note taking. Thoresby stated that although there were many excellent sermons in print in great numbers, many of which he had read or owned, and despite the fact that in many cases these printed collections were 'more correct' than his humble scribblings, the satisfaction of reviewing his own personal notes was more 'affecting' to him. Thoresby considered his own notes to represent the content that 'the providence of God' had directed him to and 'more immediately' interested him in. His conclusion was that therefore his own personal notes were the thoughts and ideas that he was 'more especially accountable to the Searcher of Hearts' for.⁸¹ These reflections emphasise that the process of note-taking, summarising and rewriting was crucial in enabling Thoresby to digest the sermons that he heard, helping to illuminate the relationship between public and private devotions. In selecting those messages and examples that most resonated with him and which he found to be most applicable to his circumstance, Thoresby internalised the content of public worship. By embedding this material in his diary he also extended the life of the sermons, allowing him to apply the doctrine to his own life and circumstance to draw practical moral and spiritual lessons from it. What is more, though this process had intrinsic worth in itself, as part of his weekly religious practice, it also underwrote later self-examination, months, and in many cases years or even decades later.

For Thoresby reviewed his diaries on his birthday, at New Year, as well as during his monthly preparations for the Lord's Supper. It seems likely that the basic marginalia marking various passages is evidence of this contemplative re-reading, Thoresby's equivalent of highlighting parts of the text to inscribe particular elements of religious instruction more deeply on his own heart and mind.

Thoresby also perused a healthy quantity of lives and memoirs of eminent pious individuals, including those of Bishops Hall, Wilkins and Stillingfleet, and Elizabeth Burnet.⁸² He occasionally resorted to reading more polemical works, usually those that related to his own changing religious preference and allegiance. Anti-Catholic treatises were popular, but also writings on conformity and nonconformity, or later in his life on the usefulness of Common Prayer, or against enthusiasm. But Thoresby evidently preferred works on the history of the Church, which brought together his scholarly 'antiquarian' interests and his religious devotions.⁸³ He found Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* 'solid and useful', he was 'mightily pleased' with Burnet's *History of the Reformation*, and thought Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars* commendable, but not entirely fair in its treatment of presbyterians.⁸⁴

Thoresby evidently had a rich and heterogeneous theological diet. There was an enormous range of material that he consulted before morning and evening prayer and during his contemplative walks and sojourns in his garden. Reading at these times served as a preparation for prayer, it was the first stage in an attempt to wrestle his heart into an appropriate condition before prayer itself. Though reading, writing and praying could blur, each aimed at achieving a contemplative and affective emotional engagement with the divine, and the activities were complimentary in Thoresby's spiritual regimen. Reading the lives of pious divines helped Thoresby to come to a renewed sense of his own inadequacy and to feel more profoundly his need of God. His religious upbringing would also have brought home

the fact that right understanding was a precondition for a living faith, it was another pious duty, not to be neglected. This makes sense of Thoresby's concerns that he spent too little time reading and writing, as well as his regular resolutions to improve his practice. It was important that the knowledge accrued was the right sort however, and Thoresby also showed impressive self-awareness about his studies from early in his life. In 1682 he read the *Divine Meditations* of parliamentarian army officer William Waller, and commented that they were:

exceedingly sweet and agreeable, especially his content in his study, books, and a solitary life. But, Lord! Teach me, as the holy author desires, so to study other men's works, as not to neglect my own good: take me off from the curiosity of knowing only to know, from the vanity of knowing only to be known, and from the folly of pretending to know more than I do know, and let it be my wisdom to study to know thee, who art life eternal.⁸⁵

Thoresby's commentary was clear acknowledgement that there was a fine line between knowing for the mere sake of knowing, and true knowledge, which was focused on God and life eternal, and this refrain recurred regularly in his writing. The benefits of properly focused study were manifold however, with the undeniable advantage that it was a form of recreation that was intrinsically as well as instrumentally acceptable and useful, and which was thus a remarkably suitable way in which to improve the time.⁸⁶ Thoresby recognised this, remarking retrospectively that his chief comfort was to be found in his library, 'writing the memoirs' of learned and pious men because this kept him more retired, 'and thereby less obnoxious to company-keeping and drinking, the uncomfortable misfortune of some relations'. Whilst books and studies should not divert the good Christian from their more practical duties, they could be commendable in themselves, serving as a means to a more worthwhile end. This

was particularly true of diary writing. In the memoir Thoresby quoted his father's words on this, saying that his diary was 'a good method to keep a tollerable decorum in thoughts, words and actions, 'bec: a man is to be accountable to himself, as well as to God', which people were too apt to forget. Thoresby also reflected that although initially he had thought diary writing might be irksome, he soon came to see it a duty, useful and convenient, particularly since it allowed him to keep track of the frame of his Soul, the wanderings of his heart, vain thoughts and sinful omissions of duty, and he also got great advantage from reading the heads of the sermons he noted.⁸⁷ Just as much as reading then, writing was also a fundamental part of Thoresby's devotional life. Keeping his diary, copying out the lives of eminent divines, studying history and collating papers were all a means to the same end and prevented the 'misspence of time' that Thoresby was so concerned with.

V. Conclusions

At this point, it is worth noting some discontinuities which have significance for our understanding of puritan life-writing. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that other diarists shared Thoresby's spirituality as well as a sense of diary writing as a religious duty, puritan diaries in fact take many forms. Very few are written up daily, as Thoresby's seems to have been – many contain only irregular entries over a reasonably short length of time. Whilst some are deeply introspective, with contemplation of the individual's relationship with God excluding all other worldly concerns, many others range much more widely, sometimes to the virtual exclusion of spiritual contemplation. Another lay diarist, the puritan shopkeeper Roger Lowe (d. 1679), is a good example of the latter. Whilst Lowe's diary reveals a committed and devout laymen who regularly recorded gadding to sermons or praying out of doors, this information is somewhat incidental to details relating to his everyday dealings with the men

and women in his village.⁸⁸ John Rastrick, who began his career as a Church of England clergyman but left to become a presbyterian minister in 1687, wrote an autobiographical narrative that tended to concentrate on his often fraught relations with his congregations and patrons. Deeper reflection on the status of his own soul and spiritual pilgrimage is largely absent, thus whilst the focus of his writing is religious, the approach taken by Rastrick contrasts sharply with the ‘soul searching’ of Thoresby, Richard Rogers, Samuel Rogers and Robert Woodford. These differences alert us to the fact that though these writings belong to the same puritan tradition, each suggests different, more individual motives for writing and for the functions of these autobiographical texts.

It follows that whilst Thoresby’s religious life was evidently framed by a particular puritan style of religiosity, this did not preclude a ‘personalised’ and distinct devotional life that left its mark in his writing. Often the relationship between print culture and personal devotion is tackled at the level of the best seller, but though this gives us an understanding of nationally significant works and broader trends, it also risks obscuring the sheer variety of written material that people were exposed to and the diversity of individual reading habits. Though Thoresby did encounter best sellers, he also read numerous works that were given to him by people that he met, that were written by his friends, which were recommended to him, or whose authors’ backgrounds, patterns of devotion or religious education and preferences were similar to his own. This all reinforced and contributed to the unique flavour of his piety, and it embedded his religious identity in his own personal experience. Thoresby’s lived experience can therefore give deeper meaning to the truism that ‘protestantism was a religion of the book’.

Thoresby’s devotional life also raises questions about the significance of change across generations, another area that scholars are beginning to turn their attention to. Generational change has long been recognised as being important in bedding down and

securing the Elizabethan Settlement, the turning point considered to be the moment when a new generation grew up knowing nothing but the protestant religion, and absorbing all manner of anti-Catholic polemic.⁸⁹ For Thoresby, the formative influence of his father is evident, at times painfully so: it was his religious education and upbringing that asserted the defining influence on his later life. His understanding of religious duty was inculcated by his father: Thoresby's devotional life was modelled on his father's, he read the same books as him, he organised family worship in imitation of his childhood experiences, and he started writing his diary because John Thoresby urged him too. Hence we see how generations can also proliferate practice and sustain religious cultures, just as much as they might alter them. Indeed, Thoresby was delighted when his children also grew up to be godly paragons, both sons pursuing careers in the Church. A desire to shape and direct future generations inspired authors to put pen to paper to record the details of their lives, and as we have seen, this often proved a highly effective means to sustain patterns of devotion across time. Whilst postrevisionist historians have recently identified many elements of continuity in post-reformation religious cultures, these continuities require explanation in the same way that religious change does, and thinking about generational dynamics may provide important clues.

Ralph Thoresby was undoubtedly a peculiarly devout individual, and it is not my intention to suggest that his devotional life accurately represents that of the majority of his contemporaries. As a protestant committed to a puritan strain of religiosity, Thoresby dedicated more time and energy to his religious devotions than most. Yet a comparison of Thoresby with other diarists suggests that these conclusions do have broader significance and applicability. Whilst Thoresby's diary is unusual in the level of detail it provides about patterns of devotion on a day-to-day basis across a remarkable length of time, other examples of life-writing suggest both chronological and cross-confessional similarities. In its particular

features Thoresby's diary is unique, but in more general terms Ralph Thoresby would perhaps not look out of place fifty or even a hundred years earlier, for his diary is notable for its likeness to those of earlier writers Richard Rogers, Samuel Rogers and Robert Woodford. Examining the experience of change at the level of the individual has demonstrated a continuity that contrasts with the simultaneous and rapid religious change that took place at the level of national politics in the latter part of the seventeenth century and beyond.

Thoresby bears comparison not only to those who shared his reservations about the Church of England, but also some of those who were staunchly committed to its structure and rituals, though diaries themselves might be superficially quite distinct. An example is the Church of England clergyman Isaac Archer (1641-1700), who, despite his commitment to the Church, detested its 'formalism' and took out a license to have a nonconformist meeting at his house when the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence was issued. Whilst Archer's diary is a more crafted piece of retrospective writing than Thoresby's, it echoes his pattern of prayers, sermons, reading, and writing; it also bears the marks of being extensively reviewed; and it is teeming with language typical to puritanism.⁹⁰ Other examples of life-writing reveal more unexpected continuities. The carefully reworked diary written by royalist and staunch conformist Alice Thornton (1626-1707) is very different in style to Thoresby's writing.⁹¹ Each passage in Thornton's diary is a brief meditation on a life event, usually shading into a prayer towards its end. Included are deliverances from accidents, illness, fire, and thanks for protection during travel, and each event is interpreted providentially, fulfilling Thornton's stated intention to 'remember and take notice of Almighty God our Heavenly Father's gracious acts of Providence over them, and mercifull dealings with them'.⁹² Thornton stated that her 'chiefest happiness' was in 'pieous, holy, and religious instructions, examples, admonitions, teachings, reproofes, and godly education, tending to the welfaire and eternall happinesses of my poore soule'.⁹³ Thornton's providential outlook, and her desire to record

and examine God's dealings with herself would certainly not look out of place in Thoresby's life-writing.⁹⁴ Such similarities, rooted in personal devotion, can add to our understanding of why and how some nonconformists were reabsorbed into late seventeenth-century parish congregations. When Thoresby gave up his dissenting ties and fully conformed to the Church of England in the 1690s, this made no apparent difference to the pattern of devotional activities that he recorded in his diary. As the seventeenth century drew to a close, for the first time individuals were offered a legal right to choose the venue and style of their public worship, but Thoresby's diary suggests that this could have made less impact on individual devotional practices in the round that might be expected. This suggests that closer attention to the contrasting religious experience at an individual as opposed to an institutional level will shed new light on the dynamics of religious change, and that the legacies of puritanism were not only to be found outside of the Church of England in the eighteenth century.

Thoresby's diary therefore provides an insight into the spiritual development of the individual, as we see how he reacted to, received, absorbed and internalised his religious education. Significantly, Ralph Thoresby's diary has revealed not only a life-long process of religious self-fashioning, but also the defining influences that shaped the construction of early modern religious identities. These were myriad, and for Thoresby their strength varied from the intimidating patriarchal figure of Thoresby's father, through the more diminutive and numerous figures of the local ministers he encountered, to the lesser pull of the authors that Thoresby read.

¹ See espec. Alec Ryrie's *Being Protestant in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2013), which chronicles a form of religiosity that came to characterise 'earnest' protestant parishioners. Other examples are *Religion and the Household: Studies in Church History 50*, eds John Doran, Charlotte Methuen and Alexandra Walsham (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2014); *Private and Domestic Devotion in early modern Britain*, eds J. Martin and A. Ryrie (Farnham, 2012); Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and*

Religious Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture (Farnham, 2012); Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 2010).

² The broader significance of religion was firmly established in *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England*, eds Tim Harris, Paul Seaward and Mark Goldie (Oxford, 1990), and is further explored in *Religious Identities in Britain, 1660-1832*, eds William Gibson and Robert Ingram (Aldershot, 2005).

³ John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven & London, 1991); John Spurr, 'The lay Church of England' in *The Later Stuart Church, 1660-1714*, ed. Grant Tapsell (Manchester, 2012); pp. 101-124, at p. 103. This is the only chapter in the book that tackles the lay experience exclusively.

⁴ Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation, and Reform, 1660-1828: Archbishops of Canterbury and their Diocese* (Oxford, 2000), Donald Spaeth, *The Church in an age of danger 1660-1740* (Cambridge, 2000). Both offer some discussion of religious practice and piety, but neither attempts a wholesale reconstruction of the lived experience of parish life.

⁵ Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe, 'Reading, family religion, and evangelical identity in late Stuart England', *The Historical Journal*, 47:4 (2004), 875-896. Andrew Cambers adopts a similarly long chronological perspective in his *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England 1580-1720* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁶ The nineteenth century published edition of the diary is a substantially abridged version of the seven surviving manuscript volumes: *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby*, ed. Joseph Hunter, 2 vols (London, 1830). Hunter's editorial choices substantially alter the character of the diary - in particular, Hunter removed Thoresby's very extensive sermon notes and the spiritual reflections that these regularly inspired.

⁷ Mark Goldie, 'Review Article: Voluntary Anglicans', *The Historical Journal*, 46:4 (2003), 977-990. The approach suggested by Goldie has recently been successfully adopted by Brent Sirota in his study of the new institutions that characterised the 'age of benevolence'. Brent S. Sirota, *The Christian Monitors: The Church of England and the Age of Benevolence, 1680-1730* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 2014). Sirota's chronology allows him reconsider the nature of the late 17th century Anglican revival and the significance of the 1688-89 Revolution for the Church and broader religious cultures.

⁸ For a fuller biography see P. E. Kell, 'Thoresby, Ralph (1658-1725)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); online edn, Oct 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>

⁹ John Coffey, 'Church and State, 1550-1750: The Emergence of Dissent', *T&T Clark Companion to Nonconformity* (Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 48, 62-6; Mark Goldie, 'Roger Morrice and the Puritan Whigs', in *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice, 1677-1691* (Woodbridge, 2007); John Spurr, *The Post-Reformation: Religion,*

Politics and Society in Britain, 1603-1714 (Harlow, 2006), pp. 150-1; John D. Ramsbottom, "Presbyterians and 'partial conformity' in the Restoration Church of England", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 43:2 (1992), 249-270.

¹⁰ For an exploration of why comprehension was abandoned in 1689 see John Spurr, 'The Church of England, Comprehension and the Toleration Act of 1689', *English Historical Review*, 104:413 (1989), 927-46.

¹¹ Spurr, 'The Church of England, Comprehension and the Toleration Act', pp. 944-5.

¹² The following exploration of Thoresby's shift to conformity is based on evidence from Thoresby's 'memoir', the retrospective account he wrote 1710-1712. The diary volumes held at the YAS do not cover the years 1695-1701.

¹³ University of Leeds, Brotherton Library Special Collections, Yorkshire Archaeological Society (hereafter Brot. Libr. YAS), MS26, pp. 124-5, 132-3, 141, 156-7, 185, 194-5.

¹⁴ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 124-5.

¹⁵ For more on Thoresby's encounters with irreligion and atheism, see Michael Hunter, 'The Decline of Magic: Challenge and Response in early Enlightenment England', *Historical Journal*, 55:2 (2012), 399-425.

¹⁶ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 154.

¹⁷ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 82.

¹⁸ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 106.

¹⁹ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 141, 237, see also 147.

²⁰ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 141, see also 153, 156.

²¹ John Sharp, *A Discourse Concerning Conscience* (London, 1684).

²² Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 135, 156.

²³ *Letters of Eminent Men, Addressed to Ralph Thoresby, F.R.S, Volume I* (London, 1832), pp. 370-5.

²⁴ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 157.

²⁵ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 124-5, 127, 132-3, 137, 185, 194-5.

²⁶ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 137, 141.

²⁷ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 132.

²⁸ Five volumes of Thoresby's diary are at the University of Leeds, Brotherton Library Special Collections, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, MSS21-25; the memoir is YAS MS26.

²⁹ See Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010) for the wide variety of early modern texts that contained traces of subjectivity.

³⁰ For more on spiritual life-writing see Raymond Anselment, 'Feminine Self-Reflection and the Seventeenth-Century Occasional Meditation', *The Seventeenth Century*, 26:1 (2011); Andrew Cambers, 'Reading, the Godly, and Self-Writing in England, circa 1580-1720', *Journal of British Studies*, 46:4 (2007); Effie Botonaki, 'Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen's Spiritual Diaries: Self-Examination, Covenanting, and Account Keeping', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 30:1 (1999); Tom Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to spiritual journals and early modern spirituality', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996). For studies of other individual spiritual diarists see: Tim Cooper, 'Conversion, Autobiography and Richard Baxter's *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696)', *The Seventeenth Century*, 29:2 (2014); Isaac Stephens, 'Confessional Identity in early Stuart England: The 'Prayer Book Puritanism' of Elizabeth Isham', *Journal of British Studies*, 50:1 (2011); Travis Robertson, 'Religious Self-fashioning as a motive in early modern diary keeping: the evidence of Lady Margaret Hoby's Diary 1599-1603', *Comitatus* (2010); I. Stephens, 'My cheefest work': the making of the spiritual biography of Elizabeth Isham', *Midland History*, 34:2 (2009); Steven Engler, 'Time, Habit and Agency in English Puritanism', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 19 (2007); Margot Todd, 'Puritan Self-Fashioning: The Diary of Samuel Ward', *Journal of British Studies*, 31:3 (1992); R. Warnicke, 'Lady Mildmay's Journal: A Study in Autobiography and Meditation in Reformation England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20:1 (1989).

³¹ Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the seventeenth-century Anglophone World* (Oxford, 2012), p. 278 and passim for codification of spiritual narratives.

³² Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 25.

³³ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 26-28.

³⁴ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, the break follows p. 72.

³⁵ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 116

³⁶ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 78.

³⁷ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 96.

³⁸ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 122; YAS MS26, p. 29.

³⁹ Tom Webster discusses the process of conversion and diaries as a 'technology of the self' in 'Writing to redundancy: approaches to spiritual journals and early modern spirituality', *The Historical Journal*, 39:1 (1996), 33-56.

⁴⁰ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 122, my italics. David Wykes noted some of the characteristics of Thoresby's process of conversion in 'Dissenters and the writing of History: Ralph Thoresby's "Lives and Characters"', in *Fear, Exclusion and Revolution: Roger Morrice and Britain in the 1680s*, ed. Jason McElligott (Aldershot,

2006), pp. 174-188. Wykes' study is mainly limited to Thoresby's early life up to 1682, and does not contrast the evidence of the memoir and diary.

⁴¹ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 121.

⁴² Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 124.

⁴³ John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) is a classic example of a conversion narrative and a staple of nonconformist life-writing. Alec Ryrie discusses spiritual diaries from the earlier 17th century in *Being Protestant*, pp. 306-314, the most well-known is Nehemiah Wallington's. The literature on life-writing more generally is vast, for a more recent overview see Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, 'In relation: The 'social self' and ego-documents', *German History*, 28:3 (2010).

⁴⁴ 'The diary of Richard Rogers' in *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward*, ed. Marshall Mason Knappen (Chicago, 1933), p. 55. Rogers' diary covers the years 1586-90.

⁴⁵ *The diary of Samuel Rogers, 1634-1638*, eds Tom Webster and Kenneth Shipp (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2004): Samuel Rogers' diary has daily entries, and was probably written at the end of each day. *The diary of Robert Woodford, 1637-1641*, ed. John Fielding (Cambridge, 2012): Woodford also appears to have written in his diary each day. Fielding suggests that the surviving diary was one in a series, the lost volumes potentially covering many more years of Woodford's life, p. 89. 'Archer's Book' in *Two East Anglian Diaries, 1641-1729*, ed. Matthew Storey (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1994), Archer's diary covers the years 1659-1700, it contains few dates and is likely to be a retrospective written up some time after the events described.

⁴⁶ Matthew Kadane explores the meaning and persistence of the importance of 'watchfulness' in *The Watchful Clothier: The life of an eighteenth-century Protestant capitalist* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 2013), espec. chapter 3.

⁴⁷ Elspeth Findlay discusses the audience and purpose of Thoresby's diary and draws attention to the 'communal' function of such texts in 'Ralph Thoresby the diarist: the late seventeenth-century pious diary and its demise', *Seventeenth Century*, 17 (2002), 108-30.

⁴⁸ 'The diary of Richard Rogers'; *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington 1618-1654: A selection*, ed. David Booy (Aldershot, 2007): Wallington's notebooks cover the period 1620-1658; *The diary of Robert Woodford; The life of John Rastrick 1650-1727*, ed. Andrew Cambers, Camden 5th Series, Vol. 36 (Cambridge, 2010): Rastrick began his career within the Church of England but left to become a nonconformist minister in 1687, his life-writing takes the form of a memoir, probably written all in one go around 1713.

⁴⁹ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, the letter is bound between pages 8-9.

⁵⁰ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, pp. 124-148.

⁵¹ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, pp. 135-6. For more on Mary Rich, see Anselment, 'Feminine Self-Reflection'; Raymond Anselment, 'Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, and the Gift of Tears', *Seventeenth Century*, 22.2 (2007); Sara Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Case Studies* (Brighton, 1987).

⁵² Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, pp. 175-77.

⁵³ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, pp. 187, 196, 199.

⁵⁴ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, pp. 384, 386-8, Hunter (ed.), *Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 424.

⁵⁵ For more on the recommended times of prayer, see Ryrie, chapter 8.

⁵⁶ 'A Dyurnall, or Catalogue of all my accions and expences from the 1st of January, 1646- Adam Eyre', in *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Durham, 1877): Eyre's diary covers the years 1647-9, the entries appear to have been written up regularly, near in time to the events described; *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*.

⁵⁷ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 144; YAS MS23, p. 125; YAS MS25, p. 102.

⁵⁸ 'The diary of Richard Rogers'; 'The diary of Samuel Ward' in *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward*, ed. Marshall Mason Knappen (Chicago, 1933): Ward's diary covers 1595-1599, with some notes added subsequently. His entries are often just a list of sins committed; 'Archer's Book'.

⁵⁹ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 159.

⁶⁰ Brot. Libr. MS26, p. 224.

⁶¹ Brot. Libr. YAS MS24, p. 80.

⁶² Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, pp. 282-3.

⁶³ Brot. Libr. YAS MS24, pp. 146, 314-15, Hunter (ed.), *Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 119.

⁶⁴ Brot. Libr. YAS MS23, p. 30.

⁶⁵ Brot. Libr. YAS MS25, p. 118.

⁶⁶ Brot. Libr. YAS MS25, p. 216.

⁶⁷ Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, Part II, espec. chapter 8.

⁶⁸ For the centrality of protestant bible-reading prior to 1640 see Ryrie, pp. 270-281. For an overview of bible-reading techniques see Jeremy Schildt, "'In my private reading of the scriptures": protestant bible-reading in England c. 1580-1720', in eds Martin and Ryrie, pp. 189-209.

⁶⁹ Joseph Hall, *A plaine and familiar explication (by way of paraphrase) of all the hard texts of the whole divine Scripture* (London, 1633); Giovanni [John] Diodati [Deodati], *Pious annotations, upon the Holy Bible*

expounding the difficult places thereof learnedly, and plainly (London, 1643); Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible wherein the sacred text is inserted, and various readings annex'd* (London, 1683) 2 vols.; Samuel Clark, *A survey of the Bible, or, An analytical account of the Holy Scriptures containing the division of every book and chapter, thereby shewing the frame and contexture of the whole* (London, 1693).

⁷⁰ 'Archer's book', p. 129.

⁷¹ This accords with Cambers and Wolfe's argument that evangelical subculture deliberately evoked earlier authors in the promotion of their own style of evangelical identity.

⁷² Brot. Libr. YAS MS24, p. 248.

⁷³ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 214.

⁷⁴ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 567; YAS MS26, pp. 78-79; YAS MS 25, evidently Thoresby was reading Charnock when he began this volume of the diary; the last time it is mentioned is on 3 March 1723, p. 169, when Thoresby departed for London, presumably leaving the heavy book behind. Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 140 (Thoresby saw Charnock preach 4 July 1680).

⁷⁵ For the works discussed in this section I have given the dates that these works were first published, unless Thoresby has provided information about the edition he consulted. Elizabeth Burnet, *Method of Devotion: or, rules for holy & devout living* (1708); Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 231; YAS MS24, p. 102. Thoresby noted Burnet's sudden death in February 1709, saying that he had particularly recommended Burnet's *Method* to his daughter.

⁷⁶ John Wilkins, *A Discourse Concerning the Gift of Prayer* (1651); Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 152.

⁷⁷ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, works by Baxter pp. 107, 110, 133, 150, 152, 179, 189, 194.

⁷⁸ This and other more ambiguous references suggest that singing was a part of Thoresby's private devotions. Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 252-253.

⁷⁹ Diarists who regularly noted sermons include: Adam Eyre, John Rastrick and John Evelyn. It seems plausible that many others recorded sermon notes or extra details about sermons separately from their diaries, as John Evelyn did – see n. 73 below.

⁸⁰ See for example Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 139; YAS MS26, p. 70.

⁸¹ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 9.

⁸² Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, p. 110; Hunter ed., *Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 147.

⁸³ David Wykes explores the influence of religion on Thoresby's scholarly and historical interests in 'Dissenters and the writing of history'.

⁸⁴ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 217, 231, 236.

⁸⁵ Brot. Libr. YAS MS21, p. 392.

⁸⁶ Steven Engler argues that contemporaries attended to time in two ways: the amount of time well spent and the continuity of attention, in 'Time, habit, and agency in English puritanism', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 19 (2007), 301-322.

⁸⁷ Brot. Libr. YAS MS26, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁸ *The diary of Roger Lowe of Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire 1663-74*, ed. William Sachse (New York and London, 1938).

⁸⁹ For generational turnover as a key element in the progress of reform see Norman Jones, *The English Reformation: Religion and Cultural Adaptation* (Oxford, 2002); and Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke, 1988). For the ways in which the notion of generational strife was invoked at various stages of England's 'long Reformation' see Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation of the generations: youth, age and religious change in England, c.1500-1700', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, 21 (2011), 93-121.

⁹⁰ 'Archer's book'.

⁹¹ *The autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton of East Newton, Co. York*, ed. Charles Jackson (Durham, 1875).

⁹² *The autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton*, p. 1. Both puritan and conformist diarists record providential mercies. Those of Samuel Ward and William Coe consist almost entirely of lists of sins and mercies, *Two Elizabethan Diaries*, 'The Diary of William Coe 1693-1729', in *Two East Anglian Diaries, 1641-1729*, ed. Matthew Storey (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1994).

⁹³ *The autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton*, p. 8.

⁹⁴ The diary of gentleman scholar John Evelyn might be viewed in a similar light, *The diary of John Evelyn*, 6 vols, ed. E. S. Beer (Oxford, 1955). Though staunchly committed to the Church of England, Evelyn's life-writing has similarities to Thoresby's. Evelyn also unfailingly recorded preachers and their texts when he attended sermons. Though he did not go into much detail about the content of these sermons, he often referred to a separate book of sermon notes, which presumably contained detailed exposition, e.g. '17 September Dr Earles preach'd on 4: Pet: 17 That they were only transitory Judgements, not permanent, which afflicted the house of God: which he prosecuted according to his excellent talent: (see your Sermon notes on this day).', *The diary of John Evelyn*, vol. III, p. 39. However Evelyn does not show the same interest in providences and very rarely offers anything by way of spiritual meditation.