Thomas Cranmer and Tudor Evangelicalism*

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'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.' With these famous words Shakespeare concisely captured the sixteenth century's 'self-fashioning' approach to life. Although human beings had to play a role in society which was largely pre-determined, they were still expected to perform their part with as much insight and artifice as possible. The challenge was to discern the right model to imitate, the best script to follow. For Jaques, Shakespeare's libertine-turned-philosopher who uttered those memorable lines in *As You Like It,* his goal in life was to find the true way of discharging the foul infections, both corporal and spiritual, which he had acquired on his many world travels. At the end of the play, Jaques pinned his hopes for a return to wholeness on meeting the former persecuting Duke Frederick who had abandoned the pomp of court life to become a monastic penitent: 'To him will I. Out of these convertites / There is much matter to be heard and learn'd.'[1]

Of course, in Shakespeare's England none of those in his audience who wished to purge themselves of the world could actually avail themselves of Jaques' solution, for English converts no longer congregated in monasteries. The reason lay in changes beginning much earlier during the reign of Henry VIII in the 1520s and 1530s. At that time courtiers like Sebastian Newdigate and Sir John Gage could still convert in the traditional medieval meaning of the word by turning from a life lived in this world to the retreat of a monastic way-station in preparation for admittance to heaven after death.[2] Yet other options were beginning to present themselves. Influenced by the rise of Catholic humanism, Thomas More attempted to hold together both a life lived at court and that of a monastic penitent. Fashioning a secular career for himself which culminated in becoming Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor in 1529, More played the role of a wise and witty man of wealth and power before his king. Yet on Fridays he retreated to his manor in Chelsea, where he visited his personal chapel and purged himself of the ills of his worldly career through weeping in confession before Christ's wounded corpus on the cross. Grieving at having inflicted such pains on Jesus, More trusted that

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[1] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 7, lines 139–40; Act V, Scene 4, lines 184–5. For the theme of 'self-fashioning' in the English Renaissance, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[2] Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 27n40.

his self-tormenting penances would mitigate the punishments his sins in this world merited at God's hand in the next.[3]

Others, however, took the Catholic humanist revival in a completely different direction. Concerned that the medieval emphasis on human effort obscured the sufficiency of Christ's redeeming work on the cross, they sought to cleanse themselves of their sins by rejecting much of the church's established belief and practice. Returning to the fountainhead of the Christian faith, they found a new model to follow for forgiveness, a script based only on the plain sense of the Bible, as read through the prism of the writings of St. Paul. These dissenters from both the world and the church insisted that a true Christian should give priority to this radically new script over everything else in shaping one's life:[4] priority over culturally-hegemonic beliefs like purgatory, pardons, and penance; priority over universally cherished devotional practices like praying to saints and burning lights before their images; priority over time-honoured 'unwritten verities' and centuries of well-reasoned biblical interpretation that authorised such practices; priority over even the ancient institutional authority of the church itself which had notoriously endorsed them. After the sword of scriptural authority had cut away centuries of error, what remained, these reformers believed, was the simple message of salvation by faith in Christ alone. This 'fervent biblicism' was the coat-of-arms by which they presented themselves on the doctrinal battlefield and by which they recognised their comrades-in-arms.[5]

Cranmer's Conversion

Born on 2 July 1489, Thomas Cranmer spent his formative years as a son of the late medieval English Church. Initially schooled by the parish priest, Cranmer eventually studied from 1503 at Jesus College, Cambridge, during the thirty years of John Fisher's chancellorship. Under the influence of the future saint's reforming program, Cranmer was trained to combine scholastic reasoning with humanist learning in order to promote the renewal of traditional Catholic faith and practice. Having proceeded to his DD in 1526, Cranmer demonstrated his own commitment to humanist reform by stressing the importance of scriptural knowledge as a university don.

According to John Foxe, Cranmer put candidates for the BD degree through such a 'severe examination' on 'the story of the Bible,' that members of religious orders 'were commonly rejected by him,' because they had been trained in the 'study of school authors without regard had

[3] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, pp. 11–73, especially at pp. 11–13, 45–6, 51–2.

[4] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, pp. 93–105.

[5] Marshall, *Religious Identities*, p. 7.

to the authority of Scriptures.'[6] In other words, by the 1520s Cranmer had decided to follow Erasmus more than Fisher and demand that in expounding the Bible candidates should give priority to the humanist principles of philology and historical development over the received tenets of scholastic theology. Yet, like Erasmus, there is no indication that during his university career Cranmer ever stepped outside the parameters of medieval orthodoxy by espousing controversial doctrines like justification by faith.[7] Although he insisted on the primary authority of Scripture for faith and practice, Cranmer continued to believe that only the institutional church, not individual theologians like Luther, could decisively determine its interpretation.

Significantly for his future, however, Cranmer also declined to invest a single individual with the authority to make such pronouncements on behalf of the whole church. Once again following Erasmus rather than Fisher, Cranmer argued that the ultimate power for defining Christian truth lay with general councils rather than the papacy.[8] Hence, as the dispute over Henry VIII's desire for a 'divorce' grew more intractable in 1529, the king realised that Cranmer was just the sort of scholar he needed. Like Henry, Cranmer was willing to challenge papal authority based on biblical exegesis, but not the received teachings of the church on justification or transubstantiation. When Cranmer left Cambridge at the age of 40 to enter the king's service, he was clearly a reformer, but one who still used his humanist scholarship in the service of the essentials of the faith that had formed him from birth.

Less than a decade later, however, the situation had radically changed. Cranmer had been the Archbishop of Canterbury since 1533. The Church of England had operated independently of the papacy since the declaration of royal supremacy one year later. In 1536 Henry's campaign to close the monasteries had begun. Within four years none would exist in England. In 1537 the bishops of the English church had tried to establish the new entity's doctrinal standards by publishing the *Institution of a Christian Man*, commonly known as the Bishops' Book. And by January 1538, Cranmer was no longer promoting merely a reformation of morals arising from the knowledge of Scripture. He was using his biblical scholarship to lobby the king directly to accept justification by faith as outlined in a passage from the *Institution of a Christian Man*.

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[6] John Foxe, *Ecclesiasticall history contaynyng the Actes and Monumentes of thynges passed in euery kynges tyme in this Realme* (London: John Day, 1570), p. 2033. Spelling has been modernised in all quotations from this text.

[7] Diarmaid MacCulloch has persuasively argued that Cranmer was not a participant in the reformist theological discussions held at the White Horse Tavern; *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 24–33.

[8] Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 94–8.

According to the Bishops' Book, for a Christian to believe in God the Father meant that

> I believe also and profess, that he is my very God, my Lord, and my Father, and that I am his servant and his own son by adoption and grace, and the right inheritor of his kingdom; and that it proceedeth and cometh of his mere goodness only, without all my desert…[9]

Upon his review of the book after its publication, Henry decided that the phrase 'the right inheritor' needed a qualifier—'as long as I persevere in his precepts and laws.' Cranmer responded:

> This book speaketh of the pure Christian faith unfeigned, which is without colour, as well in heart, as in mouth. He that hath this faith, converteth from his sin, repenteth him…and applieth himself wholly to please [his heavenly Father] again, and trusteth assuredly, that for Christ's sake he will and doth remit his sin, withdraweth his indignation, delivereth him from hell, from the power of the infernal spirits, taketh him to his mercy, and maketh him his own son and his own heir: and he hath also the very Christian hope, that after this life he shall reign ever with Christ in his kingdom. For St Paul saith: *Si filii sumus, et haeredes; haeredes quidem Dei, cohaeredes autem Christi*.[10]

In this text Cranmer makes no mention of saving faith needing first to be formed by love. He makes no room for human works to play any role in delivering a sinner from judgment. He refers only to Christ's work. Indeed, human merit was explicitly denied in the original passage, and here salvation is attributed exclusively to divine mercy. Now repentance is the fruit of saving faith, not part of its grounds. Finally, because of St. Paul's teaching, a person who has been justified by saving faith should trust that he will also inherit eternal life. Clearly, Cranmer had crossed the Rubicon, but in his case away from Rome towards the German-speaking lands of the North.

What makes a man in middle-age turn his back on life-long beliefs to stand along side of those he had previously argued were heretics? Unlike Luther, Cranmer has given us no *Turmerlebnis* to attempt to explain his change of heart.[11] If some English reformers like Thomas Bilney and

[9] J.E. Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846), p. 84.

[10] Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer.*

[11] Luther's 'tower experience' (Turmerlebnis) derives its name from Luther's account that his 'Reformation breakthrough' came while pondering Romans 1:17 in the tower of the Black Cloister in Wittenberg; *Table Talk*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, in Luther's Works, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,

Katherine Parr attempted to shape a more public presentation of their private conversion so as to have an evangelising effect on others, Cranmer was not among them. Like his peer Thomas More, Cranmer carefully shaped his self-presentation on the stage of public life so as to conceal as completely as possible the state of his private world.

If More's self-fashioned *persona* was as a Renaissance worthy with easy wit and worldly wisdom in equal measure, Cranmer's model, as befitting a spiritual rather than temporal magnate, was public monastic self-mortification. According to Ralph Morice, his principal secretary,

> he was a man of such temperature of nature, or rather so mortified, that no manner of prosperity or adversity could alter or change his accustomed conditions: for, being the storms never so terrible or odious, nor the prosperous estate of the time never so pleasant, joyous, or acceptable, to the face of [the] world his countenance, diet, or sleep commonly never altered or changed, so that they which were most nearest and conversant about him never or seldom perceived by no sign or token of countenance how the affairs of the prince or the realm went. Notwithstanding privately with his secret and special friends he would shed forth many bitter tears, lamenting the miseries and calamities of the world.[12]

Alexander Alesius, one of Cranmer's 'secret and special friends,' confided to Elizabeth I that those tears were shed on at least two occasions by severe setbacks for his Gospel of justification by faith, namely, the death of Anne Boleyn and the Act of Six Articles.[13] While More hid the intense traditional piety of his mortifying hairshirt under the fine robes of his high worldly status, Cranmer wore mortification on his face to hide his hopes and fears for the new piety that had captured his heart.

Defining Tudor Evangelicalism

What shall we call reformers like Thomas Cranmer who clearly wanted to change England's script in the 1520s and 1530s, yet were only gradually clear in exactly what they wanted to change? Although convenient, to describe them as 'Protestants' at this stage would be anachronistic. The term was first coined in Germany only in 1529 and then as a term of reproach by the enemies of those princes who issued a joint '*protestatio*' against the Diet of Speyer's revocation of religious privileges.

1955–86), Vol. 45, pp. 193–4. Cf. Luther's autobiographical fragment from 1545; *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Lewis W. Spitz, in Luther's Works, Vol. 34, pp. 325–38, at pp. 336–8.

[12] John Gough Nichols, ed., *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation* (London: Camden Society, 1859), pp. 244–5. Spelling has been modernised in this quotation.

[13] MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, pp. 159, 251.

Consequently, in England throughout the reign of Henry VIII, 'Protestant' referred to Germans of the Lutheran states allied against Charles V in the Schmalkaldic League.[14] During Edward VI's reign, the English reformers began to be called 'Protestant,' but this practice only become standard during Mary's reign.[15] Even then, however, Nicholas Ridley, the former Bishop of London and soon-to-be martyr, still recognised its origin as a term of abuse.[16]

Yet, if to call them 'Protestants' would be an anachronism, to refer to them as 'Lutherans' would be equally inappropriate. Although the latter term was the 'catch-all' epithet for religious dissent used by English traditionalists, the first reformers were actually influenced by a wide variety of sources, including the monastic pursuit of holiness, Erasmian scholarship, French court circles associated with Anne Boleyn, remnants of native English Lollardy as well as South German and Swiss reformed theologians, in addition to Luther himself. Given the fluid nature of the new religious identities gradually developing during Henry's reign, using terms with clearly fixed doctrinal associations like 'Lutheran' or 'Protestant' would be to apply 'premature precision.'[17]

Like Cranmer, the first reformers were as much late medieval Christians as they were initiators of a new religious movement.[18] They never saw themselves as anything other than true Catholics who were simply returning to the authentic, original script for their centuries-old faith, the Bible.[19] Reflecting this claim, Luther called the reformation

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[14] Thus, the plans for Henry VIII's funeral and Edward VI's coronation refer to the representatives from the Schmalkaldic League as 'the Protestants'; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London: Allen Lane, 1999), p. 2.

[15] Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Henry VIII and the Reform of the Church,' in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy and Piety*, ed. MacCulloch, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 159–180, at p. 168; MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, p. 2; Peter Marshall & Alec Ryrie, 'Introduction: Protestantisms and their Beginnings' in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, eds. Marshall & Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 5.

[16] 'I will frankly and freely utter my mind…And yet I will do it under this protestation, call me a Protestant who listeth [chooses], I pass not thereof [do not care],' Henry Christmas, ed., *The Works of Nicholas Ridley* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1843), p. 14.

[17] Greg Walker, *Persuasive Fictions: Faction, Faith and Political Culture in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), pp. 136–8; MacCulloch, Henry VIII, pp. 167–70. Cf. John F. Davis, 'The Trials of Thomas Bylney and the English Reformation,' *Historical Journal* 24 (1981), pp. 775–90.

[18] Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 141.

[19] Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1–2.

movement in Germany '*evangelisch*,' a generic description derived from 'ευανγελιον,' the New Testament's word for 'good news' or 'gospel,' and the adjective still used today to describe general Protestantism in that country.[20] Likewise, the original terms for such people in English were 'evangelicals' and its cognate 'gospellers.'[21] Because the designation is 'vague,' reflecting only 'fervent biblicism' and not specific doctrinal content, it is now becoming 'normative' amongst Tudor historians to refer to the English reformers as 'evangelicals.'[22]

Yet, the practice is not without its critics. Cognisant of the German distinction between '*evangelisch*' (Protestant) and '*evangelikal*' (modern evangelical), Peter Matheson, a historian of the German Reformation, ended his review of a recent monograph on Thomas Cranmer with a final query: 'Does it further the debate about Cranmer's sixteenth-century stance to describe his theology as "evangelical," given the specific connotation of that term in our own time?'[23] Matheson's concern is understandable. As a former principal of the Uniting Theological College in Melbourne, he is only too familiar with the assertive evangelicalism of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney and its training centre, Moore Theological College. Noted for its steadfast advocacy of biblical supremacy, personal conversion and lay presidency, the diocese is clearly out of sync with what much of the rest of Australia understands as Anglicanism and, indeed, out of sync with what the other main Australian denominations understand as Christianity. Whereas Sydney Anglicans vigorously defend their beliefs as being faithful to the biblical principles of the reformed Church of England, for Australia's Uniting Church the Reformation's legacy is more appropriately a mandate for peace and justice.

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[20] For example, the umbrella organisation for Germany's twenty-three Lutheran, Reformed and United Landeskirchen is called the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland.

[21] For Thomas More's hostile use of these labels, see his *The Confutacyon of Tyndales Answere* (London: William Rastell, 1532), sigs. Dd2v, Dd4r; *The Apologye of Syr Thomas More Knyght* (London: William Rastell, 1533), sig. B2r.

[22] MacCulloch, *Reign of Henry VIII*, pp. 168–9; MacCulloch, *Cranmer,* p. 2; Marshall, *Religious Identities*, pp. 5, 7. Cf. Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Christianity in England from Roman Times to the Reformation,* 3 vols. (London: SCM, 2001) III, 156–64; Susan Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 18; Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 226–42; Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. xv–xvi. However, for a scholar who has decided to take a different approach, see Catharine Davies, *A Religion of the Word: The Defence of the Reformation in the Reign of Edward VI* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. xx–xxii.

[23] Peter Matheson, Book Review of 'Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 54 (2003), p. 827.

Of course, Matheson is not the only Reformation scholar who would wish to make a distinction between the Protestant reformers and the later trans-Atlantic evangelistic tradition. David Steinmetz has sought to distinguish Luther and Calvin's understanding of conversion as a life-long process of repentance as well as learning from the historic American evangelical emphasis on 'the initial moment of faith in which one passes from death to life, from darkness to light.'[24] Speaking from the English context, Anthony Lane concurs, insisting that the model of 'instantaneous conversion' normative for most contemporary evangelicals must be clearly distinguished from 'Calvin's concept of conversion as a process.'[25] Finally, in seeking to explain the dearth and, therefore, what she considers to be the relative unimportance of conversion narratives for sixteenth-century Protestants, Judith Pollmann has come to the same conclusion. She argues that Protestants were reluctant to appear as theological innovators and, therefore, rejected as a template for their own era the ideal of a dramatic '"moment" of conversion' derived from the stories of Paul and Augustine. Rather, for sixteenth-century Protestants, conversion was a process 'of learning old truths and of unlearning bad habits, not as one of changing personality'[26]—a conclusion which Bruce Hindmarsh incorporates into his recent monograph on spiritual autobiography in early modern Britain.[27]

Still in the past twenty years the most influential voice in stressing the dissimilarity between the sixteenth-century English reformers and the evangelists of the eighteenth century has been that of a noted scholar of modern evangelicalism, David Bebbington.[28] In his classic work, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s,* Bebbington argues that the new experiential emphasis of Enlightenment epistemology encouraged evangelicalism's uniquely emotive character, thus making it a 'new phenomenon of the eighteenth century.' Although he recognises 'much continuity with earlier Protestant traditions,' he insists

[24] David C. Steinmetz, 'Reformation and Conversion,' *Theology Today* 35 (1978), pp. 25–32, at p. 30.

[25] A.N.S. Lane, 'Conversion: a Comparison of Calvin and Spener,' *Themelios* 13 (1987), pp. 19–21, at p. 20.

[26] Judith Pollmann, 'A Different Road to God: The Protestant Experience of Conversion in the Sixteenth Century,' in *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity*, ed. Peter van der Veer (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 47–64, at pp. 48, 54–55. For the sixteenth-century use of tales of martyrdom to bring about conversion, see Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, pp. 7–8, 163 (English Protestants), pp. 283–5 (English Catholics).

[27] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 26–28.

[28] See Timothy Larsen, 'The Reception Given Evangelicalism in Modern Britain since publication,' in Stewart & Haykin, *The Emergence of Evangelicalism*, pp. 21 to 36.

that the movement associated with Wesley and Whitefield represents such a clear break from the past that its beginnings cannot be said to date from any earlier than the 1730s.[29] Therefore, Bebbington distinguishes between 'evangelical' which he accepts as an appropriate description of the English Reformers and 'the term "Evangelical," with a capital letter' which he applies exclusively to advocates of experiential conversion from the eighteenth century onwards.

Tudor historians today have no quarrel with such an approach. Having adopted 'evangelical' as the preferred term precisely because of its very vagueness, they have no intention thereby of implying a theological consistency between the English Reformation and the 'experiential and emotional form of Christianity which belongs more to the eighteenth century than the sixteenth.'[30] At best, for Diarmaid MacCulloch, the generic use of 'evangelicalism' in the Reformation era is intended to 'liberate' the term from its nineteenth-century associations with a specific party within Protestantism in general and the Church of England in particular.[31] For Peter Marshall, however, the term is simply 'the least-worst label.'[32]

Evangelical Conversion in the English Reformation

It is worth noting, however, that the adoption of a new terminology amongst current Tudor historians is part of a much larger re-evaluation of their understanding of the English Reformation. When Bebbington was preparing *Evangelicalism and Modern Britain* in the 1980s, the standard authority on the subject was A.G. Dickens.[33] Although he was beginning to be seriously challenged,[34] the scholarly consensus still largely accepted his approach of focusing on the 'theme of Protestant conversion.'[35] And for Dickens, such conversion was primarily a moment of intellectual

[29] D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 1.
[30] Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII*, p. xvi.
[31] MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, p. 2.
[32] Marshall, *Religious Identities,* p. 20.
[33] A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation,* 2nd edn. (London: Batsford, 1989).
[34] Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); J.J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Christopher Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
[35] A.G. Dickens, 'The Shape of Anti-clericalism and the English Reformation,' in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. E.I. Kouri and Tom Scott (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 379–410, at p. 380.

insight,[36] rather than an experience of an existential inner resonance, including Luther's own *Turmerlebnis*.[37] Hence, Dickens argued that the religious alterations in England were brought about fairly rapidly by a popular movement arising as a natural response to the 'rational appeal of a Christianity based upon the authentic sources of the New Testament.'[38] With the advent of an increasingly educated populace, Protestantism's book-based faith was inevitably more persuasive than the medieval church's affective ritualism.[39] If one accepts Dickens' view that evangelical conversion in the sixteenth century was more a matter of mind than heart, then the experiential emphasis of the eighteenth century would seem very novel indeed.

Yet it is precisely this whiggish assumption of the inherent superiority of a 'rational' Protestantism that has been so successfully challenged by revisionist Tudor historians of the last twenty years.[40] On the one hand, Eamon Duffy has illuminated how traditionalist religious beliefs and practices were just as appealing to members of the educated classes as they were to rural labourers.[41] Indeed, Richard Rex has helpfully shown that English humanism, the force that Dickens posited as leading inevitably to Protestant thought, was in fact originally a flowering of late medieval Catholic learning in support of traditionalist belief which then fuelled the Counter-Reformation as much as the Reformation.[42] On

[36] 'Luther declared war between bible-Christianity and churchly, scholastic Christianity. Within this intellectual context, by 1530 widely apparent, we should also locate the core of the English Reformation,' Dickens, *English Reformation,* p. 21.

[37] 'Whatever the importance of the tower-experience, it should not be regarded as a "religious experience" as one applies this term either to medieval mystics or modern revivalists…The tower-experience was something different; it taught [Luther] what he believed to be the true sense of the Scriptures, the understanding of something objective, of something God had long ago thrown open to the insight of men,' A.G. Dickens, *Martin Luther and the Reformation* (London: English Universities Press, 1967), p. 30.

[38] Dickens, 'The Shape of Anti-clericalism and the English Reformation,' p. 380.

[39] This thesis is, of course, as old as John Foxe himself: '[A]s printing of books ministered matter of reading: so reading brought learning: learning showed light, by the brightness whereof blind ignorance was suppressed, error detected, and finally God's glory, with truth of his word, advanced'; *Actes and Monuments*, p. 838. Cf. Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 2–3.

[40] Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp. 4–5. Cf. Hebert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: G. Bell, 1931).

[41] Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–1570* (London: Yale University Press, 1992); *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (London: Yale University Press, 2001).

[42] Richard Rex, 'The Role of English Humanists in the Reformation up to 1559,' in *The Education of a Christian Society: Humanism and Reformation in Britain*

the other hand, Alec Ryrie has found little evidence for Dickens' grass-roots movement of Protestant conversions. According to Ryrie, 'most English people never experienced a dramatic, individual conversion; Protestant England was formed by pragmatic gospellers.'[43] Consequently, Ethan Shagan has recently sought to offer a new interpretative model for the English Reformation based on popular pragmatism rather than conversion. He finds the eventual advent of Protestant England to be the result of a process of mutual cultural accommodation between the Tudor regimes, who were pushing religious alterations, and the populace, who gradually agreed to changes for their own non-religious reasons, even as they modified them along the way according to their own interests.[44]

Since so much of the revisionist fire has been directed at Dickens' negative assessment of late medieval Catholicism, little scholarly attention has been paid to the second half of his thesis, namely, his understanding of Protestantism as the rational alternative. After all, those scholars who would argue that the communal and cultic rhythms of late Medieval Catholicism were superior to the Protestantism that followed can easily assume that evangelicalism's apparent lack of large-scale appeal was precisely because of its purported intellectualism. Such a one-sided approach to religious faith would seem to have held genuine appeal only for a narrow band of linearly-thinking idealists.

Yet if current Tudor scholarship has shown that late medieval traditionalists held both heart and head together, why should early English evangelicals, as late medieval Christians themselves, not have done likewise? It is an important question. For even if it is accepted that there were far fewer genuine converts to the Protestant faith than Dickens thought, it still remains crucial for Tudor historians to understand what motivated those life-changing decisions that rendered some previously earnest Catholics true believers in evangelicalism.[45] Surely in that pre-Enlightenment era, there was no inherent need for a bifurcation of human faculties. Recognising the continuing influence of Dickens' work on our understanding of evangelicalism, Peter Marshall has cautioned against the

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and the Netherlands, eds. N.S. Amos, A. Pettegree & H. van Nierop (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 19–40.

[43] Alec Ryrie, 'Counting sheep, counting shepherds: the problem of allegiance in the English Reformation,' in Marshall & Ryrie, eds., *Beginnings of English Protestantism*, pp. 84–110, at p. 105.

[44] Shagan, *Popular Politics*.

[45] Richard Rex has helpfully noted that the leading English reformers uniformly came from 'highly orthodox' Catholic backgrounds; consequently, the 'key to the success of the English Reformation lies not in the conversion of Lollards, but in the conversion of Catholics'; *The Lollards* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 133–8, 142.

> tendency to perceive the rise of Protestantism in terms of the triumph of intellect over emotion, of the controlled and printed Word over the affective, ritual, and mimetic religion of the Middle Ages.[46]

Instead Marshall counsels historians to 'consider more closely the symbiotic relationship between an existential or emotional experience, and the internalisation of a profoundly theological and intellectual proposition.'[47] We would be wise to heed his advice. As Diarmaid MacCulloch has succinctly summarised the situation:

> The old Church was immensely strong, and that strength could only have been overcome by the explosive power of an idea…Monarchs, priests, nuns, merchants, farmers, labourers were seized by ideas which tore through their experiences and memories and made them behave in new ways…[48]

Conversion as a 'Process of Persuasion'

In his recent study of the methods by which Protestantism took hold in the lands of the Reformation, Andrew Pettegree has offered a helpfully nuanced approach to the matter of conversion.[49] On the one hand, he cites the classic autobiographical fragments from both Luther and Calvin to argue that the reformers chose to follow in the footsteps of Paul and Augustine, their chief theological authorities, by offering their personal stories of a moment of sudden reorientation as an 'inspiration' for others. On the other hand, he acknowledges that the reformers came to their mature religious commitments by a gradual process which was certainly more complicated than their telescoped reflections in hindsight suggested. From these observations Pettegree draws two significant conclusions. Firstly, whereas Pollmann discounts the importance of Calvin's account of his 'sudden conversion' (*subita conversio*) precisely because it was an artificial construct, Pettegree shrewdly recognises that such a self-fashioned narrative only proves that even the great Calvin himself felt constrained by 'the very powerful strength of the conversion paradigm'

[46] Marshall, *Religious Identities*, p. 29.
[47] Marshall, *Religious Identities*, p. 27.
[48] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 1490–1700 (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 110.
[49] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, pp. 2–7. For a concise description of how many of the leading reformers came to hold their Protestant convictions, see Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 168–85.

during the Reformation era.[50] Secondly, as a result, the Reformation teaching on conversion only has coherence if two different aspects are given their due:

> [The Reformers] had a complex and refined sense of the process of Christian conversion. On the one hand, there was the dramatic moment of acceptance; then again, the creation of a Christian people required a process of long, hard unrelenting struggle…A people had to be led to right understanding and right living.[51]

Therefore, Pettegree outlines a four-stage 'process of persuasion' by which people in the sixteenth century came to embrace the new Protestant 'dialectic of belonging and rejection': awareness of the new teachings, self-identification with them, growing understanding of their implications for the Christian life, and commitment to activism on their behalf.[52]

Certainly, awareness through learning played an important role in the conversions of early English evangelicals. Rejecting the charge of novelty, the sixteenth-century reformers understood their open break with many of the beliefs and customs of the medieval church to be a recovery of the authentic way of being a Christian as outlined in the ancient writings of the apostles.[53] Hence, for Katherine Parr, Henry VIII's widow, coming to know Scripture was the decisive difference between stark alternatives: between darkness and light, ignorance and perfect knowledge, superstition and holiness, worldly vanities and truth; in short, the difference between the way to hell and the way to heaven.[54]

Despite being baptised a Christian, Katherine felt that she had lived many years no better than 'the heathen,' although she tried to cover her

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[50] Pollmann, 'A Different Road to God,' p. 49; Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, p. 4.

[51] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, p. 5. Cf. Pete Wilcox's thoughtful arguments for Calvin holding to both an initial conversion experience and a subsequent need for on-going repentance as the Christian norm; 'Conversion in the Thought and Experience of John Calvin,' *Anvil* 14 (1997), pp. 113–28.

[52] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, p. 6.

[53] Pollmann, 'A Different Road to God,' pp. 52–4; Bruce Gordon, 'The Changing Face of Protestant History and Identity in the Sixteenth Century,' in his *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996) I, pp. 1–23.

[54] Katherine Parr, *The Lamentacion of a Sinner* (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1547), sigs. A2v, A4r. Spelling has been modernised in all quotations from this text. For decidedly different views of Katherine's theological development, see William P. Haugaard, 'Katherine Parr: the Religious Convictions of a Renaissance Queen,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 22 (1969), 346–59; Susan E. James, *Kateryn Parr: The Making of a Queen* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), especially pp. 115–8. Cf. MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, pp. 326–7.

sins with a 'pretence of holiness.' 'And no marvel it was that I so did, for I would not learn to know the Lord and his ways,' having 'regarded little God's Word.' When Katherine finally listened to God's 'many pleasant and sweet words,' she came to understand the crux of her error. She had never truly looked to Christ as her saviour, since she had not accepted that his blood was 'sufficient for to wash me from the filth of my sins.' Repenting of being a 'proud Pharisee' who 'went about to set forth mine own righteousness,' she came to 'ripe and seasonable knowledge': 'This is the life everlasting, Lord, that I must believe thee to be the true God, and whom thou didst send, Jesu Christ.'[55]

Thomas Bilney came to the same conclusion upon reading Erasmus' new Latin translation of the Bible while at Cambridge.[56] 'After this, the Scripture began to be more pleasant unto me than the honey' because there 'I learned that, all my travails [in penitential works]' were 'a hasty and swift running out of the right way' but that sinners could 'obtain quietness and rest' when 'they believed in the promise of God.' As Bilney 'began to taste this heavenly lesson,' his greatest desire became to share this life-changing insight from Scripture with others.[57] When he did so with Hugh Latimer under the guise of confession, the result was, according to Latimer, that 'God called me to knowledge…So from that time forward I began to smell the word of God, and forsook the school-doctors and such fooleries.'[58] As Richard Rex has shown, the very phrase 'new learning' was coined, not to describe the academic direction represented by humanism *per se*, but rather the use of humanism to justify an interpretation of Scripture that rejected the medieval way of salvation.[59]

Thomas Cranmer also wrote that his conversion was the result of a process of enlightenment: 'From time to time as I grew in knowledge of [Jesus Christ], by little and little I put away my former ignorance.'[60] In his portrait of 1545 Cranmer has left us an important indication of how humanism could play a leading role in convincing an essentially traditionalist Cambridge don gradually to embrace the 'new learning.'

[55] Parr, *Lamentacion*, sigs. A2v, A4v, A5v, A6v, B3v.

[56] Bilney's description of his conversion is contained in correspondence to Bishop Cuthbert Tunstal during Bilney's 1527 heresy trial. See Davis, 'The Trials of Thomas Bylney and the English Reformation'; Walker, *Persuasive Fictions*, pp. 143–65.

[57] Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, pp. 1141–3. Foxe has given two versions, the original Latin and an English translation. All citations are based on Foxe's translation, but altered as needed for more precision and clarity in contemporary English against the Latin original.

[58] George Elwes Corrie, ed., *Sermons of Hugh Latimer* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1844), pp. 334–5.

[59] Richard Rex, 'The New Learning,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993), pp. 26–44.

[60] J.E. Cox, ed., *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer…relative to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1844), p. 374.

In the same year in which Luther wrote his famous autobiographical fragment, Gerlach Flicke painted Cranmer. Very much a typical Renaissance programmatic work, the painting depicts Cranmer seated, holding a copy of St. Paul's Epistles in his hands, while a copy of St. Augustine's *De fide et operibus* lies on a table in front of him. A product of Augustine's later affective theology, *On Faith and Good Works* outlined his mature understanding of the relationship between faith and works—the issue in dispute between Cranmer and the king over the Bishops' Book. On the one hand, Augustine clearly stated that Paul's teaching on justification by faith meant that good works did not precede justification, but followed it, because only people who had received the Holy Spirit could perform works out of love for righteousness. On the other hand, once Christ dwelt in the believer's heart by faith, this living faith necessarily produced good works performed out of love for God. In short, a good life was inseparable from faith, because a life could not be good without faith, and true faith could not but bear the fruit of a good life. If Erasmus awoke Cranmer to the authority of the Scriptures over the tenets of scholastic theology, the Flicke portrait suggests that Cranmer's reading of Augustine led him to consider justification by faith to be the true Pauline doctrine.

At first consideration, this emphasis on conversion through learning might seem to confirm Dickens' assessment of the essential intellectualism of Reformation Protestantism. Yet there is a surprisingly sensuous dimension to these early English descriptions. Katherine called the words of Scripture 'pleasant and sweet.'[61] Bilney claimed that through reading Scripture he 'felt' in himself a 'change from the most Highest.' For when he 'began to savour of this heavenly lesson,' he, too, found its message 'most sweet.'[62] Latimer went so far as to describe his doctrinal *volte-face* as coming 'to smell the Word of God.'[63] As Brad Gregory has noted:

> Tasting, imprinting, grafting, piercing, engraving, running, holding, rooting, cleaving, embracing—these terms do not reflect dispassionate encounter with a text…They reflect the experience of people who not only read scripture, but made it part of their being.[64]

Even the notoriously circumspect Cranmer seems to have permitted a cryptic reference to passion in his portrait. Although clerical marriage in England was still officially outlawed in 1545, the female carving next to the window-jamb would appear to be a very sophisticated reference to his clandestine spouse.[65] As Henry VIII's ambassador to Germany, Cranmer

[61] Parr, *Lamentacion*, sig. A2v.
[62] Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, pp. 1141–3.
[63] Corrie, *Sermons of Latimer*, pp. 334–5.
[64] Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, p. 160.
[65] See Null, *Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*, pp. 106–15.

wed in 1532 the niece of the wife of Andreas Osiander, the Lutheran reformer of Nuremburg. It is highly unlikely that the notoriously difficult Osiander would have allowed Cranmer to marry into his family, unless Cranmer had already adopted solifidianism. Nor would the cautious Cranmer probably have been willing to violate such a clear traditionalist taboo, unless he had come to accept the new doctrinal standards which authorised him to do so. Consequently, the most likely period for Cranmer's conversion is during his ambassadorship to Germany. A reference to this marriage in a portrait documenting his path to eventual Protestantism suggests that Cranmer's decision to embrace the 'new learning' involved more than just intellectual considerations. To understand the conversions of early English evangelicals we need to look beyond merely analysing the doctrinal dimensions of justification by faith and also examine how its message moved the affections of its true believers. Here was the source of their powerful self-identification with this new doctrine.

Christian Authenticity as an Alteration of the Affectations

One could hardly find a greater proponent of the importance of moving the affections than Erasmus himself. His scathing critique of scholastic theology and many medieval cultic practices was but the bitter fruit of his deeply-rooted conviction that they had failed to touch the hearts of the people sufficiently to inspire them to love God and do good.[66] Hence, Erasmus was one of the chief architects of the Renaissance's academic revolution that restored rhetoric to the heart of the university curriculum.[67] With its tri-partite mission to educate, to please and to move (*docere, delectare, movere*), the persuasive power of rhetoric was essential to the humanists' aim of bettering society through the moral improvement of its people.

Naturally, Erasmus felt this emphasis on transformation through the power of words must be the chief aim of the church's appropriation of

[66] See J. Laurel Carrington, 'Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1536)' in *The Reformation Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 34–48; Erika Rummel, 'The Theology of Erasmus' in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology,* eds. David Bagchi & David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 28–38.

[67] Erasmus was the author of several textbooks on rhetoric including *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum* ('Foundations of the Abundant Style'), the most influential book on rhetoric in the sixteenth century; Peter Mack, 'Humanist Rhetoric and Dialectic' in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaisance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 82–99, at p. 88. For a survey of modern assessments of Erasmus and rhetoric, see Bruce Mansfield, *Erasmus in the Twentieth Century: Interpretations c. 1920–2000* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 151–183.

Scripture.[68] In the *Paraclesis* ('Invitation'), a preface to his Greek-Latin New Testament of 1516 which so moved Bilney, Erasmus delighted in contrasting the superfluity of scholastic subtleties to the absolute necessity of biblical morality for true Christian identity:

> Neither think I that any man will count himself a faithful Christian because he can dispute with a craft and tedious perplexity of words of relations, quiddities and formalities, but in that he acknowledgeth and expresseth in deeds those things which Christ both taught and accomplished.[69]

Of course, only the inherent moral suasion of the Scriptures could bring about a Christian people who would 'not differ only in title and certain ceremonies from the heathen and unfaithful, but rather in the pure conversation of our life.'[70] For Jesus spiritually indwelt its message, since 'the Evangely [i.e., Gospel] doth represent and express the quick and living image of his most holy mind, yea, and Christ himself speaking, healing, dying, raising again and, to conclude, all parts of him.'[71] Consequently, using the same sensuous language we have already encountered in the writings of the English evangelicals, Erasmus urged Christians to devote themselves passionately to the Word of God:

> Let us, therefore, all with fervent desire thirst after these spiritual springs. Let us embrace them. Let us be studiously conversant with them. Let us kiss these sweet words of Christ with a pure affection. Let us be new transformed into them, for such are our manners as our studies be.[72]

Two years later Erasmus wrote a treatise on his rhetorical approach to the study of theology, the *Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi*

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[68] For Erasmus' rhetorical theology, see Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

[69] Erasmus, *An exhortation to the diligent studye of scripture* (Antwerp: J. Hoochstraten, 1529), sig. A2. I have elected to quote from English reformer William Roye's contemporary translation of Erasmus' Latin original. Spelling has been modernised in all quotations from this text. For the background of this translation, see the recent critical edition, Douglas H. Parker, ed., *William Roye's An exhortation to the diligent studye of scripture; and, An exposition in to the seventh chapter of the pistle to the Corinthians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 28–36.

[70] Erasmus, *An exhortation*, fol. [8]r.

[71] Erasmus, *An exhortation*, sig. A6r.

[72] Erasmus, *An exhortation*, sig. A5v.

ad veram theologiam ('Method of Attaining True Theology').[73] In its opening columns, he makes even more explicit the inherent connection between a personal affective response to Scripture and the humanist's desideratum of individual moral transformation: 'This is your first and only goal; perform this vow, this one thing: that you be changed, that you be seized, that you weep at and be transformed into those teachings which you learn.'[74] Having themselves been changed from the inside out, 'the special goal of theologians' was so to expound the Scriptures in order to elucidate the faith—rather than 'frivolous questions'—that they could likewise in their students 'wring out tears' and 'inflame spirits to heavenly things.'[75] Not surprisingly, Erasmus inserted a copy of this treatise as a foreword to the second edition of his New Testament in 1519.

As the author of one of the most influential textbooks on Renaissance Rhetoric, second only to Erasmus himself,[76] it was natural that Philip Melanchthon would explain Luther's soteriology in a manner consistent with that discipline's emphasis on the moving of the affections.[77] In his *Loci communes* (1521), Melanchthon argued that the affections of the heart determined the choices of the will. Hence, after the Fall, both human reason and the will were held captive by the affection of self-love, i.e., the concupiscence of the flesh. Therefore, moral transformation could come about only through the intervention of an outside force, the Holy Spirit. When the good news of justification by faith was proclaimed, the Spirit, working through God's Word, assured believers of their salvation. This new confidence in God's gracious goodwill towards them reoriented their affections, calming their turbulent hearts and inflaming in them a grateful love in return. These new godly affections would continually have to fight to restrain the ever-present stirrings of the concupiscence of the flesh. Nevertheless, because of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit believers now had the necessary desire and ability to live a life of

[73] Erasmus, *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. J. Leclerc (Leiden: Pieter van der Aa, 1703–6), V, cols. 73–138. See Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology*, pp. 32–9, 55–60; O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language*, pp. 59–127.

[74] 'Hic primus et unicus tibi sit scopus, hoc votum, hoc unum age, ut muteris, ut rapiaris, ut affleris, ut transformeris in ea quae discis,' Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, V, col. 77B; O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language*, p. 73.

[75] 'At praecipuus Theologorum scopus est, sapienter enarrare Divinas litteras: de fide, non de frivolis questionibus rationem reddere: de pietate graviter atque efficaciter disserere: lacrymas excutere, ad coelestia inflammare animos,' Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, cols. 83F–84A; O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language*, p. 73.

[76] See Philipp Melanchthon, *Elementa rhetorices/Grundbegriffe der Rhetorik*, transl. Volkhard Wels (Berlin: Weidler, 2001), pp. 443–61; Kees Meerhoff, 'The Significance of Philip Melanchthon's Rhetoric in the Renaissance' in *Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. Peter Mack (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), pp. 46–62.

[77] For a fuller account see, Null, *Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*, pp. 98–101.

deepening repentance. Seen in this light, accepting Luther's Reformation insight was the key to experiencing the affective transformation demanded by Erasmus' rhetorical theology. Little wonder it became proverbial that Luther hatched the egg Erasmus laid.

The conversion narratives of both Bilney and Katherine read like textbook case-studies of solifidianism producing new, Spirit-infused affections in its adherents. According to their accounts, when they accepted that justification by faith was the gospel truth, they sensed a radically new and life-changing spiritual power at work within them. In his relatively compact description, Bilney compared his experience to the story of the chronically ill woman in Luke 8:43–48. She had spent twelve years seeking a remedy for her on-going bleeding without success. Yet when she managed in faith to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, 'she was so healed that immediately, she felt it in her body.'[78] Likewise, Bilney had worn himself out in trying to satisfy his scrupulous conscience with years of penitential activities. Yet in the moment he first trusted that Jesus freely offered full forgiveness to sinners like himself, he experienced a perceptible inner change: 'immediately, I felt a marvellous comfort and quietness, in so much, *that my bruised bones leapt for joy*.'[79]

Significantly, Bilney stated that he had felt this sensible spiritual healing 'more than once.'[80] Clearly, his evangelical inner wholeness could still be wounded. Now, however, when fresh sins weighed upon his conscience, Bilney considered himself armed with gospel knowledge. He knew to approach Christ in faith once again for immediate pardon rather than resorting to priestly confession and a further round of increasingly inadequate penitential offerings as in the past. Here was the motivation for Bilney's activism. He engaged in evangelistic campaigns in order to share with others the same pastoral strategy for inner affective wholeness that he himself had found through justification by faith. Here was also the reason why Bilney was at pains to portray his initial acceptance of solifidianism in Damascene terms. Anything less than a convincing account of instantaneous forgiveness would not have addressed what he considered to be the root of the church's pastoral misdirection—the medieval insistence on the necessity of a significant period of preparation for pardon. Not surprisingly, nothing seemed to Bilney more clearly the work of Antichrist than one famous preacher's warning:

> Thou hast lain rotting in thine own lusts, by the space of these sixty years, even as a beast in his own dung, and wilt thou presume in one year, to go

[78] NB that Foxe translated 'statim' with 'by and by,' a sixteenth-century usage for 'immediately'; *Actes and Monuments*, pp. 1141–2.
[79] Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, pp. 1141, 1143.
[80] 'Non semel,' Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, p. 1141.

> forward toward heaven, and that in thine age, as much as thou wentest backwards from heaven towards hell in sixty years?[81]

If Bilney had been plagued with anxiety about his spiritual state before his conversion, Katherine Parr suffered from the opposite danger—'great confidence' in the pope's 'riff-raff' remedies for her sins. Although she had only a 'certain vain, blind knowledge, both cold and dead,' she saw no need to inquire more closely into gospel matters. Indeed, turning the standard slogan of medieval penitential teaching on its head, Katherine wrote of her previous piety: 'I did as much as was in me to obfuscate and darken the great benefit of Christ's passion.' Content to follow the crowd in matters of religion, she was not concerned that the good news about the cross of Christ was 'never truly and lively printed' in her heart.[82]

Then God opened her eyes to what true faith was—not a

> dead human, historical faith, gotten by human industry, but a supernal lively faith, which worketh by charity, as [St. Paul] himself plainly expresseth. This dignity of faith is no derogation to good works, for out of this faith springeth all good works.[83]

Of course, it was standard medieval penitential teaching to insist that faith was not justifying until it was formed by the divine gift of charity. Yet, Katherine made clear that was not what she meant. She insisted that the gift of indwelling charity, as well as the good works which it produced, were the fruit of living faith, not its grounds.

According to Katherine, the divine gift of living faith first opened her eyes to the truth that her salvation was totally dependent on 'Christ crucified.' 'Then I began (and not before) to perceive and see mine own ignorance and blindness.' Realising how stubborn and ungrateful she had been to refuse to rely on Christ alone earlier, 'all pleasures, vanities, honour, riches, wealth, and aides of the world began to wear bitter unto me.' This alteration in her affections was the turning point for Katherine: 'Then I knew it was no illusion of the devil, nor false, [nor] human doctrine I had received: when such success came thereof, that I had in detestation and horror, that which I [formerly] so much loved and esteemed.'[84]

By the light of living faith Katherine now recognised that her 'sins in the consideration of them to be so grievous and in the number so exceeding' that she deserved eternal damnation. Yet she saw that her prior penitential works had only been a 'hindrance'—the more she had sought 'means and ways to wind' herself out of her sinful state, the more

[81] Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, p. 1145.
[82] Parr, *Lamentacion*, sigs. A4v, A5r, A6r, A7v.
[83] Parr, *Lamentacion*, sig. B4r.
[84] Parr, *Lamentacion*, sigs. B5r–B6r.

she had in fact become 'wrapped and tangled therein.' Consequently, she now put all her hope in one thing only—the promise of full, free and immediate pardon in God's 'own Word.' 'Saint Paul saith, we be justified by the faith in Christ, and not by the deeds of the law.' Therefore, 'by this faith I am assured: and by this assurance, I feel the remission of my sins.' Experiencing assurance brought the 'inward consolation' of having imputed right standing with God: 'I feel myself to come, as it were in a new garment, before God, and now by his mercy, to be taken just, and rightwise.' Hence, 'all fear of damnation' was gone for those who with justifying faith 'put their whole hope of salvation in his hands that will and can perform it.' Katherine admitted that true believers would still fall into sin because of their human 'frailty.' Yet they needed only to humble themselves and return to God by trusting in his goodness. Now freed from all fear because of the love of God in bringing her to salvation, Katherine began to love and serve him in gratitude. Thus, from justifying faith 'sprang this excellent charity' in her heart.[85]

Katherine's account of her conversion makes clear that she adopted solifidianism not as a repudiation of her late medieval emotive piety, but precisely because she found its grace and gratitude theology much more effective in moving her affections than the traditional medieval means. Indeed, her active patronage of an English translation of Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on the Gospels and Acts, finally published just two months after the story of her conversion,[86] suggests that she understood her mature soteriology to be the true means of fulfilling the expectations of Erasmian humanism, not its betrayal. For, according to Katherine's account, only the ever-present hope associated with justification by faith had imprinted on her heart the assurance of benefiting from the cross, thereby redirecting her desires and enabling her at last to experience the indwelling presence of divine love. As a result, she agreed with those who said 'by their own experience of themselves that their faith doth not justify them.' For 'true it is, except they have this faith the which I have declared here before, they shall never be justified…because so many lack the true faith.'[87]

The life-changing 'lively faith' experienced by Katherine Parr was exactly the sort that Thomas Cranmer wanted the formularies of the Church of England to encourage. As early as July 1536, the description of contrition in the Ten Articles stressed the classic evangelical narrative of

[85] Parr, *Lamentacion*, sigs. A8r, B1r–B2v, B3v–B4v, B6v, C5v, F7r.

[86] John Craig, 'Forming a Protestant Consciousness? Erasmus' Paraphrases in English Parishes, 1547–1666' in *Holy Scripture Speaks: The Production and Reception of Erasmus' Paraphrases on the New Testament*, eds. Hilmar M. Pabel & Mark Vessey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 313–59, at pp. 316–22.

[87] Parr, *Lamentacion*, sig. B7r.

an initial heart-felt struggle with fear of damnation which then gave way to certain hope of eternal salvation through faith in Christ:

> The penitent and contrite man must first acknowledge the filthiness and abomination of his own sin (unto which knowledge he is brought by hearing and considering of the will of God declared in his laws) and feeling and perceiving in his own conscience that God is angry and displeased with him for the same. He must also conceive not only great sorrow and inward shame that he hath so grievously offended God, but also great fear of God's displeasure towards him, considering he hath no works, or merits of his own, which he may worthily lay before God as sufficient satisfaction for his sins. Which done, then afterward with this fear, shame and sorrow must needs succeed and be conjoined…a certain faith, trust, and confidence of the mercy and goodness of God, whereby the penitent must conceive certain hope and faith, that God will forgive him his sins, and repute him justified, and of the number of his elect children, 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 Jesus Christ.

A year later the text was wholly incorporated into the Bishops' Book.[88]

Significantly, this description of contrition had already abandoned the medieval teaching that Christians should face the future with a sober uncertainty about their eternal fate, striving to lead a godly life in a constant state of both hope and fear. But Cranmer wanted the Church of England formularies to go even further. In his response to Henry VIII over the Bishops' Book, Cranmer, in good Melanchthonian fashion, sought to make clear that assurance of salvation was not only a necessary part of true faith but also the true source of indwelling love:

> But, if the profession of our faith of the remission of our own sins enter within us into the deepness of our hearts, then it must needs kindle a warm fire of love in our hearts towards God, and towards all other for the love of God,—a fervent mind to seek and procure God's honour, will, and pleasure in all things,—a good will and mind to help every man and to do good unto them, so far as our might, wisdom, learning, counsel, health, strength, and all other gifts which we have received of God, will extend,—and, *in summa*, a firm intent and purpose to do all that is good, and leave all that is evil.[89]

Cranmer had to wait until the reign of Edward VI to produce a set of formularies for the Church of England which fully expressed his mature

[88] *The Institution of a Christen man* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1537), fol. 37r. Spelling has been modernised in this quotation.

[89] Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 86.

evangelical soteriology. Required to be read on a regular basis in parishes from 1547, his three homilies on salvation, faith and good works made solifidianism normative for the English church.[90] Firstly, Christians were reputed just, not because of anything within them, but only because of their trust in Christ's redeeming work on the cross.[91] Secondly, justifying faith was more than just intellectual assent to dogmatic statements. Since demons also acknowledged Christian doctrine to be true, saving faith was not merely accepting the teachings of Scripture but also always included assurance of the believer's own salvation.[92] Thirdly, indwelling love sprang from this assurance: 'For the right and true Christian faith is… to have sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises, to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ: whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments.'[93] Finally, saving faith was a 'lively faith,' that is, a faith which showed its love for God by doing good works.[94] When the benefits of God's merciful grace were considered, unless they were 'desperate persons' with 'hearts harder than stones,' people would be moved to give themselves wholly unto God and the service of their neighbours.[95] Thus, assurance brought about an inner change in the justified—a loving, living faith that purified the heart from sin's poison and made 'the sinner clean a new man.'[96]

In sum, although Thomas Bilney and Katherine Parr had different pastoral issues, both came to the same conclusion that accepting justification by faith enabled them to experience true biblical conversion away from sin towards a life-long service of God and greater godliness. As Steinmetz has rightly argued, the deep-seated nature of human self-centredness meant that the new power both Bilney and Katherine felt working within them would always be provoking them to further conformity to Christ.[97] Yet their loving desire to continue to repent was the direct result of the freedom from fear of damnation they experienced in the moment they first trusted Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross to win for them eternal salvation, as Pettegree's multi-step description of the conversion process has suggested. This renewal of their affections was the source of their powerful self-identification with the evangelical cause. Here was the inner impetus for Bilney's activism and Katherine's

[90] For an extended analysis of 'A Homily of the Salvation of Mankind,' 'A Short Declaration of the True, Lively and Christian Faith,' and 'A Homily of Good Works Annexed unto Faith,' see Null, *Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*, pp. 213–34.
[91] Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings*, pp. 128–30.
[92] Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 133.
[93] Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings*.
[94] Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 136.
[95] Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 134.
[96] Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 86.
[97] Steinmetz, 'Reformation and Conversion,' p. 30.

publishing projects. This grateful love for God was also the new internal motivation for the Christian life that Thomas Cranmer attempted to inculcate in everyone in the country through his shaping of the evolving formularies of the Church of England. Thus, the first generation of English reformers turned to the evangelicals' new script for forgiveness, not as an alternative to the affective piety of their medieval upbringing, but in their view as its true fulfilment.

The Wesleyan Recovery of Tudor Evangelical Assurance

If the effective moving of the affections was integral to the conversion of England's sixteenth-century evangelicals, then the distance between them and their eighteenth-century namesakes is not nearly so great as modern scholars have supposed. Indeed, the role of affective experience in the English Reformation has particular consequences for David Bebbington's work, since he has based his argument for the uniqueness of modern evangelicalism squarely on the newness of its doctrine of assurance. According to Bebbington, 'the Puritans had held that assurance is rare, late and the fruit of struggle in the experience of believers,' whereas 'the Evangelicals believed it to be general, normally given at conversion and the result of simple acceptance of the gift of God.'[98] Hence, the 'novelty of Evangelical religion…lay precisely in claiming that assurance normally accompanies conversion.'[99]

In the case of John Wesley, Bebbington attributes this supposed shift in the received doctrine of assurance to specific 'symptoms of discontinuity' from seventeenth-century Puritanism. Firstly, Wesley was an Enlightenment thinker who believed that knowledge was a matter of sense experience. Secondly, his 'High church quest for holiness' left him with nagging doubts about his salvation. Thirdly, his acceptance of contemporary Continental Protestant teaching via the Moravians led him to look for an inner witness of assurance to assuage his anxieties. Consequently, his religious experience at Aldersgate simply confirmed his empiricist epistemology. According to Bebbington, the end result was evangelicalism's dynamism, for 'without assurance, the priority for the individual in earnest about salvation had to be its acquisition; with it, the essential task was the propagation of the good news that others, too, could know the joy of sins forgiven.'[100]

It is beyond the purview of this chapter to determine whether Bebbington's characterisation of seventeenth-century Puritan doctrine is

[98] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 43.
[99] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 7.
[100] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 42–3, 48–50.

accurate.[101] However, it must be immediately noted that *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* never actually discusses England's Reformation era. As a result, Bebbington has no awareness of the English Reformers' own doctrine of joyous assurance accompanying conversion. Far more surprisingly, however, neither does Bebbington ever examine John Wesley's own clear and consistent claim to be following the Reformation understanding of assurance as enshrined by Cranmer in the founding formularies of the Church of England. When modern Anglican evangelicals like those of the Diocese of Sydney maintain that their adherence to the Thirty-Nine Articles gives them a '*locus standi*' in the Church of England and its wider Communion,[102] they are merely following in the footsteps of John Wesley.

In mid-November 1738, a little more than six months after his life-changing experience at Aldersgate, Wesley recorded in his journal that he began 'more narrowly to inquire what the doctrine of the Church of England is concerning the much controverted point of justification by faith; and the sum of what I found in The Homilies I extracted and printed for the use of others.' The result was *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works, Extracted from the Homilies of the Church of England*, a short pamphlet of twelve pages that went through at least nineteen editions during Wesley's lifetime.[103] Since the *Book of Homilies* had been given official doctrinal status by the Thirty-Nine Articles, Wesley sought to use these selections to prove that both his teaching on justification by faith and the necessity of personal assurance were not novel at all but merely the true received teaching of the Church of England.

In particular, Wesley highlighted with italics the following passage from Cranmer's 'Homily on Salvation':

> *The right and true Christian faith is not only to believe that Holy Scripture and the articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ, whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments.*[104]

Wesley also included the following passage from Cranmer's 'Homily on Faith':

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[101] See Garry Williams, 'Enlightenment Epistemology and the Eighteenth-Century Evangelical Doctrines of Assurance,' in Stewart & Haykin, *The Emergence of Evangelicalism*, pp. 345 to 374.

[102] *Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine, Subscription and Assent to the 39 Articles* (London: SPCK, 1968), p. 32.

[103] Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 16, 121.

[104] Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 128.

> Another faith there is in Scripture which is not idle [or] unfruitful but (as St. Paul declares) 'worketh by love'…so this may be called a quick or [living] faith. This is not only a belief of the articles of our faith but also a 'true trust and confidence of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ and a steadfast hope of all good things at God's hand' called by St. Paul, 'The full assurance of faith'; a confidence [that though we should] fall from him by sin, yet if we return to him by true repentance, he will forgive our offences for his Son's sake and make us his inheritors of his everlasting Kingdom.[105]

In a footnote to this paragraph, Wesley added: 'It is the doctrine of the Church of England to which every minister of our Church hath subscribed, in subscribing the Thirty-fifth Article, that "without or before this [faith] can no good work be done."'[106] Time and again John and Charles Wesley would refer to the Homilies to prove the essential Anglican orthodoxy of their teaching on assurance.[107] So successful were such claims that the former Anglican divine Theophilus Lindsey became a Unitarian, since he concluded that only the Methodists truly preached the doctrine of the Thirty-Nine Articles. Anglican divine Thomas Scott eventually concurred with Lindsey's assessment, but he decided to take the opposite approach, converting to Methodism himself.[108]

Of course, such doctrinal comparisons across centuries are always fraught with difficulties. Every dogmatic point is always intertwined in both a wider theological system and a specific cultural view of the world, both of which in turn reflect as well as express the human assumptions and experiences of a particular historical era. It is not possible, therefore, that John Wesley simply repristinated the pure teachings of Thomas Cranmer's formularies. Since Methodism was a conscious synthesis of both Laudian and Reformation strains of Anglicanism, there were significant doctrinal differences between its adherents and the English reformers. At the very least, Wesley's emphasis on free will was at odds with the Reformed doctrine of predestination taught by Cranmer and the sixteenth-century Church of England, as Augustus Toplady was at pains to point out.[109]

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[105] Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 130. Brackets indicate Wesley's interpolations. Outler's additional references to Scripture verses have been deleted.

[106] Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 130, n.19.

[107] Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth, 1970), pp. 54–6, 70, 92–3, 104, 249, 327–8; Richard P. Heitzenrater, 'Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,' in *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood, 1990), pp. 49–91, at pp. 69–70, 77–8, 83–4; Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 141.

[108] Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, pp. 277–82.

[109] Augustus Montague Toplady, *Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England* (London: George Keith, 1774). Cf. B.G. Felce, 'Toplady's View

Consequently, Cranmer taught an assurance of salvation because of the perseverance promised to the justified.[110] Wesley, however, interpreted the Homilies as teaching only assurance of present pardon, since Wesley never ceased to believe that the justified could refuse, when fallen into sin, to 'return to [God] by true repentance.'[111] Equally, there were significant cultural differences between them, including that the sixteenth century's division between an individual's self-fashioned public role and the privacy of his interior life before God had greatly diminished by the eighteenth. We have no direct knowledge of Thomas Cranmer's inner life. We have the many volumes of John Wesley's journals, specifically edited for public dissemination. Finally, the intellectual assumptions of the two historical eras were also greatly different. Erasmus' realist rhetorical theology as adapted and harnessed to interpret and expound the Lutheran understanding of Christian anthropology lies behind Cranmer's formularies. David Bebbington is surely correct to insistent on the influence of empiricist epistemology in helping Wesley to interpret his religious experience and to inculcate the same in others of his day.[112]

Despite these notable differences, however, we must not overlook the marked similarities. Bebbington's own description of Wesley's life leading up to Aldersgate in fact reflects a classic Reformation conversion narrative. Driven by anxiety produced by a traditionalist Catholic pursuit of holiness,[113] but holding out hope for a sensible pardon as promised by Continental Protestantism,[114] John Wesley personally encountered the

of Doctrinal Continuity after the Reformation' in *The Evangelical Succession in the Church of England*, ed. D.N. Samuel (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1979), pp. 30–9.

[110] 'And [the true faithful man's] trust is so much in God, that he doubteth not in God's goodness toward him, but that, if by fragility and weakness he fall again, God will not suffer him so to lie still, but put his hand to him and help him up again, and so at the last he will take him up from death unto the life of glory everlasting,' Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 93.

[111] 'We speak of an assurance of our present pardon, not (as he does) of our final perseverance,' John Wesley, 6 October 1738, *Journal in The Works of John Wesley,* editor-in-chief, Frank Baker (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984ff), Vol. 19, p. 15; Frederick Dreyer, 'Faith and Experience in the Thought of John Wesley,' *American Historical Review* 88 (1983), pp. 12–30, at pp. 16, 22; Heitzenrater, 'Great Expectations,' p. 72.

[112] Cf. Dreyer, 'Faith and Experience,' pp. 21–30.

[113] Wesley even cited as indicative of his own thinking the classic medieval scholastic maxim, 'Fac quod in te est, et Deus aderit bonae tuae voluntati,' which he translated as, 'Do what lieth in thy power, and God will assist thy good will'; Heitzenrater, 'Great Expectations,' p. 61. Yet, Wesley's diaries also record his frustration with relying on sincerity for assurance. According to Heitzenrater, 'the closer [Wesley] kept track of himself, the more he became aware of his shortcomings, doubted his sincerity, and feared lest he should fall short of the mark of his calling,' 'Great Expectations,' p. 58.

[114] Cf. Heitzenrater, 'Great Expectations,' pp. 61–5.

kind of religious experience and subsequent motivation in the Christian life that were the stated ideals of the Edwardian Reformers.[115] He then looked to both the philosophical assumptions of his era and the received teachings of his church to understand his experience as well as to give him the language needed to pass it on to others of his era. In short, Wesley's doctrine of assurance was at the same time both the recovery of an authentic aspect of the affective tradition in the English Reformation as well as an Enlightenment innovation in the means of its interpretation and presentation for an eighteenth-century audience. Having learned much from both past Cranmerian 'convertites' and his era's own *philosophes*, Wesley, unlike Shakespeare's Jaques, was a highly pertinent role model for those in his audiences seeking to purge themselves of their spiritual and social ills. Perhaps herein lies the greatest difference between the Edwardian and Wesleyan teachings on conversion—not their equally emotive dimension as previously thought, but rather how much more popular Wesley's explanation was in its eighteenth-century English cultural context than Cranmer's was in its sixteenth.

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[115] Wesley would, however, spend a lifetime reflecting upon this experience and refining his interpretation of its significance; Heitzenrater, 'Great Expectations,' pp. 65– 91.