

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick**

**Permanent WRAP URL:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/82158>

**Copyright and reuse:**

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it.

Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk)

FROM PENANCE TO REPENTANCE:  
THEMES OF FORGIVENESS IN THE EARLY ENGLISH  
REFORMATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTORATE IN PHILOSOPHY  
AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

TODD ADAM MARQUIS  
FEBRUARY 2016

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgments .....	ii
Declaration .....	iii
Abbreviations .....	iv
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1</b> .....	
<b>From Public Confession to Private Penance: The Development of the Late Medieval Penitential Formula</b> .....	19
From Ante-Nicene Contrition to Private Confession. ....	23
The Spread of the Penitentials .....	29
<i>Omnis Utriusque Sexus</i> and Canon Law. ....	40
Sorrow Versus the Keys: Is Confession Necessary for Forgiveness? .....	45
<b>Chapter 2</b> .....	
<b>Three Reactions to Late Medieval Penance: The Contritionist, the Moralist, and the Comfort of the Burdened Conscience</b> .....	53
The Contrition of the Morning Star .....	55
The Moralist Humanist .....	65
Faith and the Comfort of the Burdened Conscience .....	74
<b>Chapter 3</b> .....	
<b>A Satisfaction Already Made: Christ's Blood and Repentance in William Tyndale</b> .....	87
Salvaging Penance.....	91
Confession Redefined .....	107
Binding and Loosing of the Law and the Gospel.....	120
<b>Chapter 4</b> .....	
<b>Contrition as Confession: Forgiveness Ante-Confessionem in Robert Barnes</b> .....	128
The Confession of Contrition.....	132
The Blood of Christ over the Sweat of Man .....	144
The Powers of the Key.....	155

<b>Chapter 5</b> .....	
<b>A Satisfying Purgatory: John Frith’s Theocentric Repentance</b> .....	163
The Purging of Sin .....	168
Effortless Turning.....	181
<b>Chapter 6</b> .....	
<b>Penance in Practice: George Joye’s Confession in Action</b> .....	194
The Private Confession of <i>Hortulus Animae</i> .....	197
Death by the Power of the Keys and Confession .....	208
The Morality of Satisfaction .....	217
<b>Chapter 7</b> .....	
<b>Penance in England 1535-1547</b> .....	222
Penance in the Bishops’ Book .....	227
Evangelical Penance in the Six Articles and the King’s Book .....	248
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	266
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	280

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the historical thought of several key English reformers regarding the assimilation or rejection of different aspects of late medieval notions of the sacrament of penance during the Henrician phase of the English Reformation. It is a study primarily concerned with how notions of penance in the theology of these reformers were inherited from patristic, humanist, and continental reformers and how the evangelicals reworked them. While these reformers did not agree on all matters of theology, important points of contact can be found in how they understood the roles of contrition, confession, and satisfaction within a framework that denied the efficacy of human participation in the forgiveness of sins. There are three distinct sections. The two chapters of the first section are concerned with establishing the context of sacramental penance in the sixteenth century. The first chapter identifies distinct phases of the evolution of notions of sacramental penance from the early church through the scholastics, and the second chapter explores the theology of three important influences on the evangelicals—John Wycliffe, Desiderius Erasmus, and Martin Luther—and shows that while their views were unique, they shared important points of connection with the evangelicals in England. The second section consists of the next four chapters, which are dedicated to individual English exiled evangelicals from 1524-1535. Chapter three identifies Tyndale’s unique use of terminology in his redefining of the terms and rearranging of the formula of sacramental penance as he focused on the covenantal language of Christ’s blood as the satisfaction in place of human effort. Chapter four is concerned with Robert Barnes’ notion of the coexistence of contrition and confession, with oral confession occurring after forgiveness has been made. Chapter five details John Frith’s notion of repentance as related to an earthly purgation of sins and a passive, effortless turning from them. Chapter six examines George Joye’s notion of how an effective confession was to be made to God or to man. The third section comprises only one chapter (seven), and it contends that these exiles had significant influence on the later Henrician formularies, and that within them an evangelical notion of confession prevailed, particularly in the relationship of confession and purgatory, but also the understanding of the relationship between sorrow for sin and its forgiveness.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis has its unique flavour because of the diversity of its support—scholars, libraries, mentors, and friends. This diversity provides for the unique spice and texture of this study. I am grateful for Ashley Null’s advice that a doctoral thesis is as much a test of character as it is a test of research and writing. This advice has allowed me to focus on the work of this project, while still allowing for a variety of seemingly unrelated life pursuits that ran alongside my love for history and theology. The curiosity of sacramental penance in an evangelical construct actually began as part of my PhD studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. My supervisor, Professor Malcolm Yarnell, first sparked my interest in historical theology in general, and the English Reformation in particular, both through his pedagogy and through the Oxford Study Programme. Over the years, Dr. Yarnell has provided support beyond the scholastic—he has become a trusted advocate, whose friendship is beyond value. Without him, this project would never have been more than an idea. During my time in Texas, the Sixteenth Century Seminar was held in Fort Worth, and it was there that I first met Professor Peter Marshall and began conversations surrounding how the evangelicals in England treated the sacraments. Peter has been with this project since the notion was first broached at that seminar. His guidance as supervisor has transcended any reasonable expectations, and his input is beyond value. As I stared into this dark chasm, barely able to discern shapes and figures, it was Peter’s gentle yet intentional hand that helped prevent me from being overwhelmed by the daunting prospect of a doctoral thesis. Likewise, the advice given by my examiners, Beat Kumin and Alec Ryrie, proved invaluable in moving this product from submission copy to final stage. Jonathan Willis has also provided significant aid by allowing me to bounce fragments of thoughts off of him as I attempted to develop them into a coherent conclusion. Such aid was also offered, mostly informally or secondarily, by a host of other scholars—conversations with Steven Gunn, Judith Maltby, Felicity Heal, and Diarmaid MacCulloch during the Thursday sessions at Kimble College or Merton College, Oxford, helped provide perspective on why a study in history or theology matters. Dr Paige Patterson has provided wise council, and it was in his seminar that I was best able to learn how to write and defend the findings of research of historical theology.

This project also has personal debts that extend beyond the scholastic. The greatest debt is to my loving wife, Marisa, who was willing to forfeit the comfort and safety of life in Texas for the unknown adventures that awaited in another culture across an ocean, completely different from anything we have ever known. This thesis would be very different, if it existed at all, without her support. My parents, likewise, sacrificed dearly for this project, both financially and in terms of having a child so far from home for so long. This thesis is also indebted to Devin Quesenberry and Aaron Menard, who stood by me despite the difficulties inherent in such a major project and a major life change. This level of support was continued by Dan Shiells, who may have come late to the party, but who has provided an understanding and supporting friendship that is invaluable in all my life’s pursuits. Words of gratitude are not enough. A debt is owed to these friends and family that outweighs any debt accrued from more academic sources.

# DECLARATION

This thesis is the candidate's own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AM</i>	Foxe, John, <i>The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or TAMO</i> (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011). [ <a href="http://www.johnfoxe.org/">http://www.johnfoxe.org/</a> ] (last access 20/7/2016)
<i>BCP</i>	<i>The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662</i> , ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011)
<i>BL</i>	British Library
<i>Documents</i>	<i>Documents of the English Reformation</i> , ed. Gerald Bray (Cambridge, 1994)
<i>EEBO</i>	Early English Books Online
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>ESV</i>	English Standard Version Bible
<i>EWV</i>	<i>English Wycliffite Writings</i> , ed. Anne Hudson (Cambridge, 1978)
<i>Formularies</i>	<i>Formularies of the Faith put forth by Authority during the Reign of Henry VIII</i> , ed. Charles Lloyd (Oxford, 1856)
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>HLQ</i>	<i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>LP</i>	<i>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII</i> , ed. J.S. Brewer et al (London, 1862-1932)
<i>LW</i>	<i>Luther's Works, American Edition</i> , 56 vols, ed. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (Philadelphia and St Louis, 1955-86)
<i>ODNB</i>	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>

All Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

All translations from Latin, Greek, Hebrew, or German are mine unless otherwise noted.

# INTRODUCTION

Central to theology has always been the attempt to answer questions surrounding the notion that what a person believes, and how a person behaves in life, can influence what happens after death. In the Christian west during the late middle ages, the prevailing notion of attaining heaven was one of participation in the sacraments of the church. Among these, the sacrament of penance governed daily life in a way that no other sacrament could. Baptism and extreme unction were also concerned with removing the guilt of sin, but both only required participation once in life, serving as bookends for forgiveness. The Eucharist was the only other sacrament that was repeated regularly, and a completed sacrament of penance was requisite to partake of the host by the late middle ages. Penance was also typically a prerequisite for confirmation, holy orders, and matrimony, and it was therefore the sacrament that held together all others. Therefore, the soteriology of the late medieval church held that no other sacrament could be effective without the sacrament of penance.

As penance was concerned with governing morality and instituting forgiveness within a sacramental scheme of justification, it was to be expected that Protestant reformers would rigorously critique it. The evangelicals did, after all, often complain of its abuses, arguing that it offered the clergy nearly limitless power over the daily life of the laity. Nonetheless, the majority of evangelical reformers in the early stages of the Reformation in England sought to keep most of the central tenets of penance intact. Their views regarding the inner mechanisms of sacramental penance, reconstructed into a sola fideistic theology, maintained the elements of contrition, confession, and satisfaction, yet with redefined terms, at times

emphasizing one element over another, but always with the same intended outcome: the forgiveness of sins. Yet it was this outcome that provided the most significant alteration, as the evangelicals denied human ability to obtain satisfaction in favour of Christ's sacrifice as that satisfaction, independent of its sacramental function. Sacramental penance, the term I will use to describe orthodox teaching and practice concerning penance, stood in direct opposition to solafidistic repentance, which is used in this thesis to define the notion of turning from sins under a notion of justification that denied human or ecclesiastical efficacy. Solafidism is simply the belief that faith (*fide*) is the only (*sola*) effective means of justification. In contrast to sacramental penance, which put the burden of forgiveness on the efforts of the sinner, solafidistic repentance taught that man's efforts have no influence on salvation. Yet, in the midst of this, the English evangelicals saw commonality between sacramental penance and solafidistic repentance. Sacramental penance offers people an avenue to address and confront sinful behaviour through identifying a need for sorrow for sin, requiring a confession of it, and prescribing acts that deterred future sin. Solafidistic repentance maintained the need for sorrow, confession, and prescribed acts, only the sorrow was directed at a general state of sinfulness, justifying confession was made to God and temporal confession was made to another spiritual person or to the offended party. The work of penance was simply an amendment of life.

While Reformation change was swift in areas such as parts of Germany, or stalled in the more conservative strongholds of Spain and Italy, England's doctrinal changes were both cautious and unpredictable, a result of the waxing and waning of political influence, and of a monarch who began very selective consideration of evangelical doctrines when he first broached the idea of a repudiation of papal

authority. For the sake of clarity, I regard the term evangelical as more suitable for those who held to solafidism, and the term conservative as appropriate for those more religiously similar to the sacramentalism of the late medieval church, whether or not they were strictly ‘Roman’ Catholics.

England had no Martin Luther or Huldrych Zwingli in the immediate years surrounding the Act of Supremacy, and official theological understanding was filtered through a more political process than in some other parts of Europe. This is not to say that England did not have reforming theologians in its own right. Many of those more active theologians, however, were faced with persecution at home and exacted what influence they could through writing on the continent, publishing through sympathetic printers, and smuggling books into England from Antwerp or Calais. Clearly their influence was more muted than those in states which adopted the Reformation quickly. But they were important historically, as they initiated many of the changes that the evangelicals in England after the break with Rome would develop more maturely and with more permanence through official channels of court, parliament, and church.

It is this early phase of the so-called ‘long reformation’ in England that is the most pivotal for an indication of evangelical thought concerning forgiveness. While developing firm lines of demarcation risks ignoring the historical context of significant events, they can be necessary to track developments or create boundaries around their historical studies. While the tide of reformation in England began more gradually and subtly, for the purposes of this study, 1524 is a natural date to mark a tangible beginning of important evangelical thought. It was in 1524 that William Tyndale asked the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall for help funding his translation of the New Testament. A negative answer forced Tyndale to Wittenberg

where he further developed and advanced his evangelical ideas, and initiated events that would enhance evangelical thought in England. My four chapters detailing the early development of evangelical thinking on penance end in 1535, an appropriate moment, given the changes brought about by the Act of Supremacy at the end of 1534,<sup>1</sup> the execution of their principal opponents, John Fisher and Thomas More, and the chief concerns of the exiles tended to move to other matters. The period from 1536 through to the end of Henry's reign is the subject of the final chapter, which assesses the extent to which an evangelical theology of penance influenced the official teaching of the Henrician Church.

In particular, this study will show the development and understanding of the sacrament of penance by the key theological pioneers of the English Reformation. Particular emphasis is given to William Tyndale, John Frith, George Joye, Robert Barnes, and the framers of the first official English formularies. Rather than a wholesale rejection of those elements central to sacramental penance—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—I will aim to demonstrate how they assimilated these concepts into their notions of repentance. Just as in sacramental confession, the evangelicals in England held these elements to be foundational for forgiveness of the guilt and penalty of their sins. Confession for forgiveness was now directed to God and to the offended person, and a private oral confession was recommended but not required. Likewise, Christ's own work of satisfaction replaced human effort to satisfy the penalty of sin, and true repentance was not an annual ritual but a once for all intentional act of repudiating past sins and avoiding future ones.

---

<sup>1</sup> This act established the ruling monarch of England as the head of the church in England, and as such repudiated any papal authority.

The primary concern of these early evangelicals was making Scripture, especially the New Testament, available in the vernacular. This was characteristic of humanist influences that held that the early church provided the most reliable reading of Scripture because variant interpretations through history had not yet perverted its original meaning. One of the chief translation issues between the Vulgate and the proposed English translations revolved around the Greek *μετανοησατε*,<sup>2</sup> (*metanoisate*), in Acts 2:38. At least as far back as the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the generally accepted translation of this present active imperative was ‘do penance’. The evangelicals believed this was an incomplete rendering of the text, basing much of their entire soteriological system around a translation of this single word *μετανοείτε* as ‘repent’.

It was translation issues such as these that caused many of these evangelicals to emphasize translation or Bible exposition in their writings. They believed that lay access to Scripture would quickly elucidate the errors of the late medieval church, both in teaching and in practice. William Tyndale made his first attempt to translate the New Testament in Cologne in 1525, which was aborted when his efforts were discovered. Within a year, he printed the first English New Testament at Worms along with his own introduction to the book of Romans. Simon Fish translated *The Summe of Holy Scripture* in 1527, which served as a guide to his understanding of Scripture that was independent of the Latin Vulgate. This was also revised in 1539. George Joye translated several of the prophets and poetic books. It is likely that his translations were copied directly by Miles Coverdale. These evangelicals placed a high degree of importance on understanding Scripture as the full word of God, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Except for the times when the form of the word may matter, this thesis will prefer the tense *Μετανοείτε* when referring to the word variously translated as ‘do penance’ or ‘repent’. Likewise, when Hebrew is used by the translators, the form *נחם* will be used, unless another form of the word is necessary with context.

formed their theology around their new understanding of Scripture. John Frith and Robert Barnes are exceptions here, as neither specifically translated books of the Bible or expounded whole sections in commentary form. John Frith was nonetheless very industrious in publication, especially for having such a short career as a reformer, and he often directly engaged with conservative heavyweights on important doctrinal matters, always holding Scripture as the ultimate authority. Barnes only published four treatises, two of which were revised editions of the same work, and the other two were in Latin. While a proponent of vernacular Scripture, he did not expound or translate large portions of Scripture in his writings. Nonetheless, his influence was long-lasting and profound.

It is striking, given the central importance to these evangelicals of justification by faith, that they produced relatively little detailed exposition of penance or repentance. The sacramental system was directly opposed to solafidism, and nowhere is that opposition greater than in the sacrament of penance. After confession, which removed the *culpa*, what remained was the *poena* of those sins, alleviated by good works prescribed by the priest and ultimately by the purging fires of purgatory. In the view of the evangelicals, a person whose guilt was forgiven should not also have a penalty associated with that guilt. Works of satisfaction were at best superfluous, for Christ's blood is that satisfaction. Contrition, they argued, was motivated by love rather than fear, and confessing to a priest was an act that could not merit salvation but was useful for comforting the conscience. The evangelicals agreed universally that the power of the keys were not confined to the clergy, but rather given to all men through the preaching of the word of God.

As the doctrine of salvation by faith was central to the evangelical concept, and penance and repentance answered the essential questions of forgiveness, it

follows that the absence of lengthy treatises devoted to the subject was not due to lack of interest on the part of evangelicals. This lack of detailed argumentation concerning the sacrament of penance is perhaps evidence in itself that these evangelicals did not directly repudiate the elements central to sacramental penance. They merely denied their efficacy for salvation within the sacramental system. In fact, penance and repentance were so connected to a related raft of doctrines that most evangelicals chose to argue their conceptions on other grounds. Penance was not a separate thread of the fabric of soteriology, but was rather woven throughout all other doctrines. Hints must be gathered through use of the terminology of penance in other contexts, such as understandings of purgatory, or in discussions on the power of the keys, sin, works, or satisfaction. These are the places where we can best trace the development of penitential thought among these evangelicals.

Modern studies on the sacrament of penance in the early English Reformation are surprisingly lacking. Most studies of value are found in biographies or doctrinal surveys of English Protestant reformers, or works on the doctrine of penance in the middle ages. This dissertation is more concerned with the theology than the practices or the rites relating to the understanding of penance in sixteenth-century England, though it does not seek to ignore its connected social aspects. The way that penance and repentance were practiced is fundamental to an understanding of its importance. For this reason, modern accounts looking at the frequency of confession, changes to the formularies, place of confession, and other functions of the rite must not be ignored. The majority of modern scholarship on penance is related to its rite rather than its underlying theology. This indicates a clear gap in the available secondary sources that this project seeks to fill.

In formulating their notion of solafidistic repentance, evangelicals often had a tendency to reassign conservative terminology to fit an evangelical theology. In doing so, they subtly indicated that they did not seek a total denial of the doctrine of penance and its constituent elements of confession, absolution, and satisfaction. They merely sought to appropriate these terms into their own theology to convey the meaning and intent behind doctrinal changes. This use of terminology also indicated an evangelical intent to enter into the existing debates concerning the nature of these elements of penance and how the formula worked. They were not merely introducing an evangelical theology: they were assimilating key themes into solafidistic repentance in order to soften the blow that solafidism would have on a people steeped in late medieval sacramentalism, as well as reflecting the language and values of the culture in which they themselves were raised.

The first important source that has historically proved necessary to a study on sin and penance is Henry Charles Lea's *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, first published in 1896.<sup>3</sup> This three volume set attempts to trace different elements of sacramental penance both topically and chronologically, beginning with first-century Christianity. The chronological scope of this study is largely concerned with the practice and theology of penance prior to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, and less than ten percent of its pages deals with sacramental confession in the sixteenth century. Even within that section, no single subsection is devoted entirely to Henrician or Edwardian England. It is also noted for its clear anti-Catholic bias, and while it is still a standard resource for a historical understanding of penance, its usefulness is tempered by such a bias. Clearly a late

---

<sup>3</sup> Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 3 vols. (London, 1896).

nineteenth-century general survey of the topic through history is helpful to this study, but an updated and focused approach will enable greater understanding for English religious history.

One attempt to provide such an updated approach, at least in its regard to the notion of confession in late medieval Christianity is provided by Thomas Tentler. *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* chronicles the development of confession, beginning with its origin as a general public confession before moving to late medieval sacramentalism.<sup>4</sup> Most of this text is dedicated to the eve of the Protestant Reformation as the title suggests, but it describes its development from the patristic era through the early sixteenth century, and as such tells the story of sin and confession as it was dominantly understood in the years leading up to the period with which this study is concerned. *Sin and Confession* is widely and correctly considered to be the standard survey for late medieval sacramental confession, and some brief consideration of it is appropriate.

Tentler provides an exhaustive resource on the summas and manuals of confession and how, why, and when a person would confess. Yet his final chapter, an attempt to answer the question of how and why the sacrament worked, would prove to have the most enduring impact on a historical notion of penance, and is foundational for a development of solafidistic repentance. Tentler describes late medieval penance as an “intolerable burden”,<sup>5</sup> a notion that is not necessarily incorrect within certain contexts, but is an oversimplification that does not represent the late medieval church as a whole. As its title suggests, this book is chronologically limited to the late medieval understanding of sin and confession in

---

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

the western church, and its usefulness to the early modern church in England is obvious. Tentler's description of both sin and confession as it developed from one which took sin seriously to one that focused on acts of satisfaction is an excellent model for how the early English reformers would have understood the doctrines of sin and penance.

In the three decades since Tentler wrote, several more works have been concerned with late medieval sacramental penance. In 2002, Anne Thayer converted her doctoral thesis into the monograph *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation*, which is directed at showing the role of printed sermons concerning sacramental penance during the Protestant Reformation at large, and its use of primary Latin texts allows it to stand out as integral to understanding late medieval religion.<sup>6</sup> It is an important resource for its use of printed sermons that show the pervasiveness of penance in both preaching and practice, therefore indicating its more general importance as it attempts to discover the role that sermons on the sacrament of penance had in fostering a more receptive environment for reformation thought.

Three more monographs have been presented in recent years, which, combined with Thayer, indicate the legacy of Tentler's influence on studies of late medieval penance. In 1998, Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis built on Tentler's work through a collection of chapters directed mostly at the practice of medieval confession: its frequency, its opportunity for religious counselling, its relationship to social control, and the usefulness of the confessor's manuals. *Handling Sin* is concerned with the 'lived religion' and piety of the medieval laity.<sup>7</sup> Rob Meens'

---

<sup>6</sup> Anne Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (Burlington, VT, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis, eds., *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* (York, 1998).

*Penance in Medieval Europe 600-1200* follows a similar focus, only is more confined to the church prior to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.<sup>8</sup> Meens emphasizes the social function of penance in identifying the Carolingian denial of penance as actually private. He argues that the practice of penance was ‘pervasive’ and while the subject is too complex to provide a simple answer to the level of its utility, it played an important role in the daily life of the average medieval layperson.<sup>9</sup> Atria Larson continues this study with *Master of Penance*, which emphasizes the development of law in relationship to penance in the twelfth century.<sup>10</sup> It is considerably longer than many other important studies as it develops a notion of confession developed through Gratian’s *Tractatus de penitentia*. Penance was an important function of both forgiveness and social control.

Clearly, modern historiography has favoured medieval sacramental penance. Tentler’s work, combined with the usefulness of the penitentials and summas, has aided this branch of historical research. It does so, however, at the expense of an exploration of penance and repentance in the early modern church. A medieval notion of sin and penance is important background material for its sixteenth-century understanding, but only secondarily. A volume edited by Thayer and Katharine Jackson Lualdi on *Penitence in the Age of Reformations* helps bridge this gap through continuing the late medieval emphasis on the importance of sacramental penance in the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries in Western Europe.<sup>11</sup> It shows the adaptation by Protestants of key elements of sacramental penance into the Protestant concept of sin and salvation. It also seeks to broadly represent Western

---

<sup>8</sup> Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe 600-1200* (Cambridge, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-11.

<sup>10</sup> Atria A. Larson, *Master of Penance: Gratian and the Development of Penitential Thought and Law in the Twelfth Century* (Washington D.C., 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Katharine Jackson Lualdi and Anne T. Thayer, eds., *Penitence in the Age of Reformations* (Burlington, VT, 2000).

Europe, though reformation England is only represented through an essay on Elizabethan pastoral care under Richard Greenham. Where Tentler provides the best background historical understanding to this study as the early English reformers would have understood it, this study is essential for its focus on contemporary understandings of sacramental penance on the continent of Europe. Nonetheless, this large and important collection of essays entirely neglects the early English Reformation.

This gap is partly filled by Ashley Null's *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love*, the work that focuses most directly on penance in the thinking of early English evangelicalism.<sup>12</sup> Null, however, deals solely with how Cranmer understood repentance. Cranmer is an important figure for the final chapter of this study, but nonetheless bears little weight for the rest of it: in the 1520s evangelical theology was being forged at a time when Cranmer was still an orthodox Catholic.<sup>13</sup> For Null, both repentance and forgiveness were fuelled by love. This study provides a helpful background on contrition and repentance, relying heavily on Tentler, then defines Cranmer's doctrine of repentance in five distinct chronological periods that exhibit various historical influences on Cranmer, beginning with Augustine, moving through Erasmus and Luther, on its way to a mature Protestant Augustinianism. Its five lines of demarcation indicate dramatic changes over a short period of time, but the development of Cranmer's doctrine from a late medieval understanding through the various phases to a culmination in that understanding which is made manifest in the homilies and Book of Common Prayer

---

<sup>12</sup> Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Two Dons in Politics: Thomas Cranmer and Stephen Gardiner, 1503-1533', in *HJ* vol. 37 (1994), 1-22.

is evident. This study does not seek to duplicate Null's work, as it will concentrate on the Henrician period as a whole, referencing Cranmer only where relevant in his role producing the formularies.

While little has been written directly concerning solafidistic repentance in Henrician England, certain biographical monographs have proven to be increasingly useful in a historical understanding that helps give a broader scope to the theology of key figures. William Clebsch's *England's Earliest Protestants 1520-1535* offers a widely accepted survey of the English understanding of Protestant doctrine during the first wave.<sup>14</sup> Clebsch focuses on Barnes, Frith, and Tyndale, and also gives relatively brief discussions on George Joye, and has remarkably little to say about their penitential thinking. He is overly critical of Tyndale, who is widely considered to be the most prominent of the Henrician reformers, though his survey is valuable in creating a fuller picture of Tyndale's life. This present study will disagree on some of the major points regarding Tyndale's personality clashes and the alleged changes to Robert Barnes' belief system, but will only do so as it related to the doctrine of penance in the context of the 1520s and 1530s.

An important advance on Clebsch is Carl R. Trueman's book that highlights Luther's role among the English evangelicals, including the Edwardian and Marian reformers. *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* builds on Clebsch's work, though it is not afraid to disagree on multiple points, particularly concerning Tyndale.<sup>15</sup> As the title suggests, his goal is to chronicle 'Luther's legacy' as it was manifested through English reformers. At times, he describes many of these reformers as they disagree with Luther on important theological issues, as he sources

---

<sup>14</sup> William A Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants 1520-1535* (Westport, CT, 1964).

<sup>15</sup> Carl Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* (Oxford, 1994).

them with Luther and Lutheran ideas. He is considerably more favourable towards Tyndale than Clebsch was, and often criticizes Clebsch for his portrayal of Tyndale as being self-absorbed later in his life. This book, like the one written by Clebsch, is valuable for its insight into the theological leanings of Tyndale, Frith, and Barnes, and as such provides the necessary starting point of a discussion of their theology. The ideas of penance and auricular confession are not major features of this book, but can be seen through the discussions of their related doctrines.

Relatively little work in article form deals directly with the themes of this present study. One exception is Debra Shuger's 'Reformation of Penance' in the *Huntington Library Quarterly* which addresses the understanding of the sacrament of penance on both the continent of Europe and England during the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> Despite taking a very broad remit, Shuger gives considerable attention to the relationship to good works and rewards or bad works and punishment. She understands penance as a transaction that reintroduces a homeostasis of pleasure. Sin feels good, therefore satisfaction feels bad. Satisfaction is understood as an equal and opposite payback. In that vein, her study is mostly concerned with satisfaction and justice. She also gives considerable attention to Frith and Tyndale, which is especially important given that their notions of sin and penance are typically ignored by modern scholars. This current study agrees particularly with Shuger's understanding of sin, forgiveness, penance, and satisfaction as being understood by the reformers as a sort of economic debt, and will argue that Tyndale, Frith, and others spoke in terms that indicate this debt as tangible rather than metaphoric. However, as her focus was on the notion of penance as a

---

<sup>16</sup> Debra Shuger 'Reformation of Penance' in *HLQ* vol. 71 (2008), 557-571.

whole rather than its more specific understanding in Henrician England, such contributions are inadequate and a fuller picture must be established.

Finally, Ronald Rittgers has written a valuable monograph on suffering in early modern Germany.<sup>17</sup> Since a notion of suffering has a necessary correlation with the doctrines of sacramental penance and purgatory, some overlap with evangelical ideas of solafidistic repentance does exist. Rittgers held that this doctrine of suffering was central to the greater reformation efforts, stretching beyond solace and wise counsel into ideas of sin and punishment. Its emphasis was less on discipline as it was on consolation as a means of conveying biblical truth. Yet, despite any soteriological implications, its scope is peripheral to that of sin and penance in England both geographically and contextually.

Each of these sources are extremely valuable to a fuller understanding of one of the most pivotal concepts of reformation England, but nonetheless suggest need for a directed study of penance in Henrician England. Tentler and Lea are concerned with a late medieval notion, Null with Cranmer's soteriology, Clebsch and Trueman with early evangelicals but taking a much broader focus, Shuger with more than a hundred years of a history that is only partially related to England. It is evident that the doctrine of penance in the early English Protestant Reformation has not received the attention that it is due.

Such minimal treatment on penance and repentance in Henrician England is surprising given its centrality to both daily life and to a variety of other doctrines. Penance and repentance are at the very heart of good works, which the conservatives

---

<sup>17</sup> Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2012).

understood to be acts and attitudes that helped earn grace, including sacramental grace through acts of satisfaction. They are central to justification and what happens after death because of how they answered questions relative to purgatory, guilt, and forgiveness. They are foundational to a firmer ecclesiology, as they licensed the clergy to forgive sins or denied that license based on an apostolic understanding of the power of the keys. They tied together all seven late medieval sacraments, and some reformers and evangelicals even considered it to be a sacrament in its own rite.

This study seeks to survey how the English evangelicals developed their notions of solafidistic repentance in the context of sacramental penance. To do this, some context must necessarily be given. Chapter one details the development of late medieval penance, tracing its origins from the early church's concept of general confession. The humanist evangelicals were correct in asserting that the practice and theology with which they interacted bore little resemblance to its form in the early church. Public confession in the early church was for only the most public or heinous of sins, was unrepeatable, and carried heavy consequences. The following centuries saw significant changes as confession moved from public to private, from general to specific, from unrepeatable to annual, and from ecclesiastically-centred to one based on soteriology and forgiveness.

The second chapter introduces a second form of context, that held by three important figures that proved to be heavily influential on the evangelicals. All three figures—John Wycliffe, Erasmus, and Martin Luther—held dramatically different views on penance, but their influences can be easily seen on the English evangelicals through their emphases on contrition, morality, and satisfaction. While heavily influential on the evangelicals and critics of existing orthodoxy, they exhibit very unique traits compared to each other: one is a late medieval advocate of vernacular

Scripture, another remained within the Roman communion and exerted his influences academically, and the other a former monk who never visited England, but whom many of the evangelicals actively sought upon their first arrival on the continent.

The following four chapters are concerned with these exiles. William Tyndale was the first to escape England for the continent, matriculating at the University of Wittenberg a full eighteen months before Robert Barnes fled for Germany. These two would be among the most influential: Tyndale for his translations and his Bible expositions, and Barnes for his preaching and intimate friendship with Luther. Faith was central to repentance for both, though they disagreed on the nuances of how it was effective in sola-fidistic repentance. Much of John Frith's emphasis would be posthumous, as his short career was marked by his rapid publication of important letters and treatises from the Tower of London, mostly addressed to Thomas More and John Fisher. His notion of an earthly purgatory accepted the need for a purging of sins, while denying an extra-corporeal place of purging. His arguments on this matter actually converted Thomas More's brother-in-law, a philosopher who joined in the writings concerning purgatory. Finally, chapter six concerns George Joye, who outlived his exile counterparts of the 1530s and thus serves as a bridge between the exiles and the later Henrician evangelicals. The sample prayers of confession in his primer would prove to be his most valuable contribution to this study. These prayers bear a close resemblance to the confessions that were typically to be made to the priests, but instead denied ecclesiastical mediation in directing confession to God.

Where these four chapters are concerned primarily with English evangelicals who left for Europe, the final chapter describes evangelical influence on how

penance and repentance were treated in the early formularies of the independent English church. The Ten Articles, Bishop's Book, Six Articles, and King's Book all exhibited varying levels of evangelical influence, clearly noticeable in their treatment of penance and repentance.

Religious reformation under Henry brought permanent changes to how sin and confession were understood. In many ways, the church in England in the mid-1530s bore little resemblance to the church of ten years prior, but it also shared considerably few elements with continental Protestantism. This is clearly seen in the official formularies, but also through the influence that the exiles exerted on the laity. What is most important about this new church is not what it rejected, but what parts of late medieval Christianity were assimilated into evangelical doctrine. It is the central argument of this thesis that none of the prominent evangelicals in Henrician England issued a wholesale rejection of sacramental penance as they did with sacramental grace. Instead, they accepted some of its central tenets and advocated a new form of penance, where contrition and confession directly to God and to an offended neighbour was necessary, and where confession to a church official or another mature Christian was beneficial but not required. Satisfaction remained the pivot of repentance, but solafidism required that human attempts at satisfaction were insufficient. This new formula of penance was built around Christ's satisfaction, and while individual emphases differed among the evangelicals, all accepted the central merits of sacramental penance, built within a construct of solafidism.

# CHAPTER 1

## FROM PUBLIC CONFESSION TO PRIVATE PENANCE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LATE MEDIEVAL PENITENTIAL FORMULA

The English evangelicals of the 1520s and 1530s believed that the late medieval notion of penance and repentance had undergone drastic changes from its original form and function, changes that developed into a corruptible ecclesiastical structure and, more importantly, a faulty understanding of how sins could be forgiven. These evangelicals were of course highly influenced by the prevailing notions of penance from the preceding generations, but they maintained that the theology and practice found in Scripture and interpreted by the earliest Christians were valid because they were devoid of the corruptions of later interpretations. Their conservative opponents agreed that the practice of penance shared little resemblance with the early church, but their hermeneutic was built around a belief that God's revelation progressed with time, and therefore the more modern concept was developed through greater knowledge of God's ideal for sin and confession. The difference, then, lies in both hermeneutical approach and in an interpretation of specific revelation as progressive or as ceasing with the close of the biblical canon. It is through these competing lenses of history and revelation that a study of penance and confession must be viewed, for an understanding of the historical development of penance is integral to determine the views on penance of the historically mindful evangelicals in England.

History does not occur in a smooth linear fashion, and a notion of definitive stages of development can therefore be misleading. Such developments were by

nature never instantly widespread, as changes reflected both sociological distinctions within regions and groups of people, but at times also elucidated the slow pace at which the ecclesiastical hierarchy often moved. Even into the sixteenth century, no consensus on the understanding of the formula of the central aspects of penance—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—was ever reached. Anne Thayer identifies the common image of penance as a boat made of contrition, confession, and satisfaction, but a true harmony on how these elements were used, in what order, and what the activating agents were did not exist.<sup>1</sup> The necessity of sorrow for sins and for some form of confession of them persisted, but its expression has taken different forms. In the early medieval period, discussion focused on the frequency of confession and the role of penitential works, while controversy in the late medieval period was over the role of sorrow in effecting the absolution of the guilt of the sin. Yet through the lens of history, the impetus for change becomes clearer. The widespread institution of these changes was a gradual process occurring over generations, and no single doctrine of how the sacrament worked was exclusive to its late medieval understanding. Often, regional anomalies would exist, with a certain diocese reaching further or being laxer in its interpretation and usage, but these are not the focus of this study. Instead, this chapter will seek to define key moments in the history of sin and confession that initiated developments that account for the dramatic change between the early church and that of the late medieval period. Doing this will aid in the quest for a better understanding of how the Henrician evangelicals approached the key concepts of penance in a solafidistic context.

---

<sup>1</sup> Anne Thayer refers to these three ingredients as the boat that crosses the sea of sin to penance. Anne Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (Burlington, VT, 2002), 50.

The first five centuries of Christianity were marked by attacks from both inside and outside the church. The majority of the attacks from within were a result of the young church defining its beliefs and creating boundaries around them. Indeed, such tensions did exist between essentially Hebraic concepts and mainstream Hellenistic ideas. Yet, no major controversy over sin and confession existed in the early church. Relative uniformity with respect to the doctrine of repentance continued among the first five centuries, with the notable exception of deathbed confessions later serving as the gateway to private confession.<sup>2</sup> Alister McGrath describes the patristic era as the ‘history of the emergence of the Christological and Trinitarian dogmas’, where soteriological concepts were not expressed in ways concerning the workings of justification. The ideas of faith and works were only mentioned in paraphrasing the Apostle Paul.<sup>3</sup>

This period was marked by an unrepeatable public confession that was concerned only with the more heinous or public offenses. This public confession gradually faded away beginning in the late seventh century as the Irish penitentials gained influence. These penitentials were highly impelled by monastic traditions as they helped shift notions of sin and earthly punishment through ascetic monastic rituals, and brought confession into the private arena.<sup>4</sup> In the seventh century, confession, except in serious or public cases, was still neither mandatory nor

---

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Thomas Tentler only dedicates about five pages to the early church, a period marked by ‘canonical penance’, in his influential work on the history of sin and confession, which is admittedly focused on the late medieval church, but otherwise provides rich history for the prevailing understanding. Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ, 1977), 4-9. John T. McNeill provides greater background to the doctrine before the eighth century, but does so by providing a survey of the practice and understanding of confession rather than indicating any controversies. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (Columbia, 1990), 3-22.

<sup>3</sup> Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A history of the Christian doctrine of Justification*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, 2005), 33.

<sup>4</sup> For more on penance developing from monastic traditions, see Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform: 1250-1550: An Intellectual and religious history of late medieval and reformation Europe* (London, 1980), 82-98.

widespread, but it certainly did exhibit a certain level of popularity, as the development and spread of the penitentials increased over time. Yet, by the early thirteenth century, a minimum of annual private confession to a priest was the normal expectation, and such confession was accepted as necessary for forgiveness.<sup>5</sup>

Private confession brought several changes to the understanding of penance. The penalty of sin became separated from its guilt, and a priest who would absolve the *culpa* of sin would also prescribe works to satisfy its *poena*. Satisfaction continued to be understood as retribution for loss.<sup>6</sup> When the Fourth Lateran Council's decree *Omnis utriusque sexus* mandated annual confession in 1215, it did little to influence actual existing practice. What the Fourth Lateran Council did for the first time was to institutionalize confession and bring it into the realm of canon law. It made confession a legal act as well as a religious one, as priests could now refuse the Eucharist to any who did not complete the requisites for a full confession and satisfaction. Likewise, Canon 21 made ecclesiastical confession into a lower court, where the priest would discover sins whose absolution was reserved for a higher office.<sup>7</sup> Once this was established, the remaining four centuries prior to the onset of the Protestant Reformation sought a more complete understanding of how penance enacted forgiveness. Questions centred on the role of the priest, the definition of sorrow, and the difference between penalty and guilt. The formula of contrition-confession-satisfaction was maintained throughout, and the English evangelicals would find various revisions of this formula indispensable to their quest to return confession to its original doctrine and practice. It is with these questions

---

<sup>5</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> For more on this theme, see Debra Shuger, 'The Reformation of Penance', *HLQ*, vol. 71 (2008), 557-571. Shuger identifies the term's origins as relating to Roman private law as she builds the thesis that confession of sins had its parallel in legal confessions.

<sup>7</sup> David Myers, *Poor Sinning Folk: Confession and Conscience in Counter-Reformation Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), 30.

that the English evangelicals would also be concerned, as they sought to redefine much of the vocabulary of this period into solafidistic terms.

### **From Ante-Nicene Contrition to Private Confession**

A variety of controversies arose during the centuries that followed the apostolic age that forced Christian leaders to convene ecclesiastical councils in order to formulate important theological boundaries. Despite the importance of questions relative to how forgiveness was effective, what made a confession valid, the role of the episcopate in forgiveness, and good works as a response to forgiveness, no major ecclesiastical council convened to discuss sin and confession until the early thirteenth century.<sup>8</sup> One explanation for this is that the issue of sin and confession was not met with any major controversies that effected important doctrines, despite its soteriological centrality. Relative homogeneity existed, particularly involving the nature and effectiveness of confession.

In the first eight centuries of the Christian church, at least three classes of individuals existed: those within the community of believers, those outside the community, and the penitents, who had committed some particularly serious sin, and who were going through the process of ecclesiastical reconciliation. A further three subclasses within the distinction of penitent were described by the Council of Nicaea: the hearers were in the vestibule and absent for the Eucharist; the kneelers, who were just behind the congregation and dressed in sackcloth and ashes; and the

---

<sup>8</sup> The heresy of the Donatists was concerned primarily with the ‘traditors’ or priests who were reformed heretics, and the efficacy of their baptism during their period of heresy. The conclusion, forcefully argued by Augustine, was that the baptism was still valid independent of the priest’s holiness or lack thereof. This is technically different from admitting that the Donatist controversy addressed the priest’s ability to forgive sins, and therefore is no exception.

standers who were prohibited from the Eucharist yet were allowed to sit with the rest of the congregation.<sup>9</sup>

The movement between these classes was initiated by a confession of sins. This confession was a public act, where the penitent who was guilty of particularly heinous or public sins confessed them to the congregation. This confession was not a general confession, as it was concerned with the admission of guilt of specific sins, though it was unconcerned with an enumeration of all misdeeds and their surrounding circumstances. These sins were typically already known to the congregation because of their public nature, and this confession is designed to be a public admission of guilt and a display of sorrow for embarrassing the church body. More heinous or public acts could lead to a temporary exclusion from the church body, before a specific penitential phase allowed the penitent full ecclesiastical forgiveness and restoration. This confession was designed to be more restorative than punitive. Its purpose was to display a sorrow for sins that had by nature separated a person from the community, and to begin the process of reconciliation. Ecclesiastical leaders could not guarantee forgiveness, as only God could forgive, though they were concerned with reconciliation of the penitent to the church body.<sup>10</sup>

No consensus over which sins had to be confessed or what constituted a more heinous act was ever established, though it was generally accepted that a person who was guilty of bloodshed, violent crimes, idolatry, or a public denial of the teachings

---

<sup>9</sup> *Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215*, ed. Paul Halsall. (New York, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> While the concept of assurance of salvation is an important development in the doctrine of justification, a more thorough examination of assurance does not fit with this overall study of penance and repentance. However, a few short examples may be warranted. For instance, in the late fourth century, both Epiphanius and Cyprian agree that they are ignorant of what happens to a specific penitent sinner (Epiphanius, *Panar*, Haeres, 59). Augustine agreed that reconciliation was only an outward sign in his condemnation of deathbed confession, though his good friend Verecundus converted to Christianity during a deathbed confession (Augustine, *Confessions*, John K. Ryan, trans. (New York, 1960), 170).

of Christ would be required to confess at the next opportunity. The majority of sins were not confessed in public, and the majority of those that were confessed did not receive public penalty. If a person chose to confess other sins that were particularly taxing the conscience, a public confession with the other offenders was licit, though would not make them vulnerable to the same penalties of exclusion. John McNeill borrows a term from Erasmus that details the type of confession that was performed for lighter sins, 'exomologesis', identifying it as voluntary debasement and a voluntary punishment in the place of a more scrupulous examination of sins.<sup>11</sup> The act of confessing was itself the penalty for the sin, though the intent of the confession was not to receive satisfaction, but rather to display humility and contempt for the sin.

The public nature of this confession was necessary to determine if a person truly repented and had no intent to sin again. Sorrow for the offense, what Carolingian reformers later called contrition, was initially defined simply as 'a sorrow for sins voluntarily assumed with the intention of confessing and doing satisfaction'.<sup>12</sup> This sorrow was important to confession and forgiveness, and the shame involved in public confession was seen as an exhibition of that contrition. The church was a community of believers, and as such, any serious matters that involved a person changing class to one of exclusion or one of penance was a public matter. A person who was to confess also showed the external signs that set them apart from the rest of the congregation. Many wore sackcloth and ashes,<sup>13</sup> abstained from food and drink for a period, and were encouraged to beat their chest, utter prayers, and cry

---

<sup>11</sup> McNeill, *Handbooks*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> This definition is widely used in the penitentials. For a short catalogue of the more prominent uses, see Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 235.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Nehemiah 9:1, or 2 Kings 19:1-2, where sackcloth and ashes were used for both mourning and repentance.

out to God for forgiveness.<sup>14</sup> This type of confession was not repeatable in the early church. Ambrose was famous for stating of graver offenses ‘*sicut unum baptisma ita una poenitentia*’ (‘Just as there is one baptism, there is also one penance’).<sup>15</sup> It is the public nature of this ritual, as well as its unrepeatability and the church’s reluctance to reconcile sinners committing more heinous offenses that caused Thomas Tentler to refer to this early period as being marked by its ‘extreme severity’.<sup>16</sup> In addition, lifelong restrictions were typically placed on these reconciled Christians, prohibiting them from seeking the priesthood, marriage, or military service.

Even though official proceedings of confession and penance were public, private confession was not uncommon in the early church.<sup>17</sup> A person who had committed a sin could seek to meet privately with a more spiritually mature person in order to seek comfort or counsel. This private confession, however, was not to be confused with what later came to be known as sacramental confession or penance, or of the public confession already prevalent.<sup>18</sup> No pretence of absolution or separation from or reconciliation with the church body was offered to the person confessing. Such an elder was not necessarily a priest, either. Origen referred to those with more spiritual maturity as physicians who were experts in comfort and sympathy, and the context does not assume that Origen was referring to the power of the keys or a senior church official.<sup>19</sup> His concern, as was common in the third century, was merely the comfort and reconciliation of the sinner with a disturbed conscience. This

---

<sup>14</sup> McNeill, *Handbooks*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ambrose, *De Penitentia* II, X. See also McNeill, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> For a competing model relative only to the Middle Ages, see Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe 600-1200* (Cambridge, 2014). Meens contends that the term ‘private penance’ is misleading, particularly in the early Middle Ages, as the priest or bishop often served as an intermediary in the confessional to resolve disputes between the laity.

<sup>18</sup> To this end, McNeill argues convincingly that all private confession in the church prior to the distribution of the Irish penitentials did not have forgiveness of sins as its goal. McNeill, *Handbooks*, 11-14.

<sup>19</sup> McNeill, *Handbooks*, 7

theme of private confession to a more spiritually mature individual for the purpose of comfort was a theme that early English evangelicals would later return to.

The unrepeatable nature of penance and its often lifelong restrictions caused some to wait to offer their confession until death was imminent, an idea that increasingly popularized deathbed confessions by the eighth century.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of public confession was reconciliation with the church, but deathbed confession, like other forms of private confession until the fifth century, was intended only to soothe the conscience of the sinner. It was not assumed they were reconciled into the earthly community of believers, though neither was it assumed that their admission of sin had no weight on forgiveness. However, being a part of the community of the church was important: by the early fifth century, shortly after what many consider to be the official declaration of the closing of the canon by Pope Innocent I,<sup>21</sup> private deathbed confession was followed by reconciliation. In 416, Innocent described to Decentius how the Roman church held the custom of granting remission on Maundy Thursday, except to those who were gravely ill, ‘lest he depart without communion’, with remission clearly connected to communion.<sup>22</sup>

This curious change for the first time legitimized at least one form of private confession as having the same function as the more restrictive and unrepeatable public confession, only without its embarrassing and restrictive elements. If a person who had already made a deathbed confession were to somehow recover, they were also required to complete a public confession and be relegated to the class of those outside the community awaiting penance. As the understandings of grace,

---

<sup>20</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 6-9.

<sup>21</sup> There is some debate as to when the books of the Bible were actually officially canonized, but from this point forward, a consensus of what books were included in Scripture emerged. For more on this, see Alistair McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (1998), 27-28, 177-179.

<sup>22</sup> McNeill, *Handbooks*, 17.

sacraments, sin, and forgiveness began to be formulized throughout the succeeding centuries, it would be this edict on deathbed confession and its widespread acceptance that would prove to be the infant form of private sacramental confession.

A few centuries later, Innocent's wording was echoed by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, though the text was more concerned with communion than with deathbed confession.<sup>23</sup> By the thirteenth century, it was believed that sorrow for sins, confession of them, and receiving absolution from the priest helped infuse divine grace so that the penitent could avoid hell and spend less time in purgatory. When this belief was yet in its early stages is difficult to determine, as its development was gradual. There does not appear to be any evidence that any form of penance in the early church—public or private—was meant to lead to forgiveness by God. Instead, forgiveness of sins against God was only offered by God, and the only effective and complete confession was through seeking forgiveness directly from God. The early patristic sources are silent on the subject of forgiveness through audible confession prior to Augustine, who was famously vague on his doctrine of absolution and never referred to penance as a sacrament.<sup>24</sup> Even as late as Peter Lombard, the workings of absolution and its relationship to confession were vague,<sup>25</sup> so it seems unlikely that the early church would have viewed the relationship of confession and absolution in a proto-sacramental way. How much the average penitent believed that public confession and the process of reconciliation with the church body actually related to salvation rather than an institutional and civil

---

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol 3, article 8.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, for instance, taught that the power of the keys was indeed given to the entire church, including non-clergy, for it is the Holy Spirit who remits sins 'above man' and 'through man' (*Sermons* XCIX, 9). Others, such as Cyprian and Tertullian limited the power of the keys to the episcopacy, but maintained that forgiveness comes from God, not the priest. McNeill, *Handbooks*, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> See pp. 46-47, below.

punishment for wrongdoing is also unclear. What is clear, though, is that prior to the middle of the eighth century, only the more heinous or public sins were confessed to a mature Christian, and any punishment given by the church was intended not to work towards salvation but towards reconciliation with the local church body and act as an incentive to avoid sin in the future.

### **The Spread of the Penitentials**

In the early sixth century, manuals for lay confession based on monastic confession to an abbot were being written in Ireland. With a focus on a categorization of sin and prescription for penalties patterned after monastic asceticism, they began to spread fairly rapidly throughout Europe by the eighth century. They make an appearance at the Council of Toledo in 589, which means that their influence must have been a bit more advanced by then. Whereas the former understanding of confession and forgiveness revolved around a person's public penitential status, which involved communicants, those excluded, and those in the process of ecclesiastical reconciliation, the penitentials privatized the whole process and enhanced the role of the priest and of works of satisfaction. It is likely that they were patterned after Celtic traditions prior to the arrival of Christianity.<sup>26</sup> The growing prevalence of private deathbed confessions provided a discontinuity with the communal aspect of penance, and proved to be a gateway to elimination of its public use. The gradual reception and popularity of the penitentials changed every aspect of the public formula of confession. Although they, too, are marked by their severe penalties, they forced the entire process of confession and penitential works into a more private environment. Monastic asceticism became a necessary component of forgiveness for

---

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Murray, 'Confession Before 1215', *TRHS*, vol. 3 (1993), 56.

the laity, as sins became categorized by type and seriousness, and penitential works were prescribed that were even more severe than previously. Not all sins were explored, as the idea of probing the conscience was a later development. Poschman's designation of this type of confession as 'tariffed penance' because of these delineations and lack of enumeration is sufficient.<sup>27</sup> Confession became repeatable, and such repetition became necessary, for the category of 'heinous or serious offense' became significantly widened. Confessors had a basic guidebook for walking the penitent through a full confession, and a rubric for prescribing works of satisfaction based on the degree of the offense. Later penitentials were directed at the laity to help them prepare for confession by providing aids to examine their conscience to help reveal sin.

The first of these penitentials were written in Ireland before making their way to Celtic England, whose missionary monks took their new system of confession with them on excursions to the continent and made them accessible to Europe. The reason for their sudden popularity is unclear. Thomas Tentler argues that 'canonical penance' was waning in popularity because of its public and unrepeatable nature. Likewise, while the penalties for sin were still severe, they did not impose the lifelong disabilities that the earlier system required.<sup>28</sup> McNeill argued that penitential practices were waning in some areas, and change was welcomed,<sup>29</sup> and Tentler attributed their popularity to the private nature of confession, including the elimination of the formal entrance into the class of penitent.<sup>30</sup> The former method of public penance had never been established in Britain, and those areas on the continent that found the most foothold were places where the 'ancient method' was

---

<sup>27</sup> Bernhard Poschmann, *Penance and Anointing the Sick* (New York, 1964), 123.

<sup>28</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> McNeill, *Handbooks*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 9-10.

but a memory. Though for McNeill, the overriding reason for their continued acceptance was their usefulness to confessors as a handbook to confession.<sup>31</sup> They did face limited opposition by the Carolingian emphasis on earlier traditions, but the tariffed penance proved to be too popular. Some overlap of public and private confession did exist, as Alexander Murray describes their utility for the Carolingian bishops as ‘the Carolingian dichotomy’, where canonical penance was used for public sins and tariffed penance for private sins.<sup>32</sup> Such a dichotomy did not endure, however, as tariffed penance, influenced by the spread of the penitentials, would become firmly established as the method of confession. Whatever the reason, the spread and use of these penitentials was rapid, and they would dramatically and permanently change the face of sin and confession as it was then understood.

Relative privacy in confession was not the only major change the penitentials provided. This privacy forced the elimination of the tiered structure of those in the church, those outside it, and the penitent waiting at the door. The penitentials went one step further than Pope Leo the Great’s declaration of widespread reconciliation after deathbed confessions by offering immediate reconciliation to all who made a full confession, not just the dying.<sup>33</sup> They also brought a greater number of sins that were required to be confessed and a categorization of those sins with a somewhat clear hierarchy of sins. With a wider range of sins came the ability to go through the process of penance multiple times over the course of a lifetime. A person could in theory confess as often as they sin and not face lifelong restrictions. The full examination of conscience and enumeration of sins would not be prevalent for a few hundred years, but this new awareness of sins brought with it a new form of social

---

<sup>31</sup> McNeill, *Handbooks*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Murray, ‘Confession Before 1215’, 56.

<sup>33</sup> The sacrament was eventually also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in an effort to focus on the final act of the process rather than the sadness that was to precede confession.

control, as the confessor could now impose greater penalties on a wider range of people for several periods of their lives.

Despite these changes brought by the penitentials, some important consistency of the formula of confession and penance did continue. If Tentler's assessment that these two systems were 'fundamentally similar' despite all the dramatic changes is correct,<sup>34</sup> it is because of the continuity of contrition-confession-satisfaction as the ongoing formula. The privacy offered may have changed the incentive for many penitents and elevated the frequency of confession, but the principal aspects remained intact. A valid confession must be accompanied by a sorrow for sins, a disavowal of them, an intent to avoid them, works of penance, and reconciliation into the community. The elements of this formula of contrition-confession-satisfaction, followed by reconciliation, would be redefined and their pivots changed before the early English evangelicals encountered them, but they would all remain consistent parts of the formula for penance, and in some form would be adapted into the English evangelical understanding of repentance.

One change to this formula that has already been alluded to is that reconciliation began to occur alongside the stage of works. A person who had already confessed would already be reconciled to the church, but would have yet to fulfil the penitential works given to them by the priest. With the status of penitent now omitted, all baptised persons were members of the community of believers, and confession was now the requirement for taking part in the Eucharist, not full reconciliation after works of penance. Social reconciliation was also necessary, as a person who had a quarrel with his neighbour was required to reconcile that quarrel prior to receiving absolution. Bossy points out that this was one of the main reasons

---

<sup>34</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 10.

people avoided confession. For reconciliation with the church to occur, a person must be reconciled to his neighbour.<sup>35</sup>

Another change that occurred at some point during this period was that the focus of these works was no longer directed at reconciliation and sorrow for sin, but at an actual and tangible attempt to contribute to the process of salvation through good deeds. The penitential works became works of satisfaction, and a person was believed to have the penalty for their guilt satisfied when the prescribed works were completed.<sup>36</sup> These penitential works came to be known as works of satisfaction, as their intent moved from reconciliation with the church to an accompanying satisfaction of the penitent's debt towards God.

Although the penitentials exhibited a wide range of penances and guides for complete and thorough confession, the most consistent feature of the penitentials is the centrality of these works of satisfaction.<sup>37</sup> Though they often did not agree with each other on the penalties to be imposed, they consistently mirrored that which was already prevalent in monasticism by bringing a focus on fasting, abstaining from sleep, flagellation, and other forms of discomfort.<sup>38</sup> The type of satisfaction prescribed was usually designed around the type of sin. Many penitentials referred to the confessor as a physician, and the process of penance was designed to cure the soul.<sup>39</sup> One common description for the types of satisfactions imposed was through

---

<sup>35</sup> John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985), 47.

<sup>36</sup> Some controversy existed as to what would happen if a person died before completing these works. Many believed that intent to complete the penance was enough, and a person who died prematurely would be treated as though they had already completed the work. This changed with Peter Lombard, who represented the new idea that guilt of sin can be separated from its punishment. Lombard argued that a person who does not complete the prescribed works of satisfaction will be sent to purgatory to pay their debt, which is greater than had it been completed on earth. Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, Book 4.

<sup>37</sup> For more on this theme, see Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 9-12.

<sup>38</sup> For more on the monastic asceticism in the penitentials, see McNeill, *Handbooks*, 30ff.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to viewing the confessor as a physician, Anne Thayer notes that a competing image of the confessor as judge was also prominent. She argues that the existence of sermons that show the confessor as a judge corresponds with geographic localities that 'fostered a positive reception for

the common medical analogy that ‘contraries are cured by their contraries’, which is to say that the prescription for satisfaction for a particular sin is through the development and discipline of its antithetical virtue.<sup>40</sup> One example of this is the *Penitential of Cummean*, which prescribed silence for a gossip, fasting for a glutton, and watchfulness for the slothful.<sup>41</sup> Anne Thayer summarizes public humiliation as being prescribed for pride, avarice for restitution of goods, fasting for gluttony and drunkenness, and seeking discomfort such as scratchy clothing or lying on a hard surface for the lustful.<sup>42</sup> This healing of sins by their contrary and corresponding virtues is a recurring theme in many of the penitentials, and is central to understanding the psychological role that these works of penance offered to the sinner.

This psychological role was important, for the penalties were severe and long lasting. They served both as a reminder of the presence of past sins and the virtue that should lead to abstinence from them. The fear of these penances was likely a strong deterrent from sin, though their harshness may have led others to doubt their own ability to abstain. *The Penitential of Finnian* is an excellent example of this harshness. It begins by keeping forgiveness in the hands of God for the truly repentant. If a person sins internally, and immediately and genuinely seeks forgiveness from God, it will be given to him. But if that sin is frequent, he is required to fast for a day after seeking forgiveness. After this, the sins and satisfactions grow, and with different treatment depending on if it is committed by laity or clergy. A priest who ‘makes strife’ with his neighbour must seek pardon

---

Protestant teaching’. Anne Thayer, ‘Judge and Doctor: Images of the confessor in printed model sermon collections, 1450-1520’, in *Penitence in the Age of Reformations*, Katharine Jackson Lualdi and Anne T. Thayer, eds. (Burlington, VT, 2000), 10-29.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, McNeill, *Handbooks*, 44.

<sup>41</sup> ‘The Penitential of Cummean’, in McNeill, *Handbooks*, 98ff.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching and the Coming of the Reformation* (Burlington, VT, 2002), 66.

from both God and his neighbour, then is required to fast for seven days on only bread and water. If he intends to strike or kill his neighbour, he is required to fast on bread and water for six months and abstain from meat and wine for the next six. A layman is prescribed bread and water for a week. Actually assaulting a neighbour is worse, where a cleric must be visibly contrite, partake only bread and water for a year, and suffer a period without his clerical office. A layman's fast is forty days on bread and water, along with financial reimbursement for all that was lost.<sup>43</sup> A clear progression can be seen, where a penitent moves from single unrepeated thoughts against his neighbour, through to actual assault, with harsher penalties for clerics. These long periods of fasting or other penalties would be added to any outstanding acts of satisfaction, and those who were particularly sinful could expect years of these penalties because of their accumulation.

In the early church, much effort was made to maintain a positive public image for the church, as particularly public sins were treated similarly to other heinous sins, regardless of their actual severity. John Bossy has also demonstrated that penance in the Middle Ages had an important social dimension that demanded a level of secrecy.<sup>44</sup> This is certainly true as seen through the emphasis on harsher penalties for public or heinous sins in the penitentials. In *The Penitential of Finnian*, the harshest penalties were reserved for public sins. If a cleric is guilty of private fornication, he should 'lose his place of honour', though keep his clerical office, and be given a year of fasting on bread and water and another year without wine or meat, or triple that for repeat offenses kept private. If he begets a child, which is considered falling 'to the depths of ruin', and kills that child, he is given the same

---

<sup>43</sup> 'The Penitential of Finnian', in McNeill, *Handbooks*, 87-88.

<sup>44</sup> John Bossy, 'The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation', *TRHS*, vol. 25 (1975), 24.

penance as a repeat fornicator, only with a special prescription for tears, and an additional forty days of bread and water only in the final three years, as well as to be ‘an exile in his own country’ until seven years have passed.<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, if he begets a child and does not kill it, ‘the sin is less, but the penance is the same’.<sup>46</sup> *Finnian* thereby provided license to hide the scandal of a priest who has committed the sin of fornication. Clearly fornication in conjunction with infanticide is worse than either sin on its own, but the penalties of satisfaction are not consistent with this. The penalty for murder is considerably harsher at ten years of exile, with seven years’ penance consisting of three years on bread and water, four years of abstaining from wine or meat, and during that four years an additional three periods of forty-day fasts on bread and water alone. After ten years, he is permitted to reconcile with the community and ‘make satisfaction’ to the family of the person he murdered.<sup>47</sup> Why would fornication and infanticide receive a lighter punishment than if the fornication were public knowledge or if he had committed murder? The answer is in the very nature of the new form of private confession. In the former arena, all aspects of confession were public. Perhaps the church had found that its dirty laundry, once aired, was too much for the general populace. Inner, private sin required only confession to God. Private fornication required a significant penalty, but not as significant as public fornication. Private fornication coupled with murder received significantly less punishment than murder alone. *Finnian* reiterates this point regarding private fornication, saying that private sins ‘are to be absolved in secret by penance and by very diligent devotion of heart and body’.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> ‘The Penitential of Finnian’, in *Handbooks*, 89.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Other private sins are condemned by *Finnian*, but their penances are light. To be wrathful, envious, gloomy, or greedy: ‘great and capital sins are these; and they slay the soul and cast it down to the depth of hell’.<sup>49</sup> Yet, this serious indictment is to be cured ‘by contraries’, with their cure as ‘to cleanse away the faults from our hearts and introduce virtues in their place’.<sup>50</sup> Specifically, the penance of wrathfulness is to be kind, of having a loose tongue is to have restraint of heart and tongue, and of greed is to give liberally. These more private sins do not even have a specific penance attributed to them other than a fairly subjective virtue in place of a vice.

These penitentials made every effort to move a public rite into the private arena, even to the point of seeking to prevent public knowledge of particularly scandalous sins. The penalties imposed were more dramatic than in earlier penance, as significantly more sins were enumerated, which made repeat offenders out of most. While few were likely to be guilty of such offenses as sodomy or murder, the weight of the mounting penances for more casual sins of thought, disposition, or occasion was likely to be an overwhelming burden for the average lay penitent. No person could escape the guilt or the punishment, and years of fasting for simple lapses of judgment could prove onerous.

These harsh penalties were exacerbated by the priest’s role. While officially he was the ‘physician of souls’, some were more skilled at surgery than others, and the purity of motives was unstable in an easily corruptible system. In addition to these highly burdensome penances came the financial toll involved in making a confession. Ozment argues that the physical toll was so great that people would

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

gladly pay the indulgence rather than suffer the penances given in the confessional.<sup>51</sup> He attributes the success of the Reformation to an overwhelming desire to overcome the superstition of penance that burdened both conscience and purse.<sup>52</sup> The matter of indulgences was of course one of the instigators of the Reformation, and though it is anachronistic to view Luther's *95 Theses* as the formal start of the Reformation, it certainly was a point of contention among the Reformers. Indulgences arose as a replacement for the works of satisfaction at the end of the process of penance. Contrition and confession were requisite to an effective indulgence. Its purpose was commutation: the penitent would help build the physical infrastructure of the church by proxy through the purchase of an indulgence for the purpose of construction of churches.<sup>53</sup> R. N. Swanson described these indulgences as a way to ease the journey through purgatory, identifying them as important not only for social infrastructure but for their importance to private religion.<sup>54</sup> While for many this was preferable to fasting or pilgrimage, it still by its very nature represented a great deal of personal sacrifice.

Murray explains the advent of paying money as a work of satisfaction as a commutation of sentence in a legal sense, where if every person was guilty the priest was forced to decide punishments for all crimes rather than individual crimes. The easiest way to do this was through exacting a financial toll. The concept was through what Murray identifies as 'amercement', an old Anglo-Norman concept of mercy being offered in exchange for payment.<sup>55</sup> This amercement could take the form of a

---

<sup>51</sup> Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven, 1975), 20ff.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>53</sup> Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, 54-56.

<sup>54</sup> R.N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge, 2007), 466.

<sup>55</sup> Murray, 'Confession Before 1215', 61-63.

generous tip or a purchased mass, under the caveat that the confessor said the mass. Swanson argues that this financial toll created a dependence on the priest.<sup>56</sup> The financial reward for hearing several annual confessions in a short period would lead to obvious corruption, as the requirement of purchasing a mass from the one offering the confession was not uncommon, despite its prohibition in 1195 and 1446.<sup>57</sup> In *The Dialogue of Miracles*, an early thirteenth-century pedagogical storybook, two travellers from the same parish share stories of the cost of their priest's mass. One was fined eighteen pence for having sex with his wife during Lent and the other was fined the same for abstaining from sex during Lent.<sup>58</sup> On at least one occasion, an organized withholding of these tithes helped remove a corrupt vicar.<sup>59</sup> An important economic study of late medieval financial and religious practices argues that one notable aspect of the success of the Protestant Reformation was the church's practice of extracting rents associated with 'manifold doctrinal innovations' of purgatory, penance, and indulgences, a strategy that only worked temporarily because it provided a monopoly that eliminated competition.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to the financial toll, the harsh penalties brought by tariffed penance brought psychological baggage for some. The story of Martin Luther's conversion because of this burden is well known.<sup>61</sup> Steven Ozment claims the most important connection for Protestantism was its relief of the psychological and social burdens in contrast to the popular Protestant slogans of 'the freedom of the Christian' or 'the priesthood of all believers'.<sup>62</sup> The concept of such long life-altering

---

<sup>56</sup> R.N. Swanson, 'Problems of Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England', *EHR*, vol. 105 (1990), 856.

<sup>57</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Biller, 'Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction', in *Handling Sin*, Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis, eds. (York, 2013), 6.

<sup>59</sup> Swanson, 'Problems of Priesthood', 850.

<sup>60</sup> Robert B. Ekelund, Robert F. Hebert, and Robert D. Tollison, 'An Economic Analysis of the Protestant Reformation', *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 110 (2002), 649.

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 2, below.

<sup>62</sup> Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 9, 22.

works of satisfaction was to show man's inability to keep the law. For the particularly devout, this developed a cognitive dissonance between their sinfulness and the toll of the prescribed satisfactions.

By the early thirteenth century, a minimum of annual confession was not uncommon in some areas. This does not mean that the practice was universal. Alain de Lille remarked that its local utility had practically fallen into disuse.<sup>63</sup> Belief in its necessity for salvation was not unanimous.<sup>64</sup> Any claim of its universal acceptance or rejection would be only through an incomplete study of the sources. In some areas it was widely accepted and used, and in others its necessity was in question. Murray argues that confession thrived in places with an active and knowledgeable clergy, but was generally ignored where this did not exist.<sup>65</sup> The fact remains that some areas saw a thriving of annual confession and some were more resistant. The church was better served institutionalizing and universalizing the rite in order to provide continuity of doctrine and practice, as well as to improve social control.

### ***Omnis Utriusque Sexus* and Canon Law.**

In 1215, the first ecclesiastical council to directly address penance and confession was convened. The penitentials had already been in use for six centuries and were widely popular in many locales for more than four hundred years. The Fourth Lateran Council, considered by some to be the most important church council of the Middle Ages,<sup>66</sup> addressed several issues, many of which were designed to clean up the immorality of the clergy. Such immorality had been an ongoing problem, as has

---

<sup>63</sup> Poschman, *Penance and Anointing the Sick*, 140.

<sup>64</sup> See Thayer, *Penitence and Preaching*, 56ff.

<sup>65</sup> Murray, 'Confession Before 1215', 79.

<sup>66</sup> Henry C. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, vol. 1 (London, 1896), 230.

been widely documented, and this problem was one main purpose for convening the council in 1215. Its goal was to help reform the morality of the church through canon law. A major feature of the Fourth Lateran Council was its decrees against clergy incontinence, drunkenness, and attendance at events that were inconsistent with priestly roles in the church, as well as an insistence on annual provincial councils and establishment of schools, both with the goal of moral reform.<sup>67</sup>

Private annual confession was already practiced locally in many areas by the thirteenth century, and the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council universalized the practice.<sup>68</sup> Tentler's caution to avoid exaggeration in evaluating the impact of *Omnis utriusque sexus* on the confessional landscape is prudent, at least in terms of its impact on the frequency and intent of confession.<sup>69</sup> Existing legislation was already in place in several smaller areas requiring up to thrice annual confession, though Alexander Murray's prudence in accepting their effectiveness and Rob Meens' argument for the limited success of the Carolingian councils is warranted.<sup>70</sup> Yet the Fourth Lateran Council must be seen as producing an important and innovative decree, for it brought an existing practice under the jurisdiction of canon law, and provided both structure for penance and penalties for those who disobeyed. Lea describes its impact as a total shift of confession from the religious to the legal,<sup>71</sup> though it was also concerned with the effect of confession on both the laity and the clergy. It is also true that linking confession to the Eucharist increased the power of the clergy.<sup>72</sup> *Omnis utriusque sexus*, the formal name given to Canon 21, provided

---

<sup>67</sup> J. Albrega, ed., *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum decreta* (Bologne, 1973), 11, 14-17.

<sup>68</sup> McNeill, 'Confession Before 1215', 17.

<sup>69</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Murray, 'Confession Before 1215', 58. Rob Meens, 'Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* (York, 2013), 36.

<sup>71</sup> Lea, vol. 1, 230.

<sup>72</sup> For more on this theme, see Swanson, 'Problems of the Priesthood', 857ff.

the impetus for more changes in the understanding of confession. Bishops had for centuries been given more responsibilities and sought more social control as a result of these responsibilities,<sup>73</sup> and with confession falling under the heading of the church, more thorough understandings of secret sins could be found through probing the conscience under penalty of excommunication. Perhaps equally important, *Omnis utriusque sexus* both defined and universalized existing practice. For the first time, there was official and universal sanction of what had previously only been mandated on a local level.

As a document of canon law, *Omnis utriusque sexus* is specific in its wording in an attempt to pre-empt future loopholes to its decrees. Annual confession was required of ‘All the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment’.<sup>74</sup> The person to whom they should confess was their own priest rather than in a different jurisdiction to conceal embarrassment. Otherwise, the local priest must grant permission for confession in another jurisdiction. Completion of penance was not necessarily required, with the focus on exhorting the penitent to ‘take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them’.<sup>75</sup> In the big picture, this confession was a gatekeeper of the Eucharist, as reverent reception of it, in addition to its soteriological and sacramental roles, was required to avoid expulsion from the church. Priestly absolution was important, but the prevailing belief until later in the thirteenth century was that the priest merely declared absolution of the guilt of sins instead of actually having the power to absolve them via the ecclesiastical office.

---

<sup>73</sup> Alexander Murray notes that the bishops had been told to investigate ‘incest, Patricide, fratricide, adultery’ and to use excommunication liberally to protect public peace. Murray, ‘Confession Before 1215’, 59.

<sup>74</sup> *Fourth Lateran Council*, Canon 21

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

Such questions of the priest's role in absolution were not important at this time, as the centre of the church life was the Eucharist, which was the end goal of penance.

*Omnis utriusque sexus* also provided some basic guidelines for the priest, referring to him as a 'skilful physician' who sought symptoms and their cures through careful and discrete investigation into the sins of the penitent, who is referred to as the 'sick one'. The decree's understanding of the priest's central role is consistent with that of the penitentials and with the early church: he is to be an informed counsellor and expert in avoiding sin. With this comes great responsibility, as even accidentally revealing someone's sins that were confessed leads to being deposed and perpetual confinement to a monastery for penance. Canon 21 is contextually located with other canons advocating a higher degree of morality, including a dissociation from clerics who shed blood, take part in public gluttony and drunkenness, and who stored profane objects in the church. In these related canons, though, the most specific and the harshest penalty imposed for a violation of the statute is the penalty for violating the seal of confession.<sup>76</sup>

A few notes on terminology are necessary. The first is that the decree used the term *penitentia* to indicate the entire process rather than just works of satisfaction. It is unclear when this practice began, but it appears to be a further reflection of the influence of the penitentials and their focus on performing works to attempt satisfaction. The root of *penitentia* has always served to indicate punitive or rehabilitative acts that followed crimes, as in the English words penalty or penitentiary. This decree, however, refers to the process of contrition, confession, absolution, and satisfaction collectively as *penitentia*. Perhaps the chief identifying

---

<sup>76</sup> Canon 21 seeks a full deposition of the offending priest, followed by a relegation to a monastery for a lifelong strict observation of penance.

mark of the penitentials had developed into a colloquial use of the term as describing the whole process outlined in the penitentials. Either way, the term itself had developed by the early thirteenth century into one with a wider definition of the entire process.

The second word that is distinct in *Omnis utriusque sexus* is the distinction of confession as *solus*, rather than the previously much more common *privata*. Mary Mansfield argues that this distinction is a result of the practice among a minority of priests who had been holding a more general confession with up to eight penitents at a time.<sup>77</sup> There may be some truth to this, as Mansfield has demonstrated that group confessions were practiced and also condemned in Bordeaux in 1234.<sup>78</sup> It is more likely, though, that the purpose of the word *solus* was to emphasize the solitary nature of the confession in contrast to the previous method of public confession. Wives were to face confession alone so as to not have it tainted by the presence of their husband. Confession was required for those who had already been confirmed, and such children who generally could not expect much privacy from their parents, were also to confess apart from them. Nonetheless, auricular confession that was practiced in the late middle ages was technically solitary, but far from private. Confessions were typically made in a large open area, with a queue of waiting penitents within easy earshot. The truly private confessional was an invention of the mid-sixteenth century as a part of the Counter Reformation in Europe by an initiative of bishops and local synods in Northern Italy.<sup>79</sup> While much can be made of this lack

---

<sup>77</sup> Marcy C. Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-century France* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), 67.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, John Bossy points out that the invention of the confessional has been wrongly attributed to Borromeo, and that its invention came from the local clergy in collaboration with the laity. Borromeo was indeed influential in its spread through Northern Italy, but was not the first to propagate it. Bossy argues that Borromeo, who had a limited sense of the social dimension of sin, attempted to reform public penance into a form similar to canonical penance by delaying absolution until after satisfaction. Bossy, 'Social History', 31.

of true privacy in the late medieval church's penitential rites, it does not seem to be a contentious issue, as the practice remained for a millennium. This form of private confession was considerably more private than the previous method, and this established norm remained in place for several hundred years without any serious challenges to its practice.

*Omnis utriusque sexus* probably had little effect on the practice and frequency of confession, though it did finally institutionalize it. Yet it was the aspect of confession and canon law that would prove the most enduring. It is precisely the punitive aspects such as excommunication or withholding absolution that proved to be influential as the following centuries began to ask questions regarding what makes a complete confession and what is required for a confession to be effective.

### **Sorrow Versus the Keys: Is Confession Necessary for Forgiveness?**

The early church's understanding of sin and penance was marked by a tiered structure and unrepeatable public confession that was reserved only for more heinous offenses. Private 'confession' was commonplace and the priest's role was increased, but its purpose was spiritual counsel, not forgiveness. The only effective confession involved sorrow for sins, confessing them to God, and accepting satisfaction. The changes brought by the penitentials and *Omnis utriusque sexus* maintained this formula, and besides a gradual movement in the understanding of justification, were principally concerned with the how and when of confession. The following centuries, including the Reformation era, would be wrapped up in the who and the why of penance as it asked who or what made confession effective and complete, and what type of confession was necessary for absolution and satisfaction. What level of sorrow is necessary for forgiveness? What does a complete confession look

like? What role did the conscience play in a thorough confession? Who was the priest able to absolve, and what did that absolution look like? How did the works of satisfaction influence forgiveness for the person who has already been absolved of the guilt? In a very short period of time, these questions brought about significant changes to the prevailing understanding of penance and repentance.

Two of the most important of these questions were distinctly intertwined: the role of the priest in absolving guilt was compared to the penitent's level of sorrow. However, sorrow is relatively intangible and variable, and there was concern that a person could never know if their sorrow was sufficient for a complete confession to be effective. No consensus regarding sorrow or absolution was ever reached by the time the early English evangelicals approached the doctrine, as at least three distinct theories were promulgated through the three centuries that preceded them. These three versions of sorrow for sins were instrumental in the debates concerning sin and confession among the early English evangelicals, as a sorrow for sins and for sinfulness was elemental in repentance, at times even replacing confession entirely.

Beginning in the twelfth century, the subjective nature of contrition caused some to rethink what made it effective and what levels of contrition were necessary for absolution. Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, foundational to an Oxford or Cambridge education in the sixteenth century, viewed contrition as the only necessary element in forgiveness. It functioned *ex opera operantis*, by the work of the worker, to develop sacramental grace in the penitent. A person was forgiven of the guilt of their sins if they were fully sorry for having committed them, and this forgiveness was able to be effected without ecclesiastical interference. Oral confession was a natural sign of this contrition, but was otherwise unrelated to forgiveness, which occurred at

the moment the contrite person turned to God.<sup>80</sup> Murray reproduces a story that reflects this: a man who was confessing the rape of his daughter continued to barter with Peter to give him a harsher penance. With each plea for a merciless sanction, Peter of Corbeil lightened the penance until the sentence was a single Paternoster. The man died of his shame and, with his contrition serving as the full satisfaction, skipped purgatory and immediately ascended to heaven.<sup>81</sup>

A century later, Thomas Aquinas recognized the inconsistency of teaching that the sacraments of the church are the only way to forgiveness, yet through Lombard's view, accepting that people could be forgiven independent of ecclesiastical absolution. His notion of contrition was that it must be somehow linked to Christ's sacrifice. Contrition was necessary, but Aquinas attempted to remove from it any emotional pretence. It was more sincere if it referred to a disposition rather than an emotional response.<sup>82</sup> For Aquinas, proper contrition was a response to the pain of free will, which has gravitated into sin. Emotions are untrustworthy, and therefore such a sorrow must be a reflection of one's disposition of repentance. This sorrow, coupled with divine grace, made contrition both a human and a divine act. If this sorrow was incomplete, it was attrition, which was made complete through divine grace in the confessional.<sup>83</sup> On one level, Aquinas' redefinition of contrition perhaps made the approach to confession simpler for the average layperson, as a physical response by way of tears or wailing was not necessarily indicative of actual contrition.

---

<sup>80</sup> Poschmann, *Penance and Anointing the Sick*, 159ff.

<sup>81</sup> Murray, 'Confession Before 1215', 63.

<sup>82</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 237.

<sup>83</sup> Myers, *Poor Sinning Folk*, 17.

Ashley Null has persuasively argued that Aquinas' approach was distinctly Aristotelian.<sup>84</sup> For Aristotle, all things that exist in matter must also exist in form. Aquinas understood the matter of the sacrament to be the elements of the formula contrition-confession-satisfaction. The form, then, was the priest's absolution. If grace is thus understood as moving from God to mankind, and man's response is the movement of free will to God and away from sin with justification working through the infusion of this grace and the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, then man can have the necessary disposition to receive grace. Without grace, contrition would remain incomplete, and therefore contrition both required grace and effected it through the absolution of the priest.<sup>85</sup> Aquinas understood sin to be a movement of the free will against God, and contrition as the voluntary movement of free will towards God. For the will to move in such a way, it needs the help of grace. Thus Aquinas' understanding of contrition was that it worked both *ex opera operantis* and *ex opera operato*, or both by the work of the worker and by the work worked. Aquinas represented a mature view of sacramentalism which sought the infusion of divine grace through partaking in the sacraments. This is an important distinction in the understanding of justification that was at the heart of English evangelicalism.

The third notion of the way contrition interacted with absolution that came to dominate the discussion in the late middle ages was that of Duns Scotus. Scotus agreed that contrition was necessary for salvation, but argued that most people were too emotionally weak to achieve actual contrition. As with Aquinas, contrition must be an intellectual sorrow and a personal disposition, but that disposition must stand

---

<sup>84</sup> Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (Oxford, 2006), 44ff.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

the test of time and circumstance. It required prolonged acts of self-imposed penances. No person could be sure their contrition was adequate. Except in rare cases, the penitent, then, approaches confession only with attrition.<sup>86</sup> Through the working of the sacrament, the priest is able to turn attrition into contrition by declaring absolution. The priest's role in absolution, therefore, was greatest among the Scotists, for except in exceptional circumstances, forgiveness was impossible without him. Scotus' understanding of penance shifted the onus of forgiveness from the penitent to the priest, dramatically enlarging ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the process.

Berndt Hamm describes this Scotist view by expounding the beliefs of one of Scotus' fifteenth-century followers, Johannes von Paltz. Hamm understands this progression of thought from the penitentials to Scotus as a lowering of the minimum requirements for forgiveness. The penitentials required strict penances for sins, Lombard only required sorrow, and Scotus only required 'a desire to desire' to be sorry.<sup>87</sup> For Von Paltz, attrition was a natural response to the fear of the punishment of sin. Upon confessing sins, this attrition was made into contrition, and grace was infused.

The doctrine of the ability of a priest to absolve the sins of a penitent was based on the same biblical texts used to establish the primacy of the papacy. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus tells Peter, 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,

---

<sup>86</sup> Different understandings of what made sorrow perfect or imperfect existed, depending on what a person believed regarding how the sorrow was formed. For our purposes, the definition of imperfect sorrow will be sufficient.

<sup>87</sup> Berndt Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, ed. Robert J. Blast (Leiden, Netherlands, 2004), 105ff.

and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’<sup>88</sup> These keys came to be understood as an extension to the priesthood as a whole of the powers to bind and loose that were given to Peter and his successors, the popes. This is an important passage, for it is here that justification was found for priestly absolution, and likewise it is here that the English evangelicals would venture to discredit this power of the keys, citing context and issuing a redefinition of its imagery.

The power of the keys gave the priest the ability to absolve the penitent of the guilt of their sins if they had made a full confession, a notion that had also changed considerably by the early sixteenth century.<sup>89</sup> In the early church people merely confessed the more serious or scandalous sins, and the penitentials for the most part expanded this to include a regular confession for all indiscretions, but particularly those that were public. By the later middle ages, all private sins were also to be confessed after a thorough examination, and stress was placed on the enumeration of sins lest any be forgotten. The penitent was to prepare for confession by probing the conscience for any forgotten sins, and a major effort of the confessor during confession was spent probing to the root and circumstances of sins that were confessed and any that were forgotten. Private sins had acquired increased emphasis. For the first time, all functions of conduct and thought were to be probed in order to make a thorough confession. If anything was intentionally omitted or if the penitent misled the confessor at any point, or if the penitent desired to continue in that sin, the entire absolution was void. If a sin was genuinely forgotten, then the absolution would stand, unless that sin was later remembered and absolution had to be sought

---

<sup>88</sup> ESV.

<sup>89</sup> For more on the ability of the confessor to absolve compared to the confessor merely declaring absolution, see Myers, *Poor Sinning Folk*, 18.

for that specific sin. The pivot in the issue of genuine and complete confession is whether or not the penitent intended to continue in sin or wished to amend his life.

Absolution did signal forgiveness, however a penalty still existed after the guilt had been removed. When a priest enacted the power of the keys, he absolved the penitent of the guilt of their sin. Yet since the early church, a penalty for these sins still had to be paid. This was commonly known as binding and loosing of sins as a reference to Matthew 16. A person who has had their guilt absolved still had a penalty to satisfy. This relationship between *poena* and *culpa* allowed ecclesiastical authorities to continue punishing sin through works of satisfaction. A person had two ways to satisfy the debt of sins: through the penances prescribed in confession or through purgatory after death. The prescription of satisfaction, while often arbitrary, was meant to offset time spent in purgatory.<sup>90</sup> If a person were to finish all of their works of satisfaction in this life, they would be able to skip purgatory entirely, as they would then have died with their *culpa* absolved and their *poena* satisfied. A person who failed to complete their satisfaction could expect time spent in purgatory to mount very quickly. It is not unreasonable to suspect that the majority who died believed they would spend several thousand years satisfying the debt of sin.

In the fifteen centuries before the start of the reformation in England, the doctrines of sin, confession, and satisfaction had seen considerable changes. What once was a public act and was unrepeatable, even if it involved private confession for the sake of counsel, eventually became entirely private. Its centre moved from a display of genuine sorrow for sins to the work of the priest in issuing absolution. Eventually, it

---

<sup>90</sup> Tentler argues in detail about the arbitrary nature of the imposed penances as largely the judgment of the confessor, and likewise subject to negotiation. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 16-17.

was the priest who was able to provide forgiveness of the *culpa* of sins and the individual to work towards satisfying the *poena* through the prescribed works. It was this development that the more influential English evangelicals would claim to recognize as an aberration of Biblical edicts and a misuse of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. These evangelicals denied the supremacy of the pope and the councils, and looked beyond late medieval developments towards the early church's use of confession. While they never advocated the three-tiered class structure of those in the church, those out of it, and the penitents seeking reconciliation, they did argue in favour of private confession for the purpose of spiritual counsel or healing the conscience. They ignored the Irish penitentials altogether, as their view of *sola Scriptura* precluded any inventions that occurred after the close of the canon.

These early English evangelicals were not alone in this. As the following chapter will show, others denied the efficacy and necessity of auricular confession and the priest's role in it. Within England, the Lollards were outspoken against the existing system, though they saw merit in a sorrow for sins and a confession of them. Even Erasmus, who remained within the Roman communion, downplayed the role of the priest in confession, and his view is notably closer to his great adversary in the debate over the bondage of the will than it is to official doctrine of the late medieval church. Martin Luther maintained the importance of confession to a spiritual leader for the purpose of counsel, even declaring it a sacrament initially. The lengthy survey in this chapter of the development of the tenets of contrition, confession, and satisfaction is necessary, for evangelicals did not simply reject these concepts out of hand. Rather, they reinterpreted them, seeking to restore the practice of the early church, in the light of Scripture alone.

## CHAPTER 2

### THREE REACTIONS TO LATE MEDIEVAL PENANCE: THE CONTRITIONIST, THE MORALIST, AND THE COMFORT OF THE BURDENED CONSCIENCE

Rome's attempts to establish a uniform system of penance over the course of the middle ages was not uncontroversial. A minimum of private annual confession was widely accepted by the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was built around the notions of ecclesiastical absolution for a penitent who had 'the desire to desire' of contrition and a penitent who could satisfy the penalty of the sin.<sup>1</sup> The first wave of evangelicals in England would uniformly deny both the work of the priest and of the penitent in effecting forgiveness. They believed that the only valid method of confession was the one practiced by the early church, without modifications. They sought the restoration of public confession, with private confession only existing for the purpose of spiritual counsel or comforting the conscience. The only valid hearer of any confession that would lead to forgiveness was the one who was injured by the sin: God. Yet these evangelicals were not without precedent or precursors in questioning aspects of the orthodox teaching. Martin Luther's influence on them was considerable, but even before this, significant questions had been raised by John Wycliffe and his followers, and by the moralist humanist Erasmus.

Wycliffe's critique of penance was influential in sixteenth-century England in part because Wycliffe was English, and his Wycliffite followers continued many of his themes for the two centuries between this 'Morning Star of the Reformation'

---

<sup>1</sup> Berndt Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, ed. Robert J. Blast (Leiden, Netherlands, 2004), 105ff.

and the Reformation itself. Luther also shared many of these themes. Both denied the necessity of confession, though they found virtue in private confession, but preferred confession directly to God as the offended party and without ecclesiastic mediation. Luther was a strong advocate for oral confession, while Wycliffe and his followers were more tolerant of it than they were its advocates, but similarities did exist. Most notably, both emphasized contrition, though Luther's reworking of the formula placed faith as the active ingredient instead of sorrow for sins. Erasmus, on the other hand, toed ever closer to dogma, as his unorthodox reworking was not necessarily inconsistent with papal decree. He denied its biblical precedent and any attempts at a coerced or mandatory confession, and the 1535 English translation of his treatise on confession is remarkably similar to many English evangelicals of this period in its rejection of abuses and acceptance of merits of confession.<sup>2</sup> However, he differed from Luther and Wycliffe as much as he differed from mainstream conservative theology in deferring any question of how the sacrament worked in favour of its creating a moral development in the penitent.

These three important reactions to late medieval penance must be studied independent to the reaction of the English evangelicals, for all three influences were exerted within three very different contexts and persons. Yet, in the area of sacramental penance or solafidistic repentance, their rejection of its abuses and acceptance of its virtues remained. They sought a rejection of the existing system and a reworking into one that was less open to abuse and more consistently followed the early church's model.

---

<sup>2</sup> Erasmus, Desiderius, *A lytle treatise of the maner and forme of confession*, ed. Iohan Biddell (London, 1535).

## The Contrition of the Morning Star

John Wycliffe was born in mid-1320s Northern England, just over a century after the Fourth Lateran's attempt at a universalization of penance. Sometime around 1350, he matriculated at Merton College, and it was through his time at Oxford that he promulgated the views that would lead to his 1377 papal censure, including his views on oral confession. Neither his explicit condemnation in 1382 nor his death in 1384 led to a silencing of these views, as the Wycliffites, though exhibiting a small spectrum of belief, particularly resembled Wycliffe in this area. In fact, no significant difference in their teachings on confession is distinguishable, though small variations in focus did exist. Wycliffe was as much a philosopher and logician as he was a theologian. His influence brought his proto-reformation ideas into the more sophisticated arena of university teaching, though by the late fifteenth century, any hints at Lollardy were banished from high academic thought.

Wycliffe and the Lollards defined confession in a way that allows for private oral confession to a priest. In his treatise on confession, Wycliffe defines its two manners: 'Summe is mad oonly to god truly by herte or mouþe. And sum confessioun is made to man, and þat may be on many maneres; ouþer opynly & generally, as men confesseden in þe oolde lawe; or priuely & rownyngly, as men confessen nowe-a-daies'.<sup>3</sup> A later Lollard manuscript entitled *Tractatus de confessione et penitencia* offers a similar definition, emphasizing the voluntary nature of true 'knowlechyng'.<sup>4</sup> In describing confession in this way, Wycliffe legitimizes both private and public confession. Oral confession that was coerced was

---

<sup>3</sup> John Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works of Wyclif* (London, 1880), 327-328.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), 296.

illegitimate, for coercion cannot present contrition.<sup>5</sup> Yet in all forms of confession, only confession made to God could bring forgiveness.

Lollards generally followed Lombard in stating that confession was not necessary for absolution, as the work was done through contrition, not confession. Katherine Little identifies this contritionist notion of confession as one of the defining doctrines of the varieties of Lollardy.<sup>6</sup> They went further than Lombard, however, in stating that, despite the virtues of confession, its then-current practice was harmful, prone to abuse, and misleading. Wycliffe complained of its abuses before asserting that the priest has no power to absolve. Rather, ‘Þou moste by sorowe of herte make aseeþ to God, and ellis God assoyliþ þee nought, and þanne assoyliþ nought þi viker’.<sup>7</sup> Logically, if God would not provide absolution, then the clergy’s absolution would also be insufficient, as the power of the keys belonged to God.

Wycliffe did not deny the virtue of private confession. His disdain was focused largely on an affirmation of its necessity.<sup>8</sup> He describes it as ‘not needful to man’, and as something that was a later invention that was not instituted by Christ.<sup>9</sup> He even invokes historical precedent as insisting that private confession was invented at the Fourth Lateran, an invocation that ignores the popularity of the penitentials in the preceding centuries.<sup>10</sup> This is echoed by a later anonymous Lollard who recognized the validity of general confession and private counsel in the early

---

<sup>5</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 327, 337.

<sup>6</sup> Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (South Bend, IN, 2006), 49.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Arnold, ed. *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, vol 3 (Oxford, 1869), 252.

<sup>8</sup> This denial of the necessity of confession formed a common point of accusation against the Lollards, and this is reflected either directly or indirectly in four of the sixteen points that the bishops made against the Lollards. *EW*, 19-20.

<sup>9</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 328.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 328, 337.

church.<sup>11</sup> Neither Wycliffe nor this later Lollard were attempting to use historical rhetoric in citing Innocent as the initiator of private confession so much as identify that the church had departed from the precepts of Christ and the apostles.<sup>12</sup> Wycliffe later argues that, if John the Baptist did not require confession and Jesus did not invoke it, then any person dying prior to its official proclamation at the Fourth Lateran had no chance of being in heaven.<sup>13</sup> Wycliffe was correct in that the institution of private oral confession for forgiveness was not a part of the early church, even if he did miss its actual institution by several centuries. The lack of Christological or apostolic initiation was central, for Wycliffe held that extra-biblical source material was insufficient for theological development.

Likewise, Wycliffe saw a system that was open to abuse. Despite his well-known anticlericalism, Wycliffe devotes very little energy to ecclesiastical abuses of the sacrament of penance in *Of Confession*, his most lengthy treatment on the matter. He states that its invention was designed to make men subject to the pope through an errant understanding of binding and loosing. A person who had not sinned against God might still feel compelled to confess under a ‘feyned’ penalty directed at an innocent person: ‘Crist made hise seruanter free, but antecrist haþ made hem bonde ageyne’.<sup>14</sup> Such an abuse of the power of the keys was the central cause for Wycliffe’s denunciation of oral confession. To Wycliffe, a false attempt to bind what had already been loosed, or, conversely, pronouncing absolution for one who did not have adequate contrition, was a sin. Since the priest could not possibly know if the contrition was authentic, all pronouncements of absolution made the priest guilty of

---

<sup>11</sup> Fiona Somerset, ed., *Four Wycliffite Dialogues* (Oxford, 2009), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 295ff.

<sup>13</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 329.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 329-331.

presumption.<sup>15</sup> This abuse in hearing the confession was itself a sin, as ‘feyned assoyling’ is an attempt to absolve through the power of the antichrist rather than Christ.<sup>16</sup>

The complaint of financial abuses of the clergy in confession was a recurring refrain. These abuses were commonly known, such that even an orthodox writer like Chaucer identified that a friar would prefer silver over the tears of contrition.<sup>17</sup> *Of Confession* is more concerned with the positive aspects of confession, but Wycliffe notes the inconsistency of any use of money in penance. He describes the confessor as finding sin where no sin exists in order to create an insurmountable penance that could be relieved through the purchase of livestock for the church. This inconsistency allows the rich to sin at will and the poor to despair at their inability to financially purchase forgiveness.<sup>18</sup> He also decries the nature of penance as arbitrary, as if forgiveness was based upon how much the penitent could afford.<sup>19</sup> An anonymous Lollard text, cited by Anne Hudson, indicts priests for giving men leave to sin, provided they pay a penitential tariff of ‘twenti shillyngis or more or lesse’.<sup>20</sup> In Hudson’s view, these financial abuses were the chief objection of many Lollards concerning confession.<sup>21</sup> It is unclear how much effect if any these clerical abuses had on Wycliffe’s doctrinal considerations for the effectiveness of contrition and confession. Surely they were a source of disdain for Wycliffe and his later followers, but it appears that Wycliffe’s doctrine of confession was built on logic and Scripture rather than a malice built on personal feelings or thoughts regarding the abuses.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>16</sup> *EWV*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston, 1987), 231.

<sup>18</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 334.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>20</sup> Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 296.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 299-300.

This bold stance requires a different understanding of the power of the keys. Whereas the traditional understanding was that Jesus had given Peter the power to bind and loose the guilt of sins on earth and in heaven in Matthew 19, Wycliffe describes the priests with this understanding as ‘the porter of helles gates’, placing the emphasis on binding rather than loosing.<sup>22</sup> Wycliffe maintains that, while the keys were related to the doctrine of sin and forgiveness, their use was not in confession but in the ‘autorite of god to preche & to teche christis weie, & to repreue wickud men boþe in word & in dede’.<sup>23</sup> The keys are both positive and negative, with their dual purpose to ‘teche christen men hou þei shulden lyve to god & man’ and the ‘repreue wickud men’. It is likely from the context that Wycliffe was here referring to the priest’s role of teacher/reprover during confession. In late medieval England, confession provided the priest a rare opportunity to offer private instruction, and the aspect of defining and categorizing sin was intended to be combined with counsel on how to avoid particular sins in the future. The confessor thus inquired as to the nature and circumstances of private sin, reprovved such sins, and offered advice on how to avoid them in the future.

Hudson notes that Wycliffe’s identification of the keys as knowledge and power were symbiotic. Wycliffe held that the key of power must be used in conjunction with the key of knowledge, for the knowledge and power come from God. Ecclesiastical absolution, therefore, was at best declarative and at worst misleading.<sup>24</sup> She uses similar language in comments on her *English Wycliffite Writings*, instead identifying that the priest was either declarative or blasphemous,

---

<sup>22</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 342.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), 294-295.

without regard for middle ground.<sup>25</sup> The application of Hudson's argument is consistent with Wycliffe's notion of confession. The idea that the keys are knowledge and power can also be consistent with Wycliffe's practical application of them as the teaching and reproof of confession, thus making the latter the practical application of the former, which is itself requisite.

This is consistent with Wycliffe's vision for maintaining private oral confession. He argued that confession has done much good in the church, but its purpose was changed to one of compulsion by the Fourth Lateran. Wycliffe supported the idea of frequent private confessions, as God may initiate the movement of the human conscience to confess.<sup>26</sup> Confessing to any Christian brother is also advisable whenever the person finds it profitable, though this confession was unrelated to any forgiveness of those sins.<sup>27</sup> The anonymous Wycliffite author of *Dialogue Between Jon and Richard* describes private confession as something that 'profiteþ more þan any oþer þat I knowe made of þe pope' before stressing that Christ's forgiveness is paramount.<sup>28</sup> Another Lollard answers charges of heresy for his view on confession by stating, 'We graunteyn þat schrifte of mouþe is needful to al suche þat ben counselid of God for to make it mekeliche'.<sup>29</sup> Some Lollards completely denied confession at their trials, though they affirmed it in their own writings.<sup>30</sup> Donald Smeeton argues that the Lollards were known to make absolute statements at their trials, and in this case the emphasis was on the inability to confess without a faithful priest. Since there were few if any faithful priests at that time, they

---

<sup>25</sup> *EWV*, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 337.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>28</sup> Somerset, *Four Wycliffite Dialogues*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> *EWV*, 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> For more on a general Lollard denial of confession, see Kenneth S. Cooper, *Revival of Lollardy in the English Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, 1981), 58.

denied it overtly.<sup>31</sup> Clearly Wycliffe and the Lollards had room for properly applied private oral confession.

However, their doctrine of confession acknowledged the need of an actual, cognitive acknowledgment of sins directly to God as the only adequate hearer of sin, for only the offended party can forgive the offence. Hudson summarizes, ‘God alone can forgive sin, since all sin is basically an offence against God; equally God alone can see into man’s heart and hence know whether he is truly contrite’.<sup>32</sup> This confession can be either internal or vocal, ‘by herte or by mouþe’, and its only prerequisite is contrition. *Of Confession* describes confession as necessary to effect ‘holynesse’, and although confession to man has worth, confession to God is worth more.<sup>33</sup> John Godwyn, an early sixteenth-century Lollard, argued against ecclesiastical confession in the case of disputes with other men, as forgiveness could only be offered by the offended man.<sup>34</sup> The idea of confessing and seeking earthly forgiveness from an offended neighbour in the context of also asking forgiveness from God might be a late Lollard development, as it is not featured in any prominent Lollard writings, though, as we will soon see, it is a significant feature of William Tyndale’s doctrine of repentance.

The variety of types of confession forced Wycliffites to clarify their terms by using a variety of different words to discern what type of confession they were referencing. The Middle English term ‘shriving’ was used almost exclusively to describe confession to a priest in the sacramental system. Similarly, the more pejorative ‘rownyng’ of sins was either used simply to highlight disdain or perhaps

---

<sup>31</sup> Donald Smeeton, *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale*, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, vol. 6. (Kirksville, MO, 1986), 214.

<sup>32</sup> *EWV*, 146.

<sup>33</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 327.

<sup>34</sup> Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 469.

to identify a confession that involved an enumeration of sins without any sense of their gravity.<sup>35</sup> When speaking of confession to an injured neighbour or to God, variations of the term ‘confess’ would suffice. More commonly, though, Wycliffe preferred ‘knowleching’, which simply meant acknowledging the offense to the person offended.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the virtues attached to private oral confession, such positive effects were limited. Sin still needed to be forgiven. It is one thing to argue for a therapeutic confession, yet another to receive absolution. In Wycliffe and Wycliffite doctrine, God was the only effective hearer of confession, for only God gives grace and eliminates sin. Ecclesiastical absolution was only efficacious if the sin had already been absolved by God.<sup>37</sup> God is also the only one who knows if the one confessing ‘seye treuþe vpon conscience, or wher þat he be contrite,’ since even the penitent cannot be sure of his own level of contrition.<sup>38</sup> Confession to God is based upon the movement of the conscience, which is affected by the level of contrition an individual has, and therefore was repeatable. Wycliffe believed in lifelong, irrevocable forgiveness based on true contrition, arguing that, ‘if a man synne neuer so miche ne so longe in his lyue, if he wole aske of god mercye & be contrite for his synne, god wole forgyue him his synne wiþouten siche iapes feyned of prestis’.<sup>39</sup> The repeatable nature of this confession is not inconsistent with the early church, which held that only public or heinous sins were unrepeatable as part of the

---

<sup>35</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 327, 334. Also see Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (South Bend, IN, 2006), 59-61.

<sup>36</sup> For more on this theme, see Little, *Confession and Resistance*, 59. Little makes similar observations, though her thesis is more pointed to the Lollard understanding of self through the language of confession.

<sup>37</sup> Smeeton, *Lollard Themes*, 215.

<sup>38</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 333.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

movement between classes. Instead, Wycliffe joins the late medieval concept of private religion with the early church's understanding of sin and confession.

Likewise, private internal confession to God naturally follows from the nature of a doctrine of sin that begins internally. Wycliffe's approach is that 'many synnen greuously wiþ-inne in herte, as did þe fend, so many men maken aseeþ bi sorrow of herte, þat may not speke or wanteþ oportuntee to shryue hym to man bi voice'.<sup>40</sup> Since interior thoughts can be sin, then an internal confession can be sufficient. Further, if the priest's task was to help the penitent discover all private internal sins, and God already knows these sins without a probing of the conscience, it follows that an effective confession must be made directly to God.

This confession to God was only effective if the penitent had true contrition. For Wycliffe, contrition was the sole active ingredient in the sacrament of penance. In comparing penance to David's harp in Psalm 22, he states that contrition is the framework and substance of the harp, singing to God is the 'holow part of þe harpe', and confession is what knits these two together.<sup>41</sup> One Lollard defended himself against claims of heresy by defining his view of contrition in its relationship to confession:

We graunteyn þat schrifte of mouþe is needful to al suche þat ben counselid of God for to make it mekeliche. 3ut very contricioun is more needful, forwhi wiþou3ten schrift of mouþe may a syneful man be saued in many a caas, but wiþou3ten very contricioun of herte may no syneful man of discrecioun be saved. Þerfore seiþ þ comyn lawe, as autorite witnessiþ, 'þe wylle of a man is rewarded, not þe werke: wille is in contricioun of hert, and werke is in schrifte of mouþe'.<sup>42</sup>

The author concludes that, since common law dictates that it is intent rather than action that is rewarded, contrition as an attribute of the will is the effective agent in

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *EWV*, 20-21.

absolution, not a result of the penitent during confession or the work of the priest in saying the words of the sacrament.

Contrition is by definition a sorrow for sins that makes a person desire to avoid those sins, and thus acceptable penance required amendment of life. Wycliffe wrote that contrition, because it is grounded in the love of Christ, makes the prospect of sinning again seem unappealing.<sup>43</sup> One Lollard wrote denying the ability of the friar to absolve, ‘Contricioun of hert and leuyng of synne be sufficient be himself, wiþ þe grace of God. þus were synnus foreuen in þolde lawe, and also in þe newel awe’.<sup>44</sup> This author separates contrition from repeating sin, stating that both are necessary. Another anonymous author echoes this point that a person will have remission of sins from God if he has ‘good wil to leue his synne [and] biddiþ Goddis mercy’.<sup>45</sup> The emphasis of this is on the denial of the necessity of a mediator, but in this denial, he defines the effective works of penance as amendment of life. Both Wycliffe and these Lollards agreed that contrition was the salvific hinge of confession, and that the desire to avoid sinning was a necessary ingredient of this contrition. In doing this, they provided a simple litmus test to the penitent to gauge adequate contrition.

With contrition as the most important aspect of Wycliffe’s penance and confession as unnecessary for salvation, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Lollard concept of the priesthood of all believers allowed for confession to any Christian. One Lollard writer argued that the power of the keys to teach and reprove is given to all who are ‘knouyng of his lawe’, irrespective of the place within the hierarchy of their ecclesiastical office.<sup>46</sup> This notion appears in 1428 in charges against William

---

<sup>43</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 339.

<sup>44</sup> Somerset, *Four Wycliffite Dialogues* (Oxford, 2009), 17.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>46</sup> *EW*, 22.

White and at best can be traced to Walter Brut, another Lollard, who used a layman's ability to remit sin through baptism as rationale that all men hold the power of the keys.<sup>47</sup> This idea is, however, also derived from Wycliffe directly. He argues from James 2 that 'men shulden shriue iche to oþur þe synnes þat þei fellen inne', emphasizing the need to 'knowleche' their human weakness as a sinner rather than their false holiness.<sup>48</sup> The idea of confessing sin to laymen remained a constant for both Wycliffe and the Lollards.

Wycliffe and the Lollards agreed that private oral confession had a place in the culture of the church. They reserved their disdain for any requirement of confession, for coercion negates contrition as the active ingredient in penance. This contrition was the hinge upon which the entire sacrament swung, for without it, confession was invalid. Likewise, confession to God was encouraged, as God was the party offended by the sin. This confession must be preceded by contrition, which was verified by the desire to avoid future sin. Wycliffe was anathematized in part because of these views, and the term Lollard became synonymous with heretic.<sup>49</sup> However, there is at least one important figure who remained within the Roman communion who would share some of these important views.

### **The Moralistic Humanist**

A second important influence on the English evangelicals was one whose ideas of reform were on moral grounds, as he never repudiated most core elements of dogma.

Desiderius Erasmus was a Dutch Renaissance humanist who, despite being an

---

<sup>47</sup> Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 298.

<sup>48</sup> Wycliffe, *Unprinted English Works*, 344.

<sup>49</sup> Anne Hudson, Anthony Kenny, 'Wyclif, John (d. 1384)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004; online edn, Sept 2010 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30122>, accessed 12 February 2015].

outspoken critic of medieval religion, remained within the Roman communion until his death in 1536 at the age of seventy. His rise to prominence was around the turn of the sixteenth century, as in 1499 he was already personally acquainted with John Colet, Thomas More, and John Fisher. He is unique for this study, not only because his initial prominence predated that of the evangelicals, but despite criticisms of external ceremonies and established structures, his often ambiguous yet practical theology kept him within ecclesiastical graces.<sup>50</sup> Though his influence stood tall, his tenure in England was brief, having served as professor at Queens' College in Cambridge from 1510-1515. It is possible that this brief stay was enough to lean Cambridge even further in the direction of Renaissance humanism. This Cambridge connection is an important feature of Erasmus' theology, for most prominent evangelicals began as Cambridge men who were exposed to an Erasmian humanism at an early age. Its cry of 'ad fontes' and its love of letters was important for any theological discussions, for biblical humanists held that the most reliable sources were those closer to the original. This understanding of source reliability was cause for the evangelical appeal to prioritizing the early church understanding of Scripture over that of the later councils and popes.<sup>51</sup>

Erasmus was not a strict theologian, as he was unconcerned with many common speculative arenas of theology. He had an aversion to precise definitions of theological statements, as he found unnecessary any theological discussions unrelated to matters of thought and behaviour. John Payne argues that, despite this distinctive attitude, it would be a mistake to consider Erasmus as lacking a developed

---

<sup>50</sup> Wycliffe also considered himself a part of the Roman communion, as his efforts were not directed at a total abolition of the existing order. Regardless, he was excommunicated posthumously, and his bones were exhumed and burned as a statement to his unorthodoxy.

<sup>51</sup> Literally, 'back to the fountains', which implies purity of source.

and mature theology.<sup>52</sup> This is clear in his notion of confession, which, while fairly unique, is entirely uncomplicated. Erasmus' sacramental penance could best be described as moralist, deferring doctrinal submission to the authority of the church in its emphasis on good works. Much of his views on what effects absolution and satisfaction does not fit neatly into the mould of Late Medieval Thomism or Scotism, and Erasmus spent relatively equal effort clarifying his argument to those within the church than to those whose dissenting opinions who were already clearly opposed to the prevailing models of Late Medieval penance. His interests were primarily practical: How does confession influence a person to live a more moral life?

This moralist concept of confession refused to answer the question relevant to the contrition-confession-satisfaction formula. Erasmus accepted that all of those aspects of the formula were necessary, but refused to pontificate on the levels of contrition necessary for an adequate confession, and likewise what constituted a formal and complete confession in order to effect satisfaction. In the opening paragraphs of his 1524 *Exomologesis sive modus confitendi*, which was translated into English in 1535 and is his most thorough writing on confession, Erasmus alerts his readers not to look for these theological nuances because they have been so extensively treated by others elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> He refers the matter of attrition and contrition and their role in confession to the 'subtile scotistes'.<sup>54</sup>

Tentler notices this in relationship to his general disdain for theological writings in the vernacular for the common person to slave over definitions. He argues that Erasmus found a rough examination of conscience and knowledge of the creed and basics of the Bible to be sufficient. Instead of lengthy conscience-

---

<sup>52</sup> John B. Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Chicago, 1970), 7.

<sup>53</sup> Erasmus, *Exomologesis sive modus confitendi*, 1535, sig. A6r.

<sup>54</sup> *Exomologesis*, 1535, sig. E4r.

searching, sermons were sufficient preparation for confession. This identification forms the basis of Tentler's view of Erasmus as the *via media* regarding confession between the church and the evangelicals.<sup>55</sup> Tentler later argues that 'there is not in all of Erasmus' writings a rational explanation of the value of confession that will give it the value in forgiving and consoling it enjoyed in medieval religion. If you want to know exactly what Erasmus meant by confession—what are its parts, why it is advantageous, when it is necessary – you will find only the usual confusion'.<sup>56</sup> This moralism, emphasized at the expense of a developed systematic theology, drove Erasmus' doctrine of confession.

Despite this deferral, Erasmus provides some clues to his biblical understanding of sacramental penance. Perhaps his most controversial argument on sacramental penance is that its authority was not rooted in *de iure divino*. One way he does this is through a denial of the biblical foundation of the contrition-confession-satisfaction formula, as seen in his annotations of 2 Corinthians 7:10. He tempers the controversy in his 1522 edition by arguing that a direct biblical origin for this formula is not required for its official ecclesiastical approval to be necessary. Such approval is sufficient for acceptance. Likewise, a true repentance, defined as turning from sin, must include all three elements of this formula.<sup>57</sup> The lack of Scriptural authority for the moving parts of penance is unimportant if it is effective at promoting a turning from sin towards morality.

A lack of Biblical foundation was not the only reason for Erasmus' denying confession as deriving from *de iure divino*. His 1522 *Annotationes* on Acts 19:18

---

<sup>55</sup> Tentler, 'Forgiveness and Consolation in the Religious Thought of Erasmus', in *Studies in the Renaissance* vol. 12 (1965), 113, 118-119. Erasmus considered himself a sort of middle way between some aspects of confession, particularly involving its origins. Erasmus, *Exomologesis*, 1535, sig. B2v.

<sup>56</sup> Tentler, 'Forgiveness and Consolation', 127.

<sup>57</sup> *Annotationes* (1522). See also Tentler, 'Forgiveness and Consolation', 112.

forcefully defended this stance, and prompted a response by the Spanish humanist Diego López de Zúñiga. Erasmus replied in 1524 with an apology concerning his use of the less definitive terms *opinor*, 'I think', and *videtur*, 'seems'.<sup>58</sup> He denied penance's institution *de iure divino*, partly on the grounds of faulty Latin translations, but even more on the lack of biblical evidence. For instance, when Jesus tells the recently healed leper to show himself to the priest, that appeal was to display confirmation of the healing, denying an allegorical interpretation of Matthew 8. Erasmus appealed to Augustine's understanding of the leper as a heretic instead of a sinner, and this denial of the divine institution of penance allowed for a criticism of its contemporary practice.

More importantly, Erasmus recognized the historical fact that private annual confession as it was then practiced was clearly not instituted by Christ, and that its current form was considerably different from the original form. He does so without denying the authenticity of either form, arguing that the confession that Christ had not ordained was merely confession as it was then being practiced. This did not make it invalid.<sup>59</sup> He conceded that the early church did maintain some form of confession, but that form was a general public confession that denied the pricking of the conscience and the enumeration of sins. Private confession began as merely private spiritual counselling. Payne considers this Erasmus' 'sharpest controversy', as he was forced to defend this position and the lack of divine institution by declaring that penance can and should be changed to fit the needs of penitents over time.<sup>60</sup> Erasmus devotes *Exomologesis* to a middle way between the two sides of this debate, where he maintains that it is not necessary for Christ to have ordained it, for

---

<sup>58</sup> Erasmus, *Apologia ad conclusiones Stunicae* (1524), LB, ix, 389B-D. Also see Thomas Tentler, 'Forgiveness and Consolation', 113.

<sup>59</sup> Erasmus, *Apologia ad conclusiones Stunicae*.

<sup>60</sup> Payne, *Erasmus*, 184.

it has gathered strength over time to have the consent of the laity and the authority of the pope.<sup>61</sup> However, if it were to lose its usefulness, it should be eliminated because of its ‘innumerable inconuenientes’. Erasmus denied the likelihood of this, though, citing that even the Lutherans maintain that confession has a place.<sup>62</sup>

For Erasmus, confession was not intended to be an institution that bound consciences and harvested anxiety. It was designed to be a source of comfort for the wounded sinner that prompted him to amendment of life. Yet, this was not the practical outcome of confession as it was then practiced. Erasmus was concerned with the abuses of confession, just as the Lollards before him and the evangelicals of his own time, but his reworking was built on a moralist framework and a re-education of confessors to be better physicians of the soul. The reworking sought to eliminate probing the conscience and enumerating sins in an effort to highlight the love of God. Unlike the Lollards, no significant soteriological change was promoted. Erasmus’ concern was merely pragmatic and must be observed anytime a conscience is pricked.

This is highlighted in *Annotationes*, which appeared in two editions with considerable variety between 1516 and 1522. The preface to the 1516 *Novum Testamentum, Paraclesis*, argued in favour of a vernacular Scripture. The annotations of the New Testament provided Erasmus the opportunity to expound further on the meaning of passages of Scripture, at times advocating changes. One of the better established changes Erasmus promoted was from his notes on Matthew 3:2, where he advocated removing ‘do penance’, *poenitentiam agite*, in favour of ‘repent’, *resipiscite*. This shift also occurs in his 1516 *Novum Instrumentum*, though

---

<sup>61</sup> *Apologia ad conclusiones Stunicae*, sig. A8v-B1r.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. A5v-A6r.

this challenge to the notion of satisfaction invited controversy, and later editions included a more amiable *'Poeniteat vos'*, which was translated by James Simpson as 'May you feel penance'.<sup>63</sup> This provided for a shift away from the ecclesiastical rite and towards an amendment of life. This does not indicate a concept of penance that relied on faith alone as the source of forgiveness as it does with the evangelicals, but rather it highlights the moralistic view of turning from sins and living morally, regardless of how and why forgiveness for those sins is given. Further, if a person did in fact express sufficient sorrow for sins and confess them, the need to confess again would disappear, for repentance was a turning from sin. This idea is found in his denial of the need to enumerate sins to a priest.<sup>64</sup>

Payne notes that prior to *Exomologesis*, most of Erasmus' published thoughts on confession were critical of its practice.<sup>65</sup> This stance is incontrovertible, as Erasmus was a well-known critique of many practices of the late medieval church that were unconcerned with morality. Yet penance is one area that necessarily requires amendment of life, and Erasmus nearly abandons the sacrament in favour of its virtue. This is clearly seen in *Exomologesis*, where Erasmus identifies nine advantages of confession. Its 'chiefe vtilite' is not absolution but a debasement of human pride, for 'there can not be any more submission, or humblynge & mekenyng of a man than that one man willingly do caste down hym selfe at the feete of another man'. He continues that this humility is a necessary culmination of contrition, identifying humility for the purpose of a permanent turning from sin as the most important aspect of confession to a priest. Erasmus is clearly highlighting

---

<sup>63</sup> James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 74.

<sup>64</sup> Payne, *Erasmus*, 191.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199.

the moral benefits of both contrition and confession.<sup>66</sup> The very role of the priest as ‘phisician of the soule’ is to soothe the conscience of the penitent in order to show them how great full restoration to forgiveness is.<sup>67</sup> Erasmus does not ignore priestly absolution, but rather focuses more on the tangible temporal effects of confession. Further, Erasmus provides a brief history of confession, where he argues that the early church used confession for those guilty of ‘any haynous and odious crime’ to force a fear of sin or provoke amendment of life for those that were not sorry. He describes the movement between classes of those in the church, those outside, and the various levels of penitent, in order to show the effects of public shaming on moral behaviour.

Of the nine advantages of confession listed in *Exomologesis*, the majority are related more to morality than absolution or satisfaction. The second benefit is listed as helping people identify their sins in the perspective of everyday life, much like a person who has a disease may not know how that disease is affecting others.<sup>68</sup> The third is to avoid boasting of certain sins such as ‘defylyng of fayre and beautifull damsels or the ouer comyng of noble & riche wyues’, or other public interest sins like being shrewd in handling money.<sup>69</sup> The fourth is to offer consolation to those who are overcome with despair about sins that have very little social impact, such as nocturnal emissions. The fifth utility listed is the remission of sins, which requires a hatred of the offence and a ‘stedfast purpose to forbear and refrayne in tyme after to come’.<sup>70</sup> That absolution is listed fifth rather than first is enough to indicate that Erasmus saw the utility of confession to be best served morally rather than

---

<sup>66</sup> *Exomologesis*, 1535, sig. B6v.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. B7v-B8r.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* sig. C6v.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. D2r.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. D6v.

soteriologically. The remaining advantages of confession—abstinence from sin as the natural result of contrition, helping the penitent to know himself, the counsel and prayer of the priest to avoid sin, and restoration of fellowship to the church—at least secondarily, if not primarily, relate to morality and abstinence from antisocial behaviour.<sup>71</sup>

Erasmus maintained that private oral confession to a priest was beneficial for the penitent. He did little to elaborate on any necessary reforms to the ritual of confession itself, though he was clearly an advocate of using confession to promote amendment of life. Malcolm Yarnell has established that despite Erasmus' criticism of individual priests, he argues in favour of their propagating the faith. Erasmus after all held that the priest's primary role is not to consecrate the sacraments but to teach and shepherd the laity.<sup>72</sup> Yarnell's context is within an argument of Erasmus' notion of a royal priesthood, but his assessment is consistent with Erasmus' view on confession. Through it, the priest encouraged the penitent to live morally and avoid sin. Erasmus advocated the concept of priestly absolution, though he did not elaborate on how this absolution was effected or how it related to consolation or avoiding sin. On matters of contrition, he referred externally, preferring to keep the discussion on confession rather than its precursors or effects, absolution and satisfaction. Luther followed Erasmus in many of the principles of biblical humanism, and was highly influenced by his views on a vernacular Scripture. Their famous debate on the bondage of the will was not the only point of departure between these two, however, as the pivot of confession for Luther's view of anxious souls was at odds with Erasmus' strictly moralistic position.

---

<sup>71</sup> *Exomologesis*, 1535, sig. D6r-E5v.

<sup>72</sup> Malcolm B. Yarnell, *Royal Priesthood in the English Reformation* (Oxford, 2013), 87.

As will be seen, Erasmus' influence on an English evangelical notion of penance and repentance is clear. His denial of *de iure divino* was a major victory for evangelicals in the formation of the King's Book, and the role of good works and an amended life as the outcome of repentance was a major factor in the evangelical effort to counter the arguments that their notion of justification by faith denied the need for good works. Many evangelicals, too, were highly contritionist, seeking forgiveness through the sorrow and turning from the sin technically independent of confession. An obvious difference is in the evangelical attempts to answer more nuanced theological questions, but this is because of their denial of papal authority and inability to defer the question to the councils on the grounds of *sola scriptura*. Yet it is the humanist notion of '*ad fontes*' that brought the evangelical appeal back to Scripture as the fountainhead for proper theology, and as such provided the backbone of their answers to particular theological questions regarding the workings of penance.

### **Faith and the Comfort of the Burdened Conscience**

Perhaps of all the great conservative and evangelical thinkers of the late medieval and early modern periods, the individual who wrote the most candidly on sin and penance in the early modern period was also the one who is often credited with providing the impetus for the official start of the Protestant Reformation. This impetus, *95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, shows that Martin Luther was concerned with absolution and satisfaction from the very beginning.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Alister McGrath argues that this popular consideration may be misleading. While the *95 Theses* did in fact bring Luther into the public eye, it was not until 1522 when he returned from protective isolation in Wartburg that his reforming efforts went beyond academia. It was this return that sparked the actual Lutheran Reformation, as Andreas Karlstadt was ineffective in Luther's place in the interim. Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford, 1998), 160.

The centrality of penance in the *95 Theses* is often forgotten in favour of the more specific issue of indulgences, though the Harvard Classics edition subtitled it ‘Disputation of Dr. Martin Luther Concerning Penitence and Indulgences’.<sup>74</sup> He also wrote directly to penance in several important places, including a 1519 treatise entitled *The Sacrament of Penance*, the 1520 *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and his 1529 catechism, which included instructions for Christians to know the purpose and methods of confession. He preached in favour of confession in 1524, and his *Large Catechism* boldly exclaims ‘when I exhort you to go to confession, I am doing nothing but exhorting you to be a Christian’.<sup>75</sup> He also often worked his view of absolution into other arguments on the conscience and ecclesiology, indicating the centrality of forgiveness for his theology. Although he never visited England, Luther played a highly influential role to evangelicals in England, especially with many leading English evangelicals escaping to Wittenberg and spending time under his pastoral care.

Before his conversion, the doctrine of penance developed in Luther a compulsion to work harder to achieve a greater certainty of satisfaction. He devoted himself to frequent confession, fasting, pilgrimages, and other penitential works, and the uncertainty of that satisfaction created an angst that on one occasion nearly left him dead.<sup>76</sup> As Luther developed his doctrine of justification, he began to move the pivot of penance away from its inception with contrition and towards faith as its new centre. Contrition was still necessary, but was directed at a helplessness wrecked by a general state of sinfulness, not at the individual acts of sin. The words of absolution remained important, though they were merely a declaration of God’s absolution, as

---

<sup>74</sup> Charles William Eliot, ed., ‘The Ninety-Five Theses’, in *Harvard Classics*, vol. 36 (New York, 1909-1914).

<sup>75</sup> Martin Luther, *Book of Concord*, 479.

<sup>76</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA, 2009), 40-42.

the power of the keys belonged to God, not the episcopacy. Confession was maintained and even a focus of Luther, but without the need for a mediator, salvific confession could only be made directly to God as the offended party. Oral confession was no longer merely sacerdotal, as it could be made to any other Christian. Its purpose was entirely the comfort of the conscience. This was important for Luther, as evidenced by his reversal of Karlstadt's abolition of private confession while he was in protective exile in Wartburg Castle.<sup>77</sup> The editor of one volume of *Luther's Works*, Christopher Boyd Brown, shows how Luther's view of private confession was unique and bold, as it 'put him at odds not only with adherents of the traditional theology but also, over the course of the 1520s and 1530s, with a range of protestant opponents'.<sup>78</sup>

Human inability to fulfil God's law, and thus to achieve salvation, is necessary to Luther's understanding of sin and repentance. This is central to the *Heidelberg Disputation*, which introduces a concept of sin that does not provide for a human ability to avoid it.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, with Christ's work on the cross replacing man's efforts as the focus of repentance, this work replaces the human need to earn satisfaction through penitential works. This is Luther's theology of the cross: Christ's redemptive act is the only source of knowledge of God and satisfaction.<sup>80</sup> Any attempt to understand Luther's view of forgiveness must begin with how he understood the role of the cross in satisfaction for sins. Walther von Loewenich describes Luther's theology of the cross as the source for all theological knowledge,

---

<sup>77</sup> *LW*, vol. 51, 97-99.

<sup>78</sup> *LW*, vol. 69, 317-318.

<sup>79</sup> 'Heidelberg Disputation', *Book of Concord*. The disputation argues that God's law and human works both lead to mortal sin, and that free will only serves to lead men to evil. Reception of the grace of Christ begins by having despair at this condition, and acceptance of this grace is a passive response to faith.

<sup>80</sup> See Alister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford, 1991), 149ff. McGrath presents this revelation as only for those who have faith, as only they can understand the cross's meaning.

for ‘the cross of Christ is significant here not only for the question concerning redemption and the certainty of salvation, but it is the center that provides perspective for all theological statements’.<sup>81</sup>

Also important for Luther’s doctrine of forgiveness is the notion that man becomes satisfied through the sharing of attributes as if in a marriage. Man’s sinfulness is shared with Christ, who, at the cross, defeated that sinfulness. Christ’s righteousness is then shared with man.<sup>82</sup> Bernhard Lohse identifies the uniqueness of this view for the early sixteenth century by comparing it with the influence of Anselm or Peter Abelard on Luther’s soteriology. While similarities existed, Lohse notes that Luther saw satisfaction and the passive human acceptance as a result only of the cross rather than Christ’s teaching as added to the formula.<sup>83</sup> The New Finnish School, a group that interprets Luther’s soteriology as in agreement with the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis, takes this view even further to argue that Christ shared more than righteousness by allowing his deity to be consigned to the newfound righteous partner, thus making divinity out of man.<sup>84</sup> In each of these interpretations of Luther, satisfaction remains the pivot in man’s justification, which is the goal of penance and repentance.

Understanding Luther’s view of justification through his theology of the cross and through the exchange of man’s guilt and penalty with Christ’s righteousness allows for the beginning of his notion of penance. The *95 Theses* provides a radical new definition of penance and repentance, built around this

---

<sup>81</sup> Walther von Loewenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* (Belfast, 1976), 17-22.

<sup>82</sup> How Luther understood the righteousness of God around 1520-1530 is contentious. See Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Cambridge, 2005), 218-223. ‘God is righteous in the sense that God rewards the person who does *quod in se est* with grace, and punishes the person who does not’.

<sup>83</sup> Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology* (Edinburgh, 1999), 225-227.

<sup>84</sup> See, for instance, Tuomo Manermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification* (Minneapolis, 2005).

solafidism. Luther begins building his case against indulgences by redefining penance in the context of repentance. If the corruption of ‘purchasing’ forgiveness was to be extrapolated, it must begin with the foundation, and that foundation is found in Jesus’ call to repent in Matthew 3. Yet Erasmus’ Greek New Testament rendered the Vulgate’s *poenitentiam agite*, ‘do penance’, with *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*), ‘repent’. Roland Bainton identifies this as a pivotal discovery in Luther’s young solafidism.<sup>85</sup> Luther’s first two theses identify this mistranslation and offer an alternative translation of *metanoia* as repentance. He then defines repentance not as an act progressing from an annual sacrament, but as a lifelong internal turning from sin that produces external acts.<sup>86</sup> Luther’s cross theology was yet in its chrysalis stage, yet by beginning with this redefinition, Luther indicated that he must begin by proving the corruption of indulgences by the papacy through redefining the very fabric of penance into a passive internal turning from sin. He still accepted the legitimacy of some indulgences, though this does not seem to play into his redefinition of penance.

Theses five through seven are concerned with the pope’s inability to remit penalty or guilt, and God’s unwillingness to remit guilt for anyone who does not submit to a priest who is adequately representative of God. Luther argues subtly that God is the supreme authority, not the pope, and that even though the Bishop of Rome may misrepresent God, it is still important that the genuine priests maintain their role as God’s representatives, and they likewise require man’s submission. Theses eleven and twelve are also important, for Luther asserts that historical precedent shows these imposed penances were unrelated to death and purgatory in

---

<sup>85</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 71. For other similarities between Luther and Erasmus, see 111-115.

<sup>86</sup> Bainton quotes but does not cite Luther’s view of casual repentance as hypocrisy. ‘There must be a great earnestness about it and a deep hurt if the old man is to be put off’. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 46.

the early church, as they were intended to be tests of contrition, and therefore were prescribed prior to the proclamation of absolution. Though concerned with the idea of turning from sin rather than sacramental penance, he does not reject the need for proper contrition. These rapid-fire theses on penance served to introduce the very purpose of this document, which is to deny that indulgences have any effect since repentance has already secured the goal of these indulgences.

Luther expounded upon this new understanding of penance a few months later in writing to his mentor, John Staupitz. He describes how one of Staupitz's teachings inspired a word study of the key words and phrases involving penance in the Bible. The result of this search was a new understanding of 'penitence' that transformed the word from bitter to sweet because its foundation is Christ. Luther describes taking *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*) a step further than he had previously, as he defined it as 'coming to one's senses', and as 'a knowledge of one's own evil, gained after punishment has been accepted and error acknowledged'. This happens only by love through an inner change in heart. This new understanding of *metanoia* was for Luther an apt summary of the Pauline corpus, and thus was at the centre of justification and human behaviour.<sup>87</sup> It was this understanding that brought him at odds with the existing teaching on penance, for translating the Greek *metanoia* into the Latin *poenitentiam agite* forces for Luther a necessarily insufficient human cooperation in satisfaction and a laborious confession. The *95 Theses* and Luther's explanation to Staupitz show Luther's concept of repentance as the solution for where the conservative notion of penance had derailed. He does not merely deconstruct the sacrament, but rather provides his argument as to how satisfaction *a*

---

<sup>87</sup> C.M. Jacobs, ed., transl. 'Letter to John Staupitz', *Works of Martin Luther with Introductions and Notes*, vol. 2 (Alexandria), 42-46.

*poena et a culpa* of sin is effected through Christ. Luther is not here focused on Christ as the means of that satisfaction. His focus was on the morality of repentance as turning from sin, and only provided his views on justification as they related to the doctrine of indulgences.

In 1519, Luther wrote a short treatise entitled *The Sacrament of Penance*. Bainton argues that publisher John Froben including it in a small compilation of four of Luther's other works was a large reason for Luther's success as a reformer.<sup>88</sup> In this treatise, he remains preoccupied with indulgences, though more succinctly in the context of assurance of forgiveness and the role of the conscience. While Luther's theology of the cross was important for his doctrine of sin and forgiveness, his emphasis when discussing confession and penance was comforting the conscience, not forgiveness. He still considered penance a sacrament, along with baptism and the Eucharist, though this view is clearly still developmental. This unique view would later be shared by evangelicals in England as they worked on the first official statements of faith of the new English church. *Sacrament of Penance* was written to counter the view that penance was taxing to the conscience through the contrition forced by probing the conscience. His alternative notion offers assurance on the grounds that a 'glad and joyful' conscience has reconciled the sinner with the forgiver. He defines forgiveness in the terms of the conscience being freed 'that a person's sins no longer bite him or make him uneasy', and can be known as genuine if it removes 'the heart's fear and timidity before God'.<sup>89</sup> The power of the keys was also intended for 'comforting and strengthening the conscience'.<sup>90</sup> That he defines this forgiveness in terms of assurance rather than justification is telling of how

---

<sup>88</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 107.

<sup>89</sup> *LW*, vol. 35, 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

burdensome Luther saw the system of enumerating sins and probing consciences. He later identifies that satisfaction is made through Christ's death, yet bluntly states that 'no one can be saved without a joyful conscience and a glad heart toward God', which he states as a defining characteristic of forgiveness.<sup>91</sup> Assurance and a calm conscience were important markers for the forgiveness of sins.

While the soothing of consciences and assurance of salvation were important, Luther also describes how forgiveness is attained through penance. Luther separates the sacrament of penance from the separate notion of penance. His definition of penance maintains the contrition-confession-satisfaction formula. Yet this penance is not a part of the sacrament of penance, for all three aspects of this formula are abused and are only results of forgiveness, not the cause of it.<sup>92</sup> They are all important aspects of Christian life, but do not contribute to salvation in the way the sacramental system intended. Luther is brief on contrition and satisfaction, for these aspects are layered in the rest of the treatise. His view on confession, however, is unique, for it is based entirely on the conscience. Luther argues that venial sins should be confessed directly to God, but only God makes the distinction between venial and mortal sins. The remedy is to only confess sins to a priest that are particularly taxing on the conscience. However, it is important for a person to confess often, for frequently hearing the promise of forgiveness should help strengthen assurance.<sup>93</sup>

Luther's understanding of the 'sacrament of penance', as opposed to 'penance', is distinct from the traditional interpretation of the sacrament, and reflects his solafidism. He maintains three parts: the words of absolution, the ability of grace

---

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-21.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

to forgive sins, and faith in the promises of God. Faith is the most necessary ingredient in this formula, for it ‘alone makes the sacraments accomplish that which they signify’. He describes faith as replacing contrition or works of satisfaction as the only necessary ingredient.<sup>94</sup> The faith is specifically directed at God’s promise of the power of the keys for the priest to loose, and he argues that ‘every absolution depends on’ the priest reciting the words of absolution as a sign of the sacrament.<sup>95</sup> For Luther, a sacrament required a ‘divinely instituted visible sign’ connected to a divine promise, and that sign in penance was the required words of absolution. Assurance in this faith is important, for any person who does not believe their sins are forgiven is a ‘heathen’ who claims to know more than God. Luther is careful to identify that only God can forgive, and that this pronouncing of absolution is only the priest pronouncing an existing absolution through the faith of the penitent.

In late 1520, Luther published three treatises that went to the heart of sacramental theology. *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* was directed at attacking the sacramental system and affirming his definition of what constitutes a sacrament. This sacramental repudiation caused Erasmus to declare that Luther’s breach with Rome was irreparable.<sup>96</sup> In the section’s conclusion, Luther for the first time denies the sacramental status of penance. In its introduction, he appears to identify penance as a sacrament by listing it alongside baptism and the Eucharist. This tactic is used to further develop his definition of what constitutes a sacrament.<sup>97</sup> Yet in his section on penance, he fails to identify its sign and makes no mention of its sacramental status. At the end of the treatise, he denies its sacramental status for

---

<sup>94</sup> This idea is matured by the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, with contrition and faith serving as the only two elements in repentance. ‘Augsburg Confession’, *Book of Concord*, 178ff.

<sup>95</sup> *LW*, vol. 35, 13, 16.

<sup>96</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 126.

<sup>97</sup> *Works of Martin Luther*, 587-88. He states that, technically speaking, there is only one sacrament, the Word, with three signs, of which penance is one.

two reasons: penance had no visible sign attached to it, and more importantly, it was ‘nothing but a return to baptism’.<sup>98</sup> He denied his earlier affirmation that the words of absolution were the sign, but by connecting it with baptism, he is able to show how penance, like baptism, provided absolution through the spoken word. He also chastises the papacy for replacing faith with contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Bainton argues that the elimination of penance’s sacramental status was incomplete, as contrition remained important for Luther’s notion of consolation.<sup>99</sup> Luther maintains contrition’s role in forgiveness, though only after being attached to faith. He maintains that contrition is ‘precious’, but is only found conjoined to a faith that

startles and terrifies the conscience and thus renders it contrite, and afterwards, when it is contrite, raises it up, and consoles it; so that the truth of God’s threatening is the cause of contrition, and the truth of his promise the cause of consolation, if it be believed. By such faith a man merits the forgiveness of sins.<sup>100</sup>

Penance is therefore a doctrine of consolation for Luther, even as contrition remains an active ingredient in forgiveness. Contrition was only activated by properly placed faith in the promises of absolution by God independent of ecclesiastical mediation.

While the emphasis on contrition caused the unnecessary burdening of consciences, Luther held that confession and satisfaction as his opponents understood them were ‘the chief workshop of greed and violence’.<sup>101</sup> Instead, Luther cites the Gospels and I John for maintaining the necessity of properly applied confession, and even affirms private confession after admitting there is no Scriptural basis for it. He describes it as the chief cure for distressed consciences because of the comfort in God’s promises spoken through the mouth of another Christian, as the

---

<sup>98</sup> Martin Luther, ‘The Babylonian Captivity of the Church’, in *Three Treatises*, A.T.W. Stienhil, trans. (Philadelphia, 1970), 258. *Works of Martin Luther*, 693ff.

<sup>99</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 126

<sup>100</sup> *Works of Martin Luther*, 652-53.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 654.

power of the keys are given to all Christians. This eliminates an enumeration of sins, as special circumstances and hidden sins are unimportant to the conscience seeking comfort. It also denies satisfaction as a part of penance on the grounds that faith has already purchased forgiveness. Luther only discusses satisfaction in the negative, as his view of repentance involved turning from sins, and forgiveness was the product of faith, not words of absolution and works prescribed by a priest.

Luther preached a sermon in 1524 that showed some maturation of this view, though its basic elements remained intact. He argues for three kinds of confession: one by faith to God, another by love to an offended neighbour, and a third ordered by the pope. Confession to God must be ongoing and ceaseless, as it both praises God's grace and teaches the gravity of sin. Confession to neighbour is required, and God will not forgive the sins of anyone who does not forgive his neighbour. Luther uses the Pope's confession to denounce any form of coerced confession as ineffective. He then describes legitimate absolution in a way that is consistent with his preoccupation with the spoken word. Private confession to another Christian produces absolution because that confession is a more personal form of preaching God's promises. Faith remains the active ingredient in private confession, as faith in the promises of God brings comfort. Yarnell argues that Luther's doctrine of the universal priesthood is what allowed any Christian to absolve.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, it was the spoken words of absolution uttered by any Christian on account of this priesthood that was effected by a faith that comforted the conscience. This view of confession remained consistent until at least 1529, where his *Exhortation to Confession* argued an identical doctrine of confession and absolution.<sup>103</sup> It even called for a double

---

<sup>102</sup> Yarnell, *Royal Priesthood*, 91.

<sup>103</sup> 'An Exhortation to Confession', *Book of Concord 4*.

absolution, as forgiving a neighbour who has confessed was necessary to be forgiven by God. This slightly more mature view is different only in an emphasis of confession as having two parts: an active contrition and desire for comfort and a passive reception of God's promises. The active aspect remains bound to the passive aspect by faith, which is the important part of confession.<sup>104</sup>

Luther's doctrine of penance was built into his solafidism, though his emphasis was often not on salvation but comforting the burdened conscience. Faith is the agent of both salvation and comfort, and contrition, the work of the priest, or the work of the individual was actively denied. Contrition, confession, and absolution maintained a place in this doctrine, but faith is the only ingredient that allows them to work. It is not overreaching to see Luther's emphasis on penitential comfort in his disdain for a doctrine of merits and uncertainty of forgiveness. Luther sought to remedy this through a view of penance that involves neither probing the conscience nor enumerating sins. He did not believe he was creating a new doctrine; rather he believed that this doctrine was consistent to the beliefs of the early church and that which was promoted in Scripture.

This short overview of three unique notions of penance and repentance provides the necessary background for understanding changes of the doctrine among the early English evangelicals. All three persons and their followers—Wycliffe, Erasmus, and Luther—had distinct views on confession and penance, yet all three exerted considerable influence among the evangelicals in the following chapters. With the exception of some Lollards, the need for contrition, confession, and satisfaction was maintained, though the focus of each changed. Wycliffe was a strict contritionist

---

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

who believed confession could be beneficial in some contexts but was often prone to abuse. Erasmus agreed that sorrow for sins and their confession were evidence of a desire to turn from them, but he was more concerned with the morality of repentance. Luther maintained their necessity as evidence of forgiveness, but changed the formula of penance to include faith as the agent of forgiveness. The evangelicals in the following chapters will borrow from all three of these views in forming their own. The most common thread among them is found in Luther's solafidism, for this would prove to be a defining characteristic. Yet the following chapters will also show variations in evangelical thought on penance and repentance. Contrition, confession, satisfaction, and faith were at times reorganized and redefined, and no single English evangelical fits neatly into a specific category. None were distinctly Wycliffite, Erasmian, or Lutheran in their views of penance and repentance.

## CHAPTER 3

### A SATISFACTION ALREADY MADE: CHRIST'S BLOOD AND REPENTANCE IN WILLIAM TYNDALE

When Martin Luther connected his theology of the cross with his notion that the centrality of oral confession was for the comfort of the burdened conscience, he brought together two very distinct themes of discomfort and comfort into a cohesive notion of penance. When Erasmus denied the necessity of an understanding of penance, it served merely to highlight its practical moral usefulness. John Wycliffe's strict contritionism was in many ways more familiar to the early church than it was to a late medieval theology of one of the sacraments. These three views shared unique qualities, where their differences outweighed their similarities. Yet those similarities are important, for each of these three figures shared a disdain for the abuses of penance, and each were built on the premise that the ready availability of Scripture in the vernacular would elucidate God's true purpose for penance as shown in his own words to man.

A fourth figure stands out as sharing these similarities, yet is perhaps the best example of a conglomeration of a theology of penance between these three figures where mutually exclusive doctrines were allowed. William Tyndale's notion of private oral confession was built around the notion of comfort in a way similar to Luther. His view of morality in penance was so similar to Erasmus' view that he was often accused of holding to double justification. For him, contrition was so indispensable to a formula of solafidistic repentance that it enabled faith to bring satisfaction. Tyndale shared more elements of penance and repentance with Luther,

Erasmus, and Wycliffe than any other evangelical in England. He was best known for his work as a translator who held that the lack of a vernacular Bible was the ‘cause of all mischief in the Church’, because it hid the misdeeds of the clergy, and any attempts to bring permanent change must begin with making Scripture widely available.<sup>1</sup> The Latin edition was the received text for sixteenth-century England, and Tyndale held that much of the conservative notion of penance was built on faulty renderings from Greek and Hebrew into Latin. His Bible translations from the *Textus Receptus*, the Greek text considered to be authoritative, were among the chief reasons for his becoming a golden goose for heresy hunters, and were in part what led to his being strangled and burned at the stake at Vilvorde Castle in Belgium in 1536. By then, hundreds of copies from the Antwerp printer were already available in England. Tyndale’s last words were ‘Lord, open the king of England’s eyes’, an especially astute foreshadowing, for royal acceptance of an English Bible would come the following year after pleas by Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell, both influential evangelical leaders in England. Tyndale’s translations formed the basis of the New Testament of Matthew’s Bible of 1537, and by 1538, every parish church in England was required to make an English Bible available to the laity.

Tyndale was not merely a translator, though, as his treatises also had the attention of both evangelical printers in Antwerp and Germany and heretic hunters commissioned by Thomas More, Charles V, and two popes. In these treatises and the notes on his translations, he speaks more directly and at greater length on the topic of penance and repentance than any of the other English exiles living on the continent in the 1520s and 1530s. Like the Wycliffites, Tyndale particularly isolated two sacraments in his solafidism, with the Eucharist having a clear primacy and penance

---

<sup>1</sup> *AM*, (1583). Book 8, 1100.

serving as the consistent runner-up.<sup>2</sup> His relatively uniform reworking of the concepts of sacramental penance into solafidistic repentance is evident throughout his corpus, though unlike Luther and Erasmus, he never dedicated entire theses to the topic. Perhaps this is why many modern scholars have paid surprisingly little attention to Tyndale's stance on confession and penance, despite these concepts being foundational for an evangelical understanding of solafidism. William Clebsch makes no mention of confession or penance in his section on Tyndale,<sup>3</sup> and Carl Trueman, whose focus is on Luther's influence among English reformers, surprisingly leaves out this distinctly Lutheran concept.<sup>4</sup> In his book on Thomas More's controversies with the English Reformers, Rainer Pineas has no index entries for confession or penance, and besides some brief passing allusions, only mentions Tyndale's accusation of a conspiracy of auricular confession that allows the papacy to know the secrets of kings to highlight his theme of clerical subversion.<sup>5</sup>

Other scholars have insisted that Tyndale remained hostile to all forms of penance. Ralph Werrell, who has written extensively on Tyndale, argues that Tyndale, who was Luther's protégé for a period, must be appraised as entirely distinct from Luther. He is quick to note that Luther saw the importance of confession, but Tyndale held that it was the work of Satan.<sup>6</sup> He later offers a more meticulous analysis of this distinction in a section on the sacraments, and provides a few short pericopes of Tyndale's approach to 'ear confession' and 'shriving'.<sup>7</sup> Werrell correctly identifies Tyndale's disdain for auricular confession as it then

---

<sup>2</sup> For more on Tyndale's focus on penance mirroring that of the Wycliffites, see Donald Dean Smeeton, *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale*, vol. 6 (Kirksville, MO, 1986), 213.

<sup>3</sup> William A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535* (Westport, CT, 1964), 137-204.

<sup>4</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Rainer Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor polemics* (Bloomington, IN, 1968), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph S. Werrell, *The Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge, 2006), 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

existed in its sacramental form. He also identifies Tyndale's view that it is unnecessary for forgiveness when the doctrine of ecclesiastic mediation crumbles in favour of Christ as the sole mediator.<sup>8</sup> Many of these characterizations of Tyndale's conception of penance are accurate only on a superficial level. Likewise, as with the other evangelicals of the period, it is true that Tyndale rarely devotes entire sections to sacramental penance, addressing the issue in general discussions concerned with the sacraments at large. However, to conclude that Tyndale had an aversion to all aspects of penance because of his criticism of its central doctrines within a sacramental context would be to provide an incomplete conclusion. Penance afforded the necessary foundation for Tyndale's doctrine of repentance, which maintained the preeminence of contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

Donald Smeeton is perhaps the most thorough in his understanding of Tyndale drawing parallels with the notion of penance held by the Wycliffites. His argument that Tyndale had appreciable Lollard influence may be overplayed, but some Lollard themes can certainly be seen in Tyndale's view of penance and confession.<sup>9</sup> Some of Smeeton's observations would be true for most evangelicals, and Erasmus would certainly agree in principle to others, such as Wycliffe's view that the priest only announces absolution or any historic appeals regarding the practice of the early church. Others are more specific to Tyndale, such as their shared emphasis on contrition or their disdain for the corruption within the sacrament of penance.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that Smeeton's methodology was concerned

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>9</sup> This stands in contrast to Richard Rex's notion that the Wycliffites were largely uninfluential, and connections to the early protestant movement were irrelevant, as most evangelicals came from conservative backgrounds, not Wycliffite. Richard Rex, *The Lollards*, in 'Social History in Perspective' (New York, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Smeeton, *Lollard Themes*, 213-218.

singularly with the similarities between Tyndale and the Wycliffites and the scope of his research ends with those similarities. Still, Smeeton's understanding of Tyndale's doctrine of penance is perhaps the most thorough, despite its marginality to his central argument.

This chapter will demonstrate that Tyndale's notion of repentance moved the hinge of penance away from human effort in contrition, confession, or works of satisfaction, towards Christ's physical work acting on behalf of man's satisfaction. He maintained faith's role as the activating agent in repentance in a way that is similar to yet distinct from Luther. Tyndale held that some elements of sacramental penance were beneficial, and his disdain for the sacrament was only directed at those elements that were inconsistent with solafidism. He preferred to communicate his refined doctrine of repentance through the use of existing terminology, reworked into a framework that denied human efforts at salvation or ecclesiastical mediation. If penance was a process that culminated in either priestly absolution or attempts at satisfaction, repentance was a single act of turning that encompassed confessing sins to God, whose absolution of guilt and substitutionary satisfaction through Christ's blood was activated by faith in the promises of God.

### **Salvaging Penance**

The most important distinction between the conservatives and evangelicals was not related to sacerdotal function, morality of the clergy, or the role of the papacy, but on their competing doctrines of justification: does grace come through the sacraments of the church, or is it given independent of human effort or ecclesiastical mediation? Sacramental penance is an obvious battleground in defining sacramentalism and solafidism, as it sought to answer questions relative to forgiveness through

contrition, the work of the priest in confession, and the work of the penitent in penance. Naturally, it was through this existing construct that Tyndale developed his own ideas of contrition, confession, and forgiveness. It is important to note that his Scripture translations were known for creating new and creative terms and phrases, often preferring new phrases over those long established in an effort to further brand his differences with the Roman church.<sup>11</sup> Yet in his reworking of penance, he relied heavily on existing terminology to show that contrition, confession, and satisfaction were still relevant concepts. Rather than seek new elements of the formula with new terminology, as Luther did, Tyndale maintained the existing formula and used established terminology to communicate his doctrine of repentance and forgiveness to an audience who would more readily understand solafidism through commonly recognized terms of sin, confession, and forgiveness.

Perhaps because of his tendency to maintain late medieval terminology in defining solafidistic repentance, Tyndale was often attacked for a wholesale rejection of penance and its constituent parts by his contemporaries. On one occasion, Tyndale recounts a confrontation by Thomas More with an indictment that he held that confession was the worst invention of man, an assertion with which he refused to disagree on the grounds of its phraseology.<sup>12</sup> Instead, he sought a reworking by condemning sacramental confession on soteriological grounds, ‘wherewith ye exclude the forgiveness that is in Christ’s blood, for all that repent and believe therein, and make the people believe that their sins be never forgiven until they be

---

<sup>11</sup> Fred Robinson argues that the English language at the advent of the printing press was increasingly stratified, and that the invention of new words or phrases such as those in Tyndale’s New Testament helped solidify the meanings those words and phrases were meant to represent. Fred C. Robinson, ‘The History of English and its Practical Uses’, in *Sewanee Review* vol. 112 (2004), 377ff.

<sup>12</sup> William Tyndale, *An answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge, 1850), 172.

shriven unto a priest.<sup>13</sup> Tyndale held that the role of sacramental penance in social control was to punish bad behaviour, and an effort must be made to encourage righteous living. In terms of actual morality, Tyndale believed this concept of punishing bad behaviour to be incongruous with effecting good behaviour. His notion of repentance was that good behaviour was a product of sinners having already been forgiven instead of an avenue towards forgiveness not yet attained. This good behaviour was not merely the product of positive reinforcement but the result of an ontological reconstruction of the person as a result of having been forgiven. The sacrament had no part in justification: 'the faith of a repenting soul in Christ's blood doth justify only.'<sup>14</sup> Tyndale repeated the role that good works has for a person who has repented and received the satisfaction of Christ's blood, because man's inability to make satisfaction, coupled with the satisfaction already made through Christ's blood, brings a love of God and a love of obeying him.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, any notion of Tyndale viewing penance as being entirely unsalvageable, such as that held by Werrell, does not consider the fact that Tyndale consistently sought to rework elements of conservative dogma into a solafidistic context rather than simply reject it outright for being 'papist'. Such a view only allows for a partial reading of the source material. For instance, it is clear that Tyndale frequently condemns the sacrament of penance as he does the entire sacramental system, but at the same time salvages many of its key concepts. This is most clear in his 1531 exposition of I John, a commentary on the epistle whose central purpose was to teach its readers how they can know they are genuinely forgiven of their sins:

The sacrament of penance they thus describe: contrition, confession, and

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

satisfaction: contrition; sorrow for thy sins: confession; not to God and them whom thou hast offended, but tell thy sins in the priest's ear: satisfaction, to do certain deeds enjoined of them, to buy out thy sins. And in their description they have excluded the faith in the satisfaction of Christ's blood; which only bringeth life, and the spirit of life, and righteousness, and without the which it is impossible to please God: in whose stead they have put in the presumption of our own works. And for lack of trust in Christ's blood, our contrition is but a fruitless sorrow in the respect of hell, which maketh us hate the law still, and consequently God that made it: where true contrition, annexed with faith, is sorrow in respect of the law, unto which we consent that it is good and love it, and therefore mourn, partly because we have offended it, and partly because we lack power to fulfill it as we would.<sup>16</sup>

Tyndale here defines his formula of penance, maintaining the terminology found in the late medieval church while offering new definitions that were consistent with his view of repentance. He pauses only at the second point to identify the misplacement of the confessor as a priest rather than God or the person offended.

Immediately it is clear that his contention is not with the concept of confession itself but with the way it was being used. The specific problem with auricular confession, besides the misidentification of the confessor, is that faith in the satisfaction of Christ's blood is excluded. As satisfaction was the chief end of both sacramental penance and solafidistic repentance, Tyndale makes it clear that his disagreement is with the way that penance was proposed to work through confession and good works lending towards satisfaction. Satisfaction would thus be the centre of Tyndale's notion of the permissibility and necessity of rightly placed confession and repentance. He saw sacramental penance as having illicitly replaced the proper agent of satisfaction. This agent, Christ's blood, was replaced by human attempts at satisfaction. Because of this, true contrition was lacking because it was fueled by the fear of hell, which makes man hate the law. The only true contrition, then, is not fear

---

<sup>16</sup> Tyndale, William. 'Exposition of the first Epistle of St John', in *Expositions and notes on sundry portions of the Holy Scriptures: Together with the Practice of Prelates*, ed. Henry Walter, Reprint (Cambridge, 2010), 162.

of the law but it is respect for the law which causes contrition because a person's natural proclivity towards sin makes him incapable of fulfilling the law.

Like Luther, Tyndale adds faith to his formula of repentance. Satisfaction in Christ's blood is the pivot of repentance, but faith is its active ingredient. Faith is what makes satisfaction effective. For Tyndale, Christ already made the satisfaction for the guilt and penalty of sin, and faith in that satisfaction is required for it to be applied to the individual. Tyndale also enters the debate over the definition of contrition, showing that faith is the only ingredient that allows contrition to be complete, as faith is what attaches sorrow for sins to the guilt of the law. Without expounding it as such, Tyndale's understanding of contrition is that humans are incapable of complete contrition without faith activated by God, therefore causing misapplied sorrow over sin to be mere attrition, regardless of the source of that sorrow or the veracity of its emotional toll.

Tyndale's use of faith as the active ingredient is similar to that of Luther, and this is an important similarity, for both held that without faith in God's promises, forgiveness was impossible. This is where the similarities cease, at least in regard to their understandings of the formula of repentance. By the time Tyndale had visited Wittenberg in May 1524, Luther had already abolished penance as a sacrament and minimized the words of absolution in the formula. Luther's three-part formula kept the words of absolution, grace's ability to forgive sins, and faith in the promises of God. He replaced both contrition and satisfaction with faith in God's promises.<sup>17</sup> He also maintained its sacramental status at the beginning, until he determined that penance both lacked a visible sign and was already included in the sacrament of

---

<sup>17</sup> This idea is matured by the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, where contrition and faith serving as the only two elements in repentance. 'Augsburg Confession', *Book of Concord* (Philadelphia, 1911), 178ff.

baptism.<sup>18</sup> Tyndale, on the other hand, maintained contrition and satisfaction, along with confession, and argued that faith, instead of replacing these elements, activated them. Like Luther, he believed this faith was effective only when applied to the promises of God. Tyndale's emphasis on contrition and satisfaction as collaborators allowed for more freedom in sorrow and on a satisfaction already made than did Luther's emphasis on knowledge of eternal security and soothing the burdened conscience.

As Tyndale was most known for his work as a translator, it is perhaps unsurprising that his most extensive treatment of penance and repentance should occur in the prologue to his 1534 New Testament. Here, he provides a series of translation notes regarding his rationale for some of the key differences between his translation and that of the Latin Vulgate. Key to those notes is *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*). Like Erasmus and Luther, he offers a brief translation of the imperative tense as 'repent' rather than 'do penance'. He also provides further background as to how *metanoia* must be understood. In his description, he follows the existing formula of contrition-confession-satisfaction, though reworks some of the terms and provides his own formula using all three elements:

Concernynge this worde repentaunce, or (as they vsed) penaunce, ye hebrue hath in ye old testament generally *שׁוּב* [sob]<sup>19</sup> turne or be conuerted. For which the translacion that we take for saynt Ieromes hath most part (*conuertit*) to turn or be conuerted and some time yet (*agere penitencie*). And the greke in the new testament hath perpetually (*metanoeo*) to turne in the heart and mynde and to come to the right knowledge and to a mannes right wyt again.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, 'The Babylonian Captivity of the Church', in *Three Treatises*, A.T.W. Stienhil, trans. (Philadelphia, 1970), 258; *Works of Martin Luther*, 693ff.

<sup>19</sup> The Hebrew *שׁוּב* (*sob*) is used in the Old Testament and in Tyndale's translation of Hebrews.

<sup>20</sup> Tyndale, *Prologue to the 1534 New Testament*, 'To the Reader'.

He then offers a sort of translation guide to Latin tenses, using Jerome's translation of *μετανοέω* (the first person active indicative of *μετάνοια*) into the Latin for various tenses of *ago poenitentiam*. None of these tenses are subjunctive; that is, none of these tenses are an imperative to 'do penance'. Tyndale summarizes:

The verye sens and significacion both of the hebrue and also of the greke worde is to be conuerted and to tourne ye to God with all the hert, to knowe his will and to lyve accordynge to his laws, and to be cured of our corrupt nature with the oyle of his spirite and wyne of obedience to his doctrine.<sup>21</sup>

Tyndale's translation of *μετανοείτε* as repent is invariable in both editions of his New Testament, indicating no significant hermeneutical development regarding repentance between 1526 and 1534. The most cited verse for this controversy is Acts 2:38, where the Vulgate's *poenitentiam iniquit agite* was more commonly understood as combining the sacraments 'do penance and be baptized'.<sup>22</sup> Tyndale, following the first of Luther's ninety-five theses, translated Peter's command as 'Repent and be baptized'.<sup>23</sup> Strong's concordance lists thirty-four occurrences of *μετάνοια* in the New Testament, occurring in fifteen different forms.<sup>24</sup> In each of those fifteen forms, nowhere does Tyndale translate *μετάνοια* as anything but variations of the word 'repent', and the context can fit with his earlier definition of 'to tourne ye to God with all thy hert'. This is also true in Tyndale's Old Testament translations, where he saw continuity between *μετάνοια* and *שׁוּב* (*sob*) in his translation of Jonah and of the Pentateuch.

While Tyndale prefers to define *μετάνοια* as repent or convert, the actual choice of words itself is not necessarily crucial, as long as the proper meaning exists in the context of forgiveness. He describes this in his Prologue, 'Whether ye call this

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Tyndale, 1534 New Testament; 1526 New Testament.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.*

metonoia, repentaunce, conuerson or turnynge agayne to God, ether amendynge etc. or whether ye say repent, be conuerted, tourne to god, amende your lyvyng or what ye lust', he is content so long as the proper meaning is clear.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, Tyndale's use of *μετάνοια* affords him the opportunity to describe the way the parts of the formula work, which is a clear separation from Erasmus' *laissez faire* orientation of the workings of *μετάνοια*. Repentance is more than a turning from sin. It is a conversion from a state of sinfulness to one of forgiveness, activated by faith. This conversion is necessarily accompanied by confession, contrition, faith, and satisfaction.

Confession, not in the priest's ear, for that is but man's invention, but to God in the heart and before all the congregation of God, how that we be sinners and sinful, and that our whole nature is corrupt and inclined to sin and all unrighteousness, and therefore evil, wicked, and damnable, and his law holy and just, by which our sinful nature is rebuked: and also to our neighbours, if we have offended any person particularly. Then contrition, sorrowfulness that we be such damnable sinners, and not only have sinned but are wholly inclined to sin still. Thirdly faith (of which our old doctors have made no mention at all in the description of their penance), yet God for Christ's sake doth forgive us and receive us to mercy, and is at one with us and will heal our corrupt nature. And fourthly satisfaction or amends-making, not to God with holy works, but to my neighbour whom I have hurt, and the congregation of God whom I have offended.<sup>26</sup>

Tyndale's use of the formula and terms of penance in the 1534 *Prologue* twice includes its own alterations to the traditional formula of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The first was mentioned above, that of including faith as the active ingredient of the formula. Faith is listed alongside contrition, confession, and satisfaction, though it must not be considered of equal weight. Faith remains the defining factor in what makes contrition complete and satisfaction properly applied.

---

<sup>25</sup> Tyndale, *Prologue to the 1534 New Testament*, 'To the Reader'.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Tyndale listing faith separately can afford for some confusion. For instance, Smeeton agrees that faith is the active ingredient in repentance, but places it inside the formula alongside contrition, confession, and satisfaction.<sup>27</sup> He does not offer support for this assessment, as he appears to be taking the text at face value and is arguing within the wider context of Tyndale's high value of contrition. However, it is clear that, when comparing the 1534 Prologue to Tyndale's use of I John, above, Tyndale saw faith as a part of contrition and satisfaction rather than separate from them, with its necessity for confession evident anywhere he speaks of confessing directly to God without a mediator. Faith was the most important aspect, for without it, none of the other ingredients would be effective.

Perhaps of equal importance to faith's role in repentance is how Tyndale changes the order of the formula. His formula begins with confession, not contrition. Tyndale held that forgiveness, and therefore salvation, begins with God's law exposing sin and making man aware of his ineptness before God. Once a person is aware of the existence of sin and its effect on his status before God, that person is then able to confess to God, who brings sorrow for the state of sinfulness but fills the person with hope when that sinfulness is forgiven. Tyndale notably minimizes satisfaction in this definition, preferring to speak of earthly satisfaction to an offended neighbour or to the church if the crime is particularly public. He follows this definition with a postscript, noting that a person who sins against his neighbour necessarily sins against God, and describes this earthly satisfaction as a shadow of Christ's satisfaction through his blood.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Smeeton, *Lollard Themes*, 216

<sup>28</sup> Tyndale, *Prologue to the 1534 New Testament*, 'To the Reader'

Clebsch sees a development of double justification in Tyndale's later works, and offers as evidence of this Tyndale's requirement of satisfaction through an offended neighbour and his insistence on the need to be satisfied before the world on the grounds that sinning against man results in sinning against God.<sup>29</sup> This idea of double justification began with his rediscovery of the Old Testament law, a result of his translation of the Pentateuch, and, according to Clebsch, represents the breaking point at which Tyndale left Lutheran doctrine and went his own way.<sup>30</sup> God's promises were no longer relevant, as a moralistic approach of attempting to fulfil the law provided forgiveness, and the Old Testament lacked the motivation to fulfil the law because of human inability to do so. This motivation was supplied by the New Testament, which promised forgiveness through Christ and through obeying the moral law.<sup>31</sup> This striving to fulfil the moral law, according to Clebsch, even superseded the welfare of one's neighbour.<sup>32</sup> Carl Trueman disputes this shift towards double predestination and legalism, arguing that Tyndale's doctrine of justification remained consistent. The only change was one of emphasis.<sup>33</sup> One place that this can be seen is through the distinction between Tyndale's formula of repentance and that of the moralist Erasmus, whose sole concern with the sacrament of penance was its effect on the morality of the penitent.

Trueman's contention, that throughout his career, Tyndale maintained a solafidistic soteriology consistent with his understanding of repentance outlined in the prologue to his 1534 New Testament, is convincing. When detailing his understanding of satisfaction, Tyndale mentions being 'counted righteousness before

---

<sup>29</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 171.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-158.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>33</sup> Trueman, *Luther's Legacy*, 101.

the worlde' through making amends, and is concerned with the world having no further complaint because those amends have been made or forgiveness sought. Clebsch is apparently confused by Tyndale's terminology, where 'satisfaction' is typically used in a sense that includes forgiveness. Tyndale uses it in the 1534 *Prologue* to make amends for something that has been lost on the grounds of the world seeing evidence of a regeneration in God and a new life through that amends-making. He also uses it in the sense of both the guilt and the penalty of the sin being forgiven, with such satisfaction specifically through Christ's blood. He is conscious that his statements could sound legalistic, so he gives special attention to highlighting Christ's message in John 8, 'if ye thinke that there is anye other sacrifice or satisfaccion to godwarde then me [Christ], ye remained euer in synne before God how soeuer ryghteous ye apere before the world'.<sup>34</sup> This plea for satisfaction in Christ's blood was a common refrain for Tyndale, and any implication of double justification or legalism breaks down through a careful study of Tyndale's doctrine of Christ's blood as satisfaction for the sinfulness of mankind.

Tyndale understood the idea of satisfaction in two important and interrelated ways, as sin can incur a debt against at least two different parties. The first is in regard to a person sinning against his neighbour, requiring him to make satisfaction for that injury. In his 1534 *Prologue*, Tyndale describes this type of satisfaction as an 'amendis makyng', which if necessary, includes seeking correction by church officials and submitting to the 'true doctrine of the church of christ'. This is 'counted righteousnesse before the worlde and purgyng of the synne: so that the worlde when I haue made a full amendis, hath no further cause to complayne.'<sup>35</sup> Sins against

---

<sup>34</sup> Tyndale, *Prologue to the 1534 New Testament*, 'To the Reader'

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

another person require a punishment as evidence of repentance, what Tyndale ironically but awkwardly terms being ‘poured before the world’ through either ‘makyng amendis or axynge forgeuenes.’ This type of punishment is a part of a civil satisfaction between two people, and is a major component of civil law, though for Tyndale is only related to justification by means of the penitent seeking either repayment of the loss or forgiveness among the offended, the offended offering that forgiveness, and if it is a public sin, a public repentance. Because a sin against man is also an offense against God, a person who has injured another person must first seek to make amends with the offended party, or if they are unable, to seek forgiveness in order to be forgiven by God.

The second meaning of satisfaction is to make amends towards God, even when no injury occurs to another person. Fundamental to solafidism is the idea that a person’s debt to God is so great that it cannot be repaid through human effort, and therefore amends cannot be made. Yet forgiveness requires satisfaction of a debt, and in Tyndale’s system, the only currency of that satisfaction is Christ’s blood, activated by faith. He describes ‘fayth in christes bloude’ as being considered both ‘righteousness’ and ‘purgynge of all sinne’, which is to say that Christ’s blood both absolves of the guilt through counting the penitent as righteousness, but also satisfies the punishment that conservatives reckon as necessitating purgatory.<sup>36</sup> He later repeats that sins are ‘poured throw faith in christes bloude only’, citing John 8 to argue against manmade attempts at satisfaction.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

This double meaning is not an attempt at double justification,<sup>38</sup> but rather identifies that the two types of satisfaction as they relate to justification are joined by the fact that both the *poena* and the *culpa* are absolved and satisfied through Christ's blood only. The emphasis on Christ's literal tangible blood is evident throughout the Tyndale corpus, and is highlighted even more when placed against the backdrop of the sweat, toil, and blood of mankind's efforts to secure forgiveness through works, such as in the completion of sacramental penance.

Tyndale's understanding of Christ's blood in the context of repentance and penance is not a novel view in itself, but what is perhaps unique is that Tyndale seems to refer to Christ's blood as the literal satisfaction for man's sin as it would have been understood in the context of sacramental penance. If satisfaction required pain relative to the pleasure of sin, and no amount of a person's pain could fully satisfy, it took one who did not sin and thus was not under the penalty of sin to give the greatest work of satisfaction possible: his painful death. Christ's blood was in this way the only effective substitute for man's blood, which was insufficient.

Tyndale continues this theme through a very long description of satisfaction in his *First Epistle of St. John*. He describes his translation choice of the word *ἰλάσκομαι* (*ilaskomai*), propitiation, but for an unstated reason refers back to the Hebrew  $\text{כִּפָּר}$ , before giving a rather odd translation which eventually lends itself towards 'suaging of wrath and anger, and for an amendsmaking, a contenting, satisfaction, a ransom'.<sup>39</sup> The source of that *ἰλάσκομαι* is Christ's giving of himself as a full satisfaction. He then describes how that satisfaction was effected:

In the days of his mortal flesh, with fasting, praying, suffering, and crying to

---

<sup>38</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 171.

<sup>39</sup> *First Epistle of St. John*, 154. Propitiation is the belief that Christ literally carried man's sin and suffered in man's place. This is opposed to expiation, which refers to Christ merely disposing of man's sin.

God mightily for us, and with shedding his blood, made full satisfaction both *a poena et a culpa* (with our holy father's leave) for all the sins of the world, both of theirs that went before and of theirs that come after in the flesh; whether it be original sin or actual.<sup>40</sup>

Tyndale elucidates the concept that satisfaction came only through the merits of Christ, culminating in his sacrifice. The merits he lists are those that are more commonly prescribed by a priest following absolution, which is intended to illustrate the works of Christ as parallel to human attempts of satisfaction, with those works serving as the substitute for man's works, not the example. He even takes occasion to address the power of that satisfaction, with a tongue-in-cheek jab at the conservative conception of guilt and penalty. This is the only place where Tyndale uses terms drawn from sacramental works of confession to describe Christ's merits towards man. The context also makes it likely that Tyndale uses these parallel works in an effort to continue the picture of God as confessor. Tyndale was still in the process of describing confession directly to God. Satisfaction necessarily follows confession and contrition when combined with faith in the promises of God. These promises were fulfilled using Christ's blood as currency to satisfy the debt, and faith is the element that makes contrition complete and therefore satisfaction effective. In continuing the motif, Tyndale declared Christ's merits as man's satisfaction, then described Christ's works of satisfaction using terms that his readers would easily associate with sacramental penance. He even continues by showing a negative example of satisfaction, that of Christ forgiving his apostles without prescribing penance for satisfaction.<sup>41</sup> This theme is continued for several pages, where he mocks the custom of tipping the confessor, the practice of excommunication relative

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

to satisfaction, and the folly of trying to worship a spiritual being with physical works.<sup>42</sup> He also denies the sacramental notion of binding and loosing on the grounds that the true source of such binding and loosing is the word of God.<sup>43</sup>

In his first treatise, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, written in 1528 and published in Antwerp, Christ's blood is mentioned no fewer than forty-six times, in the context of the satisfaction of a debt, the fulfillment of the gospel, the means of forgiveness, and the source of man's trust. In each instance, the focus is on the possibility of forgiveness only being granted through Christ's blood. While each occurrence does not necessarily follow the formula of contrition, confession, and satisfaction, the fact that the central focus of man's salvation is on Christ's blood and merits as opposed to inheritance or a general repentance is where this doctrine is clearest. In fact, several occurrences in *Mammon* do indicate Christ's blood as a satisfaction in a literal sense, such as the comfort given in the spirit holding a troubled believer safely 'to the rock of the merits of Christ's blood'.<sup>44</sup> He speaks of a person receiving a prophet as having 'the same eternal life which is appointed for them in Christ's blood and merits'. He describes works that have been made good as 'fruits of the Spirit, and the kingdom is the deserving of Christ's blood'.<sup>45</sup> Christ's blood is described as the fulfillment (satisfaction) of the law,<sup>46</sup> part of the formula of repentance,<sup>47</sup> and the only currency which God would accept as payment for man's debt.<sup>48</sup> Satisfaction of the debt of sin is the chief end of both penance and repentance.

For Tyndale as for conservatives, this debt was vast and required significant

---

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 157. Tyndale accused the pope of excommunicating people liberally, then remitting that excommunication through the 'satisfaction for the uttermost farthing'.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-119.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

pain relative to the offense committed. Tyndale departs from the conservatives through arguing that the debt is too great for man, but Christ's pain was the only thing that was sufficient. Tyndale's recurrent use of the term 'Christ's blood' as the agent of satisfaction shows the depth of man's inability to fulfill this debt as well as God's willingness to remove its guilt and penalty. Tyndale communicated his view of satisfaction in such a way to show an element of continuity with the traditional doctrine, departing principally on the issue of whose efforts could effect satisfaction.

A person who has already had the guilt and punishment for his sins satisfied had no individual sins to confess or for which to express contrition. Tyndale's definition of *μετανοείτε* involved not merely a turning from sins, but converting from a general state of sinfulness to one of forgiveness. The 1534 *Prologue* denies the need both for an enumeration of sins and for confessing those privately to a priest, both of which are 'mannes invencion'. Instead, proper confession 'to God in the hert' is a confession of a state of sinfulness and an inability to accomplish anything pertaining to salvation.<sup>49</sup> Contrition, likewise, is not a sadness for individual sins but for the fact 'that we be soche damnable synners, and not onlye have synned but are holye inclined to syne still'.<sup>50</sup> The conversion involved in repentance changes the nature of an understanding of sin where both sorrow for it and confession of it are directed generally rather than specifically, as Christ's blood has already satisfied all sins.

Tyndale's notion of solafidistic repentance maintained confession, contrition, and satisfaction, with faith as the activating agent. This is perhaps most clear in his first writing, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*. *Mammon* was written

---

<sup>49</sup> Tyndale, *Prologue to the 1534 New Testament*, 'To the Reader'.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

as a defence of solafidism, and speaks of the relationship between good works and faith in a way that indicates Luther's influence. Tyndale remains consistent with the order of the elements of solafidistic repentance by exhorting his readers to 'knowledge' themselves (confession), 'abhor' themselves (contrition), and rest their conscience because of the mercy found in Christ (satisfaction).<sup>51</sup> Similar to Luther, good works are only possible for a person whose sins have been forgiven. Tyndale defines them as 'all things that are done within the laws of God, in which God is honoured, and for which thanks are given to God', where a work can only be done within the laws of God if they are done through the promises of God.<sup>52</sup> He continues this formula in the ensuing pages, stating that it is not possible to repent and abhor sins and to continue in them, as repentance requires contrition which is further defined by a permanent turning.<sup>53</sup> Repentance activated by faith is necessarily permanent, as faith activates contrition and satisfaction, and a satisfaction that has already been made does not require further sacrifice. This repentance begins with confession, which through faith activates contrition and satisfaction through Christ's blood.

### **Confession Redefined**

Tyndale's reformulation of sacramental penance was not blind to the need for reforming the sacramental approach of private oral confession. His formula begins with confession, not contrition, as faith found in confession activates contrition and satisfaction to enable repentance to be complete. It is clear he sought to maintain the practice of private oral confession, modelled after the practice of confessing to a

---

<sup>51</sup> Tyndale, *Mammon*, 126.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>53</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 18-19. This definition is rejected by Thomas More, who argues against Luther that such contrition is both impossible and unnecessary, giving necessary credence to attrition.

more mature Christian for the purpose of counsel or to the entire church in the case of public sins, as seen in the early church. Private offenses against others involved acknowledgment of the wrongdoing to both the offended party and to God who is always offended in cases of human misdeeds against other humans. He described sacramental confession in derogatory terms similar to those of the Lollards, by using various tenses of the term 'shrift' or 'ear confession', calling it a 'work of Satan, and that the falsest that ever was wrought'.<sup>54</sup> He speaks of the uselessness of seeking forgiveness through 'cramming' sin into a priest's ear, trusting in a bald ceremony that is 'a thing of his own imagination, in a foolish dream, and a false vision', void of faith in Christ's blood.<sup>55</sup> He even refers to it in a vulgar way, describing it to Thomas More as a 'filthy, Priapish confession, which ye spew in the ear', indicating both its uselessness for forgiveness and a common complaint of sexual impropriety against the clergy in confession.<sup>56</sup> He states that in its current form it is impossible to keep because of its requirement to remember and enumerate all sins, and the obvious doubts of the potency of confession if any sins were forgotten or if any repentance or sorrow incomplete, and because of the inability to know of any secret hidden desire to commit the same sin again that would make contrition incomplete.<sup>57</sup> He mocks the creation of penance as something designed to give the clergy 'fat bellies' and to keep men captive in soul and body.<sup>58</sup> More called Tyndale 'the captain of our Englyshe heretikes', in large part because of his statements on confession.<sup>59</sup> Tyndale's

---

<sup>54</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience*, 296.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 297; William Tyndale. 'The Parable of the Wicked Mammon'; Thomas Russell, ed. *The works of the English Reformers: William Tyndale and John Frith*, vol. 1. (London, 1831), 159.

<sup>56</sup> William Tyndale, *An answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge, 1850), 172.

<sup>57</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience*, 315, 365.

<sup>58</sup> William Tyndale. 'A Prologue of the Prophet Jonas', *The works of the English Reformers: William Tyndale and John Frith*, vol 1, ed. Thomas Russell (London, 1831), 55.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas More, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 8, ed. Richard S. Sylvester et al. (London and New Haven, 1961), 10.

aversion to sacramental confession was clear, though it is important to separate the complaints against its practice from the theological context in which those complaints were issued. Tyndale disliked confession because it was easily corruptible, provided no assurance, and created an irreparable reliance on the priest due to the uncertainty and inability of the penitent.

Tyndale held that all levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy had been corrupted because of the lack of availability of Scripture, which he believed to be the only source of divine inspiration. He opposed sacramental confession on the grounds of the corruption of the clergy, the denial of an intermediary, and on the notion that confession of wrongdoing requires an admission of guilt to the wronged party. This requires more than a mere reworking of the idea of confessing to a priest. To illustrate this, Tyndale often uses metaphoric language to describe God as the confessor and man as the penitent. This occurs most clearly in a small pamphlet in octavo that may have originally been affixed to the beginning of Tyndale's translation in Romans, called *Here foloweth a treates of the pater noster*. This pamphlet is unique, for it is not included in any of the existing compilations of Tyndale's works, and seems to have been found 'by accident' at the Bodleian by Malcolm Yarnell during research for his doctoral thesis at Oxford.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the only existing copies of this pamphlet are the original held by the Bodleian and one that was reproduced by Yarnell in 2004. Yarnell correctly identifies its similarity to a Lutheran treatise on the paternoster, and in 1526, Tyndale exhibited a clear Lutheran influence.<sup>61</sup>

*Here foloweth* is an expansion of Tyndale's understanding of the paternoster,

---

<sup>60</sup> Malcolm Yarnell, 'The First Evangelical Sinner's Prayer Published in English', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, vol. 47 (2004), 27.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

and includes a short introduction, followed by a detailed dialog between ‘The Synner’ and God. The identification of the person praying as a sinner makes immediately clear that the centre of Tyndale’s understanding of the paternoster was that of a confession to God. Yarnell recognizes this depiction of God as ‘spiritual curate’ was a ‘thinly veiled refutation of the mediatorial curacy’ of priests in sacramental penance.<sup>62</sup> This observation is consistent with Tyndale’s other refutations of the priestly role of confession, but it is clear that something greater is also happening.

In the preface, Tyndale describes prayer as a ‘morning of the sprite, a desire and a longyng for that which she lacketh, as the sick morneth and sorewth in his hert longyng after health’, which is in general agreement with the role of confessor to be a physician to the sick and the penitent to seek help. He describes one of the central purposes of prayer as ‘confessing: and knowledging hir grievous bondage, hir lacke and wekenes, and desyringe helpe and sucre’, carefully adding that this confession must be done through mourning.<sup>63</sup> Here Tyndale’s doctrine of sin and confession is clear. A confession that is efficacious must be made directly to God as the offended party, recognize a general inability not to sin because of weakness, and through genuine mourning of the offense caused to God, request his forgiveness and his help to avoid sin in the future.

This theme is continued in the concluding paragraph of the preface. In the place of an examination of conscience, Tyndale substitutes the need for a person to compare himself to the law ‘diligently as in a glass’, and investigate a thorough self-analysis compared to the law. The purpose of this examination is necessary before

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

the sinner ‘confess thi synne, thi lack and poverté un to god, wyth out all maner faynyngé and ypocrisy, morning and complaynyngé over thine horrible damnacion, bondage, and captivité, and wyth a stronge faith, praye god to have mercy on the for Christs sake’.<sup>64</sup> As the focus of this prayer is the sinner, it is principally concerned with the first aspects of solafidistic repentance: contrition and confession. Tyndale consistently describes mourning for inability to abstain from sin, and that mourning precedes confession directly to him. Its request for help to avoid future sins shows both the movement towards the amendment of life and God’s role as confessor, counselling the penitent in ways to avoid future sin. Already in his preface, Tyndale has described the chief ingredients in a complete confession.

The prayer begins with the sinner acknowledging the distance between God and himself, and with an acknowledgment of ‘our synne and treaspace’, and a plea for God’s undeserved mercy. Throughout the prayer, God’s response to Synner is to identify the subject of the injury caused by the sin, namely God’s glory, and he repeatedly queries Synner as to how he can confess his sins yet continue in them. Here it is clear that, consistent with Tyndale’s formula where contrition follows confession, Synner had not yet been convicted by the law. Synner’s continued response is an acknowledgment of a general state of helplessness and a need for God’s help. Synner beseeches God to forgive him of all of his trespasses and guilt and to be judged not on God’s law but on his promises of forgiveness to all who forgive their neighbours. God chastises Synner for having little faith after his continual forgiveness and his desire to ‘loose’ him of his sins.<sup>65</sup> This theme continues as God responds to Synner six times before a slight change in tone is noted

---

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

in the final exchange. God acknowledges that his righteousness forces the punishment of sins, but rejects that temptation is the fault of sin. He does not name this sin as concupiscence, or the natural tendency to sin, but it is implied by the wording, since temptation precedes sin, therefore sin cannot be the cause of temptation. It is this reason that compels God to 'heale' Synner and give him the only medicine he can be healed by.<sup>66</sup>

This short pamphlet is rich in content regarding Tyndale's view of confession. The most important aspect of his pamphlet is its identification of sin and to whom it must be confessed. Tyndale provides the earliest example of an English evangelical issuing a practical alternative to auricular confession. The short dialogue identifies God as confessor and man as contrite sinner seeking forgiveness, and contains a denial of both curatorial mediation and enumeration of sins. The confessor is both the injured and the physician, and the sinner is both contrite and intent on making a complete confession of sinfulness and helplessness. Curiously absent is the subject of most of Tyndale's interest in the subject, that of the satisfaction of Christ's blood, though this may simply be because of its absence in the paternoster. It is likely that, since this pamphlet was more concerned with the practical aspects of confession directly to God, it understood satisfaction as a foregone conclusion, or as a necessary part of confession and contrition.

The theme of God as confessor was also described in *Mammon*, though not as exhaustively. God first points out man's sin so that they 'knowledge of themselves, so that they hate and abhor themselves': then the person can approach confession:

Lest they should flee from God by desperation, he comforteth them again with his sweet promises in Christ, and certifieth their hearts that for Christ's

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

sake they are received to mercy, and their sins forgiven, and they elect and made the sons of God, and heirs with Christ of eternal life, and thus, through faith are they set at peace with God.<sup>67</sup>

As confessor, God shows man his sin and a natural hatred of that sin ensues. When man repents and turns to God, he comforts him in his sin and points him to the promises of forgiveness.

In the second chapter of his exposition of I John, Tyndale advocates regularly confessing sins to God using the same imagery. This time he speaks of the forgiven as always being sinners, but whose sins do not count against them. When a person does sin ‘of infirmity and frailty of our flesh’ which is against the wills of their heart, that person is to confess the sin of which they have already been forgiven. ‘Howbeit (I say) if, when the rage is past, we turn unto the right way again, and confess our sins unto our Father with a repenting heart, he hath promised us mercy, and is true to fulfill it.’<sup>68</sup> As long as that sin is of frailty and not a denial of God’s promises, a person can have assurance they are forgiven.

This is the heart of Tyndale’s notion of confession in an evangelical construct. In denying the need for an intermediary, a person must confess his or her sins directly to God and rely on faith in his promises to activate contrition and satisfaction. Tyndale elaborates that very point, for the reason a person must not despair in their confession is that Christ serves as man’s advocate and intercessor. Tyndale expands greatly on the person and role of Christ as the one in this confessional relationship that is able to forgive sinfulness for those who repent and amend their lives, on the basis of his being God. Jesus is also able to remit both *a poena et a culpa*, thus being the physical embodiment of man’s satisfaction through

---

<sup>67</sup> Tyndale, *Mammon*, 126.

<sup>68</sup> Tyndale, *Exposition of the First Epistle of St. John*, 152.

his death.

Tyndale refused to call sacramental confession by the simple term ‘confession’, preferring variations of the word ‘shriving’. The etymology of this Middle English word can be traced to the Latin *scribō*, ‘to write’. Shriving was a familiar term for Wycliffe and the Lollards, as it was a common colloquial term for confession in the late middle ages, though its decline in popular use indicates that it may have gone out of fashion by the early sixteenth century. Tyndale’s resurrection of the term may have been more than an attempt to show some continuity with Wycliffe, as it may also have been a subtle jab at the common and often laborious “script” of the formula given to the confessors to aid in confession. Tyndale equally employed the phrase ‘ear-confession’, which shifts the focus of the confession onto the person hearing the confession away from the person offering it. Tyndale uses both terms in an anticlerical context, which is the most common occasion for addressing improper sacramental confession and correcting its usage through redefining repentance. They are also only used relative to sacramental confession, not what Tyndale believes to be one of the forms of true confession. For this true confession, he uses a variety of terms, including confession, knowledge of sins, and the wider ideas of repenting and turning, where confession to God is at worst implied.

For instance, Tyndale answers a claim by More that Augustine and Jerome both required confession for salvation.<sup>69</sup> His response to this assertion is curiously brief, merely declaring it false, ‘if ye mean ear-confession’, and gives credibility to

---

<sup>69</sup> Tyndale did consider Augustine and Jerome to be valuable sources for understanding early church doctrine, but not as authoritative as Scripture. Where the Catholic authorities would appeal to the Fathers as necessary for understanding God’s revelation, Tyndale would only accept that which was written in the canon, believing that the Holy Spirit revealed God’s commands and promises, not church tradition.

the two saints' declaration of its necessity by emphasizing how 'the use was once far other than now'.<sup>70</sup> He then quickly moves on to deny purgatory as a place, and accuses the prelates of corruption in confession and purgatory, with no immediate mention of how Augustine or Jerome would have understood confession.

Where Tyndale makes use of the phrase 'ear confession', he often uses it interchangeably with 'shrive', as in *Obedience*, where he describes the burdens that the corrupt system of sacramental penance has brought as an example of the burdens of the ecclesiological order. He describes the 'painful an hell' upon peoples' consciences that ear confession brings because sacramental confession made people believe their sins were too great to be forgiven.<sup>71</sup> It was generally accepted that only the priest had the ability to absolve the sins of which a person felt sorrow and confessed during the ceremony of the sacrament.<sup>72</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter One, there were exceptions to this in extreme circumstances. Tyndale highlights what he sees as an inconsistency between a doctrine of priestly absolution and one that hands the power of the keys to any person in an emergency. In *Obedience*, he says, 'if any man be present, they run then every man into his ear; but to God's promises fly they not, for they know them not'. The emphasis is on the burden that this concept of sin and salvation created, 'that so weigheth down the soul unto the bottom of hell',<sup>73</sup> but the diagnosis is in the irony that a man who has offended God seeks the forgiveness of that offense through other men.

Elsewhere in *Obedience*, Tyndale dedicates an entire section to confession, including its accompanying aspects of contrition, satisfaction, and absolution. In his

---

<sup>70</sup> Werrell, 183-184.

<sup>71</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience*, 278.

<sup>72</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 134.

<sup>73</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience*, 278.

section on contrition, he briefly discusses the contexts where confession of individual sins is appropriate. The first place is to confess to the offended party, which in this case is designated as a neighbor, and the confession is for sins against that neighbor in order to fulfill the commandment of loving thy neighbor as thyself. Confession again follows the pattern of ‘repent and knowledge his fault’, where ‘repent’ refers to an intentional turning from sin, and ‘knowledge’ refers to specific, vocal confession to the offended party. He also quickly describes open confession to the congregation for open sins, and finally his concept of the right form of auricular confession, which is for those who doubt or whose conscience is injured, to find someone more experienced than they are and seek advice and comfort.<sup>74</sup>

Werrell misses this point of specific times that a form of audible and specific confession may be appropriate. He notes that Tyndale saw the necessity of confession springing from the reality of sin, and his doctrine of salvation that requires a person to forgive if they are to be forgiven. He even quotes Tyndale’s description of the paternoster, where people are bound to repent and reconcile themselves to each other by confessing their wrongdoings and making amends.<sup>75</sup> He however makes no mention of Tyndale’s mandate of individual and specific confession to the injured person. He elsewhere argues that Tyndale was opposed to auricular confession, but nowhere identifies that this opposition was dependent upon his solafidism.<sup>76</sup> In a more recent book, he argues that Tyndale disagreed entirely with Luther’s view of confession, citing Tyndale’s *Answer to More*, where he confuses Tyndale’s rejection of ‘spew in the ear’ confession for a denial of Luther’s

---

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>75</sup> Werrell, *Theology of William Tyndale*, 152-153.

<sup>76</sup> For instance, he argues that Tyndale was not necessarily Lutheran, in that Luther had a high regard for confession, but Tyndale followed Wyclif in saying that it had been ‘brought in late by the fiend’. Werrell, *Theology of William Tyndale*, 108-109.

view that oral confession is synonymous with being a Christian.<sup>77</sup> Werrell misses the most important aspect of Tyndale's notion of oral confession: that it held value within a notion of solafidistic repentance that not only prevented ecclesiastical corruption, but actually led to forgiveness, a soothed conscience, and an amended life.

Tyndale's notion of confessing sins begins in the heart and moves to the offended, and the aspect of the person offended may give confession a double meaning. If a person disobeys God's commandment, he has offended God and must confess directly to him. If this disobedience is open and public, he must confess to the congregation and seek forgiveness for embarrassing them. If it is against his neighbour, he must confess to the neighbour and seek to make amends or obtain forgiveness. This understanding of confession is similar to that of Wycliffe's two manners of confession, one to God by 'herte or mouþe' and one to man through open or private confession.<sup>78</sup> That this is coupled with contrition, satisfaction, and earthly purgatory is further evidence of Tyndale's habit of using existing terminology of sacramental penance to describe solafidistic repentance.

He describes how this concept of confession went wrong in his exposition of I John:

For when they had put the satisfaction of Christ's blood out of the way, then as they compelled men to confess open sins, and to take open penance, even so they compelled them to confess secret sins, and to take secret penance. And as they made merchandise to open penance, so did they of secret. And for them that would not receive such pardons feigned they purgatory, and for them that received them feigned they pardon, turning binding and loosing, with preaching God's word, unto buying and selling sin for money.<sup>79</sup>

This is Tyndale's most mature notion of the historical regress of confession,

---

<sup>77</sup> Ralph Werrell, *The Blood of Christ in the Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge, 2015), 66.

<sup>78</sup> F. D. Matthew, *Unprinted English Works of Wyclif* (London, 1880), 327-328.

<sup>79</sup> Werrell, *Theology of William Tyndale*, 163.

beginning with redirecting its satisfaction away from Christ's blood, replacing public confession with one that allowed for easy corruption in secret, and inventing a system of punishment before heaven for those that would not complete the corrupt system they had developed. Tyndale's brief summary of the history of penance indicates that a pattern can be seen from the beginning that was always intended to lead to 'buying and selling sin for money'.

Confession directly to God did not require any probing of the conscience to uncover secret sin, as the confession was of a general state of sinfulness and concupiscence. This confession moves the conscience and forces a reaction to sin, and the completion of that movement was required to have full contrition and amendment. Contrition that was activated by faith was a necessary corollary to an effective confession for Tyndale. He consistently speaks of the conscience being bound by the Law in the form of complete sorrow, often specifically naming that sorrow as contrition. This contrition was different from its sacramental corollary, as it was directed not to individual sins but to a regret for sinful nature. This is how he describes it to More, with repentance being directed at the action of sin and contrition beginning with man's inability to do otherwise.<sup>80</sup>

Tyndale dedicates a whole section of *Obedience* to the issue of contrition, equating it with repentance and a sorrowful and mourning heart.<sup>81</sup> He condemns the distinction between contrition and attrition, and the ability of the priest to make contrition complete at confession. He also indicts the priests for abusing this distinction in order to 'sit in the consciences of the people, to lead them captive, and to make a prey of them: buying and selling their sins to satisfy their unsatiable

---

<sup>80</sup> Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, 134.

<sup>81</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience of the Christian Man*, 298.

covetousness'.<sup>82</sup> He corrects this with the real end of contrition: repentance and knowledge of sins. He concludes this section with a brief diagnosis of how biblical confession had become sacramental confession, predictably through the corruption of the clergy who learned how to redefine contrition into attrition.

The very issue of contrition is predictably found throughout Tyndale's theology, as sorrow for sins is a typical requisite for turning from those sins. It is included in his doctrine of sin relative to man's frailty, even if that sin is especially grievous or repetitive, so long as that person has proper contrition for the disobedience he has committed in his weakness.<sup>83</sup> Tyndale's similarities to Wycliffe and the Wycliffites are best seen through his propensity to emphasize contrition when referencing repentance, even when the context otherwise implies it. In his *Prologue to Jonas*, he says that it is necessary for a person without the love of God to 'knowledge unfeignedly that there is sin in the best deed thou doest: and it must earnestly grieve thine heart'. Tyndale's 'to knowledge' also shows some Wycliffite influence, as it was a preferred term for both. Tyndale is more specific in defining this knowledging as both to confess it and to know of its gravity.<sup>84</sup> This gravity necessarily creates contrition. Repeating this sense of mourning is intentionally redundant, for it served to exhibit a correlation with the contritionist notions of many of Tyndale's conservative readers. He uses it again to make the point that a person who repents cannot continue in sin, for repentance necessarily includes abhorring sin.<sup>85</sup> Abhorring sin is what makes contrition complete, and therefore makes confession genuine.

---

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Tyndale, *Mammon*, 130.

<sup>84</sup> Wycliffe simply saw 'knowledging' as a variance of acknowledging an offense. See Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (South Bend, IN, 2006), 59.

<sup>85</sup> Tyndale, *Mammon*, 130, 126.

## **Binding and Loosing of the Law and the Gospel**

Solafidism, by definition, has no room for a confession of individual sins to a priest as a means of attaining satisfaction. A person had no individual sins to confess. He or she was either already a sinner by status, or those sins were already forgiven by virtue of the repentance and conversion. Tyndale defines this in *Obedience* as man's inability to do anything but sin, and only God can loose man of that bondage: 'No flesh can do otherwise than sin; except that God preserve him.'<sup>86</sup> Martin Luther referred to this as the 'bondage of the will', since the will was incapable of any good work, and that man's willing 'cannot indeed will good without grace'.<sup>87</sup> In his prologue to *Jonas*, Tyndale compares the works done by a person whose sins have been loosed to those done by a person still in bondage:

And therefore until that love be come, thou must knowledge unfeignedly that there is sin in the best deed thou doest: and it must earnestly grieve thine heart, and thou must wash all thy good deeds in Christ's blood, ere they can be pure, and an acceptable sacrifice unto God; and must desire God the Father, for his sake to take thy deeds a worth, and to pardon the imperfectness of them, and to give thee power to do them better, and with more fervent love.<sup>88</sup>

Tyndale's notion that man is bound by a sin that infects all of a person's deeds forms the beginning of man's need to be loosed of those sins. A person remained in that bondage until God loosed them. This theme continues when Tyndale writes to More: 'For a man must be first reconciled unto God by Christ, and in God's favour, ere his works can be good and pleasant in the sight of God.'<sup>89</sup>

The priest's claim to have the power to 'bind and loose' sins was for Tyndale

---

<sup>86</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience*, 232.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2012), 98.

<sup>88</sup> Tyndale, *The Prologue of the Prophet Jonas*, 70.

<sup>89</sup> Tyndale, *Answer*, 173.

a misinterpretation of Matthew 16. As the conservatives understood it, Jesus appointed Peter as the rock upon which he would build his church, and through that rock, gave the keys to the kingdom of heaven in order to enable the agents of the church to bind or loose on earth that which is bound or loosed in heaven. It is this understanding of the keys and the conservative understanding of the punishment for sins that gave birth to the doctrine of purgatory.

Tyndale takes no issue with the Vulgate translation, even agreeing on the use of 'heaven' from τῶν οὐρανῶν (*tone ouranown*), which is the same as the Vulgate's *caelis*, despite its more common Hebrew usage of 'the vaulted expanse of the sky'.<sup>90</sup> His disagreement is with an understanding of the context, not the terminology. Just as the rock Jesus refers to is not Peter but Jesus' claims of being the Son of God, so the usage of binding and loosing, δέσης καὶ λύσης (*deseis kai looseis*), refers not to the power of Peter and his future throne, but the law and the Gospel, as evidenced by the passive perfect of δεδεμένον (*dedemenon*), 'shall be bounde', and λελυμένον (*lelumemon*), 'shalbe lowsed'.<sup>91</sup> His exposition of I John elaborates on the power of the keys, following the syntax of Matthew 16, only replacing some key terms:

whomsoever a true preacher of God's word saith shall be damned for his sin, because he will not repent and believe in Christ, the same is damned: and whomsoever a true preacher of God's word saith shall be saved, because he repenteth and believeth in Christ's blood, the same is saved. And this is the binding and loosing that Christ meant.<sup>92</sup>

Tyndale's biblical theology was based on the binding of the law and the loosing of the Gospel, and rarely in his discussions of binding and loosing does he take occasion to voice any anticlericalism. His notion of the power of the keys is similar to that of Wycliffe, but one main reason for Wycliffe's denunciation of oral

---

<sup>90</sup> *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: New American Standard Bible*. (La Habra, CA, 1995).

<sup>91</sup> *The New Testament, 1526 Edition*, William Tyndale, trans. (Peabody, MA, 2008).

<sup>92</sup> Tyndale, *Exposition of the First Epistle of St. John*, 160.

confession was the abuse of the power of the keys, and his most vocal opposition to its practice was in such a context.<sup>93</sup> In countering the notion of purgatory, he defines binding and loosing as ‘to preach, and to feed, and with Christ’s doctrine to purge souls’.<sup>94</sup> In a single thought, Tyndale uses three words used in sacramental confession and redefines them in an evangelical context. This is even more significant with the context of purgatory, as Tyndale indicts the prelates not only with an improper understanding of binding and loosing sins, but with creating an economy of fear based on the punishment of purgatory.<sup>95</sup>

This is clear in Tyndale’s first writing, the 1525 *Cologne Fragment*, so named because only a portion of this translation of the New Testament written from Cologne is extant. It also includes Tyndale’s earliest prologue to Scripture, where he identifies his early doctrine of the binding of the law and the loosing through the promises of God. He speaks of men that are in bondage to a sin that has been exposed by the law as being unable to be loosed by their own merits, the Old Testament as elucidating man’s bondage and the Gospel loosing the conscience that has been troubled by the law, Adam as the originator of mankind’s being bound, human inability to ‘loose the bonds without the blood of Christ’, and Christ’s merits and satisfaction as the source of our loosing and the otherwise unbreakable bonds of Satan. In typical Tyndale fashion, he did not leave these undertones alone, as he dedicated a small section to defining the process of the binding of the law and the loosing of the Gospel, also identified as the *Evangelion*, which comes from the Greek word for ‘good news’. ‘The law goeth before, and the *Evangelion* foloweth. When a preacher preacheth the Law, he bindeth all consciences, and when he

---

<sup>93</sup> *Unprinted English Works*, 329-331.

<sup>94</sup> Tyndale, *The Practice of Prelates*, 432.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 406-407.

preacheth the Gospell, he looseth them again.’<sup>96</sup> He describes the law as identifying the disease and the Evangelion as curing it, and intentionally uses the same word pictures as the priest acting as physician in confession. The law shows man’s inability to obey God’s commands, and the *Evangelion* describes Christ loosing it on man’s behalf.

This idea is developed in *Here Foloweth a treates on the Pater Noster*. He states that the law and gospel are required for prayer, and describes the sole function of the law as to ‘utter sinne and declare what miserable damnacion and captivite we are in’.<sup>97</sup> Yet, in doing so, the law is useful in helping a sinner recognize his true state, which ‘compelleth him to morne, to complayne, to sorrowe, to confesse and knowledge his synne and miserie, and to seke help’.<sup>98</sup> The law helps a person to identify his general state of sinfulness and to seek a remedy. That remedy is the promises of God, which include both heaven and ‘the quietness of the conscience’. The inclusion of the quieting of conscience clearly refers to its antecedent in the probing of the conscience through sacramental penance, as in Luther’s emphasis on comfort instead of anxiety as a product of confession. Tyndale’s contention is that the conscience will never be satisfied through confession unless that confession is made to God, whose promises are the only source of a truly quiet conscience.

Tyndale’s understanding of binding and loosing is largely overlooked by modern scholarship, yet is vital to his understanding not only of penance, but of justification, biblical theology, and of morality. Through understanding Tyndale’s notion that the law convicts of sin and faith in the promises of God is what forgives sin, it is clear that Tyndale’s solafidism never envisioned a double justification, as

---

<sup>96</sup> Tyndale, *The Cologne Fragment*, 2-7.

<sup>97</sup> Yarnell, ‘First Evangelical Sinner’s Prayer’, 39.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

Clebsch argues. In fact, Clebsch entirely neglects Tyndale's view of binding and loosing in his discussion on the law, though he does identify Tyndale's understanding of consenting to sin as though man were diseased, which is a form of bondage, without recognizing the intent of the terms.<sup>99</sup> Carl Trueman correctly identifies that Tyndale puts the focus of human bondage on the person, not on God. Man has objective guilt before God, and his moral bondage that is elucidated by the law is to sin and to Satan, not to himself or his neighbour.<sup>100</sup> This bondage can only be remedied through the promises of God's mercy. Trueman does not see this connection between binding and loosing in Tyndale, but correctly identifies the focus as being on God's promises of Christ's satisfaction rather than on Christ himself.<sup>101</sup> This distinction is perhaps subtle, as God's promises are of Christ's satisfaction found in his blood, a blood that Christ was uniquely qualified to offer. Nonetheless, Trueman's assessment is correct, even if he missed the terminological connection with the binding and loosing of sacramental penance.

Clebsch, on the other hand, sees Tyndale's doctrine of the law as continually developing, but fails to recognize any element of binding and loosing. In later Tyndale, he sees the law as the 'kernel' of Scripture, not the promises of God, on the basis that the ceremonial laws of Leviticus were no longer binding.<sup>102</sup> He does so admitting that the moral law continued to bind, and despite clear continuity in later Tyndale's emphasis on the promises of God as 'loosing' the bondage placed on man by the law of God. In neglecting to identify these terms, he argues that, for Tyndale, this focus on law over gospel remained because the gospel only taught man how to

---

<sup>99</sup> Werrell, *Theology of William Tyndale*, 80-81.

<sup>100</sup> Trueman, *Luther's Legacy*, 85.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>102</sup> Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants*, 156-159.

obey, not what must be obeyed.<sup>103</sup>

Clebsch entirely neglects Tyndale's stated emphasis on the gospel as something that looses what the law binds. In his exposition of Matthew, Tyndale most clearly shows that he has found redeeming value in some aspects of sacramental confession based on the binding of the law and loosing of the gospel.

Expound the law to them, and bring them to knowledge of their sins; and so bind their consciences, and draw them to repentance, and to the appointment and covenant of the Lord again, as many holy prophets, priests, and kings in the Old Testament did call the people back, and brought them again in time of adversity unto the appointment of the Lord.<sup>104</sup>

It is important to note that if the law binds and the promises of God loose, then no level of ecclesiastical office can also have this power. This notion is not a component of anticlericalism in Tyndale, but is for him a part of the restoration of the teaching work of the priest in confession. Luther also agreed that the conservative understanding of the keys is one of the main sources of power that allowed for priestly corruption, and Luther is perhaps the strongest proponent of maintaining private confession and the words of absolution, even though it is those words that conservative priests used to pronounce their power of the keys.<sup>105</sup> Luther of course saw the keys as an aid in comforting the conscience, thus supplementing the importance of the words of absolution in Luther's confession for that very purpose.<sup>106</sup> Luther and Tyndale saw the value of the priest identifying sin through their role in aiding the penitent to acknowledge the gravity of sins and through confessing them, though this is more evident in Wycliffe, who saw the power of the keys as the authority of God to teach and reprove, including but not exclusively

---

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>104</sup> Tyndale, *Exposition of Chapters v, vi, and vii of St Matthew's Gospel*, 95.

<sup>105</sup> *LW*, vol. 35, 40.

<sup>106</sup> *LW*, vol. 35, 51.

limited to confession. Wycliffe's notion of reproof is similar to Tyndale's notion of the power to bind through the law, and his notion to 'teche christis weie' is seen in Tyndale's loosing through the promises of God. The law is what enables the penitent to identify sin, and the Christian who teaches the law is exhibiting the power of the key to bind through the very act of teaching. Likewise, the promises of the Gospel to loose must be communicated by teaching. Thomas Tentler explains one intended aspect of the priest's role as teacher by his ability to make the penitent understand the amount of their sin by probing the conscience. This teaching aspect of sacramental confession in the Late Middle Ages was 'designed to cause guilt as well as to cure guilt',<sup>107</sup> which is to say that the priests were trained to draw forgotten or unknown sins out of peoples' hearts and to bring them to their attention so that they might confess properly. Tyndale often accused the priests of corruption in confession, as he frequently mentions priests unnecessarily binding the consciences of the penitent in an effort to complete attrition. Here, he appeals to the authority of the law as the source of the binding rather than the priest, and drawing to repentance, not into penance.

Tyndale's notion of solafidistic repentance was intentionally fashioned around the terminology of sacramental penance, inside a structure that denied the need for a mediator between man and God. Repentance was a turning from sin and a conversion from a state of one who is a sinner to one whose sins are forgiven. Tyndale retained and reorganized confession, contrition, and satisfaction, with faith serving as the stimulus for adequate contrition and properly-placed satisfaction. His emphasis on faith is similar to that of Martin Luther, who maintained these elements

---

<sup>107</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, xiii

in a similar fashion but showed faith as that which instigates absolution. Tyndale also exhibited some Erasmian influence, notably his disdain for the abuses of confession, his desire for the restoration of the practice of the early church, and more importantly his translation of *μετάνοια* and its implications as understood different from the Vulgate. Tyndale also shared some traits with Wycliffe and his followers, the most obvious being his use of terms of sacramental penance and his notion of contrition being indispensable to proper repentance. His contrition differed dramatically, however, for contrition, once activated by faith, was not caused by any individual acts of sin, but for the overall status of sinfulness that was brought on by the bondage of the will. Tyndale's confession was not mediated through a priest, but directly to God, the truly offended party. Satisfaction was the culmination of repentance, but because man's works cannot effect this satisfaction, Christ's merits were acceptable in their place. This satisfaction was understood as being of the most extreme, Christ's blood. In his entire corpus, Tyndale makes evident that his doctrine of repentance is central to his wider theological understanding, and that doctrine was clothed in clearly defined and historically established terminology, familiar to his conservative rivals.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONTRITION AS CONFESSION:

#### FORGIVENESS ANTE CONFESSIONEM IN ROBERT BARNES

If Thomas More was correct in describing William Tyndale as ‘the captain of our Englyshe heretikes’,<sup>1</sup> then he was speaking not of his leadership but of his influence. Like any good army, the reformation in England had more than one captain, each uniquely influential. While Tyndale concentrated his efforts on the general populace, Robert Barnes used homiletical appeals to the laity while simultaneously charging the hill of the academic and political elites with his writings in Latin. It was Barnes’ preaching, not his writings, that was the most influential in his lifetime, though none of the texts of his sermons are extant.<sup>2</sup> Their extinction forces the modern historical theologian to rely on his writings, the purpose of which was to exert influence through either the universities or the royal court. Barnes’ influence cast a wide net because of these separate foci of laity and academic and royal elites, an influence that clearly separates him from Tyndale. Similarities between Barnes and other English evangelicals did of course exist, but most of these were in the wider context of justification and satisfaction. These similarities indicate that a coherent and broadly consistent doctrine of solafidistic repentance existed among the early English evangelicals, and that the group was not as fragmented as their doctrines of the Eucharist might suggest. Their differences are also important,

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas More, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester et al., vol. 8 (New Haven and London, 1961), 10.

<sup>2</sup> John Craig and Korey Maas argue convincingly that Barnes’ abilities as a preacher far outweighed his career as a theologian or as a royal ambassador. John Craig and Korey Maas, ‘A Sermon by Robert Barnes, C. 1535’, *JEH*, 55 (2004), 542-551.

for the various rejections and reworkings of the penitential formula of contrition, confession, and satisfaction indicate individual influences and emphases that collectively contributed to a new theology of solafidistic repentance.

Barnes is one of the more intriguing characters of the English Reformation. He was at the centre of the reformation story in England and Europe, as his close associates in England included Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell, and for a time Henry, and on the continent Luther, Melancthon, and Philip of Hesse. In 1521, he matriculated at the University of Louvain and studied under Erasmus, before returning to Cambridge to be with the Augustinian friars that helped rear him. He maintained relationships with evangelicals from Leuven, and had clear ties to Lollardy in the early 1520s.<sup>3</sup> He was also a known member of the so-called ‘Little Germany’, though at that time he was yet uncommitted to the evangelical cause.

Among the early English evangelicals, Barnes is widely considered to be doctrinally and personally closest to Martin Luther, and his Lutheran leanings, at least early in his career, are largely undisputed.<sup>4</sup> He was based in Wittenberg from Summer 1530 to October 1531, and after returning to royal favour, served as the royal ambassador in Schmalkaldic affairs, solidifying a clear German connection for the most English of English evangelicals.

---

<sup>3</sup> Korey Maas, *The Reformation and Robert Barnes: History, Theology and Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, UK, 2010), 13ff.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Carl Trueman considers him to be ‘The most significant Lutheran theologian’ in England. Carl R. Trueman, *Luther’s Legacy, Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* (Oxford, 1994), 17. Korey Maas argues that any characterization of Barnes as anything but theologically Lutheran does not bear the available evidence (Maas, 42). Clebsch may be a lone dissenter, as he argues that Barnes, while initially Lutheran, developed a doctrine wholly independent and often at odds with Luther: the shifts between 1531 and 1534 ‘signify a momentous drift away from the religious theocentrism of the early Luther toward the socially and ecclesiastically concerned covenant theology represented by Bucer, later by Calvin, and perhaps most powerfully by the English Puritan tradition’. William A. Clebsch, *England’s Earliest Protestants 1520-1535* (New Haven and London, 1964), 68.

On Christmas Eve of 1525, Barnes preached a famous sermon, clearly anticlerical in nature but not necessarily theologically evangelical. The condemnation of worldly wealth was perhaps intolerable for the extravagant Cardinal Wolsey, who committed him to the Fleet for indefinite confinement. If he had not already had ties to the old Lollard underground, he developed them during this time, as he used the confinement to distribute Tyndale's New Testament to the other prisoners.<sup>5</sup> In 1528, after nearly three years of imprisonment or confinement, he fled England for Germany by faking his own suicide, eventually making his way to Wittenberg and forming a personal acquaintance with Luther.

It is unclear just how evangelical his leanings were in 1528, but by the end of 1530 he had officially crossed party lines when he published *Sententiae ex doctoribus collectae*. This collection of lengthy quotations from the church fathers on a variety of theological issues formed Barnes' first definitive statement of theology. His marginalia were limited but important, though the Latin literacy of his audience indicates that he was more concerned with the academic elites who would recognize the implications of the passages selected, as he limited his commentary to only that which would prod his reader to further understand its implications for justification.

*Sententiae* was written in Wittenberg, and includes a preface from Bugenhagen. It is arranged topically with nineteen subheadings that form the basis for Barnes' understanding of justification, his doctrine of sin, and the power of the keys. It is also important to note that this early treatise is the only place where Barnes discusses auricular confession, and while his annotations in other sections of

---

<sup>5</sup> Carl Trueman, 'Barnes, Robert (c. 1495-1540)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1472>, accessed 15 June 2013].

*Sententiae* are more reserved, he offers more of his own commentary in his discussion of confession than he does in any other section of *Sententiae*.

The following year, he returned to England under safe conduct to help negotiate a Lutheran alliance with England, a role he would later reprise with regularity. That year, the first edition of his *Supplicatyon* appeared. It was intended to be an extended commentary on *Sententiae*, written in English to appeal to a wider audience, though it was addressed to Henry. Barnes curiously omits the section from *Sententiae* on confession, along with one on clerical marriage and one on the mass, and combines the remaining headings into eight sections, beginning with his notion of the relationship between justification and works of satisfaction.

The second edition of the *Supplicatyon* was published three years later, and it carried so many changes that it must be considered as a separate work altogether. Barnes clearly downplays his earlier radicalism in a bid for royal favour, as his topical headings and argumentation emphasized those aspects that Barnes expected to receive approval from a king that was seeking independence from Rome. Many significant changes between the editions reflected the changes in England: a shift from a condemnation of local bishops to that of the Bishop of Rome, an enlargement of his stance on obedience to the king, and a subtle shift in emphasis concerning justification by faith, moving towards a focus on its external manifestation in works in a way similar to Tyndale. This second edition of *Supplicatyon* is his best known work, and was so prominent that it prompted a book-long digression by Thomas More in his *Confutacyon* that was dedicated to answering Barnes' assertions. Corey Maas considers it the 'pinnacle' of his theological publications,<sup>6</sup> and Rainer Pineas contends that it was part of Thomas Cromwell's approach to a polemical history that

---

<sup>6</sup> Maas, *Barnes*, 93.

was to be used as a ‘weapon of religious controversy’ to advance the reformation in England.<sup>7</sup> Of the eight contentions included in the second edition of *Supplicatyon*, at least seven of them are directly or indirectly focused on sins, forgiveness, or a denial of an extracorporeal satisfaction. These writings were influential in the 1530s,<sup>8</sup> though they carried even more weight in the decades to follow.<sup>9</sup>

Like his English evangelical contemporaries, Barnes’ doctrine of penance and repentance centred on satisfaction for the guilt and penalty of sins. Like Luther, the locus of this satisfaction was at the cross, and like Tyndale, the literal agent of satisfaction was ‘Christ’s blood’. Barnes minimized oral confession, as contrition was central for the repentant to receive satisfaction. Contrition did not precede confession; indeed, it was a confession in itself. He was relentless in his attacks on abuses of pardons and auricular confession, but rarely did he pause to address their proper application. In his formula of contrition-confession-satisfaction, confession is undermined in favour of contrition effecting satisfaction. This indicates a complete reworking of sacramental penance, accepting the need for contrition and satisfaction for forgiveness, and the benefit of confessing directly to God or to another Christian.

### **The Confession of Contrition**

Though Barnes does mention auricular confession in both editions of his *Supplication*, in-depth treatment is confined to the 1530 *Sententiae*. Since *Sententiae* is little more than a collection of early church quotations used principally to promote

---

<sup>7</sup> Rainer Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics* (Bloomington, IN, 1968), 122.

<sup>8</sup> Only these three writings are immediately relevant to Barnes’ notion of penance and repentance. A fourth writing, *Vitae Romanorum Pontificum* was a historical overview of the growing corruption of the papacy over time, and serves little use for this study.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Maas, *Barnes*, 206. Maas argues that Barnes’ works were of more limited use in his own lifetime because they were written in Latin or were overtly Lutheran. Maas dedicates much of a chapter of his monograph on the influence of these works on succeeding generations.

solafidism, it must be read in such a way that Barnes interprets the quoted views as if his own. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that it receives very little attention from modern scholars. Pineas, Trueman, and Clebsch all only mention it in passing before moving on to the two editions of the *Supplication*. James Lusardi's biographical essay provides a summary only a few sentences in length proclaiming its evangelical nature. The obvious exception is Maas, whose analysis of Barnes' life and theology is by far the most thorough study available, though it largely ignores the pertinent section on oral confession, and on occasion verges toward hagiography. Yet *Sententiae* is important, because this collection of carefully chosen quotes exhibits Barnes' understanding of some key issues that are not in his *Supplication*. Auricular confession is most notable, for he dedicates a full fourteen pages of text to its historical practice. Only a defence of clerical marriage is given longer treatment, and it, too, is a theme omitted entirely from both editions of the *Supplication*. This treatment of confession makes *Sententiae* a vital component to understanding Barnes' notion of repentance, a notion that he would have preached widely to the laity in England.

Barnes' proclivity for meeting his opponents on common ground is well established, and *Sententiae*'s article on auricular confession is an excellent example of this. The article, subtitled *Confessio auricularis non est de necessitate salutis*,<sup>10</sup> appeals to a wide collection of early church sources in order to defend his denial of the necessity of ecclesiastical confession. These quotations come primarily from the patristics—Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Origen, culminating in the sixth-century *Tripartitae Historia*. The use of such a wide range of extra-biblical sources sets Barnes apart from other English evangelicals, as his strategy was both

---

<sup>10</sup> 'Auricular Confession is not necessary for salvation', translation mine.

theological and historical, built around a humanist appeal to the earliest sources available.<sup>11</sup> Though Barnes accepted the reformation edict of *sola scriptura*, he only cited Scripture in the *Sententiae* when it was also cited by the historical source to which he was appealing.

Barnes' reworking of contrition-confession-satisfaction is evident through this article on oral confession. His formula of solafidistic repentance begins with contrition, which necessitated a complete turning from sin, and that turning was what enabled satisfaction, even prior to confession. Confession to a priest was acceptable, but not necessary for salvation. The emphasis was on confession as a display of repentance, and Barnes avoids any pretext of soothing a burdened conscience, unlike his friend Luther. Barnes also held that sins must be confessed directly to God, though even in this important part of repentance, Barnes is notably brief. His focus is on denouncing the necessity of oral confession for forgiveness, not correcting its usage.

Immediately the differences with Tyndale's notion of solafidistic repentance are clear. Where Tyndale held that confession to God of a general state of sinfulness enables faith to activate contrition and satisfaction, Barnes technically eliminates the need for a conscious confession entirely. Despite this, Barnes does not follow Lombard's contritionism to its necessary end, as confession was still important, though it was actually a component of contrition which, when activated by faith, led to a complete repentance. However, as we shall soon see, Barnes maintained the necessity of a confession to God, though this is as a culmination of contrition, meaning that forgiveness still occurred *ante confessionem*.

---

<sup>11</sup> Maas dedicates three chapters to Barnes' use of historical polemic. Maas, *Barnes*, chapters 3-5.

Barnes' argument against oral confession was less anticlerical than Tyndale's vocal dissent. He uses colourful language more conservatively, calling it 'abominable',<sup>12</sup> or describing it as being sold 'as openly as a cowe and an oxe is solde'.<sup>13</sup> His methods were more calculated, as he sought to demonstrate that forgiveness occurred prior to any ecclesiastical involvement. He illustrates this in a very brief pericope of Augustine, as something that is understood as an established fact, *ut probatum est* (as has been proven).<sup>14</sup> It is not the confession to a priest that brings a person to life, but contrition that initiates repentance and provides grace: '*euidentißime apparet, quod sola cordis contritio, sine oris confeßione peccatum remittitur*'.<sup>15</sup> Augustine would only have understood contrition in its fullest sense, as its separation from attrition was a thirteenth-century development. Similarly, he understood repentance as beginning with the heart before it 'radiates from all sides'. For Augustine, contrition was necessarily *quod sola cordis*. A definitive statement such as this may be the reason for a lack of marginalia on the subject, as it may have been enough for Barnes to decide not to interfere with the text. In this brief mention of Augustine, Barnes establishes his notion that contrition begins with the heart before encompassing everything, and that this contrition brings a turning from sin that leads to forgiveness prior to confession.

This emphasis on contrition is also clearly incompatible with Luther's emphasis on healing the broken conscience. Barnes, despite being Luther's protégé for much of his evangelical career, preferred not to focus on assurance of salvation through soothing of the conscience, replacing it with a graphic, masochistic

---

<sup>12</sup> Barnes, 1531 *Supplication*. sig. D7v.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. D7r.

<sup>14</sup> Barnes, *Sententiae*, sig. H1r.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

destruction of the conscience through contrition. This is perhaps most clear in Barnes' use of the twelfth-century canon law text *Decretum Gratiani*, which argued that contrition alone 'cures' or 'destroys' sin: '*Sola contritio, in qua fit resuscitatio, tollit peccatum*'.<sup>16</sup> Barnes uses the *Decretum* to chastise those who exhibit an external display (*ostendens*) of contrition by tearing their clothes instead of their heart. The notion of displaying contrition and repentance is not the issue, as the text shows that confession is made to display repentance, not request forgiveness ('*Fit itaque confessio ad ostensionem poenitentiae non ad impetrationem ueniae*').<sup>17</sup> Rather, the Biblical language of tearing clothes out of shame indicated a physical sign without an inward change that would have been well known to the *Decretum* as well as to Augustine and Barnes. The focus is not on the fact that a person tears his clothes but that he does not also tear his heart prior to confession. However, confession can serve as an appropriate display of the past event of repentance. This is the only place in *Sententiae* that Barnes praises the merits of auricular confession, as he is typically vague elsewhere. While the focus is on internal contrition and not false external signs, the fact that he includes in his citation a section of tacit endorsement of confession as a display of repentance provides important evidence that Barnes did not wholly reject oral confession.

Contrition is linked to repentance, as a person who has contrition, with or without a physical sign of confession, necessarily turns from those sins that have caused the contrition. On this point, Barnes does not provide any marginalia, though it is telling that it is the prominent feature in the article's first citation, the *Decretum*. The selection used is one of his longer citations, and immediately announces to his

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. G7r-G7v.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. H1r.

readers that the central characteristic of confession requires repentance. The opening phrase ‘*Conuertimini ad me in toto corde uestro, & ego conuertar ad uos*’<sup>18</sup> may in fact serve as a brief summary of Barnes’ notion of solafidistic repentance. He immediately recognizes the existence of sin as a fact, the need to turn from it, and the internal but intentional and consuming nature of that turning. For a person to obey the injunction to ‘*conuertimini...in toto corde uestro*’, they must first recognize their need to turn, then do so internally *in toto*. This completeness implies the need for contrition rather than attrition, and that implication is taken further in the remainder of the citation. The *Decretum* describes turning as ‘radiating on all sides’ (*undique*), and the only remedy is to turn from sin to God (*ad Deum conuertitur*). Turning can be understood *quod etiam ore tacete*, with *tacete* (silence) indicating a denial of the need for the oral portion of confession, as turning from sins is what effects forgiveness of them. The denial of the necessity of auricular confession is furthered a few pages later, as Barnes selects another section from the *Decretum* that states that the act of oral confession is not what forgives sins, but it is the very act of turning and in the very hour of turning.<sup>19</sup> It is again evident that forgiveness occurs *ante confessionem*, and as a result of turning caused by contrition, not through confessing after that contrition materializes.

This theme of forgiveness prior to oral confession is repeated three times by Barnes through an account of Jesus healing ten lepers before telling them to show themselves to the priests.<sup>20</sup> When one of the ten returned, he told him that his faith is what healed him. Barnes uses this passage, which does not actually address

---

<sup>18</sup> *Sententiae*, sig. G7r. ‘Return to me with your entire heart and I will turn to you’, translation mine.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* ‘*In Quacunq; hora peccator fuerit conuersus etc. Non enim dicitur, ore confessus fuerit, sed tantum conuersus fuerit, & ingenuerit, uit uiuet & non morietur.*’ Translation mine.

<sup>20</sup> Luke 17:11-19.

confession, to argue that a person is spiritually healed prior to ecclesiastical intervention, not after. He again avoids citing Scripture, preferring to cite early church figures in an effort to promote the use and understanding of the early church over that of his own time.

In addition to the *Decretum Gratiani*, Barnes cites Bede's commentary on Luke 17, which goes a step further than a simple statement that forgiveness occurs prior to sin being shown to a priest. Bede concedes that, while forgiveness comes before oral confession, some may be better suited by merely attending oral confession in order to be continually reminded of themes of forgiveness. This includes depraved heretics (*heretica pravitate*), those prone to pagan superstition (*superstitio gentili*), Jewish teaching (*Iudaica perfidia*) or some other fraternal schism (*etiam schismate fraterno*). Barnes adds his own commentary here, stating that if the crime is public, then this should be enough for the public. However, if the sin is secret and private, such particular sins are automatically forgiven prior to private confession.<sup>21</sup> While clearly different from Tyndale or Luther in the use of its ingredients, the chief end of Barnes' doctrine of repentance is fundamentally the same: forgiveness requires an intentional, permanent turning from sin, where turning requires an acknowledgment of sin *coram deo*. Yet, this turning from sins, which is precipitated by contrition instead of confession, is that which brings salvation.

Barnes emphasized a denial of oral confession to a priest at the expense of any arguments in favour of a true confession to God. However, he does briefly express this notion in *Sententiae* through an excerpt from Augustine's *Confessions*. Again without marginalia, Barnes quotes from Book Ten to develop the idea of an

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. H2r.

internal confession: ‘*id ago uerbis carnis & uocibus, Sed uerbis anime & clamore cogitacionis, quein nouit auris tua*’.<sup>22</sup> He continues with a description of confession as nothing more than to be *quam displicere mihi* (dissatisfied with yourself), where the emphasis is clearly on contrition. Barnes, using Augustine, argues that true confession is both silent, yet not silent, in that God knows the confession in the heart, but that confession is made audible independent of a priest’s ear. The very fact of contrition forces some audible response: ‘*tacet enim strepitu, clamat affectu*’.<sup>23</sup> How Barnes understood the nature of this audible response is unclear. It may indicate a response of the heart that only God can hear, or it may be so ‘radiating from all sides’ that it is accompanied by physical auditory response. While the former is perhaps more in the spirit of Augustine’s teachings, it is also likely that Barnes’ denial of an enumeration of sins and of the necessity of oral confession would have concluded that confession and contrition were synonymous. If a person feels sorrow for their sin, that sorrow, when properly placed, acts in place of the confession to God. Confession, then, is a matter of the heart instead of the mind for Barnes. Since God is aware of the contrition and the desire to turn, his knowledge of the heart’s confession is by itself a sufficient confession for forgiveness. God’s awareness of the contrition is equal in weight to a heart’s confession, and satisfaction is applied by merit of that contrition.

This concept is taken further in a mention of Chrysostom’s commentary on Hebrews that identifies the human propensity to lie to self, but since God knows every sin, he made the human conscience to calculate (*computemus*) each individual

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. H1r-H2r. ‘I do not do it with words and sounds of the flesh, but with the words of my soul, and that clamouring of meditation that your ear knows.’ Translation mine.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* ‘For in sound, I am silent. In affection, I cry aloud.’ Translation mine.

sin. Therefore, the conscience aids in confessing sins to God.<sup>24</sup> This is not a desire for the enumeration of individual sins to aid in salvation, as even the action of counting sins could be an attempt to earn forgiveness. Rather, the nature of confessing individual sins is meant to identify human helplessness consistent with Barnes' doctrine of the bondage of the human will, which is that man's nature can only sin prior to forgiveness and an indwelling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup>

This is also evident in Chrysostom's second homily, where he encourages people who feel shame for their sins to tell them daily to God in their soul (*quia peccasti, dicito quotidie in anima tua*).<sup>26</sup> God is the preferred recipient of this confession rather than a layman, for '*deo qui curat ea*' (It is God who cleans it). Chrysostom adds that God is present at every sin, therefore the purpose of confessing is not to merely inform God, though the true purpose is not given here. Ambrose identifies one purpose of confession as the glory of God, since the glory of forgiving belongs to God and not man (*nulla Gloria in hac re hominis est*).<sup>27</sup> Barnes cites Bede to show that secret sin is forgiven directly by God, and it is God who 'heals and cures the inner conscience' (*Dominus sanat et corrigit*).<sup>28</sup> This also is in the context of Jesus healing the lepers to show that the sin is forgiven prior to a conscious expression of it to God.

Outside the *Sententiae*, Barnes' notion of oral confession is particularly sparse. The most notable selection in the 1531 *Supplicatyon* is through an analogy in Ephesians 5, where the Apostle Paul describes the church as the bride of Christ, and Christ sanctifies and cleans the church. Barnes, like most evangelicals, would have

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. H2v.

<sup>25</sup> Barnes elaborates on this in Article 4 of *Sententiae*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. H2v.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. G8v-H1r.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. H2r-H2v.

understood this analogy in terms of the bride serving as both the collective body of believers and as individual Christians. This was a preferred analogy of Luther, one that the New Finnish School has used to argue for Luther holding to a concept of divinization.<sup>29</sup> This Lutheran influence is seen in Barnes' addition to the passage that this is done through the shared attributes of man and wife, where the bride must recognize her need to be cleansed. If Christ is clean, then the true church is clean. Barnes' added commentary to the passage is rather extended, as he expounds upon the necessity of a recognition of sinfulness that contrition has forced in order to effect satisfaction:

if she referre hyr selfe vn to the merittis of hyr blessed husbonde Christ Iesus and to the clenness that she hathe in his bloud, than is she with out spotte. For by the reason yt she stickith by faythe so fast vn to hyr husband Christ and dothe a byde in confession of hyr synne, and requyerith mercy for them, therefore is there nothyng layd to hyr charge but all thinge is forgeuyn hyr.<sup>30</sup>

The idea of shared attributes is abundant in later Lutheran theology, but what is more important for this study is Barnes' added commentary on confession. Several lines later, he describes this confession: 'knowlegynge of hir synnes and not by hir awne puernes wherefore such a church there must nedes be'.<sup>31</sup> Here, the hearer of confession, Christ, is at the centre of the confession in the place of the sins being confessed. It is only through 'knowlegynge' of sins that a person can share in this pureness, and Barnes sarcastically denies any attempt of satisfaction through 'purenes' of good works.

---

<sup>29</sup> See p. 77, above. Also see Tuomo Manermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> 1531 *Supplication*, sig. I4r.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

This section that defines the attributes of the church underwent significant changes in the 1534 edition, as his concern shifted from being anti-clerical to pro-regnum. Barnes replaces the discussion on Ephesians 5 with one by Augustine as an answer to More. He maintains the collective nature of the church in order to fit the context of the definition of the church, and continues that the church is not perfect.

A saynge of S. Augustine, to proue, that the churche hath spottes, and wrynclcs in her, and yet by confessyng of them, and by styckyng to Christes bloude they be not imputed vnto her. This is his sayenge. The holle churche prayeth, Lord forgyve vs our synnes, wherfore we hath spottes, and wrynclcs. But by knowlegynge of them, her wrynclcs ben stretched out, and by knowledgyng, her spottes are washed away. The churche continueth in prayer, that we myghte be iustified by knowlegynge of her synnes, and as longe as we here lyue, so standeth it. And whan euery man departeth out of his body, all suche synnes are forgyuen hym, the whiche oughte to be forgyuen. For they be forgyuen by dayly prayer, and he gothe hence clenched.<sup>32</sup>

The identification of the church takes on a new meaning in this edition of the *Supplication*. Clearly, Barnes contends that the physical ecclesiastic entity in England has ‘spottes and wrynclcs’, and their being cleansed was dependent upon the church ‘knowledgyng’ them. Yet, the rhetoric of historical context does not betray the second meaning, which is that Barnes believed what he said regarding the individual sinner seeking forgiveness. This is clear when Barnes individualizes sin, confession, and satisfaction: ‘Let vs therefore pray that God may forgyve vs, and yt we may forgyve our detours, seyng it is sayde, and it shall be forgyuen vnto you. We saye this dayly, and dayly we do this, and this thing is done dayly in vs. We are not here without synne. But we shall departe hens without synne.’<sup>33</sup> Also, any indication of the addition of sins being ‘forgyuen by dayly prayer’ as an indication of a repetition or enumeration of sins is inconsistent with Barnes’ focus on confession

---

<sup>32</sup> 1534 *Supplication*, sig. M4v-N1r.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. N1r.

serving as an extension of contrition, with confession occurring in the confessional of the heart. Barnes held that a cognitive confession of individual sins to God was unnecessary except as an extension of contrition.

Confession to God as an extension of contrition was at the heart of Barnes' reformation of oral confession. For confession to be effective, the heart must do the work in the place of the mouth. Yet the question remains as to what role Barnes saw for oral confession. Apart from the subtitle of the article in the *Sententiae*, Barnes' own views on this are not immediately clear, in part because of the general lack of marginalia. Barnes' primary concern was with providing a defence for solafidism, and was therefore often content to merely define the necessary elements for salvation. This is perhaps why he does not detail what constitutes a true oral confession, even in the midst of his reputation for denouncing its abuses. Barnes had a tendency to merely draw borders around doctrines rather than explain their inner workings. Other than a few brief comments on Augustine and the *Decretum*, where he describes confession as a possible display of repentance, only once does he outline his notion of oral confession, and that outline is incomplete. In his closing citation, taken from *Tripartita Historia*, Barnes shows the early development of confession, specifically that the church did not know of secret confession for three hundred years ('*ecclesia dei ignoravit per. CCC. Anos*').<sup>34</sup> He agrees with Erasmus in stating that the practice of oral confession should not be condemned simply because of a denial of apostolic origin. Instead, Barnes endorses much of it (*imo ualde cam probo*), but insists that, despite this approval, it is not necessary for salvation. An understanding that Barnes explicitly accepted 'much of' auricular confession aids in understanding what was acceptable and how it was repurposed into his doctrine of

---

<sup>34</sup> *Sententiae*, sig. H4v.

repentance. He never definitively states how much he accepts and what he rejects, but this article in *Sententiae*, taken as a whole, shows all the key elements of his notion of solafidistic repentance taken from the context of sacramental penance.

Barnes' notion of confession was thoroughly evangelical. He was outspoken in his denunciation of ecclesiastical abuses in confession. His notion of confession was independent of ecclesiastical mediation, and his use of the source material is evidence that oral confession is functionally and ontologically unrelated to salvation. It is interesting to note, though, that he never criticizes the practice of oral confession in his *Sententiae*. He only denies its effectiveness for salvation. Unlike his mentor Luther or his English contemporaries, he only briefly provides for the positive effects of auricular confession, that of a 'cured conscience', the glory of God, or a display of repentance. This emphasis may indicate a lack of source material, as the notion of assurance is decidedly Lutheran, though Barnes was not wanting for material on the confessor as the physician of the soul, which was a constant theme in late medieval doctrines of confession. It is perhaps sufficient that Barnes' lack of emphasis on the positive effects of confession was designed to keep the focus of his work squarely on the framework established in *Sententiae*'s first article: justification comes only by faith. If a person is to confess his sins, it must be done with a whole heart by turning from those sins, and must be done directly to God.

### **The Blood of Christ over the Sweat of Man**

Barnes had fierce loyalties to his home country, and the fact that such a sentiment was not reciprocated was a tough pill for him to swallow. He left England under unpleasant circumstances, and the desire to return seems to have remained with him

during his period of exile on the continent. It is this desire, combined with the advancement of Lutheran ideas in Wittenberg, that compelled him to expand upon his *Sententiae* only months after collecting its quotations. The 1531 edition of the *Supplication* is perhaps equal parts doctrinally evangelical and pragmatically anticlerical, and includes a relatively brief defence against the heresy charges relating to his 1525 sermon and the events that led to his escape to Europe. Korey Maas considers this defence the ‘manifesto’ of the Cambridge evangelicals.<sup>35</sup> Its eight articles are heavily solafidistic, as he expounds justification by faith, the power of the keys, and the bondage of the will. This edition of his *Supplication* was as politically suicidal as it was theologically rich, as its theological emphasis failed to take into account the royal mood of a *defensor fidei* more concerned with Rome and supremacy than justification and clerical abuses. The anticlerical tone of the first *Supplication* indicates that it is likely that Barnes was bitter at what he felt was a betrayal by his conservative friends.<sup>36</sup> As in *Sententiae* and his defence of his 1525 Christmas sermon, the 1531 *Supplication* was unrelenting in its attacks on the clergy, and in particular the extravagance of the since-deposed Wolsey and related financial corruptions found in the institutions of the church.

By 1534, the conservative tide in England was on its way out, taking with it the heretic hunter Thomas More. Barnes would find solace in Cromwell’s increasing importance, and revised his *Supplication* as a more direct appeal to his king. This edition shows a significant reduction in theological overtones in general, as its main purpose was finding royal favour that would enable him to more safely move about

---

<sup>35</sup> Maas, *Reformation and Robert Barnes*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Parker does not necessarily disagree, though his portrait of Barnes is as one that is unencumbered by what was happening in England. Douglas H. Parker, ed., *A Critical Edition of Robert Barnes’s ‘A Supplication Vnto the Most Gracious Prince Kynge Hnry The. VIII.’ 1534* (Toronto, 2008), 17.

England and Europe.<sup>37</sup> Theology is not absent; it merely takes a backseat to an appeal for safe passage home. Gone are the articles on the power of the keys, arguments in favour of the vernacular Scripture, the Eucharist, and a section against the veneration of images. In their place is a much longer and repetitive defence of his 1525 sermon, a more consistent and layered theme promoting monarchical submission and royal jurisdiction, and a new section on the marriage of priests. It provides a dramatic shift in tone and purpose from the bold soteriology of the previous edition to one that is specifically pro-regnum and anti-papal. Many of the omitted sections are directly related to arguments regarding Barnes' understanding of sacramental penance, such as the power of the keys and many elements of priestly mediation, minimizing the utility for understanding Barnes' notion of sola fidei repentance in the 1534 text.

The differences in these two editions of his *Supplication* do not, however, indicate important theological changes, as Clebsch argues. He maintains that Barnes shifted dramatically between the writing of these two editions on the issues of justification and kingship. He sees a Lutheran Barnes in 1531, but one with a Tyndale bent in 1534.<sup>38</sup> He correctly notes Barnes' shift in his stance on episcopal power, but ignores the historical fact that Henry was not distinctly anti-episcopal, and had no intention of eliminating the role of bishops, provided their loyalty was to the crown rather than to Rome. Henry certainly applied immense political pressure on the English bishops to accept his supremacy, but this pressure must not be understood as a denial of their ecclesiastical significance. He admits that the shape of Barnes' section on justification was the same in both editions, but sees Barnes' shift

---

<sup>37</sup> Parker, *Critical Edition*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants*, 59ff.

on the acceptance of the book of James, an epistle that many early evangelicals admitted caused difficulty for their argument of justification by faith, as evidence of his loyalty to Luther, who famously considered James to be ‘an epistle of straw’ early in his career. For Clebsch, this indicates a waning of Lutheranism in favour of what he sees as Tyndale’s own double justification.<sup>39</sup>

That Tyndale did not hold to a double justification has been established above,<sup>40</sup> and it must follow that if there are strong soteriological similarities between the two evangelicals, neither did Barnes. Maas argues that most changes between 1530 and 1534 were unrelated to the doctrine of justification, and that Barnes maintained solafidism throughout.<sup>41</sup> Trueman likewise sees Barnes professionally concerned with royal favour, as his use in diplomatic missions would be more effective, not to mention safer, if Barnes received a royal pardon rather than just an order of safe conduct.<sup>42</sup> Yet, while Barnes and Tyndale were not necessarily in accord in all matters of justification, it is clear that their notions of penance and repentance, despite their differences, maintained both solafidism and a centrality of satisfaction. Their redefined or repurposed terms of contrition, confession, and satisfaction indicate that neither of them issued a wholesale rejection of many of the necessary elements of sacramental penance.

This theological continuity between the two editions of the *Supplication* is important, because many alterations between the two editions involved omissions of evidence concerning Barnes’ doctrine of solafidistic repentance, not redefinitions or clarifications of it. These omissions do not indicate a shift in an understanding of

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 65ff.

<sup>40</sup> See pp 100-103, above.

<sup>41</sup> Maas, *Barnes*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Trueman, *Luther’s Legacy*, 190-191.

justification, but rather a shift in focus of the arguments themselves that was a result of changing circumstances in England. While Barnes gives less attention to contrition, confession, and absolution, this, too, is an indication of the shift of focus, not belief. Like his English evangelical contemporaries and his patron Luther, that shift was towards a focus on Christ's satisfaction as the most important element of repentance. That shift is more profound in the 1534 edition, with an even greater emphasis on Christ's blood as the literal agent of satisfaction as a replacement for works of penance. There is likewise no evidence that supposes that Barnes' understanding of repentance was revised between the late 1520s and his death in 1540, as his evangelical theology, once established, remained relatively static. The newfound faith of the mid 1520s may have been unsteady, but once he developed his evangelical doctrines prior to 1530, he did not waver in them.

As mentioned above, both editions of the Supplication lack any direct discussion of auricular confession and resulting absolution, the article that was among the most thorough in his *Sententiae*. Likewise, Barnes places very little emphasis on contrition, which he notes in *Sententiae* is that which initiates repentance, and therefore forgiveness.<sup>43</sup> He does not use the same language as Tyndale does, which uses the imagery of God as the one who hears confessions, and he does not offer a liberal usage of the terms of binding and loosing as artistic language for the power of the keys in arguments related to other aspects of justification. What remains is a strong focus on Christ's blood, and, in the 1531 edition, an article on the power of the keys. Though Barnes argued that it was the act of turning from sins prior to their confession that effected forgiveness, the

---

<sup>43</sup> *Sententiae*, sig. G7r-G7v.

centre-piece of forgiveness was the blood of Christ as satisfaction *a poena et a culpa* of sin, independent of human effort such as that seen in sacramental penance.

The first article of both *Supplications* is a concise argument for solafidism, and this article provides the initial soteriological thrust for both editions. It is here that Barnes' view of satisfaction through Christ's blood as a replacement for sacramental penance is found. The 1534 edition has an even greater emphasis on Christ's blood, as it more clearly describes it as the focal point of repentance and the fulfilment of God's promise. In it, Barnes stated that justification by faith is the reason

we do gyve to faiyth, and to Christes bloude, that glorye, that belongeth to them onely, that is to say, iustificacion, remission of synnes, satisfieng of God's wrathe, taking away of euerlastyng vengeaunce, purchasyng of mercy, fulfyllynge of the lawe, with all other lyke thynges. The glorye of these, I say, belongeth to Christ only, and we are partakers of them by faiyth, in Christes bloude onely. For it is no worke, that receyueth the promise made in Christes bloude, for faythe onely.<sup>44</sup>

He then summarizes that 'the glorye and prayse of iustificacion belongeth onely to faith in Christes bloude, and not to workes in any wyse'.<sup>45</sup> Here, Christ's blood is placed next to penitential works and shown as the only legitimate agent of satisfaction. That blood is the object of faith, and is the rightful owner of the glory of the remission of sins. A few lines later he defines that faith as one 'whiche doth beleue the promyses of God, and stycketh fast to the bloude of Christe', and whose only virtue is justification.<sup>46</sup> Barnes understood that a literal satisfaction for sins must be made, and where his pre-1525 doctrine would have understood satisfaction

---

<sup>44</sup> 1534 *Supplication*, sig. L4v.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. M2r.

as through the sweat and blood of attempts of penitential satisfaction, he came to embrace the idea that only Christ's blood was sufficient.

The blood of Christ represents the cornerstone of Barnes' doctrine of satisfaction as it did for Tyndale. He describes papal pardons as 'blasphemous rubrykes they alowe agenst the bloude off chryst',<sup>47</sup> and identifies anyone who attempts to earn salvation through works as 'croked enymys of christes bloude',<sup>48</sup> and 'sore agenst christes bloud'.<sup>49</sup> He describes those who attempt salvation through obedience of the law as ones who 'dyspise the bloud of hys testament'.<sup>50</sup> It is particularly telling that he would identify 'the bloude off chryst' as the target of blasphemy rather than Christ himself or the glory of God, as the person of Christ was secondary in importance to Christ's work on the cross. Likewise, proponents of good works were enemies of Christ's blood rather than enemies of something more generic, such as enemies of Christ, of God, or of righteousness. Christ's blood was so integral to satisfaction for sins, it formed the most obvious reference point for Barnes' relationship between faith and salvation.

In addition to charging those enemies with blasphemy, he accuses them of attempting an additional satisfaction beyond what was already complete, which is the same as setting up a false system of forgiveness:

Now what cause lay yov youre good works? The lambe hathe alonly dyed for vs. The lambe hathe alonly shed his bloude for vs. The lambe hath alonly redemyed vs. These thinges hath he done alone. Now if these be suffycyent, then hath he alone made satysfaccion and is allonly worthy to opyn the boke [1534: 'be our redeemer and iustifier']. Moreouer, this tytyll ys geuen to the lambe by them yt be

---

<sup>47</sup> 1531 *Supplication*, sig. A3r.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. 1534 *Supplication*, sig. J4v.

<sup>49</sup> 1531 *Supplication*, sig. G6r.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. M6v.

in heuyn and how dare you (being but stynkyng caryon) geue it  
eyther in parte or in hole to any other?<sup>51</sup>

He continues by repeating that the lamb is the only thing worthy of redeeming, and therefore works are not merely superfluous, but a reliance on them causes a person to be an enemy of Christ's blood, as it is this blood that was the literal agent of satisfaction.

That the idea of good works must be understood as the works of sacramental penance is without question. Not only is this how it was understood in a conservative construct, but Barnes consistently interchanged the concepts of earning forgiveness through good works and that of works of satisfaction. Good works and priest-prescribed satisfaction were one and the same. In this same article on justification, he quotes Ambrose on remission of sins without labour, then expounds on God requiring nothing to be added to justification, which is 'with out all maner workes, with out all maner obseruacions, also their synnes be covered, and no manner of works of penaunce required of them by allonly to beleue here haue yov *Sola fides* and *tantum fides*.'<sup>52</sup> Later he speaks of the satisfaction of Christ's blood as complete rather than needing addition, which is attempted through the offices of the church.<sup>53</sup>

This fits neatly into his doctrine of faith and sin, as 'all thynges a fore faythe are but very blyndnes, but as sone as faythe cometh, he doth bothe iustyfy and also maketh the workys good whyche were a fore synne.'<sup>54</sup> He describes these works in a way that would remind his conservative readers of works of satisfaction in

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. E7r-E7v. The 1534 edition eliminates usage of the lamb and the book, and replaces it with more redemption language: 'They that be in heuen confesse, that this lambe is alonly worthy to redeme them. Be your works better than theirs? Or can your workes help them? Yf they can? Than is not the lambe alonly worthy to redeme them.' 1534 *Supplication*, sig. J3r-J4v.

<sup>52</sup> 1531 *Supplication*, sig. F3v.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. 1534 *Supplication*, sig. J3v.

<sup>54</sup> 1531 *Supplication*, sig. E7r.

sacramental penance, as these works would be understood in relationship to a person's 'vayne blessyngs and sanctificacions, and with youre damnable pardons, and with your whysling absolucyons, by such works as these be that haue but ye shadow of holiness and in deed be but sinne'.<sup>55</sup> What is more, forgiveness for the greatest sins has already been 'purchesyde' by Christ's blood, something that even priests cannot do without the aid of the works of penance.<sup>56</sup> Barnes understood Christ's blood as satisfaction in a literal way, not as a figurative description of the agent of satisfaction. The fact that he here identifies Christ's blood as that which purchased forgiveness as a solution to the negative identification of 'damnable pardons' and 'whysling absolucyons' indicates the relationship between Christ's blood and the pronouncement of the priest in confession.

This idea of purchased forgiveness is also a brief window into Barnes' doctrine of sin. He viewed sin as incurring a debt that cannot be repaid because humans, on their own, do not possess a valid currency to pay that debt. The existence of sin invalidates all human effort as currency for satisfaction. Christ's blood, according to Barnes, was that currency because he did not sin. This notion is similar to one held by Tyndale, though more pronounced. He describes it as that which bought the true church,<sup>57</sup> and four times in this short article describes it as a 'purcheser of grace'.<sup>58</sup> Later, he describes this currency as being complete and without supplement of works: 'Ye same thinge that purchesythe vs remission of oure synnes doth also purchesse iustificacion, for iustificacion is nothing but remission of synnes. Now faith purchessith vs remission of synnes, ergo by faith be

---

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. E8v.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. B4r.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. E6r. 1534 *Supplication*, sig. J3v, L4v.

we iustifyde'.<sup>59</sup> He continues this with the reminder that 'youre works can not helpe yov to iustificacion, for whan yov haue done alle, yen are yov vnprofitable.'<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps Barnes felt the idea of purchasing forgiveness with Christ's blood held echoes of his incessant attacks on the priests in his 1525 sermon for selling pardons and absolution.

The 1534 *Supplication* has an increased focus on Christ's blood as satisfaction, and with that comes an increase in instances of describing Christ's blood as currency. He states that it is only through faith that a person can be a 'partaker of the merites and mercy purchased by Christes bloude'.<sup>61</sup> He describes Jesus as being different from Moses because he was not a law giver, then describes Christ's purpose and method as that of a substitute: 'to purchase vs favour, he dyed on the crosse, and so did not Moyses. But he comaundeth vs to do this and do that. But Christe sayth hange you on my doing, and beleue thou, that I haue done for the, for the, and not for me'.<sup>62</sup> He continues that Christ interprets the law, and contrasts the doctrine of earning salvation through satisfaction of the law with Christ as the purchaser of the individual with his blood.

When Barnes is not referring to Christ's blood as the agent of satisfaction, he refers to Christ himself as the satisfaction. He does so twice in the 1531 edition and once in 1534, each without significant elaboration. In all three instances, Barnes merely states Jesus' status as satisfaction as an established fact. He loosely quotes Scripture identifying Jesus as the satisfaction for the sins of the church, and that it is through that satisfaction, not through merits, that sins can be remitted.<sup>63</sup> In two of

---

<sup>59</sup> 1531 *Supplication*, sig. F7r.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> 1534 *Supplication*, sig. M2v.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. K1v.

<sup>63</sup> 1531 *Supplication*, sig. S6v.

these instances, Christ as satisfaction is listed among other attributes of salvation such as Christ as righteousness and as redemption. That this idea of the shared attributes of God exists in the later edition of the *Supplication* is evidence of Barnes' Lutheran influence.

It is interesting to note that, while Barnes was clearly solafidistic and describes faith in a way that makes it integral to forgiveness, he never overtly discusses it in relationship to confession and repentance in the way that Luther or Tyndale did. Luther described faith as one of the elements of repentance, and Tyndale's notion of faith was that it was the element that activated contrition and a pre-existing satisfaction at confession, but was itself not one of the three ingredients in the formula. Barnes, however, describes faith's role in satisfaction in ways that makes its connection to forgiveness clear, and how he viewed it in relationship to contrition and confession is not evident in his *Sententiae* or either edition of his *Supplication*. Clearly faith was important in repentance, but Barnes only details where faith must be placed to be effective—Christ's blood as satisfaction—not how it fits into a general schema of contrition, confession, or satisfaction.

Both editions of *Supplication* have a clear emphasis of satisfaction in Christ's blood where elements of penance and repentance are seen. The selections in *Sententiae* are almost contritionist in their approach, and the protracted quotations and marginalia on confession are omitted. The language of God as confessor that was abundant in Tyndale and Luther is also gone. What remains are clues to Barnes' notion of satisfaction. His formula of contrition, confession, and satisfaction remained, but faith is only understood in relationship to satisfaction. Barnes does not indicate that, like Tyndale and Luther, faith was active in the whole formula. These details are not conclusive, as Barnes was less exhaustive in his details of penance

and repentance, though it is likely that if Barnes held that faith was indeed the activating ingredient in repentance, it would bear greater attention in Barnes' own discussions of faith and repentance.

### **The Powers of the Key**

An understanding of the power of the keys is vital to a mature doctrine of forgiveness, and Barnes' emphasis on satisfaction was not blind to the treatment of how binding and loosing occurred. While *Sententiae* is the only source of information for some elements of Barnes' notion of solafidistic repentance, it was brief in its description of the power of the keys. The 1531 *Supplication*, however, provides a significantly expanded outline. Its section in *Supplication* includes every quote from its *Sententiae* counterpart, but the majority of its source material is Scripture itself. The section is entirely omitted in the 1534 edition, though, again, this second edition must be understood less as a theological treatise and more as an attempt by Barnes to tell his king whatever he wanted to hear to allow him more than just safe passage.

The methodology of this section in some ways undermines the earlier defence against his 1526 charges. He often has occasion to point out the corruptions of the conservative notion of purgatory and the power of the keys, though he rarely takes advantage of such opportunities. Instead, he maintains focus on the matter at hand. His argument is framed with a logical progression. The papacy has made the word of God unavailable to the layperson. Historical precedent had already been made by Scotus and Lyra, that the power to unlock heaven was not infallible. Therefore, Barnes' conclusion was that any key that does not always fit in its own

lock is only a 'pickelocke'.<sup>64</sup> Because their key does not come with certainty, another key must exist that does have certainty. That key is the very thing that the church was holding captive: the word of God.

The identification of the key in the singular as the word of God signals a departure from Tyndale and Luther. For them, the power of the keys comes through different functions of the Old Testament binding and the New Testament loosing. For Barnes, the key is what holds the power, but the binding and loosing comes from faith in the promises of God rather than the natures of law and gospel. For all evangelicals in England, however, the power of the keys is not held by the person pronouncing the word, but rather through the reception of the word, which brings about a knowledge of sins and a turning from them. This maintains the solafidistic principle that a person cannot unlock heaven without Christ's satisfaction.

Barnes begins his argument by quoting Augustine, who held that the property of these keys is 'where by the hardnes of oure hartis are openyd vn to faithe and where by the secrettness of myndes are made manifest'. He continues through the notion that through opening 'the consyens to the knowledge of synne', which comes with grace, a person may be loosed of their sins.<sup>65</sup> Barnes' notion of the power of the keys comes through a confession of sins that are made known to the conscience so that grace can fully loose them. The power of the hidden sin was strong in Barnes as for conservatives, and Barnes argued that these sins can only be loosed through the opening of the conscience by the word of God.

The nature of secret sins being known through the conscience is important to Barnes, as it was to the conservatives, as the goal of the confessor was to draw sins

---

<sup>64</sup> 1531 *Supplication*, sig. I7v.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

out of the conscience of the person confessing. Barnes' understanding was that recognition of these secret sins comes through a knowledge of the promises of Scripture, not through the priest's ability to prick the conscience. Barnes advances this concept through indicting the priests as lacking the ability to loose the conscience. Since the word declared is 'ye thynge only where by yt our consciens is loosed and mad fre from synne', human attempts at absolution are powerless.<sup>66</sup> Even the apostles were not able to loose from sins, as the loosing occurs in the 'reseuyng of the worde', not the preaching of it. As such, since the power of the keys is God's word, which is able to judge man's thoughts and bring him the knowledge of his sins, it is that word which is 'the very trewe keye', not the 'bostyed and crakyd power' of the priest's attempts to bind and loose sin.<sup>67</sup> Man is only the 'minister and a dyspensator' of the word of God, and as such, has no power. A person is loosed through accepting the word of God and the loosing of secret sins, but only if he 'dothe beleue and averte hym selfe from hys synnes'.<sup>68</sup> For the evangelical Barnes, as for his former conservative self, being loosed of sins required a knowledge of those sins and a turning from them. The difference for the converted Barnes lay in how that knowledge of sins is obtained, and therefore how sins are loosed.

Barnes' entire notion of the power of the keys is framed in such a way as to deny the priest's attempt to bind and loose, with a special emphasis on secret sins. The role of the priest was to make a person's secret sins known and acknowledged by the sinner. As confession was typically only required annually, and yet a person was still responsible for all sins left unconfessed: the priest's task was to help the individual remember every mortal sin that has not been absolved through confession.

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. J8r.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

Barnes, himself a former Augustine friar, did not believe that any man should have this responsibility, let alone that capability. The power to draw hidden sins is not in the sacrament of confession, but in the word of God.

As the nature of the loosing of sins is on the receiving of the word rather than the preaching of it, the binding is on the rejection of the word of God. Rejection occurs when a person either does not believe in his heart, or has not repented from his sins. Again, the role of the priest in auricular confession is replaced by Barnes' notion of the word of God. If the word of God brings a knowledge of sins but not a genuine confession of them and turning from them, that person's sins are still bound. Loosing of sins is a product of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is given to those who repent, and allows for the reception of the word of God.<sup>69</sup> In contrast to the fearful nature of confession, the gospel brings peace, which quiets the conscience rather than stirs it, and looses from sins rather than merely absolves their guilt.

This idea of binding and loosing being independent from man's abilities is consistent not only with Barnes' solafidism, but also with his denial of the need for a mediator. As seen above, Barnes advocated confessing directly to God, while also accepting the benefits of auricular confession as independent of forgiveness. Here it is seen that the knowledge of the sins to be confessed comes directly from God through his word loosing the private forgotten sins of the repentant. The church as agent for revealing and forgiving sins is therefore unnecessary, and any preaching of its necessity is contrary to Scripture, which identifies sin. Barnes' anticlericalism must be seen with this in mind, as his view was that the corruption of the clergy 'selling pardons' was rooted in theology, not morality. Not only are pardons given

---

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

freely to those whose conscience is freed by God's word, but these pardons are not theirs to give.

As the power of the keys is the word of God, then that power is for all who have a right understanding of Scripture. Barnes understood the ministers of the gospel to bind and loose, 'but this do they not by charmeynge covngerynge iuglynge and whyslinge absoluciones' but by the preaching of God's word.<sup>70</sup> Since the ability to bind and loose rests independently of man and solely on God's word, the power of the keys is given to 'all christen men', who have received them because Peter is representative of the church. Therefore 'is it playne yt these keyes are geuen to the wholl churche of Christ for hyr faith, and be the commen treasure of ye church and belonge no more to one man than to another'.<sup>71</sup> Like Tyndale and Luther, confession can be made to any person who is in the church, but a person must be selective in who hears their confession. He cautions against all men having this ability, so he confines it to an ability held by the 'congregacion of faythefulle men', who can preach the word of God and administer the power of the keys. This is an interesting argument, for, in it, Barnes is admitting that the availability of a vernacular Scripture can cause 'confusion', yet earlier in his argument, he accuses Rome of shutting up heaven through holding Scripture hostage. Likewise, Barnes does not take the occasion to introduce his reworking of auricular confession to include its appropriate use among mature knowledgeable Christians, though the context would have allowed it. Barnes had a habit of making important statements without expounding upon them, and this is a clear example of this. His stance is merely that all Christians

---

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. K2v.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. K3r.

have the power of the keys, but that power should be confined to the more mature and faithful men in the church who are better equipped to preach God's promises.

The end of this section is a return in focus to the inappropriate use of the power of the keys. Barnes summarizes the inconsistencies in the conservative notion by asking 'is it reasonable yt the holy churche of god, redeemed with christes precious bloud and asolyed by him from all her synnes shulde be now bound vn to you and to your absolucyon, and she should not be released but thorowe youre power?<sup>72</sup> This is of course based on the false assumption that his conservative readers would accept his arguments thus far, which they certainly did not, but also provides rhetoric as to the inconsistencies of seeking absolution and satisfaction for something already absolved and satisfied. Yet his doctrine of the power of the keys, while not altogether consistent with Tyndale and Luther, kept the onus on the power of God's word, not on the action of the priest or of the individual.

The second edition of *Supplication* omitted the entire section on the power of the keys from 1531 edition. Barnes did, however, make one small addition to the section on pardons and indulgences, where he repeated that such pardons are 'abhomynable'. The specific source of that disdain is the teaching that 'they may absolue *a pena et a culpa*, whiche I am sure is impossible, as they understand it'.<sup>73</sup> Without defining what the keys can do, he states what they cannot do, which is exert any authority 'ouer synne, nor yet ouer eternall payne'.<sup>74</sup> Previously, when defining the power of the keys, he referred to them as the keys of heaven. In this instance, he refers to them as 'the keys of the churche', because the keys, like the church, do not

---

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. K5r.

<sup>73</sup> 1534 *Supplication*, sig. B2r.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

have any power. The power is God's promises. This minor addition is more anti-papal in nature than it is theological, as it charges the pope with the false attempt at removing temporal pain, referring specifically to purgatory. He does not take the occasion to 'rayle' against clerical abuses, corruption of the institution of purgatory, or make use of binding and loosing, and likewise does not take the occasion to correct the doctrine with his understanding of the power of the keys evident in *Sententiae*, the first edition of *Supplication*, and no doubt his famous preaching. Here it is most clear that the purpose of the revisions was to return to favour with his king. Barnes displayed excellent editorial selection in the 1534 edition of his *Supplication* by choosing which theological hills were worth dying on as he attempted to persuade his king to restore full rights of citizenship.

Barnes' restructuring of sacramental penance into a doctrine of solafidistic repentance is focused on the role of the conscience. It is this conscience that both makes a person aware of secret sin and creates contrition directed at the debt that sin has created. The necessary response to this contrition is repentance, which is a full turning from the horrors of sin to the benefits of Christ. It is this turning, independent of confession, which effects Christ's satisfaction. Confession to God, though, is a natural next step following repentance, as the debt of those sins requires seeking forgiveness of the one to whom the debt is due. Confessing to a mature and faithful Christian is still permissible as a display of repentance, though no mention is made of the confessor soothing the conscience as in Luther, or providing wise advice as in Tyndale. Oral confession is itself a step that is taken after the debt for those sins has already been forgiven. The only acceptable currency of that debt is Christ's blood, which is a literal and constant reminder of man's inability to effect salvation. Though

Barnes' early reputation as a preacher had a focus on clerical abuses regarding pardons and absolutions, his doctrine of repentance is mature and developed, and considers all the necessary elements of sacramental penance.

## CHAPTER 5

### A SATISFYING PURGATORY: JOHN FRITH'S THEOCENTRIC REPENTANCE

If Tyndale was known primarily for his work as a translator, and Barnes' reputation among his contemporaries was built around his preaching, then John Frith must be heralded as a writer known for his youthful tenacity, lively intelligence and his incorrigibly optimistic commitment to the evangelical cause. John Foxe noted that Frith's death was the most 'greueous' and lamentable, partly because of how cruelly he was handled, but more because of his almost unequalled intelligence and character. Equally notable, according to Foxe, was the way Frith 'had suche a godliness of life ioyned with his doctrine, that it is hard to iudge in whether of them hee was more commendable, being greatly prayse worthy in them both'.<sup>1</sup> Modern authorities have tended to agree. C. S. Lewis suggested that Frith 'looms larger as a man than as an author',<sup>2</sup> and Wayne Clebsch goes even further by praising both Frith's intelligence and his character: Frith had 'the finest mind, the most winsome wit, and the boldest spirit among the men who wrote theology in English between 1520 and 1535'.<sup>3</sup> Instead of hurling superlatives, Edward Arber was more contemplative in considering Frith the Philip Melanchthon of the English Reformation. This was based on his personality, not his theology, using George Joye's description of his disposition as 'ientle and quyet and wel lerned'.<sup>4</sup> It is

---

<sup>1</sup> *AM*, (1583), Book 8, 1055.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), 196.

<sup>3</sup> William A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535* (Westport, CT., 1964), 78.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Arber, ed., *George Joye. An Apology made by George Joye, to satisfy, if it may be, W. Tindale, 1535*, vol. 13 (London, 1895), vi; Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 78.

Frith's theology, specifically regarding sin and confession, that is central to this study. His reputation was built on both his character and theology, and that reputation made him formidable enough to force responses by some conservative heavyweights. Furthermore, Frith approached sin and confession in a unique way, highlighting the earthly purging of sin and portraying Christ's redeeming act as the true purgatory. A study of Frith's notion of sin and confession is integral to completing the picture of an evangelical notion of repentance in Henrician England, because of both his ideas and his influence.

Born in 1503 in Kent, Frith was barely a teenager when Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the church door in Wittenberg, and was nearly a decade younger than most other evangelical figures at the onset of the Reformation. It is impossible to definitively argue when Frith's evangelical sympathies developed. Kent, especially Westerham where he was born, was certainly a Lollard stronghold in the decades surrounding Frith's birth, and it is possible this early exposure to Wycliffite sympathies fostered a critical ear to conservative doctrine.<sup>5</sup> Michael Whiting argues that the more influential force on a young Frith was an exposure to Humanism at Eton College.<sup>6</sup> His basis for this argument is that, in addition to its influence at Eton, it was taught by Erasmus at Cambridge shortly before his matriculation. Yet, Biblical Humanism and Wyclifism are not mutually exclusive influences. Both exerted a unique level of influence on a young Frith.

The combined impact of these impressions at such a young age may have made Frith more suggestive to Lutheran ideas when he first encountered them,

---

<sup>5</sup> Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 2012), 32. Also see N. T. Wright, *The Work of John Frith* (Oxford, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Michael S. Whiting, *Luther in English: The influence of his Theology of Law and Gospel on Early English Reformers (1525-1535)* (Eugene, OR, 2010), 274.

possibly after leaving Cambridge for Wolsey's Cardinal College in Oxford.<sup>7</sup> Here, he had regular interactions with several leading evangelicals, including Thomas Garrett, whom A. G. Dickens describes as one of the 'most effective Lutheran propagandists in England', and Sir Francis Bigod, who 'appeared among the most conspicuous agents of the English Reformation'.<sup>8</sup> Their Lutheranism was detected in early 1528 by the Bishop of Lincoln, John Longland, who discovered their collection of a wide range of books by Wycliffe and by leading continental reformers including Luther, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Melanchthon, and Bucer. These dons of Cardinal College, along with Frith and seven others, were confined to Wolsey's fish cellar. Here, the death of at least three of these men—Clark, Sumner, and Bayly—robbed the evangelical cause of some of its future potential. The abjuration of at least three and pardon of one make Frith's escape to Flanders even more remarkable. In Flanders, he sought the support of a sympathetic friend in William Tyndale.<sup>9</sup> Frith may even have been the 'faithful companion' that Tyndale awaited in Amsterdam, and the two certainly worked closely together during Frith's short career. It is also likely, as Clebsch argues, that Frith guided Tyndale towards his translations instead of more original writings.<sup>10</sup>

John Frith's short literary career is usually divided into two phases: writings from exile and writings from prison. While in exile between late 1528 and October

---

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, his tutor was Stephen Gardiner, one of the architects of the Counter Reformation in England. Carl Trueman states that it is possible that Gardiner may be the source of Frith's evangelicalism, as Gardiner was frequently attendant at 'Little Germany', and may have exposed Frith to 'the exciting intellectual possibilities opened up by Humanism' as a result. Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* (Oxford, 1994), 14.

<sup>8</sup> A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York 1509-1558* (London, 1959), 58ff.

<sup>9</sup> Pineas agrees with this assertion that Frith's sole destination when leaving England was to find Tyndale. Rainer Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor polemics* (Bloomington, IN, 1968), 173. Carl Truman and Clebsch did not go this far, though both argued that Frith likely knew Tyndale while they were both in England, and had a hand in some of his translations and in his *Answer to More*. Truman, *Luther's Legacy*, 15; Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants* 80-81.

1532, he produced only one whole unique piece, as he, like Tyndale, was more concerned with promoting European Protestantism in his homeland by translating its works into English. He published two translations, the first was the Latin of the Scottish reformer Patrick Hamilton's *Diverse Fruitful Gatherings of Scripture*. Retitled *Patrick's Places*, it was, excepting only Tyndale's New Testament, the most widely read early English evangelical text.<sup>11</sup> It was reproduced both by Foxe and John Knox's *History of the Reformation in Scotland*. The second translation was of Luther's *Revelation of Anti-Christ*, which included Frith's own prologue, *Epistle to the Christian Reader* and *Antithesis*, which, like Barnes would do seven years later, compared the lives of the Popes to Christ. He also worked extensively with Tyndale on his *Answer to More*, where some of the sections are probably entirely written by Frith and remained unedited by Tyndale.<sup>12</sup> Frith's only original writing from exile, *Disputation of Purgatory*, attracted the attention of the heretic hunters more than his translations did, and its denial of purgatory was one of two causes for his arrest in October 1532. The three targets of *Disputation*, Thomas More's 1529 *Supplication of Souls*, Rastell, who was More's brother-in-law known for his natural reason philosophy, and John Fisher's 1523 *Assertionis Lutheranae Confutatio*, indicate both that the young Frith was not afraid to weigh in against the conservative giants and that he could engage in a variety of rhetorical techniques. Since Frith never wrote directly about auricular confession, the sacrament of penance, or the nature of contrition, it is this controversy over purgatory that forms the basis of our understanding of Frith on repentance and penance.

---

<sup>11</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 83.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to George Joye's assertion that Frith played a major role in its writing, Clebsch uses textual analysis to argue that some of the terms and syntax used, as well as the lack of using Tyndale's New Testament, point to Frith coauthoring *Answer to More*. Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 94-98. Trueman agrees that he completed and saw to press the work, and adds that Frith's hand is evident in Tyndale's Old Testament translations. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy*, 15.

Frith's writings from the Tower are also important for any study of his doctrine. These writings were produced in only ten months of imprisonment without access to books or many supplies. They are also relevant to gain a greater understanding of Frith's notion of law and gospel, for the majority of modern scholars use this focus in an attempt to discover stronger Lutheran ties for an English exile who never visited Wittenberg. This study of law and gospel is especially relevant when taken with Tyndale's notion of the power of the keys as seen in the binding of the law and the loosing of the Gospel, not least since Frith rarely discusses the power of the keys. The study of law and gospel is of course relevant to Frith who, as a solafidist with an eye on penance, would deny attempts to fulfil the law by human effort.

John Frith's notion of sin and repentance is in significant ways similar to that of Tyndale or Barnes. He maintained an emphasis on Christ's blood serving as sole satisfaction for the guilt and penalty of man's sins, and believed in confessing directly to God. Yet distinctive features are identifiable. Frith's emphasis on repentance was considerably more concerned with justification than it was with its moral implications, especially when compared to Tyndale. His greatest difference in emphasis is his view of purgatory. Rather than issuing an outright denial of the value of the concept like Tyndale and Barnes, and eventually Luther, Frith repurposes it to show the purging of a Christian through Christ's satisfaction and as the relationship between human suffering and sin. This notion of purgatory is best understood as an explication of Frith's doctrine of satisfaction, and such an emphasis may force an uneven study of his formula of soteriological repentance that highlights the purging of sin over the other elements of sacramental penance. As with Luther, all doctrine points to the cross of Christ, and any other elements of repentance are given

secondary treatment. Frith's notion of sin and repentance begins with faith in the promises of God. This faith enacts satisfaction, which creates an awareness and sorrow for sins, and in turn forces a turning from them.

### **The Purging of Sin**

A complete picture of Frith's notion of penance and repentance is difficult, as he never directly expounds upon oral confession, and details of the role of contrition are spotty. Yet Frith displays the most complete notion of the role of satisfaction and of purgatory of all the early English evangelicals. This is perhaps no coincidence, as satisfaction was for Frith, as for Tyndale and Barnes, the most important element in solafidistic repentance. Of all the theological debates available for Frith to use as his formal introduction into the higher matters of Reformation theology, it was this issue of Purgatory that he found the most useful to expound his notion of solafidism. The fact that Frith countered two different types of argumentation—the worldview of natural reason from Rastell and the scholastic sacramentalism of More and Fisher—is testament to his boldness of style. This boldness could be a product of his youthful ignorance, but more likely it was a reflection of the urgency of his message. This same boldness was displayed when Frith returned to England during Lent in 1531 in order to rally his homegrown troops. It was displayed again in October 1532 when he returned once more to England, knowing he would likely not return to the continent and telling his wife to be encouraged that he would likely meet the recent fate of recent martyrs James Bainham and William Roy.<sup>13</sup> It was ultimately his views

---

<sup>13</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 102.

on satisfaction and purgatory that made up some of the charges against him that led to his death.<sup>14</sup>

Frith's *Disputation of Purgatory* did not wade into calm theological waters. In late 1528 or early 1529, Simon Fish, also from Kent and also fleeing to the continent in order to find Tyndale after being exiled by Wolsey, wrote a short tract entitled *A Supplicacyon for the Beggars*.<sup>15</sup> Some evidence points to Fish entering Oxford in 1525, the same year Frith was installed at Cardinal College, but any Oxford connection between the two cannot be substantiated.<sup>16</sup> Fish was more an activist and less a theologian, and after Wolsey had been deposed, sensed safety in returning to London. He was instrumental in bringing Tyndale's New Testament to England, personally distributing copies from his own house in Whitefriars. Like Frith, he was forced to the continent a second time, and his first written work was a translation, this time from French, of Henricus Bomelius's *Summa der godliker scrifturen*, known in English as *The Sum of Holy Scripture*. When *Supplicacyon* first arrived in England from its Antwerp presses is unclear, but it was widely available in the first few months of 1529. Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* indicates it may have made its way to England when Anne Boleyn presented it to Henry VIII. Reportedly, he 'kept the booke in his bosome iij or iiij dayes', and summoned the exiled Fish and 'embraced him with louing countenance' and spent the afternoon hunting with him.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> John Frith, 'The Articles for Which He Died', *The Works of the English Reformers*, vol. 3. ed. Thomas Russell (London, 1831), 450-456.

<sup>15</sup> John Foxe has included the entire text of this in his *Acts and Monuments*. *AM*, (1570), Book 8, 1192ff.

<sup>16</sup> *AM*, (1570), Book 8, 1192.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Foxe also provides an alternative version where Henry heard *Supplicacyon* being read in public, then took the copy for himself.

Fish's strategy is similar to Luther's in his 1520 *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. He begins by noting the financial toll that foreign jurisdiction takes on the people and on the kingdom before moving on to abuses and immorality of the clergy and the hidden power they have accumulated. Tithes taken at confession are lumped together with other abuses and described as attempts at extortion, which is clearly linked to Fish's central argument that purgatory was invented to be the ecclesiastical trump card in all secular matters involving the clergy. The pope had developed a system, says Fish, that prayers are able to deliver souls out of Purgatory, and will withhold these prayers if suitable recompense is not given.<sup>18</sup> Purgatory was not a true doctrine that was corrupted by men seeking power, but was invented for the sake of corruption. After all, 'if that the Pope with hys pardons for money may deliuer one soule thence: he may deliuer hym as well without mony if he may deliuer one, he may deliuer a thousand'.<sup>19</sup> This makes the Pope an extortionist, and a 'cruell tyrant without all charitie', an accusation that extends to the 'whole sorte of the spiritualtie', who were in the habit of refusing prayers when payment for those prayers was withheld.

Purgatory is the centre of all the corruptions of the church, and the reason clerics were able to gain secular power, and therefore the reason for England being unable to follow in the footsteps of historically great empires. Fish's solution for a restoration of the king's power and to right doctrine was to 'tye these holy idle theues to the cartes, to be whipped naked about euery market towne, till they fall to laboure'.<sup>20</sup> This public display would identify those purveyors of purgatory, for they

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 659.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 660.

were criminals who had been systematically stealing from the church and the commonwealth.

Fish's argument against purgatory was neither theological nor explicitly biblical. He incited subjective experience in a plea to a king who, since his courtship of Anne Boleyn began in 1526, was relatively sympathetic to arguments against foreign powers having local jurisdiction. Arguments over papal jurisdiction were certainly not new. In 1513, Richard Hunne charged the ecclesiastical court with praemunire, a charge that was at that time largely dormant since its inception in 1392. Praemunire came to refer to a denial of jurisdiction in England by any foreign power, specifically the papal legate. Hunne's suspicious death was blamed on the clergy, and attempts to rein in the ecclesiastical practice of holding the sacraments hostage until fees were paid never came to fruition. Henry was at this time still young and had only been king for five years. When Fish published his claims regarding foreign jurisdiction and creating purgatory to enhance that jurisdiction, Henry had already served on the throne for twenty years, and over that time had become sympathetic to the notion of secular authority over papal jurisdiction.

Thomas More replied to Fish's *Supplicacyon* later in 1529, around six months after it was brought to England. Though it was a point-by-point attack on Fish's conclusions, his reply argued from both historical and biblical precedent, evidence that Fish intentionally ignored for the purpose of keeping the attention on purgatory as something invented to overrule matters of local law or reason. Its methods were more appropriate for a learned debate, and it failed to achieve the same rhetorical power and popular reception, though it did contribute to heresy

charges against Fish.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not Fish wanted to reply is irrelevant, as he died of the plague in 1531. It was Frith, not Fish, who would answer More.<sup>22</sup>

For Frith's argument to develop, however, he first had to write against More's brother-in-law, Rastell, whose 1530 *New Booke of Purgatory* was more recent. Though More's *Supplication* provided the impetus for writing the *Disputation*, it was Rastell who received the fullest treatment, and providing rich evidence of Frith's doctrine of satisfaction. After Rastell gave his reply the following year in *An Apology against John Fryth*, Frith launched a volley from the Tower with a *Bulwark against Rastell* in late 1532. Neither Frith nor Rastell showed much variation in argumentation between these works, and they are perhaps better seen as a running dialogue with consistent repetition of propositions rather than a moving, changing front of debate. *Bulwark* gave Frith a somewhat unique distinction of winning his opponent for his cause, as its arguments on satisfaction and repentance were sufficient to convince Rastell of its merits.<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps indicative of Frith's persuasiveness that More, who replied to Fish, did not reply to Frith, despite Frith's arguments being significantly more complex and sweeping, and despite Frith winning the public relations battle by securing a convert in Rastell. Arguments that the master of purgatory was too busy to respond are a bit convenient in this light, and therefore not entirely persuasive. He may have indeed been busy in his role as Chancellor and at preparing other polemics, but the doctrine of Purgatory was right in More's wheelhouse, and the conversion of Rastell no doubt hit close to home.

---

<sup>21</sup> Roger Lockyer, *Tudor and Stuart Britain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 2004), 53.

<sup>22</sup> Pineas argues that this was written as a reply to More's *Supplication*, and this well may have been the initial impetus for its writing, though Frith's *Disputation* gives equal attention to all three in order to show the volume of Scripture in a denial of purgatory. Pineas, *Thomas More*, 173.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Marshall, 'Evangelical conversion in the reign of Henry VIII', in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie, eds. (Cambridge, 2002), 34.

Whatever the reason, More chose not to respond, and the reasons for this will always remain a matter of judgment.

Frith's response to Rastell provides a relatively complete notion of Frith's doctrine of satisfaction as it relates to purgatory, as his responses to More and Fisher were more dedicated to a scriptural or historical refutation of purgatory as a place in the afterlife. His regular polemical strategy against Rastell was to show that his opponent's conclusions were unnecessary before identifying them as invalid.<sup>24</sup> The reason for the insufficiency of purgatory was inextricably linked to the insufficiency of human attempts at satisfaction. This is because that satisfaction has already been made through Christ serving as the tangible currency used to satisfy man's debt to God. In the preface to *Disputation*, Frith affirms the existence of purgatory. In fact, two purgatories exist, though neither are posthumous: 'one to purge the heart and cleanse it from the filth which we have partly received of Adam...[and] another purgatory, which is Christ's cross.'<sup>25</sup> Here, the influence of Luther's theology of the cross is evident, as Frith's notion of true purgatory could not exist without it.<sup>26</sup> Defining these two purgatories affirms that the effects of sin require a purging, an idea that is a departure from any other prominent evangelical or reformer of the early sixteenth century.

Yet, this purging does not occur after death and before ascending to heaven. It occurs on earth during the course of the human life. The first purgatory is identified as 'the word of God' which makes man clean, and this cleanness is preceded by faith, a necessary element in repentance. The preaching of the word of

---

<sup>24</sup> For more on Frith's polemic strategy, see Pineas, *Thomas More*, 173-191. Trueman agrees, Trueman, *Luther's Legacy* 151.

<sup>25</sup> *Disputation*, 90-91.

<sup>26</sup> Trueman alludes to this, but does not develop it. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy*, 16.

God allows a person to be convicted of their sin and believe in the promises of the Gospel. This purging is only effective through faith in ‘the preaching that Christ’s death hath fully satisfied for our sins, and pacified for ever the Father’s wrath towards us’.<sup>27</sup> This concept is later echoed in Frith’s response to Fisher, where he calls the blood of Christ ‘our perfect purgation’ whose purpose ‘washeth away the sin of the world’.<sup>28</sup> Frith’s notion of solafidistic repentance begins with an understanding of the word of God and ends with faith in the full satisfaction that was made by Christ’s death.

The second purgatory he identifies as the cross of Christ, but this is not to be understood in a soteriological sense. Rather, it is an earthly purging, ‘wherewith he scourgeth every son that he receiveth, that we may remember his law and mortify the old Adam and fleshly lust, which else would wax so rebellious that it would subdue us, reign in us, and hold us thrilled under sin. Whensoever we have committed a crime, then is God present with this rod’.<sup>29</sup> Where the first purgatory concerns the means to obtaining forgiveness independent of human effort, the second purgatory is an earthly punishment for sins committed, and this is identified by Frith in a way that is reminiscent of works of satisfaction being invoked in sacramental penance. Those works are prescribed with a dual function: to pay the physical debt for the penalty of sin and to help the person abstain from sin when tempted later. This is echoed in the third book of his *Disputation*, where he quotes Augustine’s understanding of a ‘spiritual fire, which is temptation, affliction, tribulation’, whose purpose it was to show that such fire does not save, but rather helps cleanse on earth those who are

---

<sup>27</sup> *Disputation*, 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

already forgiven.<sup>30</sup> Frith's second purgatory meets this second function of satisfaction in conservative doctrine. The chief difference, however, is that the instigator of this second purgatory is God's divine will, operating independent of human effort.

The differences in these purgatories are clear. Frith's first purgatory is only concerned with a person's status *coram deo*, and the second with human morality. The first purgatory is the debt of satisfaction paid with Christ's blood, and the second is the shaping of human moral fibre to abstain from those sins that have already been purged. Frith's central emphasis in his writings on purgatory is that of human guilt, and the majority of his *Disputation* is directed at the first type of purgatory. He had a greater emphasis on Christ's atonement than Tyndale did, and his view of the law was distinctly Lutheran: humans were ontologically incapable of anything but sin. This is where Christ's redemptive work is most important, for as this human incapacity to avoid sin is addressed in the second purgatory, it is the first purgatory that provides the satisfaction for those sins. Frith is less concerned with trying to avoid sin, as those whose sins have already been through the first purgatory are already dead to the law and therefore dead to sin. Here it is most evident that Frith's notion of purgatory also serves as a basic summary of how he viewed justification. Those who seek to earn their own satisfaction through the works of penance are attempting to make themselves into Christ and fulfil a satisfaction that was already made. He includes his second type of purgatory as a way to explain the role of faith and works, but otherwise is less concerned with how this purgatory affects morality.

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

Frith's first purgatory is to be understood as a correction of the conservative notion of purgatory, as both were concerned with the satisfaction *a poena et a culpa*. While Frith did not use the same covenantal language as Tyndale did in his notion of a unilateral covenant with God, the emphasis on Christ's blood or Christ's person remains the central feature of his notion of satisfaction. The insufficiency of attempts at satisfaction is even greater when its invalidity is established, and that invalidity is a result of all human attempts to gain satisfaction, even through purgatory, as being 'injurious to Christ's blood'. He uses this phrase six times in his response to Rastell, including two occasions where he does not bother to expound beyond such injury being self-evident and enough cause for the rejection of purgatory. He also uses the phrase in two other places: once in his response to More, rejecting More's conception of physical effort towards satisfaction, arguing that the necessary end of More's view was that Christ's blood was not sufficient if more needed to be added to it; and once in relationship to seeking satisfaction through partaking in the Eucharist.<sup>31</sup>

The reason human attempts at satisfaction are 'injurious to Christ's blood' is because Christ's blood, or often more concisely Christ himself, is that purging. This invalidates any reason for a purging of sins already forgiven and a debt already satisfied. Frith states that Christ 'hath in his own person purged our sins, and is set on the right hand of God. Behold the true purgatory and consuming fire, which hath fully burnt up and consumed our sins, and hath for ever pacified the Father's wrath towards us'. If this purgation is insufficient, then Christ must be unrighteous.<sup>32</sup> For Frith, no greater evidence exists that an incorporeal purgatory is false than the fact

---

<sup>31</sup> *A Book Made by John Frith, Answering M. More's Letter*, 335.

<sup>32</sup> *Disputation*, 100.

that Christ's death has removed the guilt. He was himself the penalty, and therefore nothing remains that needs to be purged. Predictably, Frith here calls a denial of this 'injurious to Christ'.<sup>33</sup>

References to Christ's blood are central to Frith's understanding of satisfaction. Against Rastell, he cites Hebrews 9 to show that the remission of sin requires a sacrifice. He states further, 'If there be no remission without blood, what shall repentance do, where the blood of Christ is excluded? Yea, or what shall thy purgatory do, for there is no bloodshed. So is there nothing that taketh away sin but only the blood of Christ Jesus, shed for our redemption'.<sup>34</sup> The importance of blood is so great that one of his reasons for denying a posthumous purgatory is that it has no bloodshed. He even links it to morality, as Christ's blood is 'our perfect purgation' which not only 'washeth away the sin of the world' but also makes a person want to avoid sin.<sup>35</sup>

When writing against Rastell, Frith summarizes the entire cause of satisfaction as 'the blood of Christ, which hath fully counterpoised the justice of God the Father, and hath pacified his wrath towards us that believe. He is the very purgatory'.<sup>36</sup> He defines purgatory as both Christ's blood and Christ himself, equating the two in purpose. Using these terms interchangeably is unique to Frith, as his concern was more with Christ's unique ability to provide satisfaction, though when he wishes to discuss satisfaction in the context of works, he prefers to highlight Christ's blood as that work. Much can be made of this use of Christ as purgatory, and it is indeed a step further than Tyndale or Barnes would be willing to take. For

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

them, the blood of Christ referred to his tangible works that allowed satisfaction to take effect. However, Frith uses the terms interchangeably with the person of Christ instead of his works or his passion, emphasizing his blood when the context is works or sacrifices and emphasizing his person when the context demands otherwise. An important example of this is in his response to More, where he cites the Old Testament practice of sacrificing animals, referring to Christ, not his blood, as the sacrifice that takes away sin.<sup>37</sup> This understanding of Christ's person being the purgatory is meant to highlight the sufficiency of Christ's blood, accentuating the notion that the satisfaction found in Christ's blood does not need fulfilment in an intermediary place of purging of the *poena*. The *poena* have already been purged through Christ.

This notion that purgatory, and thus satisfaction for the debt of sins through Christ's blood, was indispensable to Frith's doctrine of salvation. He believed it was one of two reasons for which he was condemned. About a week and a half before his death at the stake in June 1533, he wrote a short treatise which was posthumously titled *The Articles Wherefore John Frith Died*. He describes how he was questioned specifically regarding two articles: whether he believed in purgatory, and on his doctrine of the real presence in the Eucharist, a response to his prison writings against Thomas More. This second indictment receives greater treatment in this short writing, but the first has obvious implications for how his interlocutors understood Frith's notion of repentance as contrary to sacramental penance.

---

<sup>37</sup> 'Now knoweth every Christian that all manner of sacrifices and offerings were nothing but figures of Christ, which should be offered for the sin of his people. So that when Christ came, all sacrifices and oblations ceased. If thou shouldst now offer a calf to purge thy sin, thou wert no doubt injurious unto the blood of Christ, for if thou thought his blood sufficient, then wouldst thou not seek another sacrifice for thy sin...But all the sacrifices which were then offered, did but signify that Christ should come and be made a sacrifice for us, which should purge our sin for ever'. *Ibid.*, 159.

In an answer to the first indictment, he echoed the preface to his *Disputation*, stating that

the body is purged by the cross of Christ, which he layeth upon every child that he receiveth as affliction, worldly oppression, persecution, imprisonment, and death finisheth sin; and the soul is purged by the word of God, which we receive through faith, unto the health and salvation both of body and soul.<sup>38</sup>

So cardinal was the doctrine of satisfaction through the work of Christ on the cross, Frith was unwilling to abjure under penalty of death. His answer was only a rehearsal of his doctrine already discussed, and likewise was widely known. However, this perhaps provides the most adequate summary of Frith's understanding of penance and repentance. Where he only makes cursory mention of confession, absolution, or contrition, his doctrine of satisfaction took centre stage until his death.

The second purgatory only applies to those whose sins have already been purged by Christ in the first purgatory. As this purgatory was more concerned with avoiding sin, and Frith was more concerned with forgiveness than morality, this second purgatory was not at the forefront of his notion of satisfaction. Nevertheless, a common complaint against evangelicals was that their solafidism did not provide answers for human morality and social control, and Frith's response to this indictment was included in his notion of purgatory. He defines this second purgatory as 'the rod or scourge of God'. Its purpose was to remind the faithful of God's law through discipline after committing a crime. At the same time, this rod should be understood as a 'medicine to heal our infirmity, and to subdue our rebellious

---

<sup>38</sup> John Frith, *The Articles Wherefore John Frith Died, which he wrote in Newgate the 23 day of June, 1533* (London, 1548), 450.

members'.<sup>39</sup> Frith held that this was the type of purgatory that Augustine argued was a 'spiritual fire, which is temptation, affliction, tribulation'.<sup>40</sup> To clear any confusion, Frith identifies the cessation of both of these purgatories at the moment of death.

Frith agreed with Luther's view that the 'faithful' were *simul justus et peccator*, which is to say that persons who have had their sins purged in the first purgatory were still prone to commit acts of disobedience, hence their status as simultaneously justified and yet sinners. Concupiscence, or an inclination to sin, is itself sinful. This notion is echoed in *Bulwark*, where Frith affirms the sinfulness of all mankind, but also that those who were predestined by Christ were also spotless and therefore 'both sinners and righteous'.<sup>41</sup> He expounds on this more clearly when writing against Fisher,

Our perfect purgation is the pure blood of Christ, which washeth away the sin of the world. And albeit, we have the remnants and dregs of sin and rebellion of our members, as long as we have life, yet are they wholly finished in death; for as such efficacy is Christ's death, that it hath turned the death of his faithful (which was laid upon us as the pain of sin) into a medicine against sin.<sup>42</sup>

This theme is continued in the ensuing section that addresses the concept of human accountability before God on the day of judgment, as found in Matthew 12. Frith argues that the text does not refer to the faithful who have already been purged in Christ's blood, as 'their sins are covered of Christ, and his blood shall give the whole accounts for them.' However, those who do not have this faith in Christ's blood will have 'the book of their conscience opened', revealing all their secret sins.<sup>43</sup> Frith

---

<sup>39</sup> *Disputation*, 91.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-187.

<sup>41</sup> *Bulwark against Rastell*, 229.

<sup>42</sup> *Disputation*, 193-194.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-196.

subtly nods to sacramental penance in referring to the ‘book of their consciences’ in order to elucidate secret sin. He has previously argued that those who have not had their sins purged in the first purgatory have no relevance to the second purgatory, therefore these secret sins of the conscience would hold no more weight than their public sins for which they believed they had already been forgiven by the priest. Frith could have simply referenced their sinfulness as he does elsewhere, but linking the unfaithful with the unveiling of the conscience threw further weight behind his notion that Christ’s blood is the purging of sins. Human sins unsatisfied and unpurged will be uncovered on the day of judgment, though by then it is too late.

Frith also responds to Rastell in *Bulwark* that this second purgatory is relative to the dual nature of man as spirit and flesh as seen in Romans 7. These two elements are directly opposed to each other and are always in conflict. This duality is the cause for the purging of man by God, despite human attempts to purge themselves through prayer, alms, or fasting. The human role in morality is to tame the flesh in order to avoid sin, and this second purging is instrumental in that taming. If ‘the remnants of sin’ begin to overcome this effort of taming, God ‘sendeth some cross of adversity or sickness to help suppress them’.<sup>44</sup> This is further evidence that these two purgatories do not exist posthumously: the first purgatory immediately cleanses of sin, and the second one is only concerned with the flesh.

### **Effortless Turning**

Frith’s understanding of penance and repentance had satisfaction at its core. Yet this picture is not yet complete, as confession and turning from sin were necessarily instrumental to any notion of solafidistic repentance. Frith’s understanding of

---

<sup>44</sup> *Bulwark*, 234-238.

repentance is perhaps more clear and is certainly simpler than that of Tyndale or Barnes. For a doctrine of penance to be consistent with the evangelical dogma, it must deny the most fundamental aspect of sacramental penance, that of doing physical acts of satisfaction in order to obtain forgiveness for the penalty of sins. For Frith, even the act of repentance by itself can be an attempt to attain forgiveness through human merits. Much of his explication of this idea comes in response to Rastell, who argued that full contrition and repentance were sufficient to provide a satisfaction for sins. Repentance in this context is understood as an act of turning from sin that is initiated by human effort.<sup>45</sup> Frith disagrees with Rastell on the grounds that Christ died in vain ‘if we, by all our contrition, repentance, sacrifices, and works (I add more to help him) can fully pay and satisfy for our sins’.<sup>46</sup> Frith considered both contrition and repentance to be works, and in this way does not limit his discussion of works to the works of satisfaction in sacramental penance. The link for Frith, as for his fellow evangelicals, is the role of faith.

Tyndale and Barnes both identified faith as central in satisfying the debt of sin. Frith does not avoid discussing its usefulness for the purging of sins in relationship to his first purgatory. He utilizes faith in his notion of satisfaction by citing John 15, as it is faith in the word of God that ‘purges’ and makes a person clean before God. Faith is the cause of the purging, therefore the purging is applied to the hearts of those who have faith. Similarly, orthodox teaching on sacramental penance considered contrition to be an element of human effort. Of those early evangelicals in England whose doctrines of penance and repentance can be reconstructed, Frith was the least contritionist. Unlike Tyndale, Barnes, or Luther, he

---

<sup>45</sup> John Rastell, *A New Booke of Purgatory*, sig. A3v.

<sup>46</sup> Frith, *Disputation*, 104-108.

does not provide a clearly detailed analysis of a sorrow for sins in his formula of repentance. His nearest allusion to this is his description of Rastell's view that contrition equals repentance, though Frith considers both contrition and repentance to be insufficient for satisfaction by themselves, as both imply human effort.<sup>47</sup>

Though despite the fact that he does not define it as contrition, it is clear that the first purgatory gives clues to how a sorrow for sins fits into his schema of purgatory and repentance. He identifies that which is purged through faith as occurring in the heart, unrelated to the *poena* or the *culpa*, and relates this to the second purgatory because the heart, once purged, 'giveth us a will and gladness to do whatsoever our merciful Father commandeth us'.<sup>48</sup> Here, the purging occurring within the heart must be interpreted in the same way as the *Decretum*'s notion of contrition as through the heart 'radiating on all sides', which caused morality.<sup>49</sup> If the purpose of contrition is to avoid sin, Frith defines contrition by identifying that the purged heart is one that responds by love, not fear, of the law: 'For we ought not to abstain from evil because of the punishment that followeth the crime, but only for the love that we have to God, without any respect either of salvation or of damnation'.<sup>50</sup> If faith in God's word is what effects the first purgatory, and that purgatory affects both the heart and the desire to avoid sin by loving God, then it follows that for Frith, faith enacts satisfaction, which in turn creates contrition.

Frith's lack of direct discussion of the sacrament of penance makes it difficult to reconstruct his notion of how and in what order the formula of penance is enacted, specifically regarding faith, contrition, and confession. Frith does however leave some clues in his writings. Since faith in Christ's promises precedes and enacts

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-106.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>49</sup> See pp.136-139, above.

<sup>50</sup> *Disputation*, 119.

satisfaction through the first purgatory, and contrition follows satisfaction, it is clear that this is the order in which they occur in Frith's formula. What about Frith's notion of turning from sin? The second purgatory provides discipline for sin and sinfulness, but this does not mean that repentance occurs after satisfaction. Where does confession fit? Frith is the clearest on the first of these questions, while assuming his reader will know the second as it relates to coming to a knowledge of sin.

Frith avoids defining repentance in his *Disputation*, instead remaining focused on its culmination, that of its satisfaction through Christ's merits instead of a moralistic notion of turning and sorrow. He does define repentance from the negative, describing what it is not. When opposing Rastell, he denies that repentance can make 'such payment and satisfaction', since repentance implied human effort, and as such satisfies neither *poena* nor *culpa* for sin. Rastell's approach to repentance was too moralistic for Frith to accept. Any amount of human effort was insufficient and 'injurious to Christ's blood'. Only Christ's blood can satisfy, and any endeavour to do more or add to them is both insufficient because of its redundancy and invalid because it was opposed to Scripture. Frith held that God finds pleasure in forgiveness, contrary to Rastell's claim that a justification technically independent of morality implies that God finds gratification in condemnation.<sup>51</sup>

In his response, Rastell accused Frith of arguing that repentance was gratuitous,<sup>52</sup> which is merely an echo of his previous argument regarding levels of repentance commensurate upon levels of guilt.<sup>53</sup> Frith answers predictably:

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-109.

<sup>52</sup> Rastell, *Apology against John Fryth*.

<sup>53</sup> Rastell, *A New Boke of Purgatory*. sig. F3r-F5v.

satisfaction is not a commodity of human effort. This time he argues more specifically that the existence of good works is organically unrelated to any argument on Purgatory. He denies the gradation of sin and therefore the gradation of repentance, and dismisses the matter wholly on the basis that Christ's blood was the agent of satisfaction rather than any effort by man to turn from his sin. He answers the indictment that he prefers to 'clean destroy repentance' more directly, still in the context of satisfaction, by referencing I John. This is a direct nod to Tyndale's *Exposition of the First Epistle of John*, written only two years earlier.<sup>54</sup> Frith includes this translation of I John and his own commentary, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son purifieth us from all sin": whereupon I say that for us which are in the light, his blood only is sufficient'.<sup>55</sup> Frith's initial answer as to whether or not repentance is sufficient satisfaction for sins was not to help define the word but to reject it on the grounds that even the aspect of turning from sin was insufficient.

A few lines later, Frith finally offers his definition of repentance, the only place where he does so in his entire corpus. He holds that two types of repentance exist, one without faith such as Judas' or Rastell's, which hopes to purchase a remission of sins. This type of repentance, because it is a good work independent of faith, is not an element in Frith's notion of solafidistic repentance. His second type of repentance, however, 'followeth justification and remission of sins, and is a flourishing fruit of faith.'<sup>56</sup> This second type is a result of the method of that remission,

for by faith we do perceive the favour and kindness that our loving  
Father hath showed us in his son Christ Jesus, and that he hath

---

<sup>54</sup> This connection is perhaps mere conjecture, but the chronology of the two events is valid, and Frith's uncharacteristic use of 'the blood of Jesus Christ' is essentially Tyndalian.

<sup>55</sup> Frith, *A Bulwark against Rastell*, 237. Internal quotation marks mine.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

reconciled us unto himself by the blood of his Son, then begin we to love him, the more we hate the body of sin, and lament and be sorry that our members are so frail that they cannot fulfil the law of God; and so in mourning and bewailing our infirmity, it causeth us to abstain from both meat and drink, and all worldly pleasures, which is the pure fasting that we talk of: but you understand it not. And this repentance cometh not to purge the sin which is committed before, but only taketh an occasion by the sins before committed, to know what poison there remained in our flesh, and seeketh all means to make us hate the body of sin, and to subdue it with all manner of works that God hath appointed.<sup>57</sup>

This is the most complete definition of repentance that Frith offers. Frith clearly defines repentance as the necessary culmination of a process that begins with faith. After faith has passively activated the promises of Christ, the repentant person begins to love God. This love produces a hatred of a general human inability to avoid sin, described in a way that clearly implies contrition, and this contrition forces a turning from sin. The beginning of this turning is not a fear of a vengeful God, but a cognizance of a loving God who has paid the debt for those sins with blood. Interestingly, repentance requires a permanent turning and an active and intentional denial of all aspects of sin on the grounds of the sacrifice of Christ on mankind's behalf. He does not include in this definition any type of confession, as Tyndale does, either to priests as in the conservative system or to the congregation, the offended party, or directly to God as Tyndale, Barnes, and Luther do. Neither does he take occasion to explicate his understanding of the keys, though their nature is implicit in his definition. His doctrine of repentance is simply that, once aware of the horrors of sin, a person who has turned from sin will not return to them. Never is this focus on satisfaction more evident, since the notion of absolution, priestly or otherwise, is missing from his definition of repentance.

---

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

It is interesting that Frith includes a description of fasting as a virtue, which is not to help satisfy past sins but is a result of a loss of appetite because of their horrors. Rastell's concept of fasting is not necessarily inconsistent with this, as Rastell did not use fasting as an example of works of satisfaction, but rather describes a fasting person as one who 'when he is fastyng hath more fresshe and quyck wytte to studye or to lerne any scyens, arte, or other conclusyon'.<sup>58</sup> This was characteristic of Rastell's approach using natural reason, and therefore fasting is always in the context of the soul being a part of the natural body and likewise being influenced by natural things such as food and drink, which explains the lack of emphasis on fasting as a work of satisfaction.

Though his overall focus was on Christ's blood as satisfaction and mention of an oral confession is absent in his *Disputation*, Frith does mention it elsewhere, though only in anticlerical contexts meant to highlight abuses of the practice. *Antithesis* is meant to be a rapid fire listing of Christ's works compared to those of the Pope. In it, Christ's promise of forgiveness is juxtaposed to that offered by the Pope: 'Christ promiseth forgiveness of sin, and the kingdom of heaven, unto them that repent and will amend their lives. The Pope saith, that no man can be saved, except he be first shriven of his priest and friars; for they bring in money'.<sup>59</sup> This is a jab at the practice of paying fees to the confessor, indicating the corruption of the practice as a means of income for the church and clergy. *Antithesis* is a translation of Luther and Melanchthon, and hence is best understood as their work, but Frith's translation sets his own seal of approval on the concept.

---

<sup>58</sup> Rastell, *New Boke*, sig. C3r.

<sup>59</sup> *Antithesis*, 307, 309.

For safe measure, he echoes this sentiment about the corruption of oral confession in *To the Christian Reader*, at the start of the translation. He bemoans the fact that it is indoctrinated in children beginning at preparation for confirmation,

because they would the more easily bow you to their yoke, compelling you, being very children of twelve years, to keep their fasts which they prescribe; and if you eat two meals in these prescript days, then must you go to a priest and confess a great transgression, submitting yourselves unto him, whatsoever he will enjoin unto you, and call it penance necessary for your soul's health.<sup>60</sup>

It is perhaps telling that the only places that Frith mentions oral confession are in his earliest work, of which much is a translation of continental reformers, and in the context of the corruption of the established church. He gives no instructions regarding a proper reworking of it, such as Tyndale, Barnes, and Luther do, and likewise is theologically silent on its vices. For whatever reason, it is clear that Frith was less concerned with the practice of oral confession than he was with the satisfaction of their guilt and punishment.

This does not mean that Frith believed a formal acknowledgment of sins was unnecessary. An awareness of sins creates a contrition for them, and by definition a knowledge of them. Yet, Frith's response is not a confession of sins but a belief in God's promises. He describes this to Rastell: 'if we believe that he imputeth not our sins unto us, but that his wrath is pacified in Christ and his blood; if we believe that he hath freely given us his Christ, and with him all things, so that we be destitute in no gift (Rom. Viii.) then are we righteous in his sight, and our conscience at peace with God'.<sup>61</sup> This notion is given tautologically in *Bulwark*, where forgiveness comes if a person 'believe that he imputeth not our sins unto us', with one byproduct

---

<sup>60</sup> *To the Christian Reader*, 468-469.

<sup>61</sup> *Disputation*, 101.

being a peaceful conscience.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the best example is in his refusal to deny the merits of the sacrament of penance, by emphasizing satisfaction and denying a destruction of contrition, though avoiding any mention of confession.<sup>63</sup> He is silent on the issue in most of the rest of his works, except in reference to belief or faith being the agent that satisfies. Frith seems to go out of his way to avoid the notion of confession, even describing the connection of the conscience to sin. Later he continues the theme of a repentant person able to ‘perceive that thou art a sinner’ in a way that either ignores confession entirely or combines it with belief.<sup>64</sup>

Frith continues to avoid including a cognitive, intentional confession in response to Rastell’s argument that the sacrament of penance gives full payment for sins. He describes satisfaction in both soteriological and moralistic terms, with the latter specifically mentioning an acknowledgment of guilt to an injured neighbour. He occasionally mentions this form of confession, but only in relationship to Christ’s satisfaction being imputed only to those who forgive a neighbour who confesses those sins.<sup>65</sup> Yet, he avoids any mention of confession to God, despite a lengthy treatment on the way satisfaction is given through Christ’s blood. He even cites the paternoster, which is the same text that Tyndale uses to construct a formula for a specific confession to God. Frith only uses it to further the notion of confession as something that occurs between human offenders and offended.<sup>66</sup>

However, two important exceptions to an avoidance of discussing confession are in the *Epistle to the Christian Reader*, affixed to his translation of Luther’s *De*

---

<sup>62</sup> *Bulwark*, 229-230.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, *Disputation*, 129, where Frith argues ‘that God forgiveth no man which hath offended his neighbour, unless that he make satisfaction unto his neighbour, if he be able; but if he be not able, yet is he bound to acknowledge his fault unto his neighbour.’

<sup>66</sup> *Disputation*, 126-127.

*Antichristo* and written under the pseudonym Richard Brightwell, where he personalizes this belief and further defines it. He also very clearly defends a need to confess sins directly to God:

It is not therefore sufficient to believe that he is a Saviour and Redeemer, but that he is a Saviour and Redeemer unto thee; and this canst thou not confess, except thou knowledgest thyself to be a sinner, for he that thinketh himself no sinner, needeth no Saviour and Redeemer. And of these Christ saith, I came not to call righteous men, (that is to say, them that think themselves no sinners, for in very deed there is none righteous, no not one), but sinners to repentance. For they which are strong have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. Therefore knowledgest thyself a sinner, that thou mayest be justified.<sup>67</sup>

A few pages later he is clearer on continual confession to God, instead of a once-for-all confession. He commends his readers to be ‘ever knowledging, with a mild heart, our iniquities to our Father which is in heaven, for he is faithful and just to remit us our sins, and to purge us from all iniquity through the blood of Jesus Christ his Son’.<sup>68</sup> The agent of satisfaction remains Christ’s blood, and Frith borrows Tyndale’s use of ‘knowledging’ for confessing, but he alters his language to intentionally redirect readers to his concept of Christ as the purgatory that cleanses. His blood is the agent of that purging as a result of the remission of sins. This blood is the forum for the final purpose of this focus on the satisfaction for sins rather than the confession of them. Frith held that belief and confession were synonymous, with both being necessary for satisfaction.

It is clear that confession is inherent in Frith’s notion of belief and faith in God’s promises. While he does clearly avoid these terms in his exiled works and in *Disputation*, this is insufficient to argue for a total denial of confession in light of his statements in *To the Christian Reader*. Frith often refers to the sorrow for sinfulness

---

<sup>67</sup> *To the Christian Reader*, 460-461.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

and the law making a person aware of sinfulness, and therefore an actual knowledge of sins necessitated a contrition for them. He also argued for its practice amongst offended neighbours. It is likely that the discrepancy between his clear avoidance of these terms and his actual doctrine is a matter of context, as the majority of his relevant writings are on the issue of purgatory, and purgatory's links to confession were perhaps too strong to avoid confusion. It is most likely that confession was for Frith attached to belief in the same sense that Barnes attached it to contrition. Confession, then, was not its own separate element in the formula of repentance.

Likewise, Frith's discussions on the power of the keys provide an incomplete picture, though it is notable that he always mentions them regarding their implications for satisfaction.<sup>69</sup> He defines the power of the keys in the context of a criticism of purgatory in his *Disputation*, directed at Fisher. His own English translation of Matthew 16:19 provides for a little artistic license, as he is not concerned with the plurality of the keys, stating that there is only one key, the 'key of knowledge, and this key is the word of God'.<sup>70</sup> Frith is not obstinate on the concept of the singularity of these keys, which is more consistent with Barnes than with Tyndale, because his intent is to singularize the word of God. He describes this as 'this key or keys' because their meaning is being ascribed and its Scriptural usage is metaphoric. Frith's key was:

the word that bindeth and looseth through the preaching of it. For when thou tellest them their vices and iniquities, condemning them by the law, then bindest thou them by the word of God; and when thou preacheest mercy in Christ unto all that repent, then dost thou loose them by the word of God.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> As with Tyndale, Frith criticizes clerical abuses on the financial reward for clergy absolving sins and issuing pardons. *Antithesis*, 309ff.

<sup>70</sup> *Disputation*, 199-200.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite this difference, Frith, Barnes, and Tyndale all held that the power of the keys was logocentric. The principal aspect of the law is to bind the sinner through a cognizance of sins and the principal aspect of the Gospel is to loose the sinner through its promises. Frith simply does not divide the law and the promises, preferring to state that the word serves both functions. Frith also agrees that the keys were consigned to Peter but not confined to him, as the other apostles used them liberally, 'that repentance and forgiveness might be preached'.<sup>72</sup> Logically, then, it follows that if a person does not preach the word, he or she cannot loose sins, 'though he call himself Pope', but if he does preach the word, 'he bindeth and looseth as well as Peter and Paul, although he be called but Sir John of the country'.<sup>73</sup> Again, the primacy of the Scripture in the common language is found in the doctrine of absolution.

Like Luther's theology of the cross, all aspects of theology for Frith returned to his theology of satisfaction. He gives very little attention to contrition, confession, and the power of the keys, emphasizing Christ's person and Christ's blood as the agent that, once activated by faith, causes satisfaction. Where confession and faith find commonality is unclear, but it is likely that Frith's confession was a part of his understanding of belief, and is itself not separate. Once faith has activated satisfaction, a love for God reveals a sorrow for sins which is deep enough to force a permanent turning from them. Contrition and turning were a necessary element of solafidistic repentance for Frith, but were at the same time tertiary in comparison to the relationship between faith and Christ's blood. His notion of satisfaction radiating

---

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

through the human life and affecting his morality ultimately led to one of the two charges that resulted in his death, an event that particularly emphasized Frith's reputation of being of a high moral calibre. The charges against him came in part because of his vocal denial of the place of Purgatory, instead defining a purging of sins as dual-natured—one purging is through Christ's satisfaction and the other is through the human response of good works. Prior to his death at twenty-four years of age, he had successfully swayed one vocal opponent and had enacted influence through interaction with two theological heavyweights through promotion of his solafidism that came as a result of his denial of a post-mortem Purgatory while accepting the need for a purging of sins. It is this unique notion of Purgatory that would perhaps have a legacy in the official formularies of the new English Church, as two important Henrician formularies denied the need for an incorporeal Purgatory, though accepted that sins may indeed be purged on earth in much the same way.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Frith's legacy extended well beyond his short evangelical career, and his notion of repentance, while unique among the English evangelical exiles of the sixteenth century, would prove that the centrality of the doctrine of Christ serving as the satisfaction for both the penalty and the guilt of sins could overcome other more peripheral elements of solafidistic repentance.

---

<sup>74</sup> See pp. 240-241, 263, below.

## CHAPTER 6

### PENANCE IN PRACTICE:

### GEORGE JOYE'S CONFESSION IN ACTION

The most common strategy of the English evangelical exiles for influencing doctrinal belief in Henrician England involved making Scripture and important writings of continental reformers available in English in order to broaden the influence of reformation theology. This strategy was effective, not only because it was successful in bringing Scripture into the vernacular, but also because it forced the conservative elites to look past Jerome's Vulgate by interacting with the authoritative Greek and Hebrew. Yet one important element was missing: an answer to lay education through the catechetical literature of the late medieval church. George Joye provided such a remedy through a primer designed for a basic survey of essential theology as well as private devotional tools. The effectiveness of this primer allows for Joye to be remembered not as a translator or a theologian, though he was both, but for his pastoral concern of the practice of theology in action.

Joye's greatest achievement was the way he integrated a new understanding of solafidistic repentance into the collective devotional life of Christians. This is Joye's legacy, developed through the distribution of his primer, *Hortulus Animae*, known in English as *The Garden of the Soul*, where he introduced key concepts of sin and a confession made directly to God through sample confessions. *Hortulus Animae* develops a practical notion of confession that is short on theology, though doctrinal defence is not ordinarily the *teleos* of devotional literature. Its purpose was to spur the reader on to obedience and piety through important doctrines and their

examples, directed at children or the less theologically sophisticated. As such, *Hortulus Animae* is unique among the writings of the English exiles, and its usefulness for any study of sin and confession cannot be overestimated.

A second writing reinforces Joye's notion of solafidistic repentance, as it was written as a defence of his beliefs of confession and the power of the keys. It was written after Joye found safe harbour on the continent, but was directed to a prior local to Joye's hometown in Bedfordshire. Joye contended that this prior had misrepresented their private conversations concerning confession to the local magistrates, which forced Joye to flee England. *The Letters of John Ashwell*, when combined with *Hortulus Animae*, provides a more comprehensive theology of Joye's solafidistic repentance. In it, a cognitive confession of sin and sinfulness directly to God was necessary for forgiveness, private oral confession to another believer aided only in comfort, and private confession to an injured neighbour was necessary for God's forgiveness. Unlike Frith, Joye wrote extensively on the merits of oral confession and the power of the keys, and did so at the expense of evaluating contrition and expounding on a theology of satisfaction. Satisfaction was particularly important, as it was the culmination of any theology of forgiveness, but Joye was more concerned with the 'how' than he was with the 'why' of forgiveness. In this way, Joye stood alone among the English evangelicals before 1536, as his pragmatism occasionally came at the expense of theology. Yet, Joye's primer and the answer to the charges that nearly led to his death show that he maintained the importance of contrition, confession, and satisfaction in formulating his notion of solafidistic repentance.

Joye was also unique for outliving his fellow exiles. The effectiveness of the first wave of the reformation in England was in many ways truncated by the short

careers of many of its best theologians and preachers. Some died during indefinite confinement,<sup>1</sup> others via the pyre prior to any escape attempts,<sup>2</sup> and others, such as Tyndale, Frith and William Roy, after a period of exile that proved pivotal to the changing face of England's reformation attempts. Barnes' fifteen years of evangelical activism was remarkably the longest, although this capacity also coincided with a successful career as royal ambassador in Schmalkaldic affairs. These are the exiles and martyrs of the first wave of English evangelicals. For the most part, they were dead or silent by 1536, and a new wave of evangelicals would exact influence, primarily through political means. Joye's earliest extant writing was in 1530 and the fact that he was able to survive throughout Edward's reign gives him the unique distinction of linking Tyndale, Frith, and Barnes with Hugh Latimer, Thomas Cranmer, and Miles Coverdale, each of whose evangelical careers began prior to 1536, but saw their greatest influence in later Henrician or Edwardian years.

Despite this, Joye has been largely ignored by modern scholars, who have sought to tighten a Lutheran connection in England, a connection that is less established in Joye. For instance, James McGoldrick's monograph that highlights this Lutheran connection does not even include a footnote for Joye.<sup>3</sup> Carl Trueman devotes chapters to Tyndale, Barnes, and Frith, but does not discuss Joye's connection to them even parenthetically.<sup>4</sup> These scholars can be forgiven for this oversight, as Joye's Lutheran connection was limited compared to other prominent figures with Antwerp links, but his importance as an evangelical figure certainly deserved greater attention. Those modern sources that are more detailed descriptions of Joye are limited in number. Clebsch's 1964 *England's Earliest Protestants*

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Clark, Sumner, and Bayly did not survive Wolsey's fish cellar as Frith did.

<sup>2</sup> Bilney is the most notable example, despite his initial escape via ambiguous abjuration.

<sup>3</sup> James Edward McGoldrick, *Luther's English Connection* (Milwaukee, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* (Oxford, 1994).

provides a relatively brief chapter on Joye, though much of that is dedicated to his disagreement with Tyndale,<sup>5</sup> and Charles Butterworth's 1962 monograph is dedicated entirely to Joye.<sup>6</sup> These two sources lack more than half a century of historiographical developments, and are due to be updated. Such efforts to minimize Joye's influence have served also to ignore his uniqueness among English evangelicals. Likewise, as none of these sources that do survey Joye attempt to uncover his doctrine of repentance, it is clear that more study is warranted.

Joye's influence on the formation of an English church was vital. Elements of relevant sections on sin and confession from *Hortulus Animae* would find their way into the Bishop's Book, which, along with its predecessor the Ten Articles, was the first attempt at an official statement of doctrine. It likewise provided the first replacement of the Irish penitentials because of its practical focus concerning confession. While the emphasis on confession and contrition would come at the expense of other important doctrines, the fairly full treatment of confession and contrition brought to the forefront an element of solafidistic repentance not otherwise available among the English evangelicals.

### **The Private Confession of *Hortulus Animae***

Joye was not an effective translator, as his writing style was sloppy and imprecise. His efforts at translation, including attempting to rework Tyndale's New Testament, are a testament to Joye's intentions more than his acumen. While others sought to mould official doctrines, Joye was more pragmatic. Clebsch surmises that while religious opinions were shaped by Tyndale, Frith, and Barnes, the influence of its

---

<sup>5</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 205-229.

<sup>6</sup> Allan G. Butterworth, *George Joye, 1495?-1553: A Chapter in the History of the English Bible and the English Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1962).

practice was more at the hands of Joye.<sup>7</sup> Where other evangelicals were more concerned with the theology of penance, Joye was a populariser of evangelical ideas on penance. This is most evident in *Hortulus Animae*, which is often reputed to be the first English primer, and it is Joye's earliest extant original writing.<sup>8</sup> This is a false designation, not only because Joye produced an earlier primer that is lost to history of which *Hortulus Animae* is likely an expanded reprint,<sup>9</sup> but also because English translations of Latin collects have been in existence as early as 1381, and two traditional collects still appear in the English language.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, C. S. Lewis argues that much of the success of the 1549 Book of Common Prayer can be attributed to these late medieval vernacular translations.<sup>11</sup> It is more accurate to state that Joye's *Hortulus Animae* was a reprint of the first known English *evangelical* primer, and it was based on a now extinct first primer in English. *Hortulus*, too, was lost to history until rediscovered in 1949 and placed in the British Museum.<sup>12</sup> Joye's attempts at reforming popular religion are most evident through the basic devotional materials of this primer.<sup>13</sup>

*Hortulus Animae* followed the same formula as the Sarum *Horae*, and its main role as a primer was to prepare catechumens for confirmation. *Hortulus* was not concerned with performing as a deep theological treatise. It contained basic elements of the faith described in a way that young children could understand.

Likewise, in a way similar to Tyndale's *Here foloweth a treates of the pater noster*,

---

<sup>7</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 205.

<sup>8</sup> James A. Devereux, 'The Primers and the Prayer Book Collects', *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 32 (1968), 29. Joye also had translated Bucer's Latin Psalter in 1529.

<sup>9</sup> Clebsch notes that the first primer may have been what John Foxe referred to as 'Mattens and Euensong', and was likely very similar to its successor. Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 208.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief history of how the 'hours' and 'collects' were eventually shaped into primers, see Devereux, 29-30. See also Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven and London, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), 218ff.

<sup>12</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 208.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

recently rediscovered by Malcolm Yarnell,<sup>14</sup> Joye's primer provides two confessions made directly to God as exemplars for all sinners. *Hortulus* was condemned with Joye's Psalter and his earlier primer in 1531 by Bishop Stokesley of London, but Clebsch notes that after 1534, any primers came not from Antwerp but from London. He argued that, because of *Hortulus Animae's* influence on future primers, 'The religious character of Joye's work was incalculably important to English Protestantism'.<sup>15</sup> The uniqueness of this primer and the existence of these confessions greatly enhance our understanding of solafidistic repentance in Henrician England.

*Hortulus Animae*, like its predecessors in the primer genre, was tasked with teaching the basics of Christian doctrine to catechumens preparing for confirmation.<sup>16</sup> An age for confirmation was not officially established and its acceptance was generally uneven, though where the late medieval church accepted confirmation, it was typically required prior to first communion, or around the age of twelve. It was also not unusual for adults who were recent converts to prepare for confirmation as catechumens. Preparing for confirmation was taken very seriously, and it was one of the few ecclesiastical rites that were reserved for the bishop. The catechumenate typically involved years of learning the basics of the Christian faith, culminating in the recitation of the Decalogue, Creed, and Paternoster by rote to the bishop at confirmation. Catechumens prepared for this by studying the primers, which included sections on these three elements of the faith, and often concluded

---

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Yarnell, 'The First Evangelical Sinner's Prayer Published in English', in *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, vol. 47 (2004), 27-43.

<sup>15</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 208-209.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the use of primers and the preparation for confirmation, see James Fielding Turrell, 'Confirming, Catechizing, and the Initiation of Adults in the Early Modern Church of England.' Unpublished PhD Dissertation (Vanderbilt University, 2002). See also Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c. 1530-1740* (Oxford, 1997).

with study materials in question and answer format. At the end of confirmation, the bishop asked if the candidate agreed to renew the promises made on their behalf at their baptism, and this was typically followed by the Eucharist. As we have seen in chapter one, it was not unusual for the priest during confession to ask the penitent to recite the Decalogue, the Creed, or the Paternoster as a review of confirmation or to measure correct doctrine. Confirmation, and by extension the primers, therefore touched church life in a way that no other single element of the late medieval or early modern church could.

Joye's *Hortulus Animae* served the same purpose, emphasizing an evangelical theology in place of a discussion of the sacraments. Other than notable brevity in the question and answer section compared to its late medieval predecessors, *Hortulus Animae* followed the basic formula of primers. Its sections on the Decalogue, the Creed, and the Paternoster feature a concept of sin and forgiveness as they expounded the basics of the Christian faith. After providing calendars to aid in curricula for private study, Joye's brief preface, consisting of only two recto and one verso page, describes the purpose of his primer by explaining an evangelical soteriology aimed at forgiveness. In doing this, he illustrates much of his notion of solafidistic repentance. The primer begins with a review of the Decalogue in order to show man with 'what kynde of sycknes he is infect', followed by the Creed to learn repentance, and finally the Paternoster to show how forgiveness must be sought.

In the preface, Joye describes this methodology as the means to forgiveness and repentance. He explains 'the hole somme of saluation' as to 'know thy selfe a synner, of whom to seke remedy, and howe you shalte obteyne it, truely by prayer'.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> George Joye, *Hortulus Anime*, 'Preface', sig. D1v.

This summary of salvation begins with the ancient Greek aphorism of ‘know thyself’, and describes the condition as that of a sinner. Joye is not concerned with individual sins, but rather the human condition of sinfulness. To know thyself a sinner was different from the common evangelical refrain of ‘knowledging’ a sinfulness, as the first element in repentance was not confession but belief. A person must know themselves to be a sinner in order to seek a more experienced expert who can provide the remedy. The first element of repentance for Joye therefore was belief, in this context being properly designated as faith, which separates Joye from Tyndale, and orients him towards Frith or Barnes, who generally undermined confession, including it more closely in their definitions of contrition or repentance.

Joye, however, held that the remedy for sin cannot be obtained without confession, which is built on resolute faith. He continues in his preface, ‘We muste pray, crye, and call, in sure faith and truste, that he wyll in all our necessities here vs, for the causes aforsayd’.<sup>18</sup> This ‘aforsayd’ is the grace and remission of sins through the blood of Christ. This ‘hole somme of saluation’ describes an image of sacramental confession by the identification of sin through the law, an assertion of the remedy through the Holy Spirit, and a confession of those sins ‘in sure faith and truste’ in prayer directly to God. Joye subtly eliminates the mediator, and does not elaborate except to say that after a person knows themselves to be a sinner, the remedy is prayer. Tyndale and Joye both significantly encouraged confession, to God for salvation and to man for both healing the conscience and for reconciliation of an offended neighbour. This emphasis is so strong that, despite Joye intentionally placing faith at the beginning of his formula where Tyndale held that it followed

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

confession, Joye's notion of the pragmatism of confession was most similar to that of Tyndale.

Joye also consistently describes this remedy in medical terms and the sinfulness as a disease in a way that his readers would have understood was similar to seeing the confessor as a physician of souls and confession as a medicine. Throughout *Hortulus Animae*, he compares the knowledge of sin with the healing of medicine, and places that next to a comparison of an earthly remedy to earthly infirmity: 'If a man is diseased, he first asks what kynde of syckenes he is efecte, and than considereth what strength he hath, what he is able to do, what he can not do, and thirdly searcheth for a medicine to lay in his disease'.<sup>19</sup> He compares this to forgiveness and the means to salvation:

The comaudemnt of god do teache a man to knowe his infirmitie, and make hym to fele what he is, what he can do, and what he can not do, so that he may knowledge hymselfe a persone full of vice and sinfulness, full of weyknes and feblenes, so that his synne, to his conscience ones reuelated and knownen by the lawe, that than he may be gladde to seke after remedy and grace, whereby he may be restored and iustified, and so may he be able to fulfyll the comaudemntes.<sup>20</sup>

The emphasis remains on sinfulness, not individual acts of sin, as the infirmity. Likewise, the law replaces the priest in its task as illuminating this sinfulness and showing the frailty of human depravity. He does not here use the language of binding and loosing especially prominent in Tyndale and Barnes, but describes it in much the same way: its principal task is that, by revealing the conscience, it will make the penitent find the remedy to the disease of sinfulness, which in turn enables the penitent to fulfil the law. The very notion of contrition or attrition circled around the idea of the burden of the conscience. In many cases, the particular sins needed to

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. D1r.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

be confessed only because they were identified as a burden to the conscience rather than a sharply defined violation of the law. The sinner would naturally feel a sense of anxiety about this sinfulness, but Joye, stopping short of Luther's emphasis on soothed consciences, describes God's pleasure as being 'mercyfull to all poore penitent herts' on account of 'the bloude and merites of his son Jesus Christe'.<sup>21</sup>

This summary of salvation in the preface is displayed in the mechanisms and the construction of the primer. The Decalogue serves to show human infirmity, as priests would often use it as a means to discover forgotten sin. In *Hortulus*, it is described as something that 'doth shewe vnto vs what we owe to god', which implies a human debt that requires repayment, yet one humans are incapable of fulfilling.<sup>22</sup> The Creed details what is to be believed in order to fulfil that debt, and knowledge is clearly primary for forgiveness in Joye's theology. Finally, the Paternoster describes how this belief is to be manifest in order to receive forgiveness.

The greatest value of *Horulus Animae* to a study of sin and penance is in Joye's examination of the Paternoster, a value that extends to the modern church, as Joye's wording was later adopted in the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>23</sup> Joye offers two sample prayers written to guide children in confessing their sins to God. In addition, he provides several other sample prayers for a variety of other purposes, most of which are related in some way to forgiveness. These prayers, combined with Tyndale's prayer in his short treatise on the Paternoster, offer the only examples of an evangelical form of confession. The importance of these prayers cannot be overestimated.

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. D5r.

<sup>23</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 209.

Joye's description of the Paternoster is by way of commentary, as he expounds upon his English translations of the Lord's prayer. When arriving at the sixth petition, 'foryue vs oure trespasses', Joye pauses to pragmatically display how this should be done in light of the burden of sin given by the law. His prayer begins with a plea to 'conforte our conscyence' that has been 'abasshed' when elucidated by the law. He requests that God gives peace to his heart, and that judgment not be levied according to the crime but that mercy be shown to those who were submissive. The emphasis on this prayer remains to 'confort all mennes conscyence', and pleas for help to avoid despair for guilt. This point is belaboured until a plea for forgiveness and for help avoiding future sin is given.<sup>24</sup> This sample prayer, if left by itself, makes Joye appear to focus more on the tangible effects on the conscience than on satisfaction.

The next confession, one that is given specifically for children to know how to acknowledge their sin, is perhaps more characteristic of Joye's notion of a specific confession to God, despite its brevity. Joye provides some basic concepts of prayer for mealtime and before bed. Every evening, the child is advised to seek rest in God, then examine his or her conscience before God to enable that rest. The prayer begins with an expression of gratitude to God for offering his son for forgiveness. Then the prayers gets more specific,

I pray the forgiue me al my synnes which I haue this day vnryghtwysely comytteth in dede, worde, and thought. And that thou woldest vouchsafe of thy gracious goodness to kepe me this nyghte: for I comyte myselfe both body and soule and all myne hert to thy hands.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> *Hortulus Anime*, sig. D2r.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. L2r.

This is followed by a plea to ‘thy holy aungell’ for protection from a ‘dedely adversary’, the devil. The ‘holy aungell’ is the Holy Spirit, as described in the preface, and whose role is to protect from future sins. This confession is simple, in that it denies the need for the enumeration of individual sins as well as the gradation of sins. It seeks forgiveness for all sins committed that day, and a proof of the validity of the turning through a commitment to the hand of God.

This very brief prayer is marked by its specificity. Joye, who in his preface indicates that forgiveness is for a general state of sinfulness rather than individual sins, here provides a template for the confession of specific sins. The purpose is not just a recitation of the template, but of an intentional probing of sins committed in ‘dede, worde, and thought’. Its intent is not to develop a strict enumeration of sins, but rather to make the penitent aware of any sins committed throughout the day in order to better understand God’s grace.

The text has an unclear break after this prayer, as Joye’s exhortation was to ‘saye these two prayers’ at bedtime, but they are repetitious in wording and pattern. If they are to be said in succession, then it is clear that some reflection was intended following the first prayer, and any repetition was to aid as a mnemonic. More likely, though, the second prayer was intended for an older child or adult, as there is significant thematic overlap. This second prayer begins with an identification of the might and power of God, but then goes a little deeper into the aspect of the person confessing:

I thy synfull creature and moste unworthy childe, contrite in my hert before thyne hyghe maiestye, aske the mercy and forgyenes of all my synne and iniquite that I have this day comytted agaynste the, yea and ever syche synne that I was conceivd in my mothers wombe, vnto this present hour.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

The penitent begins by admitting a general state of sinfulness before seeking forgiveness for all individual sins committed, including antenatal original sin. This is also an interesting departure from conservative dogma, which held that original sin was forgiven at baptism, and only actual sin is forgiven at confession. The emphasis remains on avoiding the enumeration of sins in an effort to receive forgiveness.

Yet, an awareness of sins required an acknowledgment of specific sins to God, while remaining mindful of the pitfalls of attempts to recall all sins committed when those sins had already been forgiven. This awareness begins with the conscience that has been unveiled by the Holy Spirit, who is portrayed as fulfilling the role of a priest as healer and teacher. He is able to ‘teache vs in our hertes, and telleth vs by his holy secrete inspiration’.<sup>27</sup> The Holy Spirit teaches how the father is merciful to the truly penitent, and how infinite mercy is found in Christ’s merits and blood. As described elsewhere in this primer, Joye’s understanding of the conscience relative to sin is always understood in relationship to Christ’s work on the cross. It is that work that teaches mankind to ‘abhorre our vices’, and thus is the source of the wounding of our consciences’.<sup>28</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Joye’s marginalia in this prayer prods the child to confess ‘what offence ye haue comytted that day that cheyflyest grudgeth your conscience’.<sup>29</sup> Through an attempt to alleviate the conscience, the child can learn the benefits of grace.

Elsewhere, Joye advises a man who ‘knowe and feale his synnes and trembleth at the hydeous sight of them’ to not let them prick his conscience for too long, lest he ‘turne to theyr owne good works, to satysfactions, pilgrimages, and pardons’. Instead, he is to ‘faythfully beleue that Christe suffered for they sake’, and

---

<sup>27</sup> *Hortulus Anime*, ‘Preface’, sig. D1v.

<sup>28</sup> *Hortulus Anime*. sig. K3r.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. L2r.

that he is their full satisfaction because 'he bare our synnes in his owne body upon the crosse'. Full belief is the only sure way to satisfy the conscience, for any way that relies on works does not provide full assurance. Confession of committed sins is followed by an admission of appreciation for God's protection in abstaining from sin in the past, then a plea for the strength to continue avoiding sin, before a request for physical rest in sleep in order to better serve God the next day.

This prayer follows a pattern of confession that mirrors that of sacramental confession. It begins with a confession and an acknowledgment of contrition and culminates with an amendment of life by avoiding future sin. This confession is important, for it denied an enumeration of sins but accepted that specific sins are not only emotionally taxing, but also require a cognitive acknowledgment of them in order to confront them and amend the life. The amendment of life is an important element in solafidistic repentance, for good works were often the evidence of a person already being forgiven. This prayer, along with the Decalogue and the Creed, were to be said nightly in order to create the discipline of understanding the gravity of sin and the awareness of the promises of the Gospel.

These prayers provide the pragmatism of the understanding of sin and confession that Joye outlined in his preface. They are examples of how a person is to acknowledge and avoid sin, confront the conscience, and develop a spiritual habit. Although Joye's notion of repentance was preoccupied with satisfaction, these prayers only identify the human element of confessing and avoiding sins, and are otherwise unconcerned with theological developments involving how satisfaction was effected. His next important work, a written defence of the charges that caused him to flee to mainland Europe, was a more honest attempt at theology rather than practice, and provides more clues to his notion of sin and repentance.

## **Death by the Power of the Keys and Confession**

George Joye was first implicated with evangelical leanings in 1526, when his home was searched for banned literature, and he was investigated again in 1527 after officials were anonymously alerted by a local prior named John Ashwell near Joye's hometown of Bedford. This investigation landed him before Wolsey, but Joye arrived after the proceedings had begun, which allowed him to see the fate of Bilney and Arthur, who were summoned at the same time. Joye followed the pattern of Tyndale, Frith, and Barnes by fleeing to the European mainland and working as a translator. Three and a half years later, he answered the charges that were levelled against him by writing *An Answer to Iohan Ashwell priour of Newnham Abbey sente scretely to the bishop of Lyncolne*. *Answer* was an attempt to make public what John Ashwell wished to remain private. It included the text of Ashwell's original letter accusing Joye of heresy, followed by a line-by-line response. The suspicions arose largely out of personal conversations between them, and Ashwell's letters list five accusations against Joye: a denial of the ability of a priest to bind or loose sin, justification by faith alone, the validity of marriage of priests, the ability of the laity to hear confession, and veneration of images. Three of these five accusations are related to Joye's understanding of penance and repentance, and two of them go to the very heart of the issue. Perhaps nowhere else is it more evident that the private conversations of George Joye, and presumably other English evangelicals of the 1520s and 1530s, held repentance and penance as a central concern. Likewise, a consumer demand existed for this level of argumentation, as *Letters of John Ashwell* went through three printings.

Of the five accusations, Joye devotes the most attention to the charge that the power of the keys belongs to both priests and bishops. The accusation is less concerned with the authority of the words of absolution than it is regarding special jurisdiction being reserved for higher ecclesiastical offices. Instead of correcting the accusation, he admits it by demonstrating how the keys were designed to be used. When Christ gave the power of the keys to the apostles, ‘he sente them not forth with them to heare confessions, but to preach his gossell’.<sup>30</sup> The power of the keys, then, is given through preaching, not pronouncing absolution. Joye consistently refers to the keys as the ‘keye of knowledge’ to indicate how they are made effective.

It naturally follows that if the keys are effective through preaching, then ‘these keyes ar annexed vn to the office of preaching as ye may se at the geuinge of them’.<sup>31</sup> Any attempt to use the keys through means other than preaching was at best misleading and hypocritical. Similar to Barnes identifying oral confession as a ‘pickelocke’, Joye describes the ‘rustye tradicions and laws of men’ designed to create a system of salvation as ‘counterfeited keyes’.<sup>32</sup> The priests were likened to ‘pharisays and lawiers’, who were guilty of closing off heaven by forbidding a vernacular Bible. If the guilt and punishment of sins was loosed through preaching Scripture, and Scripture was held hostage by forbidding its translation, then this translator’s plea for an English Bible was really a plea for freedom to exercise the power of the keys. Joye reworks their understanding of the ‘knowledge’ to mean the knowledge of the Gospel, and the plurality of the keys alludes to

the double propertye that one keye hathe both to open and to shutte. Nowe sith the shitting vp of the kingdome of heauen be the taking a waye of the

---

<sup>30</sup> Joye, *Letters of John Ashwell*, sig. A6r.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. A5v.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. B1v.

keye of the knowledge of goddis worde: then muste the opening of it nedis be the geuvinge of the keye of the knowledge of Goddis worde.<sup>33</sup>

Through holding hostage the preaching of the word of God, the church was guilty of exercising a power it did not rightfully possess: the power to bind sins by closing the door to heaven. Joye also identified the keys as separate, with one designed to bind and another to loose, delineating between the judgment of the law and the promises of the Gospel.

Joye develops this notion of how these powers are manifest through preaching Christ's death and resurrection as the source of repentance and remission of sins:

at the preaching of the lawe, men knowe there sinnes, and feel themselfe bounde, of the which knowledge and felinge ther followth repentaunce. And at the preaching of the Gospel which promiseth remission of sinnes there foloweth faith which loseth the captiue conscience into the keye of knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

For Joye as for Tyndale and Frith, the power of the keys in solafidistic repentance was through the binding of the law and loosing of the Gospel. This is also consistent with *Hortulus*, which held a distinctly Lutheran notion of assurance through faith relieving ('looseth') the conscience rather than binding it through uncertainty.

However, to remove any doubt regarding human effort, Joye identifies that the power of the keys is not an achievement of the one preaching the word, but the Holy Spirit that turns the key to help a person understand 'the right sence and vnderstanding of his worde'.<sup>35</sup> The Holy Spirit is the agent that activates faith, opens the eyes of the blind, and opens men's wit. While Joye expounds less on the notion

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Sig A6r.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

of a passive acceptance of faith than Barnes does, he describes the Holy Spirit as enacting this faith in man through the power of the keys in order for righteousness to be imputed.<sup>36</sup>

This passive acceptance of faith undermines all other aspects of repentance in favour of a basic but genuine knowledge of the 'right sence and vunderstanding of his worde'.<sup>37</sup> Faith, then, is cerebral, almost philosophical, not emotional or practical. Joye cites Jesus' disciple Thomas as being absent when the keys were given as reason for his incredulity when Jesus appeared to him. Thomas had been with Jesus for his earthly ministry and had personal experience with Jesus in a way that Joye's readers could not. Even this experience was insufficient, as his knowledge was incomplete. After touching Jesus' wounds, Thomas' knowledge became complete, 'losinge' his heart. In this case, Joye describes the loosing as being from unbelief, not the *poena* or the *culpa* of sin. Belief, therefore, is the result of being loosed by the Gospel.

The law is typically understood as the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. Tyndale does not elaborate, but consistently refers to all the commands of the Old Testament as the law which binds humanity. Joye is even less specific, defining it simply as 'that wich God commaundeth vs to fulfil, as ar the x commaundmentis'.<sup>38</sup> The identification of the Decalogue is unusual, as it is clearly more specific than the Pentateuch, Old Testament, or all commands of God in Scripture. The importance Joye places on the Decalogue can be seen in his primer, and it was a preferred device of many preachers to help the penitent remember

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Sig B2r.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Sig A7r.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

forgotten sins so that absolution may be complete and effective. It is likely that Joye uses it here in that context, as both the conservative priest and the evangelical author would have emphasised the Decalogue's role of creating an awareness of sin.

Yet Joye was less concerned with an awareness of sin than he was with the cognizance of the heart bound because of sinfulness. He describes how the burden of the conscience created by this awareness can lead to a love of the law because of the comfort of being loosed. Yet the onus is still on the sinner to believe the promises in order to be loosed. A person, through the hearing of the promises, 'fealeth his harte eased, comforted, and loosed. But if he beleueth it not: then is he yet holden stil bounde in to damnacion'.<sup>39</sup> Joye does not define his view on predestination, though elsewhere he does appear to hold that a person can lose salvation.<sup>40</sup> Yet, here it is clear that, if the Holy Spirit turns the key of knowledge to loose a sinner, then any other external manifestation of that loosing is not conclusive that sins have been forgiven. This is technically no different from Luther's notion of assurance for the quieted conscience, though Joye expounds further in stating that the quieted conscience does not actually provide assurance by itself, since knowledge is objective.

The law is God's command that binds a person to the consequences of sin, and the Gospel is the promise God makes that he will be made righteous, a promise fulfilled by Christ on the cross and led by the Holy Spirit. Once a person recognizes a general inability to obey the law, that person must trust God to fulfil it on his or her

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. A8r.

<sup>40</sup> Joye's notion of church discipline is that, if a person remains obstinate in sin and gets removed from the earthly congregation, that person is also removed from the heavenly congregation. This implies that the person was in the congregation first in order to be removed from it. *Ibid.*, sig. A8r-B1v.

behalf. A person who does not believe is still bound to damnation, and a person who has faith is loosed to paradise. This notion of the power of the keys is a further elaboration of Joye's 'hole somme of saluation' as to 'know thy selfe a synner, of whom to seke remedy, and howe you shalte obteyne it, truely by prayer'.<sup>41</sup> God's commands teach human sinfulness and God's promises teach both the remedy and the means of attaining it.

Joye's elaboration of his notion of the power of the keys dominates his response to the charges against him. This description is even more exhaustive than anything Tyndale had to say on the subject, and Joye goes beyond Tyndale by extending the power of the keys to excommunication and church discipline. In this respect, he is treading near the line of double justification that Tyndale has often been wrongly accused of holding.<sup>42</sup> Clebsch also makes this claim regarding Joye.<sup>43</sup> In his understanding of Matthew 18, if a person is openly in sin and does not turn from it, the church has a duty to separate that individual from the rest of the congregation after going through the steps outlined in Matthew 18. This separation is an extension of the binding found in John 20. He paraphrases Matthew 18 to say that 'whom so euer you putt out of the congregacion here... the same thing is confirmed in heauen: and whom you receyue agene as pentient [sic] and sorye for his offences the same receyued in heauen'.<sup>44</sup> This second use of the power of the keys is a declaration of a lack of divine forgiveness for the obstinate. A person who continues in sin after being confronted by the church does not display repentance and is not forgiven. Joye contends that the law binds and the church only preaches binding and

---

<sup>41</sup> *Hortulus Anime*, 'Preface', sig. D1v.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 171.

<sup>43</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 215.

<sup>44</sup> *Letters*, sig. A8v.

loosing; therefore the unrepentant actions of the individual are what cause the bondage, and the excommunication is only a declaration of that pre-existing binding, rather than a display of the action of binding.

Joye avoids directly addressing the accusation that a bishop and a priest have the same power of binding and loosing until after he has defined his terms. Because the power of the keys is God's word, those who preach the condemnation of the law and the promises of the Gospel have the authority to use the power of the keys. This includes all believers, not just clergy. Joye therefore pleads guilty to the charge levied against him, and adds an indictment of his own: the pope is guilty of using counterfeit keys by promoting forgiveness through 'those rustye tradicions and laws of men to shutt up the kingdome of heuen and to take away the knowledge of Christ'.<sup>45</sup> Since the punishment of sins is loosed through the preaching and reading of God's word, it is God, through the Holy Spirit, that holds the power of the keys. Joye's life's work of making Scripture known in the English language is central to forgiveness, as it holds the power to bind and loose.

This is relevant for another of the five accusations that caused Joye to flee to Antwerp, that all laymen have the right to hear confession. While an indignant Joye held that this is a slight misinterpretation of his intent, he clarifies by offering a two-fold definition of confession. His first definition was Tyndale's second, which is that someone who has offended his neighbour is bound 'with repentaunce go to him knowleginge his offence, desiring him forgeuenes, reconcylinge eche other'.<sup>46</sup> The purpose of this confession is Christian unity through reconciliation, and is precipitated by a turning from the offence and confessing it to the offended. The

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. B1v.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. C5r.

penitent should expect absolution if his confession was sincere. Likewise, a person who has sinned against God should have a quiet conscience through faith, which brings peace.

It is in this context that Joye discusses ecclesiastical oral confession, the purpose of which is not absolution but the quieting of a troubled conscience. Perhaps less anticlerical than Tyndale, Joye's polemic was more concerned with providing the 'spiritual salve' that confession was intended to be. He defines the purpose of this type of confession as comfort:

If a man hath eny grugge and inquietness in his conscience by the reason of sinne committed that euermore troubleth and fereth him of damnacion, and this man cannot be quiet and comforted ne haue eny peace in his harte and assured howe and by what meani he maye haue that suer forgeuenes, which is through faith in Christe, without the which no consciens maye be suer and at reste from the face of sinne and damnacion.<sup>47</sup>

It is interesting to note that Joye's notion of the power of the keys coming through teaching and preaching the word of God is not included in his purpose of confession. Even in the sacramental context, one benefit of oral confession was that, through it, the clergy would have a unique opportunity for private spiritual instruction. Indeed, spiritual instruction necessarily would occur when the promises of God are pronounced to aid the troubled conscience, but would come as a secondary benefit, not as a primary purpose. Joye mentions that the conscience can only be quieted for those that have faith in Christ, and it is the reminder of the promises of that faith that causes spiritual comfort. George Joye's endorsement of proper, institutionalized oral confession in an evangelical schema is therefore teleologically unrelated to the power of the keys.

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

In building his case for oral confession, Joye was not negligent in identifying some logical inconsistencies, even if only briefly. He highlights the ignorance and malice of the clergy in an attack against the whole system, but he also points out the illogical idea of a person enumerating all sins since their previous confession. This practice ‘vexeth not a lytell many a good simple consciens’, brings less educated people into a desperate fear, and is ‘no small iniurye to Christis bloude to attribute the forgeuenes of our sinnes (as they teache) to the selfe confession’.<sup>48</sup> His understanding of confession answers all of these problems. It soothes the conscience through the promises of God and honours his blood through an elevation of it to the agent of absolution and satisfaction for sins.

Joye also criticizes the practice of condemning consciences that he finds as inherent with a probing of circumstances, intent, and secret sin. Because he understood the power of the keys as given to all, he concluded that the purpose of oral confession was preaching the comfort of the Gospel, not the absolution of guilt and prescription of a penalty for satisfaction. A person who has an injured conscience may therefore confess to a layman as to a priest, provided that layman is ‘discrete’ and ‘learned’. He even adduces the practice of confessing to a layman if no priest is present and there is great need that is prescribed in the penitentials: ‘Verely I neuer see greter nede then even nowe to feche this holsome and swete salue, that is to saye that only faith in Christes deth iustifieth and set our hartis at reste at the laye man or woman’.<sup>49</sup> Joye’s understanding of oral confession extends beyond the ecclesiastical office to include all faithful laymen, which transforms the purpose of oral confession to be that of comfort and preaching justification through Christ’s

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. C5v.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. C5r-C5v.

death. In this way, Joye is consistent with Tyndale in practice, though his argument is more strongly based on the power of the keys and the more Lutheran notion of assurance.

One condition of these two types of confession is contrition, which for Joye was more substantial than a mere emotional pain, as it involved a weighing of the gravity of the offense to God or to the neighbour. As such, it was motivated by love of God, not a fear of punishment. This understanding is consistent with the late medieval notion of contrition in the place of attrition, based on a human depravity as an offence to the glory of God. This relationship between contrition and confession is more Lutheran than Tyndalian, with an emphasis not on soteriology but on soothed consciences. A person's sins are already forgiven at the moment of their first confession to God. All subsequent confessions to laymen only serve this purpose of spiritual comfort that the sin committed was forgiven even before it was committed. However, Joye's notion of confession to the injured party as requisite for salvation is consistent with Tyndale's emphasis on reconciliation, and neither propose the sort of double justification that Clebsch attributes to Tyndale.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Morality of Satisfaction**

Noticeably absent in Joye's description of confession, forgiveness, or the power of the keys is that which was a main point for other English evangelicals: the agent of satisfaction. This is not due to negligence, but to difference of emphasis. Joye's strategy in defending his stance regarding the theology of the power of the keys was to deflect attention away from doctrine towards practice. His description of properly

---

<sup>50</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 171.

placed confession involved sample prayers. The theology involved in reassigning a purpose to confession was torn straight from the pages of Tyndale.

This does not mean that Joye does not provide clues to his notion of what makes satisfaction effective. In Joye's 'hole somme of saluation', described in the preface to *Hortulus Animae*, the notion of satisfaction is oddly absent. Joye does elsewhere in the preface indicate that God's mercy comes as a result of 'the bloude and merites of his son Jesu Christe, and the dethe that he suffred for the loue that he beareth vnto vs'.<sup>51</sup> This is echoed in the charge that John Ashwell made against Joye that faith is sufficient without works. His response is that 'we are receyued in to his favour by the dethe and meretis of his sonne Jesus Christe our saviour', which causes humans to 'fulfill his pleasures in doinge the works of loue' because Christ's death forces humans to love him.<sup>52</sup> Joye's emphasis in describing satisfaction to characterize solafidism was actually to emphasize the result of that satisfaction, which is the practical aspect of love bringing obedience to the God who provided the satisfaction.

Joye not only undermines the importance of satisfaction practically, he also does it theologically through a description of humankind being *simul peccator et justus*. Joye was more concerned with how a person either seeks forgiveness or reacts to that forgiveness. This is perhaps why his emphasis was more on imputation of sins than their satisfaction. Joye answered Ashwell's charge of faith being independent of works by stating that 'to be justified or to be made rightwyse before God by this faithe is nothing els but to be absolved frome sinne of God, to be forgeuen, or to haue no sinne imputed vnto him of God'. The emphasis is not that a

---

<sup>51</sup> *Hortulus Anime*, 'Preface', sig. D1v.

<sup>52</sup> *Letters*, sig. B2v.

debt of satisfaction needed to be repaid, but that sin was never imputed to cause the debt. He describes this righteousness as God's mercy which is moved 'for Christis bloudis sake to promise vs forgeuenes', but the emphasis is clearly deflected away from Christ's blood towards the fact of righteousness existing because sins have not been imputed.

This emphasis is clarified later, where Joye states that this removal of the imputation of sin is equal to satisfaction, but the burden remains on the removal of imputation. In the same *Answer to Ashwell*, he cites Psalm 32 before offering his own commentary.

Blessed is that man to whome the lorde rekeneth not his sinne. [David] sayd not blessed is he that worketh, but he to whom God rekeneth not sinne. That is to saye althoughe he be a sinner and not able to come oute of dette: yet wil not God of his mercy reken it vnto hym ne laye it to his charge, for that the penitent sinner beleueth that Christe made satisfaction for him and payd the raunsome for it with his precieuse bloude.<sup>53</sup>

Where the other English evangelicals base their solafidism on the idea that Christ's blood served as their satisfaction, a satisfaction that the conservatives had been attempting to meet through the culmination of the sacrament of penance, Joye focused more on the post-satisfaction concept that sins had never been imputed. Christ's blood and his merits remained as the agent of satisfaction, but the emphasis was clearly deferred away from them in favour of a more practical and experiential element of how the faithful believer was to respond to this satisfaction.

Joye's most descriptive discussion on satisfaction displays a Lutheran notion of shared attributes. He only mentions these attributes as related to satisfaction in

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. B5v.

passing, but the agent of Christ's blood as that which provides for the sharing of attributes is clear. He notes that Christ's death and suffering is what pleased God, who 'hath receyued me into his fauoure for Christis bloudis sake', which means that Christ's merits belong to the penitent, including 'his rightwisnes, his wisdom, his holynes, his satisfaction, his fulfilling of the lawe, and al his good deades are mine'.<sup>54</sup> The sharing of these attributes means that the penitent's debt of sin has been satisfied because it is Christ's attributes that have been imputed in the place of the penalty of sins. Yet, even these attributes are described for the way they cause love in the believer, which in turn brings good works. This is Joye's view of satisfaction, not that it is unimportant, but rather that the faithful believer should be more concerned with its practical application relative to obedience.

When George Joye fled to the continent of Europe in 1528, he assured not only the ability to live long enough to bridge two waves of evangelicals in England, but also the development and influence of his primer and his notion of the power of the keys and confession. These attributes would prove important for the formation of formularies and lay understanding of sin and confession for the remainder of Henry's reign and beyond. He developed Tyndale's notion of the power of the keys being through preaching the binding of the law and loosing of the Gospel, and developed a clearer notion of oral confession than his partners in exile. While devoting less attention to contrition and satisfaction, this was not at the expense of a developed theology, but was instead more practically focused. It was this practical application that would prove the most important, as Joye's primer became the standard by which

---

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. B7r.

all other primers prior to 1545 would be judged, including the catechetical aspects of the Book of Common Prayer that endured beyond the Tudors.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Clebsch, *Earliest Protestants*, 209.

## CHAPTER 7

### PENANCE IN ENGLAND 1535-1547

The religious thought and convictions of those who fled England in the 1520s are an important part of the theological history of the Reformation. In many cases, the journey to Antwerp and beyond was out of a natural instinct for the preservation of life, though these exiles were purposed with both the discovery and promotion of reformation doctrines, especially those of a Lutheran tint. The prevailing strategy of spreading reformation thought to those in the homeland was to create English translations of the Bible and of Protestant books. Indeed, without their influence, and despite their chronological and numerical limitations, the official acceptance of an English Bible in 1536 would likely have been delayed by years or decades.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, the influence of these exiles in spreading solafidism contributed to the growth of evangelical beliefs, and provided support for the evangelical clergy in England. These exiles were vital for the reformation of many doctrinal issues and the spread of solafidism in England.

Yet it would be misleading to suggest that these exiles were the only agents of reform. Others chose to stay in their homeland and exact a change from within. Theirs was no less a war for souls than that of those who left, and in many ways they were no less radical in their beliefs, though they were often forced to temper certain aspects of doctrine in order to foster a suitable political outcome. Through luck, timing, or the fortune of court politics, they survived long enough in England to

---

<sup>1</sup> While fully implemented in 1538, Cromwell's injunctions of 1536 can be recognized as the first official legal acceptance.

make a tangible impact on how this newly established church approached sin and penance. Most were mere background figures, offering support for those more prominent and influential. Others, such as Thomas Cranmer and Hugh Latimer, had regular direct interaction with their conservative opponents and with the king to help define the direction of the English church.

Yet, despite these differences, clear dichotomy between exiles and non-exiles did not exist. Robert Barnes fled England shortly after his conversion—perhaps even as part of his conversion—yet returned for a successful career as an ambassador for Schmalkaldic relations.<sup>2</sup> George Joye spent considerable time in Europe, only to return to England, and outlive the vacillations of Henry, enabling him to see the fruits of evangelicalism through the coming of England’s Josiah, Edward VI. Tyndale preferred to stay on the continent despite Cromwell’s resilient pleading for his return, and Frith’s career was too short for a successful return home, but this is not to say that had either of them survived to the later 1530s, they would not have been influential in the formation of the official formularies in England. Even Cranmer, whose developmental time abroad was on official embassy and not as an exile, must be seen as sharing some traits with the exiles, as MacCulloch identifies that it was Cranmer’s extended mission to Germany in 1532, during what Clebsch considers to be the ‘silent years’ of the exiles,<sup>3</sup> that proved to be instrumental in directing Cranmer towards Lutheranism.<sup>4</sup>

The combination of influences between exiles and non-exiles can clearly be seen in the first two major attempts at formulating a statement of faith and what they said about solafidistic repentance for the new English church. The Ten Articles of

---

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough narrative of Barnes first being introduced as ambassador, see Rory McEntegart, *Henry VIII, The League of Schmalkalden, and the English Reformation* (London, 2002), 40.

<sup>3</sup> William A. Clebsch, *England’s Earliest Protestants 1520-1535* (Westport, CT), 174.

<sup>4</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (London, 1996), 69.

1536, together with a significantly enlarged and expounded formulary a year later in *The Institution of a Christian Man*, indicates a clear evangelical influence on the newly established official understanding of penance. The formula for the sacrament of penance in the Bishops' Book, as *Institution* was colloquially called, replaced satisfaction with amendment of life in its clear promotion of solafidism.<sup>5</sup> Christ's sacrifice provided the only adequate satisfaction for sins, and the human response to this is to turn from sin towards good works. In the debates surrounding the formulation of the Bishops' Book and the Ten Articles, the evangelicals conceded relatively few doctrinal points, particularly concerning penance, as it came to resemble the solafidistic repentance of the exiles more than the sacramental penance of the late medieval church.

Despite any evangelical advances evident in the Ten Articles or the Bishops' Book, conservatives developed some momentum of their own only two years later, first prominently exhibited in the Six Articles of 1539, followed by a more exhaustive statement made primarily by Henry's revisions to the Bishops' Book in 1543. Both of these formularies clearly indicate a conservative resurgence, but such resurgence can be exaggerated, as can be clearly seen in the way they defined penance. Despite losing ground in the Six Articles on the compulsory nature of confession, the evangelicals won a significant victory through a denial of its origin as *de iure divino*—a notion that, despite Erasmus denying its divine institution, was nevertheless a testament to evangelical thought in the King's Book.<sup>6</sup> The King's Book likewise denied solafidism, but major victories were won through how

---

<sup>5</sup> All citations from the Ten Articles, Bishops' Book, Six Articles, or King's Book will be taken from the edition edited by Lloyd unless otherwise noted. When a formulary is compared to another in the Lloyd edition, both page numbers will be given.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Erasmus' denial of *de iure divino*, see John B. Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Research in Theology, 1970), 181-191.

confession was to be made and the ambiguous nature of purgatory. The changes brought about by the Six Articles and the King's Book do not indicate a clear and equal pendulum shift towards conservatism, as it was the changes in practice, not the theology, that were the most substantial.

Each of these four formularies—the Ten Articles, the Bishops' Book, the Six Articles, and the King's Book—required royal consent, at least partially or provisionally. Henry tasked himself with being the ruler of both the *corpus christianum* in England and the monarch of the terrestrial government—the lord of both secular and spiritual matters. This dual role was one that he believed was necessary for all secular rulers, as a foreign head of state like the pope should have no earthly jurisdiction. Henry, likewise, had no intention of becoming his own pope, pronouncing doctrine without consultation. While the final say on dogma rested with him, most important matters were debated at length among high-ranking clerics. His intention was not so much to create a *via media*, as some have argued,<sup>7</sup> but in his quest for sound doctrine, the vacillations of court dominance between the evangelicals and the conservatives caused what from an outside perspective appears to be erratic theological behaviour. Henry's malleability allowed for competing influences to have their day, and often it was matters external to theology that allowed momentum to shift. MacCulloch argues that Stephen Gardiner's absence in 1537-1539 provided the gateway for evangelical dominance. Rory McEntegart adds to this by identifying the collapse of Schmalkadic relations and a failed marriage to the 'Flanders Mare' Anne of Cleves as developments which allowed the Bishop of Winchester to sway the king in a more conservative direction that is seen in the Six

---

<sup>7</sup> Of those that hold variations of this view, G.W. Bernard is among the more vocal and exhaustive as he defines Henry as strong and decisive, yet accommodating to a spectrum of religious views. G.W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven and London, 2005).

Articles.<sup>8</sup> For McEntegart, the consistent swaying of official doctrine mirrored the waxing and waning of Schmalkaldic negotiations, for which Henry held a genuine interest.<sup>9</sup>

Yet despite these vacillations, a surprising degree of doctrinal homogeneity can be seen in the discussions regarding the sacrament of penance. A *via media* between two mutually exclusive concepts of justification is not possible for the theologically aware.<sup>10</sup> Either the ministration of the sacraments aided by the good works of penance leads to forgiveness or the human condition prevents either human or ecclesiastical intervention in salvation. In the late 1530s and 1540s in England, the basic tenets of justification would remain controversial, though this would become secondary in the debate of penance and repentance. While the conservative bishops were never able to fully accept solafidism, they did find points of connection with their opponents in the understanding of contrition, auricular and silent prayerful confession, and the necessity of good works. Likewise, the evangelicals did not readily accept the culpability of confession or the role of prevenient grace, but they found common ground on the role of Christ's merits, the power of the keys, and faith. Evangelicals made some concessions in the Six Articles and the King's Book, but the greater of these concessions was related to the practice of confession, not the theology of penance. The evangelical cause in England at the end of Henry's reign, while still distant from its German cousin, was even further from its late medieval predecessor in large part because of these subtle victories concerning penance. These victories allowed for greater evangelical promulgation of solafidistic repentance

---

<sup>8</sup> MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 243. McEntegart, *League of Schmalkalden*, 149ff.

<sup>9</sup> McEntegart, *League of Schmalkalden*, 26ff.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Rex continues this theme, particularly in relationship to the changes brought in the Henrician Reformation. Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (London, 1993), 171ff. See also Alec Ryrie, 'Divine Kingship and Royal Theology in Henry VIII's Reformation', *Reformation*, vol. 7 (2002), 49-77.

following the death of Henry, who was instrumental in both the evangelical advances and their setbacks in the 1530s and early 1540s, and whose notion of penance would lean towards evangelical belief, while remaining in favour of conservative practice.

### **Penance in the Bishops' Book**

Even before the Royal Supremacy was formalized in late 1534, evangelicals in England began to sense momentum swaying in their favour. With repudiation of the papacy, the door was opened to debating long-established dogma, as a denial of the primacy of Rome allowed for a total denunciation of any Roman doctrine not found in Scripture. Henry, influenced by evangelical writings that were banned by his own Lord Chancellor, slowly warmed to elements of evangelical doctrine. His break with Rome was not merely out of a quest for a new bride, but was a culmination of evangelical arguments against papal supremacy. Such convictions led to the 1535 execution of two important conservative leaders in John Fisher and Thomas More, and allowed for a greater influence of the strongly evangelical, if not Lutheran, Thomas Cromwell.<sup>11</sup> Thus, when the Ten Articles arrived in 1536 and were elaborated upon in the Bishops' Book in 1537, the evangelicals had reason to sense a turning tide. Dismay at the extirpation of their evangelical queen in May 1536 gave way to the rapture of the acceptance of the Ten Articles after its introduction at convocation in July.

---

<sup>11</sup> For more on Cromwell's evangelical tendencies, including the likelihood of his Lutheran sympathies, see McEntegart, *League of Schmalkalden*, 134-136. McEntegart notes that his evangelicalism spread further than simple solafidism, as his political advocacy with the Schmalkaldic League, his personal correspondence with Luther, his appointment of Barnes as Lutheran ambassador, as well as an apparent view of consubstantiation indicate a strong Lutheran influence. A.G. Dickens cautiously agrees, citing that his 'virtually Lutheran' views were only tempered by royal conservatism. A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 1989), 135.

The Ten Articles, the English's church's first official attempt at formulating a statement of belief, are widely believed to have been heavily influenced by the Wittenberg Articles of 1536. The Wittenberg Articles were the result of negotiations between the English ambassadors Robert Barnes, Edward Fox, and Nicholas Heath, with Luther, Melanchthon, and Bugenhagen, no less, on the German side. Melanchthon is largely considered to be the final editor of the Wittenberg Articles, as they were in many ways extracted from his *Loci Communes* and the Augsburg Confession.<sup>12</sup> As such, they provided a strong Lutheran structure for the Ten Articles, which were produced shortly after the ambassadors' return to England.

A.G. Dickens notes that the Ten Articles were less conciliatory towards the Wittenberg articles than they were an example of 'our English talent for concocting ambiguous and flexible documents'.<sup>13</sup> Christopher Haigh considers it 'a compromised compromise' because of the watering down of Lutheran concessions in Wittenberg.<sup>14</sup> Rory McEntegart is more cautious, particularly towards attempts to identify the Wittenberg articles as the lone influence on the Ten Articles. The basic substance of Wittenberg theology was already widely known in England in 1536, and multiple sources of influence for the Ten Articles are clearly attributable.<sup>15</sup> The Ten Articles quoted entire lines from the Wittenberg Articles, and while their doctrines were not always in accord, they agreed on fundamental Protestant notions of justification and forgiveness. This is important, for if the Wittenberg Articles were a statement of Lutheran belief, and if a clear influence can be attributed to the Ten

---

<sup>12</sup> E.G. Rupp, *Studies in Making of the English Protestant Tradition* (Cambridge, 1949).

<sup>13</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, 200.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), 128.

<sup>15</sup> McEntegart, *League of Schmalkalden*, 60.

Articles, then the first statement of belief in the new English church was painted with Lutheran brushes.

When the Ten Articles were formed into the Bishops' Book in 1537, even more was plagiarized directly from the Wittenberg articles. Gerald Bray offers a chart that shows the overlap in article use between the Augsburg Confession, the Wittenberg Articles, and the Ten Articles, even extending to those articles which eventually formed the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, it is no coincidence that the Pilgrimage of Grace, a conservative reaction in the Northern counties to both the Ten Articles and the dissolution of the monasteries, demanded that the 'Confessa Germanie' and the 'heresies' of Luther, Barnes, and Tyndale be destroyed.<sup>17</sup> Instead, the Ten Articles remained as an official statement of the beliefs of the English Church until they were superseded by the Forty-Two Articles in 1553. Their notion of justification is fundamentally solafidistic, and their treatment of penance reflects a denial of human efforts of satisfaction.

The Ten Articles and the Bishops' Book indicate that this English church shared traits with both Lutherans and with continental Catholicism, but its dissimilarities to both outweighed any singular likeness. This can be seen most clearly in its discussions of penance and its related doctrines. While remaining technically solafidistic, the doctrine of penance bore little resemblance to either that of the late medieval church or that of the English exiles already discussed. It, too, was its own thing, a *tertium quid*, a strange third thing that accepted justification by faith alone while promulgating a soteriology that ontologically accepted the

---

<sup>16</sup> *Documents*, 161-162.

<sup>17</sup> An interesting analysis of this is given by Dickens, who surmises 'the preservation of the monasteries should be deleted from the list of religious motives in the Pilgrimage of Grace, and put into some largely secular category' on the grounds that the laymen had a general disrespect for the clergy. A.G. Dickens, *Reformation Studies* (London, 1982), 75.

necessity of good works and participation in the sacraments as earning favour with God.

However evangelical they were, the Ten Articles could not be neatly classified as Lutheran despite their Wittenberg ties. Neither were they distinctly Reformed or conservative. The Ten Articles and the Bishops' Book indicate the initial thrust of an English church that was in the process of forging its own identity. It was unsteady in its motions and insecure in its developments. Alan Kreider describes this movement away from Wittenberg as beginning with the Ten Articles despite it being widely considered to be an evangelical victory.<sup>18</sup> Originally, the Ten Articles more closely resembled the Wittenberg Articles, and conservative reaction to noticeably Lutheran doctrine forced the evangelical cause to adopt a strategy based on slow movements and patience. These Wittenberg similarities, particularly concerning the three sacraments and justification, initiated a heated debate that prompted sliding the Ten Articles subtly more towards conservative doctrine. Reginald Pole, who had yet to receive the cardinal's hat, condemned only the source of the Ten Articles, ignoring its substance. J.D. Mackie sees more than transubstantiation and veneration of images as conservative-leaning, as he highlights the emphasis of the role of good works in the Ten Articles, despite the fact that good works were presented in a clearly evangelical way.<sup>19</sup> Yet despite Mackie's objections, it is clear that the first five articles retained a heavy Wittenberg influence, while the last five reflect an evangelical attempt to seek unity with their conservative colleagues on things nonessential. Diarmaid MacCulloch points to the Lambeth discussions earlier in 1536 for the primary influence of articles six to ten, which are

---

<sup>18</sup> Alan Kreider, *English Chantries* (Harvard, 1979), 121-123.

<sup>19</sup> J.D. Mackie, *The Early Tudors 1485-1558* (Oxford, 1992), 382-384.

notably more conservative in their affirmation of the veneration of images, prayers to saints, and purgatory, though each in a modified and slightly less conservative form. MacCulloch sees these final five articles as ‘evidence of compromise’ between conservatives and evangelicals.<sup>20</sup> Yet, such compromises in the Ten Articles more typically concerned ceremonies and practice instead of actual theology.

These Ten Articles would likewise prove enduring as an adequate representation of a new church with a new Supreme Head, still trying to find its identity in a world where long-held beliefs were being challenged and social structures were imploding. Its enduring presence would be found in the creation of the Bishops’ Book the following year, as most of the text of the Ten Articles would find their way into the extended formulary. Cranmer served as chief editor of the Bishops’ Book, with slight annotations by Henry, pushing it ever more slightly towards evangelicalism. The theology of the Reformation in England was, however, unique for its development by committee, and the Bishops’ Book was a product of a variety of bishops. The Bishops’ Book was more useful as a statement of theology in a practical environment, as it shared elements with sixteenth-century primers, including an exposition of the creed, Decalogue, and paternoster, as well as an identification of the sacraments and short articles on the *Ave Maria*, justification, and purgatory. The articles on justification and purgatory were copied nearly verbatim directly out of the Ten Articles, and were perhaps the strongest statements of evangelical belief in the English church of the mid-1530s.

Likewise, the article on penance in the Bishops’ Book was copied almost verbatim from the Ten Articles. The subtle enduring changes of the Bishops’ Book

---

<sup>20</sup> MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 161-162.

indicate a finished work that was slightly more Cranmerian in its doctrine,<sup>21</sup> as well as Cromwellian in its influence. Cromwell was after all politically savvy and knew how to exert the power of his office, as John Guy argues that he ‘manipulated’ the bishops on some doctrinal matters to reach a more evangelical end.<sup>22</sup> The Bishops’ Book, like the Ten Articles on which it was founded, maintained a heavy Lutheran influence. It agreed with pre-1520 Luther in affirming the sacramental status of penance, placing it with baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments of the higher order. Dickens denies any Lutheranism on a variety of grounds, not least of which is his interpretation that the sacramental status of penance should be defined in the orthodox sense because of its refusal to deny confession and penance. Likewise, he sees solafidism in the Bishops’ Book as technically incomplete, as it required contrition and faith to join with charity.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the notion that contrition and faith can exist within a solafidistic structure is consistent with the views of Tyndale, who emphasized contrition as a product of faith, and Barnes, who replaced a conscious acknowledgment of sins with contrition. Joye and Frith both held that contrition followed satisfaction, but the notion that contrition and faith are instrumental in justification is as evangelical a belief as it is conservative. Haigh understood this, though considers it a ‘convenient formula’ because of its emphasis on the necessity of works.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, while Luther did eventually deny the sacramental status of confession, it was because it lacked the necessary sign, not because it did not serve the same sacramental purpose as baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Finally, Dickens is correct that the Bishops’ Book numbers seven sacraments, however he ignores its

---

<sup>21</sup> For a thorough study on Cranmer’s developing notion of repentance, see Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988), 180.

<sup>23</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, 200.

<sup>24</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 129.

theology of the sacraments, as baptism, the Eucharist, and penance function separately from the other four sacraments, with the Bishops' Book distinguishing between sacraments of dominical institution and sacraments of the church in a two-tiered sacramental structure.<sup>25</sup> It is not the number of the sacraments that would indicate the party ties of the Bishops' Book, but the way a sacrament is understood to be effective.

The retention of penance's sacramental status is a result of its necessity for salvation, a necessity rooted in its purpose: forgiveness. The sacrament itself was only necessary because it contained the whole of the biblical necessity to repent. It is notable that Henry did not consider any aspect of the discussion on the formula of penance to be controversial, as an early draft with annotations by him and his Archbishop includes no entries for this section.<sup>26</sup> The Bishops' Book affirms a formula of penance that has three ingredients: contrition, confession, and amendment of life. The first two elements in this formula would strike a familiar chord with the conservative clergy, but it is the third element, that which is most important for forgiveness, that is changed. This change affirms the moral and behavioural element of penance, while denying its actual role in satisfaction. Social implications may have made this change easier for the conservatives to accept, while also answering the common indictment that solafidism leads to a sweeping denial of good works.

Likewise, while contrition and confession are both affirmed as active ingredients in penance, they are redefined in important ways. The requirement of contrition nullifies a Thomist notion of the priest enacting the power of the keys to form contrition out of attrition. Instead, contrition has both negative and positive

---

<sup>25</sup> For more on the numbering of these sacraments, see Guy, *Tudor England*, 200.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Cranmer, *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters*, ed. John Redmund Cox (Cambridge, 1846), 95.

aspects, inseparable from each other, and is formed after coming to awareness of sins ‘by hearing and considering of the will of God, declared in his laws’. The authors of the Bishops’ Book are careful to avoid ascribing the power of the keys to the words of absolution given by the priest at confession. Where Tyndale, Barnes, and Frith would specifically mention this aspect of ‘binding the conscience’ by the will of God, the Bishops’ Book states only that the conscience becomes aware of God’s displeasure through the Old Testament, forcing the mourning found in contrition. The difference is linguistic, not theological, as the laws of God fill the same purpose of forcing the conscience into a painful awareness of sins in the same way they do for Tyndale, Frith, Barnes, and Joye. Likewise, this contrition is not a simple mourning for the guilt of those sins already committed, as it reflects the evangelical notion of sorrow at a state of sinfulness. It is not simply centred on that shame, but also on the fear of an offended God who has already made satisfaction.<sup>27</sup>

This definition of contrition is also unique in that it contains a positive element that is born out of the requisite sorrow. The sorrow of contrition forces ‘a certain faith, trust, and confidence of the mercy and goodness of God’.<sup>28</sup> This positive aspect reflects a Lutheran concept of the necessity of assurance. By including assurance in its definition of contrition, the Bishops’ Book effectively addresses the common criticism of the clergy holding consciences ransom. This is only possible because assurance is a result ‘not for the worthiness of any merit or work done by the penitent, but for the only merits of the blood and passion of our Saviour Jesu Christ’.<sup>29</sup> Satisfaction is therefore included in contrition rather than as the culmination of contrition and confession. This may reflect Barnes’ influence on

---

<sup>27</sup> Bishops’ Book, 97; Ten Articles, 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

the Wittenberg Articles, as he was unique among the exiles in holding that contrition brings satisfaction prior to confession.<sup>30</sup>

Satisfaction formed assurance based on the ‘merits of the blood and passion of our Saviour Jesu Christ’. This phrase is repeated several times in the Ten Articles and Bishops’ Book, and is of special interest because it highlights Christ’s suffering in an effort to replace human merits. This emphasis is consistent with the thinking of the English exiles, though they generally preferred only to speak of Christ’s blood as the direct agent of satisfaction instead of separating his blood from his passion and identifying both as merits. Henry’s marginalia sought to change ‘only’ for ‘chiefly’, as if Christ was the most prominent though not the sole agent of satisfaction.<sup>31</sup> Cranmer’s reply was that ‘these two words may not be put in this place in any wise’, on the grounds that ‘our election cometh only and wholly of the benefit and grace of God, for the merits of Christ’s passion’.<sup>32</sup> This depiction of Christ’s merits as satisfaction is even more specific than that of the exiles in drawing its understanding of satisfaction from good works, with Christ’s merits as the only effective currency. It is again clear that by presenting Christ’s actual suffering as merits earning salvation for an impotent humankind, the evangelical bishops were providing a slightly softer landing for the conservatives to come to terms with *solafidism*.

After completing a section on contrition, the Bishops’ Book pauses to identify faith’s role in penance, and does so in such a way that a modern scholar could safely consider it a part of the formula, as it was for Tyndale, Joye, and Frith. It also fits contextually, because of the role of faith in the positive aspect of contrition. Faith is identified as something that is received passively, confirmed, and

---

<sup>30</sup> See pp. 139-151, above.

<sup>31</sup> Cranmer, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 95.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

strengthened by the application of ‘Christ’s words and promises’ and by ‘the sacraments instituted by him’. Similar to one common evangelical method of describing the binding of the conscience of the Old Testament without using the terminology of binding and loosing, the Bishops’ Book describes the promises of Christ in the New Testament in a way with which the exiles would agree. The binding of the Law and loosing of the Gospel is therefore relatively consistent among the English evangelicals.

However, the second element of obtaining and growing in faith is one that the evangelical exiles do not address in their writings. The Bishops’ Book affirms the role of the sacraments as enacting and reinforcing faith. Most evangelicals would not disagree with this use of the sacraments, especially regarding the notion of penance and repentance for their roles in enabling and growing in faith. They generally were not preoccupied with the sacramental status of penance. However, the placement of the sacraments alongside ‘Christ’s words and promises’ in their faith properties would not find affirmation among the evangelicals. Christ’s words are infallible, while the sacraments are merely instruments that point a person to Christ. The two are equal in neither power nor effectiveness at growing faith.

This aspect of enabling and strengthening faith is the rationale for the necessity of auricular confession. Interestingly, this affirmation is on the basis that ‘the absolution given by the priest was instituted by Christ to apply the promises of God’s grace and favour to the penitent’.<sup>33</sup> The notion that absolution was instituted by Christ is of course controversial. Other reformers denied a dominical inheritance of confession, while at the same time favouring its practice because of its usefulness

---

<sup>33</sup> Bishops’ Book, 98; Ten Articles, 9.

in soothing the conscience.<sup>34</sup> This controversy extends even to the Bishops' Book, as one subtle change from the Ten Articles alters 'the said sacrament was instituted by *Christ* in the New Testament' to 'the said sacrament was instituted by *God* in the New Testament'.<sup>35</sup> This change was an intentional denial of Christ as the origin of penance while accepting divine ordinance, though later in the section affirming Christ as the origin of absolution. Such a change was absent in the annotations and marginalia between Henry and Cranmer, indicating either that Henry did not notice the change or that Cranmer had not included it in Henry's copy. The wording of this is subtle, as it never actually affirms Christ to be the originator of auricular confession or of the words of absolution that were to serve as the sign of the sacrament. Instead, that which is of Christological origin is the thing the sacrament signifies: absolution itself.

The lack of elaboration on this point of absolution leaves it open to interpretation. Given its inheritance from the Augsburg Confession and the Wittenberg Articles, not to mention having Cranmer as its editor, it is likely that this issue touching the means of justification would lend itself to a more evangelical rendering. In this interpretation, the priests were to pronounce the absolution of Christ, and Matthew 18:18-20 must be understood as evidence that the power of the keys belongs to Christ, and that the priests are merely pronouncing the existence of the keys in stating absolution.<sup>36</sup> However, it is also likely that a conservative bishop would have understood the power of the keys as belonging to the priest to perform

---

<sup>34</sup> Martin Bucer, for instance, denies the power of the keys given to the priest as divinely inspired in any way, and since Christ did not give the power of the keys, he likewise did not advocate private confession. Bucer was however in favour of private confession, despite denying its Christological inheritance. For more, see Willem Van Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma, trans. (Leiden, 1996), 27.

<sup>35</sup> Bishops' Book, 96; Ten Articles, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Bishops' Book, 98; Ten Articles, 10.

the actual binding and loosing himself, under the authority of the church. Such ambiguity led to discontent among the conservative bishops, and would be one cause for the amendment of the Bishops' Book in 1543.

The emphasis in this short section is not on the power of the keys or its origin, but rather on a more Lutheran notion of comforting the afflicted conscience. The stated reason for auricular confession is that it is a means for those whose consciences have been grieved through the first part of contrition to 'attain certain comfort and consolation of their consciences'.<sup>37</sup> This comfort is a result of the absolution that the priest pronounces. In other words, a person becomes afflicted with his inability to avoid sin, and this affliction manifests itself as the first part of contrition. The result of this sorrow is a conscience burdened by the inability to avoid sin. The words of absolution then, through the creation and strengthening of faith, provide consolation, which is the 'intent' of confession and the culmination of both negative and positive aspects of contrition.

The third element of penance builds on this strengthened faith and consoled conscience to enable a change of morality and behaviour. From the beginning, it insists that Christ is the satisfaction for the guilt and penalty of sin, and the Bishops' Book returns to this theme often. This is a crucial point, for the third element of penance in the Late Medieval church was satisfaction, and the Bishops' Book takes brief pause to remind its readers that the notion of the satisfaction and absolution *a poena et a culpa* is invalid. As general editor, Cranmer left most of the Ten Articles untouched in bringing them to this expanded statement of faith. The majority of changes are nothing more than a translation of Scripture from Latin to English. However, two interesting changes between the Ten Articles and the Bishops' Book

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

are worth noting. The first change in this section reminds the reader that ‘God the Father forgiveth and remitteth to all sinners not only their sins, but also eternal pain due for the same’. The text of the Ten Articles singularizes the word ‘sin’. It is entirely possible that the difference here is linguistic, as many of Cranmer’s recommendations to Henry’s changes were similarly towards that which is more grammatically correct. A second possibility, however, is that Cranmer sought to highlight the sufficiency of Christ’s satisfaction as covering all of human sins, including those that were forgotten or went unconfessed. These unconfessed sins were a considerable burden in sacramental confession, and describing them as plural was perhaps intended to highlight the extent of their forgiveness. Cranmer was a studied and intentional theologian, and any change to the text itself is important. Likewise, he was often quick to avoid any limitations to Christ’s blood, and pluralizing the sins that can be remitted only adds potency to that oblation.

The second change comes as part of the definition of the purpose of an amended life. Both documents state ‘Yet all men truly penitent, contrite, and confessed, must needs also bring forth the fruits of penance, that is to say, prayer, fasting, and almsdeed’. The Bishops’ Book adds ‘with much mourning and lamenting for their sins before committed’ to the end of this, which is a clear attempt to bring the notion of contrition into the whole of the sacrament of penance.<sup>38</sup> Without this mourning, a person’s fruits of penance would in fact merely be robotic actions unrelated to the sacrament of penance. The Bishops’ Book therefore considers contrition to be the beginning and end of penance.

The specific acts of penance prescribed are a curious choice in an evangelical construct. It is precisely these formulaic works of prayer, fasting, and alms in any

---

<sup>38</sup> Bishops’ Book, 98; Ten Articles, 10.

relationship to salvation that most evangelicals argued against on the grounds that they only caused more burden and did nothing for salvation. Yet here they are offered within a framework that assumes a person already had assurance of salvation and a quieted conscience despite still mourning over sin. The ritualized prayers, fasting, and almsdeeds therefore served the same function of repentance as obeying God's commandments and works of charity, works that the Bishops' Book also defined as 'worthy fruits of penance'.<sup>39</sup>

The requirements of this amendment of life do not include ascetic ritualism, but are nonetheless aimed at bringing the penitent to 'chastise and subdue my carnal body', and submission that 'God necessarily requireth that every penitent man shall perform'. Furthermore, these fruits of penance help mitigate the pains and afflictions of the human condition. The intent is not only to create a spiritual discipline of self-inflicted punishment, but also to help mitigate God's punishment towards us in this world. This notion is highlighted even further by the Bishops' Book, as a substantial addition of an entire paragraph aimed at describing the purpose of this fruits of penance is added to the Ten Articles. The addition states that the fruits of penance will 'stir and provoke' people to do good works, and will allow for God to remit 'the miseries, calamities, and grievous punishments, which God sendeth to men in this world for their sins'.<sup>40</sup> The belief here is that God will take into account self-inflicted punishment in order to mediate a portion of the deserved punishment.

Without explicitly naming it as such, it is clear that in addition to the submission of the flesh, these fruits of penance, which were the primary prescriptions for the mediation of the *poena* of sin in purgatory, are an attempt to

---

<sup>39</sup> Bishops' Book, 99; Ten Articles, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Bishops' Book, 100.

mediate the *poena* of sins on earth. While not strictly a denial of purgatory, John Frith would no doubt have been satisfied with this response, as it is clearly compatible with his notion of two purgatories.<sup>41</sup> The Bishops' Book is vague on purgatory by arguing that praying for the dead is a good deed, 'but forasmuch as the place where they be, the name thereof, and kind of pains there also be to us uncertain by scripture, therefore this with all other things be to be remitted to Almighty God'.<sup>42</sup> This very brief and ambivalent article on purgatory is placed at the end, a relegation that many evangelicals would not have found unsatisfactory.

Another article that was copied wholesale from the Ten Articles is a short section on justification. The only edits in the Bishops' Book edition are translations from Latin to English and the introductory 'we think it convenient' instead of 'we will'.<sup>43</sup> It defines justification in very simple terms: 'justification signifieth remission of our sins, and our acceptation or reconciliation into the grace and favour of God, that is to say, our perfect renovation in Christ'.<sup>44</sup> The definition is unconcerned with matters concerning how this justification is effected cosmically, such as through propitiation or expiation.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the Bishops Book is quick to note that contrition, faith, and charity are elements of human effort, and therefore insufficient for justification, yet at the same time stating that it is through these works that justification is attained. Luther satisfied this question in a famous response to Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio* by defining the human will as in bondage, and faith as a gift that enacts justification to bring about the ability to avoid

---

<sup>41</sup> See pp. 168-181, above.

<sup>42</sup> Bishops' Book, 211.

<sup>43</sup> Bishops' Book, 209-210; Ten Articles, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Bishops' Book, 209; Ten Articles, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Propitiation is the term used to describe Christ absorbing sins onto his person in order to effect forgiveness, whereas expiation simply means that Christ created eternal separation from sin by casting them away.

sin. This is a short article, and while the bishops held that it was an important doctrine, the article was more concerned with the practical theology of justification than it was with upper soteriology. Most of the attention is spent on how the forgiven person is expected to behave, a curious choice for an exposition that is typically dedicated to how justification is attained.

Repentance requires a turning of attitudes and behaviour from bad to good, and ‘must necessarily concur in remission of our sins’. It requires three familiar elements in a way that must be directed both to other humans and to God. Contrition and faith join with charity to allow the penitent a substitutionary participation with Christ’s blood and passion, and in turn this brings a conversion of attitudes and behaviours.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, no mention is here made of fasting, prayers, and almsdeeds, all of which were mentioned as evidence of repentance on the earlier section on the sacrament of penance. Brief mention is made of suppressing ‘fleshly appetites’, but the Bishops’ Book does not even make a brief allusion to these rituals that were more familiar within a conservative sacramental construct of penance. Perhaps the focus is meant to be on actual obedience of the commandments rather than attempts to subjugate the flesh to aid in that obedience. The earlier section on the sacrament of penance drew correlations between its evangelical understanding and that of the late medieval church, and attempted to show that many external aspects could indeed be helpful in the right framework. Fasting, prayers, and almsdeeds, however have no impact on justification, and therefore were omitted from the section. Instead, this section affirms the role in justification of a tangible and intentional repentance from sin, describing the process of contrition, faith, and charity towards God and neighbour.

---

<sup>46</sup> Bishops’ Book, 209; Ten Articles, 12.

Three important sections of the Bishops' Book were added that were not in the Ten Articles. These sections on the Creed, the Decalogue, and the Paternoster allow the Bishops' Book to provide similar information on penance and repentance to the primers, a genre that George Joye has already proved incalculably valuable to this study. Strangely, the observations of the Creed bear little fruit for an understanding of sin and forgiveness, despite the necessity of its recitation for many prior to confession and its centrality to Joye's primer. Likewise, the exposition of the Decalogue is in general more concerned with individual sins than Joye's focus on the binding of the conscience through the law. Instead of this binding/loosing motif, it describes the law/gospel dichotomy in these terms: 'Almighty God taught us by his prophet Moses what we should do, so he taught us by his Son Jesu Christ what we should ask'.<sup>47</sup> This emphasis on individual sins is important, since many of the early penitentials used the Decalogue as a way to categorize sins in order to remember them for confession.

Yet, the evangelicals were uninterested in remembering every sin, for they believed that their sins were already forgiven prior to confession. Likewise, actual behaviour is not the true test of repentance, as falling into sins already forgiven is technically irrelevant to repentance. These evangelicals were more concerned with concupiscence, which, too, 'is neither damnable nor yet culpable, if we by the Spirit and grace of God endeavour and apply ourselves to withstand and resist it and do not give ourselves to live after the motions and desires thereof'.<sup>48</sup> The Bishops' Book affirmed that concupiscence remains a tendency for all, but the difference between a repentant person and one who is damned is the attempts at resistance. It is this

---

<sup>47</sup> Bishops' Book, 177.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

‘continual resisting and fighting against the said corruption, concupiscence’ that serves as a true litmus test of those who are regenerate. It is therefore not a matter of a person exhibiting more charity than before, as the ferociousness of spiritual attacks can see fluctuation. It is instead an internal matter of the repentant person remaining resolved that, despite setbacks, he will continue resisting the tendency to sin.

Despite the surprising silence from the sections on the creed and the Decalogue on matters pertaining to sin and penance, the importance of the Bishops’ Book discussion of the Paternoster cannot be overstated. Like the handling of the Paternoster in most primers, this exposition includes sample prayers at the beginning of relevant sections. Yet it is perhaps most important for what it does not say: neither these sample prayers nor their exposition were preoccupied with seeking forgiveness. Personal forgiveness dominated Joye’s discussion on the paternoster in his primer, yet the Bishops’ Book only lightly treats it in the section relevant to seeking forgiveness. The Bishops’ Book orders the Paternoster by petition, and allows for little overlap of themes, despite contextual allowance. Yet the notion of forgiveness is still an important component of the Paternoster, with the emphasis landing on the act of forgiving others instead of through seeking forgiveness from God.

The section begins with a sample prayer aimed not at forgiveness but at the comfort of the conscience:

we wretched sinners, knowing and confessing unto thee, our most merciful Father, the great and manifold sins wherewith our conscience is continually cumbered, and having none other refuge but unto thy mercy, we most humbly beseech thee, comfort our conscience both now and in in the hour of our death.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

Contrition is formed by the ‘knowledging’ of sins, which burdens the conscience in such a way that only confession can comfort. This is also how it is presented in the book’s description of auricular confession, and it is unsurprising to find it here too. The prayer appears to be written for someone whose sins have already been forgiven, which would make superfluous any requests for future forgiveness. Yet, that pre-existing forgiveness does not necessarily unencumber the conscience. The prayer continues seeking for ‘peace in our hearts, that we to our comfort may look for thy judgment’, and a reminder that good works are insufficient for forgiveness.<sup>50</sup>

Forgiveness does necessarily appear in this prayer, though it is secondary to the comfort of the conscience and the penitent forgiving those who have sinned against him, the latter of which is central to the petition for forgiveness. It mentions giving forgiveness as requisite for receiving it, as the second cannot exist without the first. If a requirement for repentance is true contrition and turning from all sins, then a certain empathy towards those also seeking forgiveness is required. The section only briefly interrupts the notion of forgiving others to exhort a ‘daily’ washing of sins through the blood of Christ. Its second mention is not for forgiveness, but for aid in forgiving others. The second mention appears to be more interested in the attitude of the heart, as it reads to ‘make thou our hearts so meek and gentle, that we may gladly and unfeignedly forgive them which have hated or hurted us in word or in deed’.<sup>51</sup>

What is unique about this section on the Paternoster compared to the writings of the evangelical exiles is that the notion of confessing directly to an offended God is only mentioned cursorily. Even amidst some passing instances in the section on

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

penance, the focus is on confessing to a priest. The exiles, while critical of ‘ear confession’, all affirmed auricular confession as being helpful for the comfort of the conscience in much the same way, but were careful to outline the need to confess directly to God. The section on the Paternoster also confirms the need to confess sins directly to God, but does so in a way that is secondary to the central thrust of forgiving others. Of the four parts of the text edited by Charles Lloyd, the one that details confession to God is by far the shortest at nine lines. It describes how no man is without sin, and therefore every man needs to ‘knowledge himself to be a sinner, and that he hath need to ask forgiveness of God for his sins, and to require his mercy’. This confession directly to God should be done daily.<sup>52</sup> While confessing directly to God was the central part of any discussion of the paternoster given by the exiles, the Bishops’ Book provides it merely as a subplot to the overall theme of forgiving in order to be forgiven. This section dominates the text and comprises nearly seventy-five percent of the space allotted for the Paternoster.

This section is not merely a recitation of familiar points. After establishing the theological necessity of forgiving others, it presents the giving of forgiveness and the accepting of forgiveness as symbiotic. A person must forgive to be forgiven, but it is this idea of being forgiven that allows for the giving of forgiveness to be easier. It states ‘if we will escape everlasting damnation, we must heartily forgive those which have trespassed and offended against us. No man can offend us so much as we offend God; and yet he is always ready to forgive us’.<sup>53</sup> Given the gravity of this offense, it is ‘ingratitude’ and ‘hardness of heart’ to refuse forgiveness to others. With its lengthy discourse on the gravity of the human debt to God relative to each

---

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-195.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

other, the text seems to imply that failing to forgive others indicates that the penitent who does not forgive his neighbour is unaware of the gravity of his own sins, and therefore not adequately contrite. Forgiving others also requires asking God for forgiveness of one's own faults, a forgiveness that has already been given to the contrite and repentant.

The Ten Articles and the Bishops' Book developed a version of the sacrament of penance that was entirely unique. The Lutheranism of the Wittenberg Articles appears as more than a faint whisper through the emphasis of comforting the injured conscience, though some concessions to the conservatives are clear, if only in style and not in substance. The Ten Articles and Bishops' Book contained as many differences with the exiles on sin and confession as they did similarities, though these differences were primarily differences of emphasis rather than doctrine. The emphasis on praying directly to God was almost completely absent, and even in places where the text raised the notion, it quickly changed to highlight the need for seeking forgiveness from an injured neighbour. Contrition maintained an important role, and its redefinition to include a positive element of developing faith in God's mercy is decidedly evangelical.<sup>54</sup> Yet the third element in the formula of the sacrament of penance, where amendment of life replaces works of satisfaction, indicates the most important evangelical influence. It was the removal of these acts of satisfaction that denied the confessor the ability to abuse his power, thus solving one common complaint of the evangelicals. Replacing satisfaction with the amendment of life changed the role of good works from causing forgiveness to being caused by forgiveness. Despite some conservative concessions in the Ten Articles and the Bishops' Book, this clear emphasis on the human inability to merit salvation

---

<sup>54</sup> Bishops' Book, 97; Ten Articles, 9.

is what makes their notion of the sacrament of penance almost wholly evangelical. Some differences with the exiles existed, but the way the formula of penance worked and what it effected clearly showed the influence of Tyndale, Joye, Barnes, and Frith.

### **Evangelical Penance in the Six Articles and the King's Book**

The slow and steady progress of the evangelical cause in the 1530s fostered a level of optimism that stretched deep into relations with German Lutherans, where debates on a variety of Protestant doctrines influenced English thought, and where Henry consistently sought counsel with Lutheran scholars. Debates centring on clerical marriage, prayers for the dead, private masses, and communion of both the cup and the bread resulted in compromises that tended to favour the evangelicals. How sins were forgiven, certainly one of the more important and distinguishing doctrines among the Protestants and Catholics in Europe, while not without controversy, was one that more heavily favoured evangelicals in England, as conservatives conceded some important elements of the sacrament of penance. The topic that most vexed the doctrinal debates surrounded the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements of the Eucharist. The late medieval church interpreted Christ's claims in the synoptic Gospels literally. 'This is my body' was interpreted in an Aristotelian way, where the substance of the bread and wine literally transformed into Christ's body and blood at the exact moment of the priest's blessing, though the physical features of the bread and wine remain as 'accidents'. It is this issue of transubstantiation more

than any other that slowed evangelical momentum in June 1539 with the Act of Six Articles.<sup>55</sup>

Rory McEntegart argues compellingly that the title of the act ‘gives a false impression of homogeneity; a title more appropriate to its evolution would be the “Act of One plus Five Articles”’, referring to the issue of the real presence being the most central to the purpose of the act’s promulgation. The other five articles were born out of five doctrinal topics of discussion with the Schmalkalden ambassadors.<sup>56</sup> Alec Ryrie agrees, citing the English negotiations of 1538.<sup>57</sup> MacCulloch adds that Stephen Gardiner’s offhanded comment to Lord Chancellor Audley in 1543 indicated that the initial thrust towards the Six Articles was ‘to resist the detestable heresy against the sacrament of the altar’.<sup>58</sup>

With this in mind, the Six Articles were not the ‘disaster’ that they appeared to be at first glance, and were neither reactionary nor a direct reversal of policy.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, they do not indicate a distinctly conservative shift that had been slowly permeating in Henry’s earlier policies, as G.W. Bernard asserts.<sup>60</sup> The central article on transubstantiation gives one indication of how the evangelicals won small victories throughout the Six Articles, as it affirmed the real presence but did not use the technical term transubstantiation, which left the door cracked for future debate. Yet the negotiations of the Six Articles were about minimizing losses and maximizing victories. For instance, the Six Articles made regular auricular confession compulsory, a notion that was met with profound disagreement by the

---

<sup>55</sup> See Ryrie, *Gospel and Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 2003), 13-38. For an alternative view, see Haigh, *English Reformations*, 152.

<sup>56</sup> McEntegart, *League of Schmalkalden*, 166.

<sup>57</sup> Ryrie, *Gospel and Henry VIII*, 30-31.

<sup>58</sup> MacCulloch, *Cranmer* 242.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, see Haigh, 153-156.

<sup>60</sup> Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, 500.

evangelicals. This setback would change the face of the practice of auricular confession because its legal enforcement was no longer in doubt. Despite this change in practice, the doctrine of confession was left untouched. The text of the Six Articles states in thesis form, that ‘auricular confession is expedient and necessary to be retained and continued, used and frequented in the Church of God’.<sup>61</sup> Neither the exiles nor those seeking a magisterial reformation from within denied the need for some form of auricular confession. What they denied was its effectiveness at promoting human participation in forgiveness, a topic that the Six Articles does not address. For these evangelicals, confession was indeed compulsory, but only to the offended party and not to a priest, who was there for comfort and council. The most important emphasis of confession was how it was effective—through the satisfaction of Christ.

A second, more important, evangelical victory can be found in the article on confession, a victory that provides a vital clue to Henry’s views on its necessity. In the discussions of the formulation of the Six Articles, Bishop Tunstall argued that auricular confession was required by all because it was rooted *de iure divino*. As established above, most exiles traced oral confession to being instituted by Christ or the apostles, but held that it was unnecessary because it was not required by divine law. The conservative push in the Six Articles was directed not at its usefulness but at its requirement as an institution ordained by God.<sup>62</sup> The conservatives succeeded in this interpretation in the Schmalkaldic discussions of 1538 in a pronouncement that ultimately proved meaningless. Yet, the Six Articles required royal assent, and evangelical attacks on Norfolk’s prodding of divine law resulted in Henry’s

---

<sup>61</sup> *Documents*, 224.

<sup>62</sup> Krieder, *English Chantries*, 147.

unwillingness to accept its necessity.<sup>63</sup> Instead, Henry promoted the notion that confession was ‘expedient and necessary’, but not required by God. Henry so championed this view that when Bishop Tunstall remonstrated over the issue, Henry vented his frustrations in a long letter that reminded him that convocation had already agreed on the wording.<sup>64</sup> He even chastised Tunstall over the historical argument that Bede and Paul did not affirm its necessity by divine law.<sup>65</sup> This was clearly an important and emotional issue for Henry as it was for Tunstall and Cranmer, and the necessity of confession was an important linchpin in its requirement for salvation.

The view of confession in the Six Articles must therefore be seen as that passionately advocated by Henry. He sided with the evangelicals in stating that confession was helpful and necessary, but not commanded by divine law. Oral confession was thus, divinely speaking, *adiaphora*. This is important, for while Henry was not actually seeking a *via media*, he was listening to both sides of convocation in his attempts to discern correct theology. His denial of *de iure divino* in the Six Articles while accepting its necessity is an important reflection on how Henry understood evangelical belief concerning oral confession.<sup>66</sup> He knew that they accepted its merits, and he, too, refused to reject it despite common late medieval complaints regarding its ease of abuse.

On the surface, this seems inconsistent with the enforcement of and penalties for confession in the Six Articles. While evangelicals would win the most important battle of confession and divine law, its legal requirement was such that no

---

<sup>63</sup> McEntegart, *League of Schmalkalden*, 161.

<sup>64</sup> MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 253; Bernard, *King's Reformation*, 504-505. For the letter's full text, see BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E V ff. 134-137 (LP 14 ii App. No. 29).

<sup>65</sup> Bernard, *King's Reformation*, 505.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

evangelical could subscribe. The penalties were directed not at the clergy who refused to hear confessions—it is likely that few would have been targeted by such legislation—but at the laity who ‘contemn or contemptuously refuse, deny or abstain to be confessed, at the time commonly accustomed within this realm and Church of England’, under penalty of imprisonment or loss of property, or of death for repeat offenders.<sup>67</sup> These harsh penalties cause Susan Brigden to describe the Six Articles as ‘the most savage penal act against heresy’,<sup>68</sup> though it would be misleading to assert that these harsh penalties produced a palpable level of persecution.<sup>69</sup> All evangelicals advocated some form of confession; none advocated its necessity under coercion. If the purpose of auricular confession was the comfort of the conscience, as advocated in the Bishops’ Book, then coercion was at best superfluous. True confession was not oral, but in the heart to God. Henry likewise agreed that it was not required by divine law, so why make avoiding confession a felony that could result in execution? It is likely that such a conflict of ideas, while maintaining a more evangelical notion of confession, represented a return to the outward appearance of the late medieval church in order to satisfy a type of political and domestic unrest as seen in the Pilgrimage of Grace, as advocated by Susan Brigden and J.J. Scarisbrick.<sup>70</sup> While Henry believed that the church had the right to determine legal requirements for certain ceremonies, despite them being adiaphora, the theology of confession in the Six Articles was not incompatible with evangelical theology.

While the doctrine of confession remained unchanged, its external manifestation represented a post-Lateran ideal of a minimum of annual confession

---

<sup>67</sup> Bray, *Documents* 227.

<sup>68</sup> Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (London, 1989), 305.

<sup>69</sup> See Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, 505.

<sup>70</sup> J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (London, 1981), 365; Susan Bridgen, *London and the Reformation*, 299-306.

prior to partaking in the Eucharist. This is clear through the adjoining of the penalties to those who have contempt for or refuse to take the Eucharist ‘at the time commonly used’. Combining these two sacraments is a step further than most evangelicals would be willing to take, though this combination was less important to them than the more pressing issues of how they worked individually. It does, however, show confession’s importance in the Six Articles. If the Six Articles began as an attempt to enforce unity on the sacrament of the altar, then requiring confession as a prerequisite despite the prevailing understanding that it was not necessary for salvation, highlighted the importance of confession. Confession, therefore, returned as the gatekeeper of the sacrament of the altar. While some evangelical concessions were made regarding confession in the Six Articles, it is clear that the evangelicals gained significantly more ground than they lost, especially in regard to confession. The ‘whip with six strings’ was in fact much tamer than was initially thought by the continental reformers who, like the framers of the Six Articles, were more interested in the issue of the real presence.<sup>71</sup>

The remaining years of Henry’s reign were difficult for the evangelicals. John Foxe described religion as ‘more and more decayed’ after the death of Cromwell, and he had reasons for claiming this that stretch beyond historical polemic.<sup>72</sup> Schmalkaldic negotiations had almost completely disintegrated, and with them any hope for increased Lutheran influence over Henry. England’s two most prolific evangelical preachers lost considerable influence—Hugh Latimer abandoned his see and went silent until after Edward’s coronation, and Robert Barnes was executed in July 1540. Cromwell, the general of evangelical movements through

---

<sup>71</sup> For more on the Act of Six Articles being less dramatically anti-evangelical, see Ryrie, *Gospel* 15-33. Ryrie considers the article on auricular confession ‘entirely unexceptional’.

<sup>72</sup> *AM*, (1570), Book 8, 1334.

court and parliament, fell victim to the politics of the court and was executed two days prior to Barnes. Frith had already died in 1533 and Tyndale met the pyre in 1536. Though some evangelicals maintained positions of influence, the evangelical voice was waning in both boldness and volume. Yet, as Ryrie notes, most were merely forced underground, as the death of Henry in 1547 brought an enthusiastically evangelical king, and encouraged evangelicals out of the shadows and into the public arena.<sup>73</sup>

Even though Henry's vacillations leaned more towards the conservatives in the early 1540s, the evangelicals still maintained a certain level of influence. These different influences can be seen in the 1543 revision of the Bishops' Book, a book of similar form written with more monarchical control than its predecessor.<sup>74</sup> *A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for Any Christian Man*, popularly known as the King's Book, brought several changes to the official formulary of the English church. Henry's marginalia and interactions with Cranmer show that he clearly had a degree of involvement in the creation of the Bishops' Book, making such dramatic changes seem less dramatic. Henry's claims that he was too busy to read the Bishops' Book and Cranmer's annotations are implausible, if not at least because of his own annotations.<sup>75</sup> Like the Six Articles four years earlier, it is often noted for being a nail in the coffin of evangelicals in England. G.R. Elton argues that it was entirely orthodox in its teaching, replacing only the pope with the king.<sup>76</sup> Brigden saw evangelical lament over what was clearly Gardiner's strict conservatism

---

<sup>73</sup> Ryrie, *Gospel*, 223ff.

<sup>74</sup> John Guy argues that, while the evangelicals blamed the conservative bishops for the King's Book, it was Henry who penned the book himself. Guy, *Tudor England*, 194.

<sup>75</sup> Haigh agrees, stating that 'it is hard to believe that this was true of a king always eager to pick theological nits, and the bishops would surely have delayed printing for royal approbation'. Haigh, 133.

<sup>76</sup> G.R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Cambridge, 1974), 199.

permeating through every page.<sup>77</sup> Yet what is added is just as important as what is missing, and an evangelical influence on those elements central to solafidistic repentance in the King's Book is evident.

Henry's role in these doctrinal changes was one of genuine interest. The break with Rome extended beyond simple papal jurisdiction, and Henry took seriously his new title of 'Supreme head on earth of the Church of England', as established in the 1534 Act of Supremacy.<sup>78</sup> As the pope and councils sought, and to the evangelicals failed, to determine correct doctrine, Henry wanted to determine where they had erred and how to correct it in the church in England. J. D. Mackie describes this new role as a combination of secular and spiritual affairs under one crown, which had 'full power to visit, redress, reform, correct, and amend all errors, heresies, abuses, and enormities which by any manner of spiritual authority may lawfully be reformed and redressed'.<sup>79</sup> Richard Rex considers the Act of Supremacy to attribute to the monarch powers more extensive and with fewer checks than were held by the pope, yet this power grab was born out of genuine theological intent.<sup>80</sup>

This new role was one of genuine religious interest. After all, prior to Henry's ascension to heir-apparent at the death of his brother Arthur, he was on course to 'occupy the primatial see of Canterbury'. No doubt this would have resulted in significant theological tutoring in Henry's developmental years.<sup>81</sup> Religion had always been a serious matter to the *defensor fidei*, and his commitment to developing a church often conflicted with the time commitment to other monarchical duties. Yet, his role in amending the Bishops' Book to more closely

---

<sup>77</sup> Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 346.

<sup>78</sup> Mary I rescinded this title, and Elizabeth I amended it to 'Supreme Governor'. For more, see *Documents*, 113-114.

<sup>79</sup> J.D. Mackie, *The Earlier Tudors 1485-1558* (Oxford, 1952), 359.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (London, 1993), 22.

<sup>81</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 4-5.

match his own beliefs is a reflection of his personal religious devotion. The King's Book is one indication of how much Henry's theology had shifted from his earlier *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, and indicates that, while he maintained some conservative beliefs, he also gravitated towards other evangelical notions. More importantly, it showed the degree of shift away from both Wittenberg and Rome. Contrary to Elton's assertion that Henry was entirely orthodox,<sup>82</sup> Scarisbrick accurately states that 'Henricianism' is not 'Catholicism without the pope'.<sup>83</sup> Neither Protestant nor Catholic, it shared attributes with both.

One example of this is what the King's Book has to say about justification. The Bishops' Book is unapologetically solafidistic, yet Henry's *Assertio* was entirely sacramental in its soteriology. While Christopher Haigh is correct in that the King's Book denies strict solafidism, J.D. Mackie overreaches in describing it as 'a well-arranged presentation of the orthodox views' free from the papacy and papal indulgence.<sup>84</sup> Rupp, likewise, does not reach far enough, as he suspects a significantly more middle route than most would contend, seeing compromise on both sides as the key to its formation.<sup>85</sup> Compromise did exist, at least as much compromise as can be had within two mutually exclusive doctrines, but it is clear that the overall tone of the King's Book is less Lutheran and more conservative than the Bishops' Book, as Kreider argues.<sup>86</sup>

The section on justification in the King's Book has considerable changes from the corresponding section of the Bishops' Book, not least of which is being trimmed to a third of its original length. Like its counterpart, it appears near the end,

---

<sup>82</sup> Elton, *England Under the Tudors*, 199.

<sup>83</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 399.

<sup>84</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 152; Mackie, *The Earlier Tudors*, 430.

<sup>85</sup> E. Gordan Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London, 1953), 149-154.

<sup>86</sup> Kreider, *English Chantries*, 151.

but is surrounded by two new sections on free will and the role of good works, both related to the doctrine of justification. All three of these sections provide a variation of a doctrine of justification that is distinctly different from that provided by the sacraments of the late medieval church, but also offers a rejection of a Lutheran notion of an imputation of faith.<sup>87</sup> The section gives greater detail on how justification works, as well as the relationship between original sin and mortal and venial sins and Christ's unique ability to serve as the sole mediator between humans and God. It begins by establishing a need for forgiveness, that original sin and the depravity of man accompany concupiscence, and this tendency to sin separates man from God. This guilt is so great that 'they can in no wise be delivered by any strength or power that is in them'.<sup>88</sup>

The Bishops' Book defined justification as 'the remission of our sins, and our acceptation or reconciliation into the grace and favour of God', described as 'our perfect renovation in Christ'.<sup>89</sup> The final text of the King's Book on justification provides an example of one of Cranmer's more glorious defeats. MacCulloch tells of the Archbishop's attempts to provide linguistic acrobatics to the rejection of the wording that denied the concept that faith worked alone. Henry's response was involved in the final draft, that justification by faith was 'neither only nor alone', in an echo to Henry's annotations of the Bishops' Book that Cranmer denied.<sup>90</sup> Yet at the same time, the King's Book describes a small level of affinity towards a faith-based justification. It describes this reconciliation as one that implies a status change from righteous to unrighteous, from 'children of ire' to 'children of God' that provides an inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. God is the 'principal cause and

---

<sup>87</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, 208.

<sup>88</sup> *A Necessary Erudition*, 363.

<sup>89</sup> *Bishops' Book*, 209.

<sup>90</sup> MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 309; *Formularies*, 223-224.

chief worker' of justification, and humans are entirely incapable of justification without him.<sup>91</sup> This status change influences the free will of the sinner to allow him to do good works. The preceding article on free will affirms that man has free will to discern good and evil, but its gravity is such that 'it willeth not that good which is acceptable to God, except it be holpen with grace'.<sup>92</sup> Sin has corrupted this free will so that it 'cannot eschew sin' without being made free by the special grace of the Holy Spirit, who causes a person to 'embrace' grace offered in Christ.<sup>93</sup>

The Late Medieval emphasis on sin and punishment is missing, as the King's Book indicates that 'every man that doth offend God doth not lose his faith thereby', and that even those who fall into deadly sin do not automatically lose faith.<sup>94</sup> The human will is in bondage to sin, and only the grace of God in Christ can free the sinner. It shows the relationship between a lost sinner, whose concupiscence enslaves the will, forcing a downward trajectory into sin, a trajectory that can only be corrected through the grace found in Christ through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. When the will is corrected, good works can follow. This concept is prerequisite to understanding the article on justification as it relates to good works. The King's Book places conditions on justification, while defining its terms uniquely:

Although our Saviour Christ hath offered himself upon the cross a sufficient redemption and satisfaction for the sins of the world, and hath made himself an open way and entry unto God the Father for all mankind, only by his worthy merit and deserving, and willing all men to be saved, calleth upon all the world, without respect of persons, to come and be partakers of the righteousness, peace, and glory which is in him; yet for all this benignity and grace, shewed universally to the whole world, none shall have the effect of his benefit of our Saviour Christ, and enjoy everlasting salvation by him, but they that take such ways to attain the same as he hath taught and appointed by his holy word, in such order, manner, and form as here followeth.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> *A Necessary Erudition*, 364.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 360-362.

<sup>94</sup> *Formularies*, 223-224.

<sup>95</sup> *A Necessary Erudition*, 365.

The caveat to Christ's 'sufficient' redemption and satisfaction through his merits is that, because of those merits, the sinner must respond accordingly.

Yet this caveat is not a call for double justification; it is a repetition of an evangelical-friendly notion of penance. It begins with faith, described as a response to hearing the word of God. This faith must be grounded in the threats of God's damnation and the promises of his mercy. These threats and promises 'conceive an hearty sorrow and a repentance for their sins, with a sure trust to have forgiveness of them by the merits and passion of our Saviour Christ'.<sup>96</sup> The notion of faith responding to the law and gospel with contrition, amendment of life, and an assurance of salvation is the scholastic medieval one. The concept of assurance is tempered a few pages later by a plea to be in constant 'dread of our own frailty', but this is in the context of being aware of the effects of sin and a caution against complacency. The article later summarizes that good works must be added to faith, but describes those good works as 'proceeding of the same grace'. To remove any question, it immediately follows with a reminder that 'we be justified gratis, that is to say, freely, forasmuch as all gifts or works, whereby our justification is wrought and accomplished, come of the free mercy and grace of God, and not of our deserving'.<sup>97</sup>

The article on good works expounds this notion further, and ties justification to penance because of what it terms 'works of penance'. It offers a thinly veiled reference to the late medieval notion of sacramental penance, denying the need for such 'superstitious works of men's own invention, which be not commanded of

---

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

God'.<sup>98</sup> Good works are defined as 'such outward and inward works as God hath prepared for us to walk in, and be done in the faith of Christ, for love and respect to God'. These works can only come through the special grace given through repentance, and human effort independent of this grace cannot bring good works. It here defines works of penance in the same way as good works were described in the article on justification: a person hears God's threats and promises and responds by grace with contrition to repentance, which brings an assurance of the remission of sins.<sup>99</sup>

The order of these works of penance as a response to the law and gospel indicates a certain level of compromise between the evangelicals and conservatives, as this denial of solafidism is likewise different from the soteriology found in the sacramental penance of the late medieval church. The works of penance replace the idea of a works of satisfaction, for these works do not bring a satisfaction already made by Christ. Confession is omitted in this early outline, but is given passing mention in a summary of Christ's words to be contrite, knowledge sins, and receive remission of them. Works of penance become effective because of this contrition, which allows God's grace to dwell in a person, turning otherwise superfluous works into works of righteousness. These works of penance, then, are the same good works that the evangelicals described as the fruits of repentance. Instead of describing them as the effects of justification, the King's Book considers them requisite for salvation, but they only become works of penance after forgiveness has been given. The King's Book's notion of justification centres on its doctrine of penance and repentance,

---

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

where good works are required for salvation, but those good works are enabled by a grace given to the person at repentance.

Like the Bishops' Book, the King's Book also provides a relevant chapter on the sacraments, moving its discussion on the sacrament of penance to second, following baptism. The terminology of its formula of penance is one that would no doubt have pleased Gardiner, as it offered a return to the late medieval formula of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. It defines the centre of the sacrament of penance as the words of absolution spoken by the priest, and as such places the priesthood on a higher plane than most evangelicals would have liked. Yet, the activating agent of this absolution is not the words of the priest but the faith of the individual. Faith is described as 'the ground and foundation' of the entire sacrament. Without faith in the promises of God, contrition would be insufficient, confession would be misplaced, and the works of penance would not even qualify for good works in the sense outlined in the section on justification. Faith is the beginning and the end of the sacrament of penance in the King's Book.

The formula of penance in the Bishops' Book likewise has considerable similarities with its counterpart in the King's Book in 1543. Contrition is defined as 'inward sorrow and grief' that is prompted by God's grace, which reminds the penitent of God's love. Contrition grounded in faith compels the penitent to specifically confess to the priest any sins that are afflicting the conscience, which implies a denial of a strict enumeration of sins and penalties for an incomplete confession. Similar to the evangelical notion of confession, confession is to be centred on 'the cause of sin to have been of himself, by yielding to the concupiscence of the flesh'.<sup>100</sup> Yet it is the notion of satisfaction that reformation

---

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

doctrine attacked, for it was inconsistent with solafidism and opened the clergy to corruption. Contrition and confession were relatively minor elements in the formula of penance and repentance in the King's Book, though were included by every prominent evangelical in England during Henry's reign. Even the Bishops' Book, the most compromising of all evangelical documents on the topic, affirmed contrition and confession, but replaced satisfaction with 'amendment of life', while still advocating fasting, alms, and prayers as spiritual disciplines to tame concupiscence.

Yet this formula of the sacrament of penance in the King's Book was more strongly evangelical not simply because it was driven by faith or because it contained elements with which the evangelicals could find common ground, but because of the way that the third element in the sacrament of penance is defined. Satisfaction involved works that had been made good through faith in God, and were a physical manifestation of the sinner being discontented with his sinful state. It 'declareth a desire to please and content God his Father, for the unkindness towards him, in falling from the estate of grace'. The text quickly moves to define this satisfaction in a way that is entirely unique, for it does not actually satisfy anything. It defines satisfaction, cautioning the reader that

the satisfaction is not so to be taken as though the penitent sinner could worthily merit or deserve remission of sins by any pain or punishment to be by him suffered, or to make to God any just or full recompense equivalent to the sin that he hath committed against him, and so to satisfy, which he can never do; for that satisfaction hath only our Saviour Christ wrought in his glorious passion: but to satisfy (as here is meant by satisfaction) is to please God with an humble, lowly heart, ready to bring forth the fruits of penance.<sup>101</sup>

Satisfaction is defined in a strictly solafidistic sense, and urges the fruits of penance, which is nothing more than the amendment of life as detailed in the Bishops' Book.

---

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

Alms, prayer, and fasting are described as one aspect of these fruits of penance, but not as something that has any influence upon guilt or punishment; they are merely for ‘the cutting away of the occasion of sin’.

This definition of penance provides the most significant departure from the late medieval concept of *a poena et a culpa* in an allegedly conservative document. The absolution spoken by the priest is effected by the faith of the penitent, not by the priest or by the power of the keys. The works of satisfaction, here dubbed the fruits of penance, deny any post mortem effect on the payment for the guilt of sins. The King’s Book is more hostile to Purgatory than the Bishops’ Book is despite being more brief, but it also leaves to the providence of God whether such a place exists and how its existence or lack thereof may impact the purging of sins.<sup>102</sup> Without any actual tangible effect on the forgiveness *a poena et a culpa*, these works of satisfaction are in effect proofs of a pre-existing forgiveness, as is consistent with the King’s Book’s notion of good works being made good after satisfaction.<sup>103</sup>

The words of absolution have an increased importance in this notion of penance. As in the late medieval church, this comes after the prescription of satisfaction, and their intent is to comfort the penitent and to assure him of his forgiveness. This assurance is important, for it not only reminds the penitent of the gravity of his sin but also of the depth of God’s ability to forgive because of Christ’s passion. The King’s Book argues that this is why regular confession must be required, perhaps as a further affirmation of the directive in the Six Articles. It is the oral acknowledgment of wrongdoing, combined with the comfort of God’s forgiveness in absolution, that prevents future sin.<sup>104</sup> Auricular confession does not

---

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

provide that forgiveness, but as a reminder of sin and forgiveness, is a valuable Christian tool to aid in obedience.

The Six Articles and the King's Book slowed evangelical momentum, especially in areas relevant to the Eucharist and ceremonies. Primarily, though, where outward elements may have reminded the average person of his or her pre-Reformation heritage, some important doctrinal elements retained an evangelical edge. This is most clearly seen through their views on penance. Some evangelical ground was conceded, especially in relationship to the role of the priests, and some common ground had always existed. Yet, the denial of the role of penance in forgiving *a poena et a culpa* of sins was the most important evangelical victory. With it, comes the insufficiency of the priesthood to bind and loose, the inability of man to merit salvation, and the sheer dependence upon Christ's sacrifice alone as the satisfaction for sins.

The Ten Articles and the Bishops' Book were the English Church's first attempts at developing an official statement of belief. While both formularies showed the influence of the exiles on the notion of penance and repentance, both maintained the evangelical strategy of slow and steady victories in offering certain concessions to the conservatives. Yet these concessions were limited, as a distinctly English sacrament of penance that denied works of satisfaction and affirmed the amendment of life as a necessary response to Christ's satisfaction rose to distinction. While maintaining that penance was necessary for salvation, this necessity was grounded not on the sacrament, but on the requirement of the sorrow for sins, their acknowledgment, and of an intention to permanently turn from them. Confessing directly to God, while an emphasis among the exiles, was noticeably undermined in

favour of arguments for the need to forgive others. Confession directly to God without a mediator was mentioned, but certainly not emphasized.

Evangelical momentum stagnated when the Act of Six Articles was introduced in 1539. Yet neither the Six Articles nor the King's Book were devoid of evangelical influence in their treatment of the sacrament of penance. The Six Articles made annual confession compulsory under statute law, a notion that most evangelicals would have deplored despite seeing virtue in the practice itself. More importantly, the Six Articles denied that annual confession was required under divine law, as its compulsion denied the effectiveness of contrition. The King's Book was more exhaustive in its conservative doctrine, but even its notion of penance was not devoid of evangelical notions of faith or satisfaction. Purgatory was particularly undermined despite the newly compulsory nature of confession, and Christ was affirmed as the only mediator between God and humankind, a notion that would have minimized the power of the keys in confession. While much of the Six Articles and the King's Book indicate a strong turn towards conservative doctrine, their more important developments concerning penance and repentance were more instrumental in promoting a shift of the external rites and rituals of penance while maintaining an evangelical hue. Significant evangelical ground was lost in 1539 and 1543, but an examination of the Six Articles and the King's Book on penance indicates that fewer concessions were made in these areas. After all, the evangelical bishops, just like Henry, accepted the need for confession and good works, while seeking a system that removed the corruption they believed was so prominent in the sacrament of penance of the late medieval church.

## CONCLUSION

A concern with the forgiveness of sins is central to the human condition of sinfulness. This is Bede's assertion in his eighth-century *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, where he outlines two contrasting practices of penance in the early medieval church. In the first, he describes a boy that was so devout in completing prescribed works of satisfaction, that the confessor's death prior to their conclusion caused them to be transformed from an interim status to a lifelong ritual. The boy entered a monastery and continued their strict observance throughout his life, resulting in his ability to foretell future calamity for the village.<sup>1</sup> In Bede's second example, a layman's continually suspended promises to do penance eventually came too late, as he received books from two devils on his deathbed that showed that his bad deeds dramatically outweighed his good deeds. The devils tapped him on the head and foot with ploughshares that were eventually to meet and drag him to hell, with no amount of penance or level of contrition able to effect satisfaction, despite the fact that he was still among the living and clearly unwilling to go to hell.<sup>2</sup>

Both of these examples indicate an early medieval view of penance in England near the rise of the penitentials, where earthly punishments and rewards were associated with penance. The first example venerates an ascetic penance that enables prophetic gifts, and the second is a cautionary tale to do good works and penance early in life, as deathbed contrition may prove insufficient. Yet both examples highlight a notion of medieval theology that sees an essential response to

---

<sup>1</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Judith McClure and Roger Collins, eds. (Oxford, 2008), 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 258-260.

God's offer of forgiveness in a way that is clearly opposed to that of the English evangelicals in the early sixteenth century. Bede displays the notion that, sooner or later, this human participation in penance will be necessary to avoid purgatory or hellfire. The medieval church accepted a version of justification that had the sacrament of penance at its core, and used the element of human efforts at satisfaction as the centre of the narrative in both positive and negative senses. The evangelical notion likewise centred its notion of justification around repentance, with the human response of good works occurring after satisfaction.

When the evangelicals in England developed their notions of sin and confession seven centuries later, they did so based on the idea that forgiveness was independent of good works. Most of them maintained those elements fundamental to sacramental penance—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—but did so through redefining those terms and at times rearranging their order. Where Bede's examples emphasized God's blessing through human effort, the three elements of sacramental penance were included in a formula that emphasized Christ's satisfaction being made effective through the mechanisms of solafidistic repentance.

The evangelicals who wrote from the safety of continental Europe did not always agree on the details of forgiveness within solafidistic repentance, but those more prominent or influential included notions of contrition, confession, and satisfaction in their own concepts of solafidistic repentance. Tyndale reordered the elements to begin with a general confession of sinfulness, an acknowledgment that allowed for faith to complete contrition, and thus satisfaction. His theological emphasis showed Luther's influence, which centred on the idea that a satisfaction had already been made through Christ's blood replacing human blood through the sacrifice of the cross. Practically, however, he was a Wycliffite contritionist in the

sense that contrition, once made effective through faith found in confession, effected satisfaction. His view on good works showed Erasmian influence, to such a level that some scholars have accused him of holding to double justification.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Barnes agreed that contrition brings satisfaction, but salvific confession either follows satisfaction or is naturally coexistent with contrition. This contrition effects satisfaction because it is the ‘very act of turning and in the very hour of turning’ that allows Christ’s satisfaction to be applied.<sup>4</sup> In one sense, Barnes was the most Lutheran of the English exiles, through his emphasis on satisfaction through the cross. Regarding his notion of solafidistic repentance and its role in soothing the conscience, however, Barnes denied the characteristic Lutheran emphasis on confession as an aid to comfort. He was instead a true contritionist, which is theologically distinct from, and even opposed to, Luther’s emphasis. Yet, as sins were forgiven through contrition at man’s binding by the law, Barnes held that all sins were forgiven because of the promises of the Gospels, regardless of the penitent’s ability to remember them.

The short career of John Frith means it is not possible to know how his views on solafidistic repentance might have developed. However, his views on purgatory served as both his preferred medium for introducing his notion of solafidism into the theological landscape and as one of the reasons for his death. Purgatory is of course directly linked to satisfaction. Like Tyndale and Barnes, Frith maintained an emphasis on Christ’s blood as satisfaction, but Frith was more concerned with the theological implications of repentance than he was with its relationship to morality. In Frith’s formula of solafidistic repentance, faith in the promises of God is a

---

<sup>3</sup> William A. Clebsch, *England’s Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535* (Westport, CT, 1964), 171.

<sup>4</sup> *Sententiae*, sig. G7r. ‘*In Quacunq; hora peccator fuerit conuersus etc. Non enim dicitur, ore confessus fuerit, sed tantum conuersus fuerit, & ingenuerit, uit uiuet & non morietur.*’ Translation mine.

passively received gift that is itself a type of confession that enables satisfaction, a recognition of which presents itself as contrition and turning from sins. This turning does not purge sin, but through contrition's making man aware of it, repentance is the natural response to hating sin. Frith does not directly deny the merits of oral confession, but he also does not include it in his discussions of solafidistic repentance. An argument from silence is insufficient to suggest that he did not value its merits, but it also prevents a modern historical theologian from grasping its place in Frith's solafidistic repentance. What is clear, though, is that Frith held the cross of Christ as primary, and any other doctrine that does not immediately point to that redemptive act as secondary.

While Tyndale and Barnes were strictly contritionist, and Frith was largely unconcerned with contrition, George Joye viewed contrition as a response to, not a cause of, a heart being confirmed in Christ. Faith was the first element in Joye's solafidistic repentance, and faith required confession in order for forgiveness to be received. Knowledge of self as a sinner does not require a negative response towards that depravity, as it may merely be a cognitive knowledge of being a sinner and Christ as the satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Despite placing faith at the beginning and undermining contrition, his emphasis on confession places him closer to his fellow translator Tyndale, even though their disagreement on other translation matters threatened the unity of the English evangelical movement. Joye's influence on solafidistic repentance during the Henrician reformation is most clearly seen through his primer, which provides practical examples of how a person is to confess to God. Only Tyndale provides another example through what Malcolm Yarnell calls 'the first evangelical sinner's prayer in English', and that example is more limited in scope

---

<sup>5</sup> George Joye, *Hortulus Anime*, 'Preface', sig. D1v.

because of its lack of context.<sup>6</sup> Even inside his tendency to undermine contrition, Joye's sample prayers exhort the penitent to 'knowe and feale his synnes and trembleth at the hydeous sight of them', though even then he quickly describes how that contrition can be healed through a belief in Christ's suffering.<sup>7</sup>

These four leading evangelicals reflect a strong emphasis on the satisfaction of Christ working through human repentance. This emphasis was no less evident once the break with Rome allowed for the creation of new doctrinal formularies. Yet the formularies existed within an entirely different axis. They were the product of a variety of social and political mechanisms, and as those mechanisms moved, so did the tone and flavour of the formularies. The Ten Articles and the Bishops' Book were clearly more evangelical in their understanding of repentance. Their formula was similar to the late medieval understanding, replacing satisfaction with amendment of life. Yet satisfaction was understood in a solafidistic sense, with an emphasis on Christ's sacrifice replacing human effort through sacramental penance. Contrition was uniquely defined as having positive and negative aspects. The negative aspect was the sorrow for sin and the positive aspect enacted both comfort and faith.<sup>8</sup> The description of faith enabling satisfaction clearly includes it in the formula of repentance prior to confession.<sup>9</sup>

The Six Articles and King's Book disagree with the earlier formularies on many points, as these statements represent key conservative victories. As Rory McEntegart argues, the Six Articles are best understood as the 'Act of One plus Five Articles', as they were primarily concerned with the issue of the real presence, with

---

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Yarnell, 'The First Evangelical Sinner's Prayer Published in English', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, vol. 47 (2004), 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. L2r.

<sup>8</sup> Bishops' Book, 97; Ten Articles, 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

the other five articles generated from the five topics of discussion with the Schmalkalden ambassadors.<sup>10</sup> While making confession compulsory, the Six Articles left the doctrine of repentance untouched, and denying the notion that oral confession was required *de iure divino*. The King's Book replaced works of satisfaction with works of penance, since the works do not bring forgiveness except through contrition. Yet even with these conservative victories, an evangelical hand can still be found in those matters central to solafidistic repentance.

While disagreements within the inner constructs of the elements and formula of solafidistic repentance existed among the more prominent evangelicals, the notion of the necessity of confessing to God was paramount. Confessing privately to another Christian or to a priest was usually encouraged, and confession to the injured party was often required. Yet difference of opinions regarding confession were also found among the evangelicals. Tyndale held that repentance required confession of both a general state of sinfulness and of individual sins directly to God, as he is the offended party in all types of sin. He also maintained, however, that private oral confession was useful, denying its efficacy but highlighting both its ability to aid people in abstaining from future sin and in comforting the conscience in Christ's work of satisfaction. He considered confessing to another offended human and forgiving those who confess to be exigent, to the point of denying the legitimacy of the forgiveness of those who refuse. This is consistent with his view of the power of the keys. This passionate Bible translator denied the conservative notion that the church holds the power to bind and loose, arguing that the Law bound and the promises of the Gospel loosed. Therefore, any mature Christian could hear

---

<sup>10</sup> Rory McEntegart, *Henry VIII, The League of Schmalkalden, and the English Reformation* (London, 2002), 166.

confession, provided they do not claim to have the power of the keys separate from the word of God.

Barnes was just as critical of the power of the keys as Tyndale was, though his notion showed a high regard for Scriptural unity through its designation as one key that both locked and unlocked. Perhaps more importantly, Barnes argues that the law is effective at finding secret and hidden sin, while the promises forgive because they are the ‘trewe key’, not a ‘bostyed and crakyd power’.<sup>11</sup> Since contrition brought satisfaction, confession was not necessary. His discussion of this in *Sententiae* was absent in the editions of the *Supplication*, where confession made to God was merely an extension of contrition. Private oral confession is recommended, though not for the soothing of burdened consciences as with Luther, but rather as a display of repentance, as seen in Luke 17 (*‘Fit itaque confeßio ad ostensionem poenitentiae non ad impetrationem ueniae’*).<sup>12</sup> Otherwise, Barnes does not devote much attention to confession. Likewise, John Frith never directly addresses oral confession, while only briefly condemning its abuses.<sup>13</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, Joye seems preoccupied with confession. Joye was concerned less with theology than he was with practice. This is most evident in the sample confessions given in *Hortulus Animae* and in evidence from his life as seen in the charges that were brought against him by John Ashwell. In both, similarities with Tyndale can be found, as a conscious, intentional confession directly to God and to an injured neighbour were both necessary for forgiveness. The emphasis on confessing to a neighbour was not God’s forgiveness, but Christian unity through reconciliation, and required turning from the offence to occur prior to

---

<sup>11</sup> Robert Barnes, 1531 *Supplication*, sig. J8r.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Barnes, *Sententiae*, sig. H1r.

<sup>13</sup> John Frith, *To the Christian Reader*, 468-469.

the confession.<sup>14</sup> Confession to another mature believer for comfort or counsel was encouraged, but never required, and that believer's ability to absolve the *culpa* was denied. Any layman can hear the confession of a penitent with a burdened conscience, as the 'spiritual salve' of confession comes from Scripture.

Of the three evangelical exiles in this study that address confession, a relative theological homogeneity can be found, even if a difference in emphasis is clear. Confession to God in some form was either necessary or encouraged. Tyndale and Joye required confessing to an injured neighbour, and all three encouraged confession either to a mature Christian or to any faithful believer. The Ten Articles and the Bishops' Book agree on this, and the only meaningful disagreement of the Six Articles and the King's Book is on the legal requirement of confession.

Likewise, while all four evangelical exiles approached solafidistic repentance differently, all arrived at the same conclusion: forgiveness is only available for those who are contrite, turn from their sins, and put their faith in Christ's blood as satisfaction. Confession to God is always involved in some way in that process, with only Barnes including a sort of subconscious confession in his definition and Frith equating confession with belief. When auricular confession was encouraged, it was with an emphasis on its voluntary nature. Even the Ten Articles and Bishops' Book advocate contrition, confession, and repentance being enacted by faith.

This emphasis on confession as voluntary was affirmed in the Edwardian *Order of the Communion* of 1548, which brought changes to the liturgy to allow communion in both kinds. In the medieval church, confession was required before participating in the Eucharist in order to protect the sanctity of the passion of Christ by allowing only the penitent to partake. *Order of the Communion*, likely written by

---

<sup>14</sup> George Joye, *Letters of John Ashwell*, sig. C5r.

Cranmer, replaces this safeguard with a warning that those who partake of the bread and wine and are unrepentant do so unworthily and sin against God. In this way, *Order of the Communion* also requires repentance, but does not enforce this requirement judicially. The reader is instead prompted to ‘search and examine your own conscience’ because of the importance and gravity of Christ’s passion.<sup>15</sup>

Repentance is then described as including confession, contrition, and amendment of life, requiring that:

with an unfeigned heart to Almighty God your sins and unkindness towards his Majesty, committed either by will, word, or deed, infirmity or ignorance; and that with inward sorrow and tears you bewail your offences, and require of Almighty God mercy and pardon, promising to him, from the bottom of your hearts, the amendment of your former life.<sup>16</sup>

Repentance in *Order of the Communion* thus includes the same elements of sola-fidistic repentance as the Ten Articles and *Bishops’ Book*. Confession to God denies an enumeration of sins but affirms man’s sinfulness.

Other forms of confession in *Order of the Communion* are nearly verbatim to that of the early evangelicals. It first describes authentic repentance as requiring an intentional reconciliation with offended or offending neighbours. It then encourages any with a troubled conscience to confess sins to any learned priest for the purpose of ‘ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, that his conscience may be relieved’, and that God’s absolution may be communicated beyond doubt. It adds a third type of confession that Barnes identifies was a part of the early church, yet none of the evangelicals in this thesis promote: a general confession made to the church. This general confession was requested of all who sought to receive communion.

---

<sup>15</sup> Cranmer, Thomas, *The First Book of Common Prayer of Edward VI and The Ordinal of 1549 Together with The Order of the Communion, 1548*, ed. Henry Baskerville Walton (London, Oxford, and Cambridge, 1869), 339.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

By the end of 1549, forced confessions vanished from the English orders of service without a fight.<sup>17</sup> Such public silence is reason for at least one nineteenth-century historian, writing from a period where evangelical disdain for confession was accepted, to argue that the people ‘were not displeased at being freed from the spiritual tyranny of their instructors’.<sup>18</sup> The young king Edward was intensely Protestant, and his two Lord Protectors, Edward Seymour and John Dudley, sought to maintain the king’s favour through a vigorous programme of reform.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis has shown that, contrary to the view held by many modern historians, auricular confession within a construct of solafidistic repentance was encouraged by the most influential evangelicals in England during Henry’s reign. They reworked the central notions of auricular confession into their doctrines of repentance. Yet, Goldsmith’s outdated notion that evangelicals rejected all forms of auricular confession is not necessary for an understanding of a general displeasure at its compulsory enforcement.<sup>20</sup> The long-term influence of the Henrician evangelicals is evidenced by the abolition of compulsory auricular confession under Edward, yet a retention of confession’s practice is also evidence of its general acceptance and utility within solafidistic repentance. Also important is the notion that Edward, who was known as the ‘new Josiah’ because of the perception of their shared antipathy for idols and false worship, did not seek to abolish auricular confession. Like the

---

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Houlbrooke, ‘The family and pastoral care’, in *A History of Pastoral Care*, ed. G.R. Evans (London, 2000), 272.

<sup>18</sup> Goldsmith, *History of England*, Pinnock’s Improved edn. (London, 1837), 186.

<sup>19</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (Berkeley, 2002), 56.

<sup>20</sup> Alec Ryrie provides a compelling argument that late Henrician England may have had more of an evangelical tendency among the laity than many revisionists claim. While the average English person had little influence on such change, many may have felt constrained to avoid giving open support despite being sympathetic to the evangelical cause. They may or may not have remained numerically in the minority, but the evangelicals dominated the religious scene of Edwardian England. Alec Ryrie, ‘Counting Sheep, Counting Shepherds: the problem of allegiance in the English Reformation’, in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie, eds. (Cambridge, 2002), 84-110.

evangelicals who had disdain for the Six Articles, he sought only to remove its legal compulsion. It was, after all, not required *de iure divino*. The Edwardian Protestants, like the Henrician evangelicals, did not seek an outright ban on private oral confession.

Under a Protestant king, Thomas Cranmer's evangelicalism was given rich pastures in which to graze, an environment that allowed for the publication of the two Edwardian editions of the Book of Common Prayer. The 1552 edition provides forms of service for rituals relating to five of the seven traditional sacraments—baptism, confirmation, ordination, matrimony, the Eucharist, and extreme unction. The Prayer Book excludes sections on confession and holy orders. In lieu of a section on penance, it includes prayers of confession in its sections on morning and evening prayers.

These sections develop an evangelical notion of private confession. They agree with Tyndale and Barnes as they provide a more developed understanding of a general public confession in the early church. One morning prayer states 'we ought at al times humbly to knowledge our synnes before God' in private, adding that it is perhaps more important to do this 'when we assemble and mete together'.<sup>21</sup> The confession given is general enough to avoid an enumeration of sins, yet deep enough to create an awareness of sinfulness. It includes not just a general state of sinfulness, but also an active offense against the law, a passive refusal to do good, a cry for mercy for those who are truly penitent on the grounds of his promises, and God's help for those who seek to turn from their sins.<sup>22</sup> Included in this short prayer is the established evangelical notion of the power of the keys coming from the law and

---

<sup>21</sup> 1552 *Book of Common Prayer*, sig. A1r-A2v.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. A2v.

gospel, a confession of sinfulness, an expression of contrition, and a spoken desire to repent. The Prayer Book announces the power of absolution coming from God instead of the pope, and provides a more developed notion of aid in avoiding sin.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the only notable difference from the Henrician formularies is the fact that the prayer is designed to be read aloud in congregation, a notion that is not inconsistent with the Edwardian humanist focus on the early church theology and practice of repentance.

The notions of solafidistic repentance present in the Edwardian Prayer Books show a clear debt to the early English evangelicals. Cranmer's freedom to compose theology gave them freedom to rise. The first three editions of the *Book of Common Prayer* indicate that those instrumental in its composition had read Tyndale, Barnes, Frith, and Joye, and understood the importance of their notions of solafidistic repentance. This evangelical legacy is equally evident in unofficial works of the mid-Tudor period, such as Thomas Becon's *A Sycke Man's Salve*. Written to comfort the deathly ill, Becon confronts his reader with the possibility that death may be imminent for even the healthy, and reminds them that life's difficulties are reminders of its brevity, but also are a result of individual sin.<sup>24</sup> Becon's work takes the form of a dialogue, and at one point the dying person named Epaphroditus offers a confession of 'manifold wickednesses and vnumerable synnes' which caused him to deserve hell. He confessed 'I haue sinned, I haue synned, O lord God, against thy holy lawes and I haue broken thy blessed commaundementes, most greuously offending thy glorious maiestie'.<sup>25</sup> He reinforces this general confession by asking for Christ's forgiveness of 'all my synnes which I haue committed against thy deuine

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Becon, *A Sycke Man's Salve* (London, 1561), sig. \*4r-v.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. J2r-J2v.

maiestie, from the houre of my birth vnto this present time, and to receiue me into the holy fellowship of those thy blessed and chosen people'.<sup>26</sup> Becon's character recognizes that individual sins were committed, but is preoccupied with the forgiveness of the state of sinfulness and acceptance into a holy fellowship. He recognizes the physical punishment of sins on earth, something that would have found agreement in Frith's second notion of purgatory, but points directly at confession to avoid hell, not purgatory. Here, the influence of the theology of Tyndale, Barnes, Frith, and Joye is clear, yet also appears to be further developed.

If the most important theological questions asked by conservatives in the late medieval church centred on what happens to a person after death and how sins can be forgiven, then the evangelical response to these questions was fundamental to the Reformation. As sacramental penance was the only repeatable sacrament of the traditional church that directly concerned itself with forgiveness, then each of the other sacraments relied upon the sacrament of penance. Likewise, just as Luther's theology of the cross fastened all theology to Christ's sacrifice, so did solafidistic repentance call all theology to Christ's work as satisfaction. Solafidistic repentance, then, is at the centre of the soteriological discussions of the English Reformation under Henry VIII. Where division can be found among evangelicals in other important doctrines, relative unity across the evangelical spectrum is evident in understandings of how sins were forgiven and the human role in repentance. The ordering of the elements of solafidistic repentance is not as important as the general acceptance of all their moving parts—contrition, confession, and satisfaction all involved faith in God's promises regarding Christ's work for forgiveness

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. J3r.

independent of human effort. Solafidistic repentance was the most important doctrine for evangelicals in England, and it was the one where they found a high level of agreement.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Printed Primary Sources

- Albrega, J., ed., *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum decreta* (Bologne, 1973)
- Aquinas, Thomas, *The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*, 20 vols. (London, 1912-1922)
- Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. John K. Ryan (New York, 1960)
- Barlowe, William, *A proper dyaloge between a Getillman and an Husband man* (Antwerp, 1530)
- Barnes, Robert, *A Critical Edition of Robert Barnes's A Supplication Unto the Most Gracyous Prince Kynge Henry The .VIII. 1534.*, ed. Douglas H. Parker (Toronto, 2008)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A Supplicatyon made by Robert Barnes doctoure in disunite vnto the most excellent and redoubted prynce Kinge Henry VIII* (London, 1534)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Vitae Romanorum Pontificum* (Wittenberg, 1536)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Supplication of Doctour Barnes* (London, 1548)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Two Treatises* (London, 1739)
- Becon, Thomas, *A Sycke Man's Salve* (London, 1561)
- Bray, Gerald, ed., *Documents of the English Reformation* (Minneapolis, 1994)
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston, 1987)
- Colet, John, *The Sermon of Doctor Colete made to the conuocation at Paulis* (London, 1520?)
- Constantine, George, ed. *The examinacion of Master William Thorpe preste accused of heresy before Thomas Arundell, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Antwerp, 1530)
- Coverdale, Miles, *The Coverdale Bible*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Folkestone, Kent, 1975)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A Paraphrase upon all the Psalmes of David*, transl. Johannes Campensis (Antwerp, 1534)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Remains of Myles Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter*, ed. G. Pearson (Cambridge, 1846)
- Cranmer, Thomas, *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr*, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge, 1844)

- \_\_\_\_\_, *The First Book of Common Prayer of Edward VI and The Ordinal of 1549 Together with The Order of the Communion, 1548*, ed. Henry Baskerville Walton (London, Oxford, and Cambridge, 1869)
- The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011)
- Erasmus, Desiderius, *Exomologesis sive modus confitendi* (Antwerp, 1524)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Apologia ad conclusiones Stunicae* (Antwerp, 1524)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Paraclesis*, ed. J. Frobenius (Antwerp, 1529)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A lytle treatise of the maner and forme of confession*, ed. Iohan Biddell (London, 1535)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Beatrice Corrigan (Toronto, 1974)
- Fish, Simon, *The Summe of the holy Scripture...with an informacyon howe all estates shulde lyve accordyng to the Gospell* (London, 1529)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A Supplication for the Beggars*, ed. Edward Arber (Cambridge, 1846)
- Fisher, John, *The English Works of John Fisher: Bishop of Rochester*, ed. John E. B. Mayor (London, 1876)
- Frith, John, *A disputacion of purgatorye made by Iohan Frith* (London, 1533)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A Mirrour or glasse to know thy self* (Antwerp?, 1533)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *An other boke against Rastel named the sybsedye or bulwark to his first boke* (Antwerp, 1537)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A boke made by Iohn Frith prisoner in the tower of London answering vnto mores lettur which he wrote agenst the first little treatyse that Iohnn Frith made concerning the sacramente of the body and bloude of Christ* (London, 1546)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A Myrroure or lokyng glasse wherein you may beholde the Sacramente of baptisme described* (London, 1548?)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Articles Wherefore John Frith Died, which he wrote in Newgate the 23 day of June 1533* (London, 1548)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Transl., Martin Luther, *A pistle to the Christen reader the revelation of Antichrist* (Antwerp, 1529)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Transl., Patrick Hamilton, *Dyvers fruitful gatherings of scripture concerning faith a. works* (London, 1532)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Work of John Frith*, ed. N. T. Wright (Oxford, 1978)

- Henry VIII, *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum: Or, an Assertion of the Seven Sacraments, Against Martin Luther* (London, 1687)
- Hudson, Anne, ed. *English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge, 1978)
- The Institution of a Christen Man* (London, 1537)
- Jacobs, Henry Eyster, ed. *Book of Concord* (Philadelphia, 1911)
- Joye, George, *The praier and complaynte of the ploweman vnto Christe* (Antwerp, 1531)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The letters which Iohan Ashwel priour of Newnham Abbey besids Bedforde sente secretelly to the Bishope of Lyncolne in the yeaere of our lorde M.D.xxvij* (Antwerp, 1531)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Souper of the Lorde* (Nornburg, 1533)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Ieremy the Prophete translated into Englisshe* (Antwerp, 1534)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Subuersion of Moris false founcacion* (Antwerp, 1534)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Psalter of Dauid in Englishe purely and faithfully translated* (Antwerp, 1534)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The New Testament* (Antwerp, 1535)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A Compendyouse somme of the very Christen relygyon gathered faithfully out of holy scripture* (London, 1535)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The garden of the soule: or the englisshe primers* (London, 1535)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Our Sauour Iesus Christ hath not ouercharged his chirche with many ceremonies* (Antwerp, 1543)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *An Apologye made by George Ioye to Satisfy (if it may be, W. Tindale)*, ed. Edward Arber (Cambridge, 1846)
- Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, 23 vols, ed J.S. Brewer, et al. (London, 1862-1932)
- Lloyd, Charles, ed., *Formularies of Faith Put Forth by Authority During the Reign of Henry VIII* (Oxford, 1825)
- Lombard, Peter, *The Sentences*, 4 vols. transl. Giulio Silano (Toronto, 2007)
- Luther, Martin, 'The Ninety-Five Theses', in *Harvard Classics*, vol. 36, ed. Charles William Eliot (New York, 1909-1914)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Works of Martin Luther with Introductions and Notes*, 3 vols, ed., transl. C. M. Jacobs (Philadelphia, 1915)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Luther's Works, American Edition*, 56 vols, ed. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (Philadelphia and St Louis, 1955-86)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Three Treatises*, (Philadelphia, 1970)

- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids, 2012)
- McNeill, John T., and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales* (New York, 1990)
- More, Thomas, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester (New Haven and London, 1961)
- Rastell, John, *A New Boke of Purgatory* (London, 1530)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Apology against John Fryth* (London, 1532)
- Roye, William, *A Breve Dialogue bitwene a Christen Father and his stobborne Sonne*, ed. Douglas H Parker and Bruce Krajewski (Toronto, 1999)
- Russell, Thomas, ed., *The Works of the English Reformers: William Tyndale and John Frith*, 3 vols. (London, 1831)
- Somerset, Fiona, ed., *Four Wycliffite Dialogues* (Oxford, 2009)
- Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: New American Standard Bible*. Updated edn. (La Habra, CA, 1995)
- Thorpe, William. *The examinacion of the honourable knight syr Jhonn Oldcastell Lorde Cobham*, Reprint (Anne Arbor, MI, 2007)
- Tyndale, William, *Expositions and notes on sundry portions of the Holy Scriptures: together with the practice of prelates*, ed. Henry Walter, Reprint (Cambridge, 1849)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Cologne Fragment* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *First Epistle of Saint John* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *New Testament (1526)* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *New Testament (1534)* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Obedience of the Christian Man* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Practice of Prelates* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Prologue to the 1534 New Testament, To the Reader* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Prologue to the Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Cambridge, 1831)
- \_\_\_\_\_, and John Frith, *The works of the English Reformers*, ed. Thomas Russel (Cambridge, 1831)

\_\_\_\_\_, *An answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue; The supper of the Lord after the true meaning of John VI. and 1 Cor. XI.; and Wm. Tracy's Testament expounded*, ed. Henry Walter, (Cambridge, 2012)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Here foloweth a treates of the pasternoster*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell (Fort Worth, TX, 2004)

Wycliffe, John, *Unprinted English Works of Wyclif*, ed. F. D. Matthew (London, 1880)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, 3 vols, ed. Thomas Arnold (Oxford, 1869)

### **Published Secondary Sources**

Bainton, Roland H., *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA, 2009)

Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford, 2008)

Bernard, G. W., *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven and London, 2005)

Billier, Peter, and A. J. Minnis, eds, *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* (York, 1998)

Bossy, John, 'The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation', *TRHS* vol. 25 (1975), 21-38

\_\_\_\_\_, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985)

Brigden, Susan, *London and the Reformation* (London, 1989)

Butterworth, Allan G., *George Joye, 1495?-1553: A Chapter in the History of the English Bible and the English Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1962)

Clebsch, William A., *England's Earliest Protestants 1520-1535* (Westport, CT, 1964)

Cooper, Kenneth S., *Revival of Lollardy in the English Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1981)

Craig, John, and Maas, Korey, 'A Sermon by Robert Barnes, C. 1535', *Journal of Ecclesiastic History* vol. 55 (2004), 542-551

Devereux, James A., 'The Primers and the Prayer Book Collects', *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 32 (1968), 29-44

Dickens, A. G., *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York 1509-1558* (London, 1959)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Reformation Studies* (London, 1982)

- \_\_\_\_\_, *The English Reformation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 1989)
- Duffy, Eamon, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven and London, 2006)
- Ekelund, Robert B., Robert F. Hebert, and Robert D. Tollison. 'An Economic Analysis of the Protestant Reformation', *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 110 (2002), 646-672
- Elton, G. R., *England Under the Tudors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Cambridge, 1974)
- Goldsmith, Oliver. *History of England*, Pinnock's Improved edn. (London, 1837)
- Green, Ian, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c. 1530-1740* (Oxford, 1997)
- Guy, John, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988)
- Haigh, Christopher, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993)
- Hamm, Berndt, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, ed. Robert J. Blast (Leiden, Netherlands, 2004)
- Lea, Henry Charles, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 3 vols. (London, 1896)
- Houlbrooke, Ralph, 'The family and pastoral care', in *A History of Pastoral Care*, ed. G.R. Evans (London, 2000), 262-293
- Hudson, Anne, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988)
- Kreider, Alan, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge, MA., 1979)
- Larson, Atria A. *Master of Penance: Gratian and the Development of Penitential Thought and Law in the Twelfth Century* (Washington DC, 2014)
- Lewis, C. S., *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954)
- Little, Katherine C., *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (South Bend, IN, 2006)
- Loane, Marcus L., *Masters of the English Reformation* (London, 1954)
- Lockyer, Roger, *Tudor and Stuart Britain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 2004)
- Lohse, Bernhard, *Martin Luther's Theology* (Edinburgh, 1999)
- Lualdi, Katharine Jackson, and Anne T. Thayer, eds., *Penitence in the Age of Reformations* (Burlington, VT, 2000)
- Maas, Korey, *The Reformation and Robert Barnes: History, Theology and Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, UK, 2010)

- MacCulloch, Diarmaid, 'Two Dons in Politics: Thomas Cranmer and Stephen Gardiner, 1503-1533' in *The Historical Journal* vol. 37 (1994), 1-22
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (London, 1996)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (Berkeley, 2002)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London, 2003)
- Mackie, J. D., *The Early Tudors 1485-1558* (Oxford, 1992)
- Manermaa, Tuomo, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis, 2005)
- Mansfield, Marcy C., *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-century France* (Ithaca, NY, 1995)
- Marshall, Peter, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Reformation England 1480-1642*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 2012)
- Marshall, Peter, and Alec Ryrie, eds., *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002)
- McEntegart, Rory, *Henry VIII, The League of Schmalkalden, and the English Reformation* (London, 2002)
- McGrath, Alister, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford, 1991)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford, 1998)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Iustitia Dei: A history of the Christian doctrine of Justification*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Cambridge, 2005)
- McGoldrick, James Edward, *Luther's English Connection* (Milwaukee, 1979)
- Meens, Rob, *Penance in Medieval Europe 600-1200* (Cambridge, 2014)
- Murray, Alexander, 'Confession Before 1215', *TRHS*, vol. 3 (1993), 51-81
- Myers, David, *Poor Sinning Folk: Confession and Conscience in Counter-Reformation Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 1996)
- Null, Ashley, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (Oxford, 2006)
- Ozment, Steven, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (London and New Haven, 1975)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Age of Reform: 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (London, 1980)
- Payne, John B., *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Chicago, 1970)
- Pineas, Rainer, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics* (Bloomington, IN, 1968)

- Poschmann, Bernhard, *Penance and Anointing the Sick* (New York, 1964)
- Rex, Richard, *The Lollards* (New York, 2002)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (London, 1993)
- Rittgers, Ronald K., *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2012)
- Rupp, E. Gordon, *Studies in Making of the English Protestant Tradition* (Cambridge, 1949)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London, 1953)
- Ryrie, Alec, 'Divine Kingship and Royal Theology in Henry VIII's Reformation', *Reformation*, vol. 7 (2002), 49-77
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals and the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003)
- Scarbrick, J. J., *Henry VIII*, reprint (London, 1981)
- Shuger, Debra, 'Reformation of Penance' *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 71 (2008), 14-35
- Simpson, James, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA, 2007)
- Smeeton, Donald, *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale* (Kirksville, MO, 1986)
- Swanson, R. N., 'Problems of the Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England' *English Historical Review* vol. 105 (1990), 845-859
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge, 2007)
- Tentler, Thomas, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ, 1977)
- Thayer, Anne, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (Burlington, VT, 2002)
- Trueman, Carl R., *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* (Oxford, 1994)
- Van Spijker, Willem, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, transl. John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma (Leiden, 1996)
- Von Loewenich, Walther, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Belfast, 1976)
- Werrell, Ralph S., *The Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge, 2006)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Blood of Christ in the Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge, 2015)

Whiting, Michael S., *Luther in English: The influence of his Theology of Law and Gospel on Early English Reformers (1525-1535)* (Eugene, OR, 2010)

Yarnell, Malcolm, 'The First Evangelical Sinner's Prayer Published in English', in *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, vol. 47 (2004), 27-43

\_\_\_\_\_, *Royal Priesthood in the English Reformation* (Oxford, 2013)

### **Unpublished Papers and Theses**

Turrell, James Fielding, 'Confirming, Catechizing, and the Initiation of Adults in the Early Modern Church of England.' Unpublished PhD Dissertation (Vanderbilt University, 2002)

### **World Wide Web Sources**

Foxe, John, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or TAMO* (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011). [<http://www.johnfoxe.org/>] (last access 20/7/2016)

Halsall, Paul, ed., *Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215* (New York, 1996). [<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/lateran4.html>] accessed 3 June 2014]

Hudson, Anne, Anthony Kenny, 'Wyclif, John (d. 1384)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 2004; online edn, Sept 2010 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30122>, accessed 12 February 2015]

Trueman, Carl. 'Barnes, Robert (c. 1495-1540)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1472>, accessed 15 June 2013]