

THE CONCEPT OF PURGATORY IN ENGLAND

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It is not the purpose of this dissertation to present a history of Purgatory; rather, it is to show through the history the influence of purgatorial doctrine on the English lay community and the need of that community for this doctrine. Having established the importance this doctrine held for so many in England, with an examination of the chantry institution in England, this study then examines how this doctrine was stripped away from the laity by political and religious reformers during the sixteenth century. Purgatorial belief was adversely affected when chantries were closed in execution of the chantry acts under Henry VIII and Edward VI. These chantries were vital to the laity and not moribund institutions.

Purgatorial doctrine greatly influenced the development and concept of the medieval English community. Always seen to be tightly knit, this community had a transgenerational quality, a spiritual and congregational quality, and a quality extending beyond the grave. The Catholic church was central to this definition of community, distributing apotropaic powers, enhancing the congregational aspects, and brokering the relationship with the dead. The elements of the Roman liturgy were essential to community cohesiveness, as were the material and ritual supports for this liturgy. The need of the community for purgatorial doctrine shaped and popularized this doctrine

Next, an analysis of surviving and resurging elements of expiatory rites is explored; ritual, especially that surrounding death, as well as the relationship with the dead, were sorely missed when stripped away through political actions linked to Protestant belief. This deficiency of ritual aspects within the emerging Protestant

religion became evident in further years as some of the same customs and rituals that were considered anathema by Protestants slowly crept back into the Protestant liturgy in an attempt to restore the relationship between the living and the dead. Strong evidence of this is provided through sixteenth to nineteenth century death eulogies, surviving rites of expiation, as well as lay essays and popular literature discussing the phenomenon called the Sin-Eater.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The notion of purgatory or a third place had great and direct impact on the way people thought because this third place was the immediate destination of the soul after death in the minds of most Christians. People imagined at death that this would be the next form of being. They also imagined the dead to be held in this state until last judgment, some sort of transitory state in which the dead could be aided. Their direct relationship with purgatory and those held in purgatory was an important element of religious and community life. The vitality of traditional religious life in medieval England was linked with the doctrine of purgatory.

The history of Purgatorial doctrine has been examined by theological and secular historians alike. These discussions have been ongoing since well before the Reformation and continue to attract the attention of modern Reformation scholars. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to present a history of purgatory; rather, it is to show through the history the influence of purgatorial doctrine on the English lay community and the need of that community for this doctrine.

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a transgenerational quality, a spiritual and congregational quality, and a quality extending beyond the grave. The Catholic church was central to this definition of community, distributing apotropaic powers, enhancing the congregational aspects, and brokering the relationship with the dead. The elements of the Roman liturgy were essential to community cohesiveness, as were the material and ritual supports for this liturgy. The need of the community for purgatorial doctrine shaped and popularized this doctrine.

The doctrine of purgatory is a Roman liturgical practice but did not find its origins in this liturgy. Instead, this doctrine emerged out of cultural traditions of the Indo-European world well before the advent of Christianity. Therefore, an examination into the roots of the purgatorial concept via pagan influences and theological discussions by early church fathers provides a clear understanding of the early church's acceptance of this belief. The idea of a third place started mainly from the ancient Greeks concepts of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. This doctrine of the immortality of the soul was linked with correct moral behavior and the shunning of material needs, and thus the need for purification. The nascent Catholic church imbibed and developed these concepts of the afterlife, which fit so well with descriptions of the apocalypse. Concepts of an afterlife in which the supplications of those living might assist those dead were long held by the early Christian church. Prayers for the dead are evident in the many of the earliest writings of the early church. While no state or condition of purgatory was ever mentioned by the early Church Fathers, the practice of

praying for the dead leads one to ask what were they praying for if not for their God to have mercy on those souls already dead. These concepts of the afterlife were introduced into England during its first conversion between the third and fourth centuries C.E.¹ They remained a fixture of the Christian communities in England throughout its evolving inculturation process.

The penitential and sacramental systems that developed during the Anglo-Saxon period of England mirrored and reinforced the Anglo-Saxon Dooms,² were basic to this society, and revolved around penance for this world and for the next. This penitential system was Germanized, dummed down and inserted into an even more decayed Carolingian church, where a very low form of ledger book Christianity was popularized. The sacramental and penitential systems spread through Cluniac monasteries that offered perpetual prayers for the dead to those who contributed to the well being of the monasteries. The taking of sacraments came to be seen as a way to help the dead, a 'works' that shortened the time of purgatory, boosting the sacramental system. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries purgatory formed a central doctrine of the church and one that reinforced and was reinforced by the sacramental system.

The English community seems to have had a special place in its heart for purgatory. Private chapels, or chantries, to carry on purgatorial practices, were popular everywhere, but particularly in England. When Henry VIII and Edward VI

¹ Adrian Fortescue, *The Mass: A study of the Roman Liturgy*, eds. Bernard Ward and Herbert Thurston (New York: Preserving Christian Publications, 2007).

² Customary law set forth by the Anglo-Saxon kings prior to the Norman invasion (ca. 560 BCE to 975 BCE).

dissolved the chantries, they attempted to extinguish a system that was vital to the community but dependent on Rome. They made a special mission of collecting and disposing of relics and ending the material culture that surrounded and supported the doctrine of purgatory. However, the concern for the dead was vital to the English community; purgatory began to reassert itself in other forms almost as soon as it was extinguished.

It is not the intention of this study to prove or disprove the “truth” of any purgatorial doctrine, but rather to examine why the early church believed in this phenomenon and how such a belief came to be accepted by so many in England. Having established the importance this doctrine held for so many in England, with an examination of the chantry institution in England, this study then examines how this doctrine was stripped away from the laity by political and religious reformers during the sixteenth century. Purgatorial belief was adversely affected when chantries were closed in execution of the chantry acts under Henry VIII and Edward VI. These chantries were vital to the laity and not moribund institutions.

Next, an analysis of surviving and resurging elements of expiatory rites is explored; ritual, especially that surrounding death, as well as the relationship with the dead, were sorely missed when stripped away through political actions linked to Protestant belief. This deficiency of ritual aspects within the emerging Protestant religion became evident in further years as some of the same customs and rituals that were considered anathema by Protestants slowly crept back into

the Protestant liturgy in an attempt to restore the relationship between the living and the dead. Strong evidence of this is provided from sixteenth to early-eighteenth century death eulogies, surviving rites of expiation, as well as lay essays and popular literature discussing the phenomenon called the Sin-Eater.

Finally, a mistake that must be avoided from the outset is the assumption that the concept of a Third Place between heaven and hell is held only within the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths. Many religions include similar ideas when reduced to their core beliefs. Such faiths as Hinduism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism, to mention only a few, all hold similar beliefs concerning what Miriam Van Scott refers to as the “Purgatorial Hell.” For example, lying between Djanna and Jahannah, the Islamic Limbo, Al Aaraaf, bears a striking resemblance to its counterpart in the West, an intermediate condition in which the “morally neutral” reside. The existence of a purgatory-like concept in other religions demonstrates that the need for a relationship with the dead exists in many other cultures and is a basic human emotion.³ This may help the reader understand that while in England, first as a political move rather than a religious undertaking, the stripping of the purgatorial doctrine away from the laity resulted in many resurgences of belief systems concerning the afterlife that were contrary to Protestant beliefs.

³ Miriam Van Scott, *Encyclopedia of Hell* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 10, 240, 308.

CHAPTER II

INTERACTION OF RITUAL AND MYTH WITHIN SOCIETY

Scholars such as Peter Brown and E.R. Dodds have long argued the importance of syncretism between Christianity and the Greco-Roman world. The mythological world, according to Brown, was one in which the philosophers and theologians of Late Antiquity (whether Christian or pagan) might find truth, not abstract, meaningless tales.⁴ A true citizen of the Roman world, Christian or pagan, must not abandon Roman culture with its Greek background. Christianity became the caretaker of the *Pax Romana* and Roman culture.⁵ Brown asserts Christianity, not paganism, ensured the survival of Platonism.⁶ The development of purgatory within the Catholic church is an example of this Platonic influence. The early church absorbed Greco-Roman cultural elements, such as duties to one's ancestors and fellow citizens after death. Therefore, theologians of the late third and early fourth centuries' held a strong sense of *pietas* towards their adherents. Brown asserts that the reason for such a strong sense of

⁴ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 75-77; see also E.R. Dodds *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience From Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1965.)

⁵ *Ibid.*, 82-84.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

responsibility was due to the fact that these theologians “firmly believed that they would have to stand before Christ in the Last Judgment, to answer for the sins of the population of their cities.” Further Brown highlights the prominent spending habits of elite Romans, conspicuous consumption that was meant to be publicly noticeable. As time passed this penchant for spending moved from providing for public works projects during the second century to providing for the remission of sins during the fifth century and onwards.⁷ Therefore, an examination of the roots of the purgatorial ideal provides a clear understanding of the syncretism between these two cultures.

Rural traditions, ritualized customs, and community mythology influenced the doctrine of purgatory. In order to understand how they influenced the doctrine of purgatory, one must first understand the concept of myth. A myth is defined as a fundamental truth that cannot be proven by science or religion, but may be supported by them. It is a universal truth that is understood throughout various cultures, with its fundamental purpose being to help bring humankind closer to the essential truth of its inner self. It is through the story of myth that humanity has been able to explain its existence on this earth, as well as predict its future role. In simpler terms, it is the story of life at its most basic level, shaping humankind’s notion of the divine and its internal self. As the late mythologist Joseph Campbell stated: “It [myth] puts us back in touch with the

⁷ Ibid., 108-109.

essential archetypology of our spiritual life.”⁸ Campbell helps us to better understand Edward Muir’s elucidation of the function of ritual in early modern Europe. Muir held that the functions of rituals were to act as “rules of conduct” by which communities and their inhabitants were led. He also explained the difficulty modern scholars have when trying to interpret actions taken by these past communities. Muir contended that “rituals give access to emotional states that resist expression in language, which is why they have become so desired and yet distrusted in our logo-centric culture.”⁹ Thus, following Muir’s interpretation, these rituals (or mythologies) were what held communities together. Rituals acted not as conduits to the supernatural per se, but rather were instruments that brought about community solidarity by allowing a community’s inhabitants to share in life’s difficulties, especially those surrounding death and the afterlife.¹⁰

For the purpose of this study it is important to consider the importance of mythologies as creating a link between humanity, divinity, and nature. The overall beginnings and future development of what came to be known as a purgatorial belief can be explained by a human’s desire to ascertain its place in this universe, as well understand the nature of truth. Truth then becomes in some sense a type of “myth” itself. These are fundamental questions that humanity has asked time and time again. Andrew Lang supported this statement

⁸ Joseph Campbell, “Sacrifice and Bliss,” in *The Power of Myth*, interview by Bill Moyers, ed. Betty Flowers (New York Doubleday, 1988), 97.

⁹ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 2-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

when he stated that he “saw in the myth a kind of primitive scientific theory: Mythology answered the insistent human HOW? And WHY? How and why was the world made? How and why were living creatures brought into being? Why, if there was life must there be death?”¹¹ It was these issues that the early church was already grappling with well before the medieval era.

It is erroneous to assume that the doctrine of purgatory was itself an emerging doctrine of twelfth-century France as the eminent medieval historian Jacques Le Goff stressed in his seminal work *La Naissance du Purgatoire*. Yet, LeGoff did offer some enlightening elements concerning purgatorial doctrine. The author stated that the purgatorial doctrine was so successful simply “because it incorporated certain very ancient symbolic traditions.”¹² When considering what the eventual doctrine of purgatory came to be, culture, as much as clerics, had an impact. Although the word purgatory itself did not appear in an official capacity until the thirteenth century, underlying Greco-Roman ritual beliefs foreshadowed the establishment of a purgatorial doctrine. As will be shown, the early church’s liturgy and tradition reflected a belief in the efficaciousness of prayers for the dead, a belief that soon developed into grand visionary tales of the afterlife. From these traditions emerged the medieval doctrine of purgatory spoken of with such eloquence by LeGoff.

¹¹ Clyde Kluckhohn, “Myths and Rituals: A General Theory,” in *Myth and Literature*, ed. John B. Vickery (Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966), 33.

¹² Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 11.

The early church found itself living among such traditions and cultural beliefs. Historian John Van Engen stated that, “the great mass of medieval folk lived in a ‘folklore’ culture best likened to that observed by anthropologists in Third World countries. Forms of primitive magic and not faith largely governed religious-cultural attitudes and practices.”¹³ Thus it is not so surprising that ancient beliefs and customs concerning the dead found their way into the liturgy of the early church. A pre-existing cultural acceptance of Purgatorial concepts was necessary in order for any purgatorial doctrine to be successful in the church.

Countless works have been produced on the numerous examples of “pagan continuity;” therefore, only those examples that produce the strongest ‘echo’ of familiarity with purgatory are given here. Many scholars in the vein of such mythologists as Joseph Campbell have pointed to a long history of civilizations believing in some type of afterlife that encompasses punishment. As Rodolfo Lanciani stated: “The cult of saints and worship at the graves of the dead have been seen as a pagan legacy.”¹⁴ Lanciani revealed the extent to which early Romans went in order to prepare themselves for entry into the afterlife, pointing out that these individuals’ efforts did not end with their death, but continued through the efforts of their progeny. Those Romans with the financial ability to do so left large funds for the sole purpose of their remembrance. These

¹³ John Van Engen, “The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (June 1986): 519.

¹⁴ Rodolfo Lanciani, *Pagan and Christian Rome* (Mass.: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), 21-23.

'remembrances' were performed at the deceased's tomb, and, according to Lanciani, they were "a man's best retort to the debts accrued in his lifetime."¹⁵

Roman life was itself a day-by-day calendar of festival events designed to explain man's involvement with nature and the divine. An illustration of this is represented by the *dies parentales* (days of worshiping the dead) that occurred between the thirteenth and twenty-first of February. This public festival for the dead denoted a time in which a Roman met his obligation (offerings / prayers) to his ancestors. In explaining the monthly calendar put forth by the early Romans, Warde Fowler describes the month of February in the following context:

"February, the month of purifying or regenerative agencies, was like the Lent of the Christian calendar, the period in which the living were made ready for the civil and religious work of the coming year, and in which also the yearly duties to the dead were paid."¹⁶ Fowler goes further to describe this festival as one of joy, not sadness. The *Parentalia* constituted a time in which to commune with one's ancestors, who were still considered active members in their community of the living. It was a time in which a deceased member's family assumed its obligatory task of presenting offerings and prayers for their relatives, "to partake of a meal with the dead, and to petition them for good fortune and all things needful."¹⁷

Compare this to the annual feast day normally celebrated by the Catholic church on the second of November, All Souls Day, in which members still visit the

¹⁵ Ibid., 83-84.

¹⁶ Warde Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 307-308.

church cemetery to offer prayers, leave flowers, light votive candles, and have their family member's grave blessed by the parish priest.¹⁸

Another ancient Roman tradition (based upon an even older Etruscan custom) describes a hole dug in the center of Rome so that communication between the living and the dead might be made easier. Gifts were placed within this shaft in order that the condition of the dead might be eased in the netherworld.¹⁹ A real fear of upsetting the spirits of one's ancestors led to many partaking in time-honored traditions of making offerings to the dead. The cult of the dead was a vital element of the classical Western world, well into Late Antiquity. We are well aware of the Greek association with the afterlife, but one only has to observe the frescoes discovered in Etruscan, and later still, Roman tombs that depict the soul's journey into the afterlife to see these traditions were continued.²⁰

The question to consider first is how did the belief in the immortality of the soul develop? It is evident that the belief in the immortality of the soul is expressed with eloquence in Plato's *Phaedo* as well as referenced in his later work, the *Republic*. Yet, it is a mistake to point to Plato as the author of such

¹⁸ For a description of the ritualized Christian calendar of a traditional Europe, see Muir, 57; also see John A. MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable* (London: George G. Harrap, 1932; reprint, Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1973), 120 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹⁹ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Discoverers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 88; Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick provide additional insight into this ancient tradition of communion with the dead in *A History of Pagan Europe* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19; Also see Joseph Campbell for additional information concerning ancient rites in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 2d ed. (New Jersey: Princeton Univ., 1968), 143.

²⁰ Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, *A History of Pagan Europe*, 26; for more information concerning the anxiety felt by persons of the classical world over memorials and death see Maureen Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

belief systems that developed in the Christian church as purgatory. Plato himself was only correlating his belief system with that of various Greek mythologies long in existence. For example, myths based upon the underworld travels of Demeter and Persephone evolved into the Eleusinian mysteries (1500 BCE) some eleven centuries prior to the writings of Plato.²¹ These ancient mystery cults spoke of future rewards after death – presupposing the existence of the soul after death. But why speak of a cult this ancient? What of the Pythagorean who held similar beliefs found in the cult of Orpheus?²² These myths are hinted at by Plato in paragraph 68 when speaking of past lovers “willing to go to the underworld” thereby assisting his argument for the existence of the soul after death.²³ It seems the heavy syncretism amongst mysteries have influenced the writings of Plato concerning his thoughts on the immortality of the soul. Yet, before we investigate the possible influence of these mysteries, let us first examine Plato’s thoughts concerning the condition of the soul after death.

Plato, through Socrates, began his pursuit of presenting a sound argument for the immortality of the soul in paragraph 73 of the *Phaedo* by asserting that the soul existed before taking on human form. He did so by utilizing the theory of recollection. This theory holds that the human soul has

²¹ When discussing the Eleusinian cult, Walter Burkert asserts that the initiates were hoping above all else that Demeter granted them a privileged existence after death. *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), 21.

²² Grube makes this point in passing but does not expand upon its implications to overall development of eschatological thought. Yet, Grube does comment on Plato’s Pythagorean influence in relation to his theory of Forms in Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1977); Also see fn 8 paragraph 61d.

²³ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

experienced or witnessed all knowledge prior to its existence on earth in human form. The human being that progresses in life is not in point of fact “learning” but merely recollecting what it already possesses in memory. Therefore, when Socrates challenged his young companions to accept his theory of Forms he asserted that all that we see and know originates from their originals:

The Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious . . . we must have acquired knowledge of them all before we were born.²⁴

The method through which Plato approaches his arguments is one of reason. Reason, that “noblest part of man,” is always holding court over the many divergent emotions expressed by the equally separate apparitions of the soul. Plato makes a concerted effort to convince his companions of this point, concluding “is it not in reasoning if anywhere that any reality becomes clear in the soul?”²⁵

Discussing the condition of the soul after death in paragraphs 80e and 81-b of the *Phaedo*, Plato postulated that a soul at death that is pure, or rather not weighted down by corruption, journeys immediately to the divine. Yet that soul which was polluted and impure at death was not free to take such a journey.²⁶ The journey of this soul was an altogether different one to say the least. For instance, Plato indicates the polluted soul’s plight:

It (*polluted soul*) wanders, as we are told, around graves and monuments, where shadowy phantoms, images that such souls produce, have been

²⁴ Ibid., 26; this statement is again put forth in paragraph 92.

²⁵ Ibid., 13-14.

²⁶ In light of paragraphs 66-67, and 80, one might be inclined to further investigate the seemingly Platonic influence upon Western Christianity’s acceptance of the belief of the sinful and corrupt condition of man with the decline of this acceptance in the Eastern Church.

seen, souls that have not been freed and purified but share in the visible, and are therefore seen . . . these are not the souls of good but of inferior men, which are forced to wander there, paying the penalty for their previous bad upbringing.²⁷

Shortly thereafter Plato capsulates his argument concerning the ability of the soul to access the divine when he states the following:

no one may join the company of the gods who has not practiced philosophy and is not completely pure when he departs from life, no one but the lover of learning.²⁸

Plato again relies upon sacred rites of some unknown cult of his day when in paragraphs 108 and 113-14. Plato comments on the divergent aspects concerning souls when traveling in the afterlife. Perhaps foreshadowing thoughts expressed in the *Republic* concerning the purification elements after death, Plato's description of the souls allotted to the River Acheron is instructive:

Those who have lived an average life make their way to the Acheron and embark upon such vessels as there are for them and proceed to the lake (Acherousian Lake). There they dwell and are purified by penalties for any wrongdoing they may have committed . . . those who are deemed incurable . . . their fitting fate is to be hurled into Tartarus never to emerge from it.²⁹

The words *cleansing* and *purification* are expressed throughout this work; therefore a closer look is warranted. Foreshadowing future Christian doctrine, paragraphs 69b-c insinuate that after death the soul shall undergo some type of purification. Yet this type of cleansing is not expiation as it shall become in future centuries, but rather a cleansing through wisdom³⁰ and intelligence garnered in

²⁷ Plato, *Phaedo*, 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁰ See also paragraph 79d for additional material on the importance of acquiring *wisdom*.

life. For Plato, mystery cult initiation rites were the avenue to obtain some of this cleansing:

It is likely that those who established the mystic rites for us were not inferior persons but were speaking in riddles long ago when they said that whoever arrives in the underworld uninitiated and unsanctified will wallow in the mire, whereas he who arrives there purified and initiated will dwell with his gods.³¹

The initiates that were undergoing this *teletai* not only were the recipients of relief of suffering during their quickened state but were to receive relief after death. In fact, Walter Burkert has shown that if the itinerant practitioners refused to participate in these rites, pain, and suffering were what awaited them after death.³²

Plato's moving interpretation of Socrates acceptance of death in the *Phaedo* makes this work truly inspiring. In fact there are similarities found between Socrates' words and tenets echoed centuries later in Christian thought. For both Socrates as well as early Christians looked forward to their death not with fear of the unknown but rather with joy and earnest zeal.³³ This is first hinted at through *Phaedo's* initial description of Socrates last moments:

Although I was witnessing the death of one who was my friend, I had no feeling of pity, for the man appeared happy both in manner and words as he died nobly and without fear, Echecrates, so that it struck me that even in going down to the underworld he was going with the gods' blessing and that he would fare well when he got there, if anyone ever does.³⁴

³¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, 18.

³² Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 21-22; see also Plato's *Republic*, 365a; for the threat of punishment in the beyond; see also Plato's *Phaedo*, 113, where the author discusses eternal torment, or the denial of it at least.

³³ This is evident in early Christian martyrdoms.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6; also see paragraphs 84-85.

Further, Plato expands upon this thought, asserting that only through death can wisdom be attained. Moreover, the journey of death is one of hope in which once again it seems the soul is to be *purified*:

It really has been shown to us that, if we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself. It seems likely that we shall, only then, when we are dead, attain that which we desire and of which we claim to be lovers, namely, wisdom, as our argument shows, not while we live; for if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body. . . And if this is true, my friend, said Socrates, there is good hope that on arriving where I am going, if anywhere, I shall acquire what has been our chief preoccupation in our past life, so that the journey that is now ordered for me is full of good hope, as it is also for any other man who believes that his mind has been prepared and, as it were, purified.³⁵

Plato continues this line of reasoning in the following:

I have good hope that some future awaits men after death, as we have been told for years, a much better future for the good than for the wicked.³⁶

Many examples exist of the obvious syncretism between the many mystery cults of the Roman Empire in which Christianity emerged. It is true that they all shared common features, one of which was the promise of salvation after death. According to Manfred Clauss, this salvation was accomplished through the secret initiation rites enacted by the numerous mysteries. For instance, initiation into the Mithraic cult lent to the recipient of such rites the promise of his god's aid in gaining admittance to "the sphere of the fixed stars" after death.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 15.

³⁶ Ibid., 11.

³⁷ 14 Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The God and His Mysteries*, Richard Gordon, trans. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 14, 141; Dating the origins of the Mithraic cult is difficult but there is evidence by 90 AD that the Cult had become popular in the Italian provinces such as Nida; see Clauss, p. 21 for more details concerning the origins of this particular cult.

Some historians have noted that the overriding belief during the Hellenistic period was one of a difficult journey after death into the heavens. Thus, it was of great importance to associate with a god who had control over the heavens, such as Mithra.³⁸

The most common feature in the mysteries of Mithra was the rite of a sacrificial bull-slaying to propitiate the gods. In this sacrifice, perpetrated by Mithra, life is rendered unto earth in the form of plants and herbs as well as the sacred wine that comes from the beast's blood. From the offering put forth by Mithra comes renewal and life for all humans on earth. But this sacrificial renewal concerns itself with life on earth and not after death.³⁹ The initiates themselves performed rites required for the salvation of the soul after death but not for the benefit of souls already beyond the barrier of life.⁴⁰ For our purposes, the most important aspect of these mystery cults is their almost universal belief in the immortality of the soul. Even more, the additional belief system in place that foretold of some type of judgment each soul must undergo in their transmigration either to a world of punishment or one of beatific vision.⁴¹

The change to incorporate ideas for praying for the dead and benefiting their souls came with the doctrine of the cult of Orpheus. The mythical character,

³⁸ David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 87; Plutarch places the birth of Mithraism along the southeastern coast of Asia Minor during the first century B.C.E. Remarks by Plutarch have led some historians to believe the capital of the province of Cilicia, Tarsus, to be the actual birthplace of Mithraism; see Ulansey, pp. 40 – 41, for more details into the origins of this particular cult.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 16-17.

⁴¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1978), 11-12.

Orpheus, was reputed to be the actual founder of the Orphic religion, which has its origins in the sixth century BCE. This mystic cult of ancient Greece drew its inspiration from Orphic hymns in which purification of the soul for suitability in the afterlife was expressed. As W.K.C. Guthrie states, "Orphism was a religion with a belief in immortality and in posthumous rewards and punishments." In fact, Le Goff asserts that the Christian concept of purgatory was first established in such pagan beliefs held by early Greeks in this orphic doctrine and then transferred to the church.⁴² Martin P. Nilsson, in his work on Dionysiac mysteries, goes so far as to assert that the Bacchic mysteries (Dionysiac) drew much of their burial customs and rites associated with deceased members from earlier Greek mysteries, such as Orphism.⁴³

Guthrie reveals that the Orphic cult held the belief that it was acceptable and even commendable for the living to provide assistance to their dead kinsmen through intercessory prayer. This was easily accepted by the cult's initiates due to the fact that Orpheus, having once shown he was capable of compelling the rulers of the underworld, might once more have the ability to intercede on the initiates behalf.⁴⁴ Although admitting that the evidence for this assertion is supported by a small portion of Orphic poetry, Guthrie believes this argument sound. The actual Orphic hymnal text referred to by Guthrie is pulled from Book II of Plato's *Republic*. Here Adeimantus attempts to convince Socrates that

⁴² W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 2d ed. revised (London: Methuen, 1952), 164; Le Goff, 22-23.

⁴³ Martin P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1957; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 122, 144.

⁴⁴ Guthrie, *Orpheus*, 29.

some forms of mystery religions were in fact responsible for immorality in the state due to their 'purging' nature. Adeimantus argues that citizens were acting immorally because they thought they could be purged from their sins through rites found in the Orphic literature. Expressing a concern held by later reformers during the Reformation, Adeimantus theorizes that beliefs in the ability to 'purge' sin through sacrifice facilitate a person's inclination to behave immorally.

Adeimantus states the following to support his argument:

They produce a whole farrago of books in which Musaeus and Orpheus, described as descendants of the Muses and the Moon, prescribe their ritual; and they persuade entire communities, as well as individuals, that, both in this life and after death, wrongdoing may be absolved and purged away by means of sacrifices and agreeable performances which they are pleased to call rites of initiation. These deliver us from punishment in the other world, where awful things are in store for all who neglect to sacrifice.⁴⁵

A purgatorial condition, or simply a belief in a state of expiation where sins were remitted, could easily have found its origins within this Orphic cult. Lanciani and Guthrie provide further evidence for these similarities between Orphism and Christianity through extensive descriptions of Orphic and Christian artwork found throughout Europe that bears striking similarities to one another.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Guthrie, *Orpheus*, 214; Francis M. Cornford, trans., *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), 48-49.

⁴⁶ Lanciani provides explications with images of various Orphic images such as his 'Good Shepherd' representation (Lanciani, 23); Guthrie also provides evidence through a series of vases that bear Orphic representations (Guthrie, 21); Guthrie goes further to state: "He is to be found for example on wall-paintings at Pompeii, and was a favorite subject of early Christian art. The common representation of him sitting playing his lyre surrounded by beasts wild and tame who are lulled into amity by his music suggests naturally the picture of the lion and the lamb lying down together, and he was also taken as the symbol of the Good Shepherd. This was for various reasons, some of which may interest us later. He is therefore a familiar figure in the paintings of the Catacombs. In speaking of Christian art one may mention the enigmatic seal in the Berlin Museum which has carved on it a human figure nailed to a cross. Above the cross are seven

If there is any confusion to be taken from the *Phaedo*, it lies in whether or not the majority of Greek citizens actually accepted a belief in the afterlife. Compare the already mentioned reference by Plato to accepted Greek mythologies concerning the afterlife and comments from Simmias and Cebes that assert that the majority of peoples held that the soul at death was “dispersed and this is the end of its existence.”⁴⁷ This approach is contradicted by J.N.D. Kelly who asserts that a belief in future punishments and the idea of the transmigration of souls was in fact prominent.⁴⁸

Despite the lack of any concrete statement on purgatory within the Old or New Testaments of the Holy Bible, the Christian church relied on scriptural references that inferred a purgatorial state. For church theologians a series of passages taken from the apocryphal⁴⁹ work of 2 Maccabees proved to be their strongest and most relied upon proof for the support of a practice of praying for the souls of the faithfully departed in a purgatorial state. The passage itself describes a battle in which Jewish soldiers led by their high priest, Judas, are killed and then subsequently found to be in possession of pagan amulets. This discovery renders their souls to be forfeited for violation of a Jewish Law.

stars and a crescent moon, and around and beneath it the words Orpheos Bakkikos” (Guthrie, 23).

⁴⁷ Plato, *Phaedo*, 27-28.

⁴⁸ Kelly, 12.

⁴⁹ Paul Juris renders a concise and definitive explanation on the books of the Apocrypha as well as giving additional information on the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate translations in which the Apocrypha can be found. One statement does bear mentioning: “It should be noted that these writings were not officially declared to be divinely inspired, and included in the Catholic canon of Scripture as such, until 1546 at the Council of Trent. Previous to that time, these books were included in the Latin Vulgate and in the Greek version of the Old Testament, which is known as the Septuagint, but not officially decreed to be divinely inspired writings” (Paul Juris, *The Other Side of Purgatory* [Minnesota: Nystrom Publishing, 1981], 82-83, 87.)

And the day following Judas came with his company, to take away the bodies of them that were slain, and to bury them with their kinsmen, in the sepulchers of their fathers. And they found under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw, that for this cause they were slain. Then they all blessed the just judgment of the Lord, who had discovered the things that were hidden. And so betaking themselves to prayers, they besought him, that the sin which had been committed might be forgotten. But the most valiant Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forasmuch as they saw before their eyes what had happened, because of the sins of those that were slain. And making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection, (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead), And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.⁵⁰

As to the origins and authenticity of this apocryphal work, the church admits that the identity of the author of this book is unknown. Yet, two general councils, Florence (1438-45 CE) and Trent (1545-63 CE), confirmed its authenticity.⁵¹

The actions taken by Judas were not in conformity with Jewish teachings of his era. The practice of praying for the dead was not a feature of Jewish custom or law at this time, which raises the question of where these ancient Jews absorbed this practice. The answer lies not within the Jewish framework of

⁵⁰ 2 Macc. 12:39-46 *DV*; The Douay version offers a note to this text: "Here is an evident and undeniable proof of the practice of praying for the dead under the old law, which was then strictly observed by the Jews, and consequently could not be introduced at that time by Judas, their chief and high priest, if it had not been always their custom" (Douay Version, *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate* [Belgium: Brepols' Catholic Press, 1797. Reprint, New York: C. Wildermann, 1938], 1055).

⁵¹ *DV*, 1002.

understanding, but in the pagan cultures within which Judas and his followers would have associated and been immersed.⁵²

Yet, evidence reported in 2004 may in fact contradict Juris' assertion concerning Jewish customs relating to the dead. Writing in response to a 2004 article that re-investigates archaeology evidence unearthed in 1979, Ronald S. Hendel argues for new approaches to inscriptions found at Ketef Hinnom. Hendel is particularly interested in the possibility that amulets discovered at Ketef Hinnom point to Judaic beliefs in resurrection of the dead in pre-Second Temple Judaism. This makes the Ketef Hinnom discovery all that more intriguing. Yet there is more to consider before leaving this discovery; a closer examination of the amulet inscriptions:

Ketef Hinnom I (Amulet I)

YHW . . . the grea[t . . . who keeps] the covenant and [G]raciousness toward those who love [him] and (*alt*: those who love [hi]m;) those who keep [his commandments . . . the Eternal? [the?] blessing more than any [sna]re and more than Evil. For redemption is in him. For YHWH is our restorer [and] rock. May YHWH bles[s] you and [may he] keep you. [May] YHWH make [his face] shine. . .⁵³

Ketef Hinnom II (Amulet II)

[For PN, (the son/daughter of) xxxx] h/hu. May h[e]/ sh[e] be blessed by Yahweh, the warrior [or: helper] and the rebuker of [E]vil: May Yahweh bless you, keep you. May Yahweh make his face shine upon you and grant you p[ea]ce.⁵⁴

⁵² Juris, 109, 116-117.

⁵³ Gabriel Barkay, Marilyn J. Lundberg, Andrew G. Vaughn, Bruce Zuckerman, Kenneth Zuckerman, "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 334 (May, 2004), 61.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

Archaeologists re-examining the 1979 discovery at Ketef Hinnom have given a pre-exilic date to the inscriptions on Ketef Hinnom I and II to the end of the seventh century. With this in mind the following assertion made by Gabriel Barkay, Marilyn J. Lundberg, Andrew G. Vaughn, Bruce Zuckerman, and Kenneth Zuckerman concerning the inscriptions on Ketef Hinnom I and II bears further investigation:

the inscriptions were never meant to be seen again; that is, like the inscriptions in *mezuzot* and *tefillin*, once written and rolled up, they no longer really act as the components of documents intended to be read. Rather, their function is apotropaic and/or sanctifying; the inscriptions in these plaques exist as amulets to give their wearers protection against evil in the presence of holiness.⁵⁵

The amulets in question were initially discovered in 1979 by Gabriel Barkay and have since sparked much debate over the amulets pre-exilic dating as well as their meaning. Why so much controversy over meaning? Well, to start, the amulets were discovered on bodies inside a crypt. This then is the grounds for Hendel's correct assertions for beliefs in a bodily resurrection. In fact, if Hendel is correct in his research, might not this discovery also point to pre-exilic Judaic belief in the efficacy of prayers for the dead? If so, Ketef Hinnom represents an example of prayers for the dead two centuries before that of Plato's mentioning of the Orphic Hymns. This is extremely important in that if one is going to ask where indeed did many of the ideals concerning the Christian concept of salvation after death originate and then answer that a logical step might be to explore the many mystery cults, then the same question might be

⁵⁵ Ibid., 46.

asked concerning its origination in the many mystery cults. If so Kitef Hinnom is a good starting place. The mere fact the amulets were discovered upon bodies in a crypt as stated above, shows they were never meant to be viewed by anyone other than the wearer. These amulets can be seen as nothing else but ancient examples of charms to ward off the evils of death as well as supplications to their God for protection and forgiveness after death.

CHAPTER III

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PURGATORY

Turning from the realm of paganism and folklore, a consideration of the Catholic church's 'official' stance on the purgatorial question is examined to provide insight into doctrinal development. The current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has little to offer the reader by way of information relating to purgatorial doctrine. In fact these official church teachings only provide three brief paragraphs to explain the church's stance on purgatory. Within these short paragraphs can be found the following points of interest asserted by the church: (1) after death there will be some type of purification of the soul through a cleansing by fire, (2) this purification will involve some manner of discomfort for the soul, and (3) God allows those still alive to assist by their actions those souls being purified. Although there may be some question as to how the soul is cleansed, the church is firm in its stance as to the benefit of the living providing assistance to the dead: "From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of

penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.”⁵⁶ To clarify, as far as the church is concerned, purgatory is a condition (for the church has never made a definitive declaration as to whether or not purgatory is an actual place in existence) of temporary punishment for those church members who have died in a state of grace, yet have not been thoroughly cleansed of their lesser transgressions. But this declaration took centuries for the church to arrive at, and much had to be defined before an official acceptance of this doctrine occurred.

As early as the third century, the Catholic church began to develop a belief and doctrine referred to as the Communion of Saints, as espoused in the Apostles’ Creed. This ‘communion’ between the living and dead refers to the spiritual connection between the church faithful still on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven. This doctrine is primarily based upon the parallel mystical bodies of the church and Christ: “So we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”⁵⁷ Therefore, with these mystical bodies in mind, church members (members were a key in this situation) could then assist those souls in purgatory through their prayers and good works. Louis L. Morrow, in his explication of the Catholic faith, clarifies this relationship between the mystical body and church membership: “The faithful on earth, through the communion of saints, can relieve the sufferings of the souls in purgatory by prayer, fasting, and other good works, by indulgences, and by

⁵⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994), 268-69.

⁵⁷ Romans 12:5 DV

Masses offered for them. St. Augustine explains: ‘Prayer is the key by which we open the gates of heaven to the suffering souls.’”⁵⁸

Roman Liturgy

Before examining those “proofs” the Christian church utilized in its defense of the doctrine of purgatory, it is important to understand the fluid nature of the church’s liturgy and ritual over the centuries. This is a vital element in the understanding of how such a doctrine came to permeate the medieval mindset. The church’s ritual throughout its history has not always been uniform, but rather quite diverse due to local traditions.

For example, Firmilian of Caesarea, in a letter to St. Cyprian (c. 256 CE), complained of Pope Stephen I’s rule concerning the use of Roman customs in all churches. Firmilian indicates to Cyprian that the Christian ritual was not the same throughout Christendom:

But that they who are at Rome do not observe those things in all cases which are handed down from the beginning . . . concerning many other sacraments of divine matters, he may see that there are some diversities among them, and that all things are not observed at Jerusalem, just as in very many other provinces also many things are varied because of the difference of the places and names.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Louis Laravoire Morrow, *My Catholic Faith: A Manual of Religion* (Wisconsin: My Mission House, 1956), 149.

⁵⁹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American reprint of the Edinburgh edition, vol V., *Fathers Of The Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, (Buffalo: *The Christian Literature Co.*, 1886), 391; Fortescue, 49.

From this and other examples of the same, it is understood that the Ante-Nicene liturgy was in a state of fluidity and subject to variation depending upon local custom. With that said, English liturgist and former Professor of church History at St. Edmund's College, Ware, Adrian Fortescue asserts that the church orders were already standardized universal sometime during the first three centuries of the Christian era. This order included a liturgy that held some form of intercession on behalf of the dead. According to Christian liturgical scholars, some form of intercession for the dead (in its earliest form that of the diptychs) was read during the Christian liturgy. The names associated with this intercession were read from diptychs. The diptychs were tablets (folded together) on which were written the names of the faithful – living and dead. The question for many liturgists is not whether or not these prayers were apparent in the early liturgy, but where they were located in the various incarnations of the Christian liturgy. However, this question does not concern us. What is important is the universal concession of their appearance in early Christian texts dating back as far as the Apostolic Constitutions (c. fourth century CE).⁶⁰

The Christian rite that Fortescue asserts was “uniform” by the third century was by the fourth century beginning to crystallize into several different liturgies in various regions of Christendom: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Gaul (Gallican

⁶⁰ Fortescue, 69-70, 115; Fortescue is also a good source when examining the role of diptychs in the early Christian Church, especially during the Synod of Elvira (c. 300 C.E.); see also Louis Duchesne, *Christian Worship Its Origin and Evolution: A Study of the Latin Liturgy up to the time of Charlemagne*, trans. M.L. McClure, 5th ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919); *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book VIII, Section II, paragraph XIII (*The Bidding Prayer for the Faithful after the Divine Oblation.*)

rite). These variances in liturgy were the result of regional disparities owing to cultural influences more so than any doctrinal disputes. Again, it is important to note, that every variance of Christian liturgy encompassed some form of prayers for the faithful, usually in the form of diptychs.⁶¹

In the West, the Christian liturgy fell under that of the Gallican rite until at least the eighth century C.E. when the Roman rite gradually displaced the Gallican variants. But this did not occur without the Roman rite being modified itself. Fortescue refers to this process as the beginning of the medieval derived rites that influenced Rome and its liturgy. Thus, when medieval rites were eliminated, the Roman rite was not left untouched. It now was encumbered with “foreign” elements.⁶²

The Gallican Rite is revealed in such writings as the Gregorian Sacramentary with additions made by Alcuin under the reign of Charles the Great in 791 CE.⁶³ Obtained from Pope Adrian I in about 788 CE, the Gregorian Sacramentary was introduced throughout Charlemagne’s Frankish kingdom with Alcuin’s *Supplement* in an attempt to bring about liturgical uniformity. This proved impossible due to the many cultural variants throughout the Frankish kingdom. Therefore, Alcuin saw to merging the Roman liturgy with the many localized customs that were so dear to the laity. What resulted is referred to as

⁶¹ Fortescue, 77, 85; this is quite odd given the fact that the northern region of Italy, Gaul, Britain and Spain all fell under the influence of Rome.

⁶² Ibid., 98, 182; The predominate theory as to the origins of the Gallican rite holds that it emerged from the earlier Antiochene rite, and through cultural syncretism, resulted in the variant seen materializing during the fourth century.

⁶³ Alcuin will be covered in more detail in a later chapter, see pg. 71.

the *Supplement*. Gallican elements are also apparent in the Irish MS, the *Stowe Missal* (c. eighth century) and the Leofric Missal (c. tenth century) written in Exeter. The Roman rite (now with Gallican additions) was in use throughout Gaul by the end of the ninth century, according to Amalarius of Metz and Walafrid Strabo.⁶⁴

Where England is concerned, the missionary travels of St. Augustine in 597 CE under the authority of St. Gregory have been well documented. This record has been immortalized in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, most famously the *libellus responsorium* in Book I Chapter 27.⁶⁵ Here Gregory lays out the church's policy of *inculturation* of the Anglo-Saxons of England. Augustine was concerned by the regions lack of proper observance of the Roman rite, but instead held to Gallican elements. Gregory's response was to direct Augustine to choose those elements he judged best and to work slowly towards supplanting the Gallican elements. Through ecclesiastical gatherings, such as the Synod of Whitby (664) and the Synod of Cloveshoe (747), the Roman Rite was brought into use throughout England. Yet, like the spread of the Roman rite in Gaul, this process allowed non-Roman sources to remain in place.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., 121-24, 178-79.

⁶⁵ Colgrave, Bertram and R.A.B. Mynors, eds. and trans., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*.

⁶⁶ Fortescue, 179; for an in-depth narrative explaining the re-conversion of Britain see J.N. Hilgarth's *Christianity and Paganism, 350-750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1986).

Scriptural Proofs

With a review of the fluid nature of the Christian liturgy in mind, especially its entry into England, it is time to examine those “proofs” the Christian church utilized in its defense of the doctrine of purgatory. Although the references to prayers for the dead found within the book of 2 Maccabees is considered by many as the church’s strongest scriptural evidence for a purgatorial state, other scriptural references within the Hebrew Bible and New Testaments offer additional evidence, albeit in an indirect manner.⁶⁷ Taken together they help to support the church’s belief in the doctrine of purgatory. While there is not room to list and explicate all, those that have the most direct implications for a belief and practice in prayers for the dead or a purgatorial state deserve further discussion.

Scriptural evidence is difficult to find that is as clear as that taken from the book of 2 Maccabees. Yet, what can be found are statements that might lead to an understanding of how the early church came to form its purgatorial doctrine. A key point of departure is the Gospel of St. Matthew, within which is drawn the indirect assumption that some sins are purged after death.

And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in the world to come.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ See also: Mic. 7: 9; Dan. 12:10; Zech. 9:11; Isa. 4: 4; Mal. 3: 1-4.

⁶⁸ Matt. 12:32 *DV*.

After reading this one line of scripture it is easy to draw the conclusion that there are some types of sins that may be forgiven in the afterlife. The Douay (Douay-Rheims) Version of the Holy Bible, citing Augustine and St. Gregory, held that in reference to this passage: “some sins may be remitted in the world to come; and consequently, that there is a purgatory or a middle place.”⁶⁹ Also within the book of St. Matthew can be found a statement with possible purgatorial reference made by Christ while delivering His Sermon On The Mount: “Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence [prison] till thou repay the last farthing.”⁷⁰

More support for a belief of an afterlife experience that is neither heaven nor hell is found in the Gospel of Saint Luke. This condition, this place of Abraham’s Bosom, was not one of discomfort. Ralph V. Turner points out that in Luke 16:25, “the just were comforted in hell in the bosom of Abraham.” Abraham’s bosom was not considered to be a location where sins were purged; it was only perceived as a place of waiting. What this passage reveals is a belief in some type of afterlife that consisted in an alternate place, a third place, one not for the saved, nor the damned. This went a long way in helping the church to support a doctrine of purgatory.⁷¹

From such explications of scriptural evidence theologians have argued for an alternate state of being after death that is not heaven, nor is it hell, a place not

⁶⁹ Juris, 130-31; thought is also expressed in Le Goff’s *Birth of Purgatory*, 42; *DV*, 24.

⁷⁰ Matt. 5: 25-26 *DV*; This same interpretation can be garnered from Luke 12: 58-59 *DV*; See also Luke 12:2-5 *DV*.

⁷¹ Ralph V. Turner, “Descendit Ad Inferos: Medieval Views on Christ’s Descent into Hell and the Salvation of the Ancient Just,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27, no. 2 (April – June, 1966), 182.

associated with the intermediary paradise of comfort that connotes a bosom of Abraham, yet not a place of torment in hell or eternal happiness in heaven.⁷²

The Apostle Paul provides evidence for this 'other' place in his letter to the Philippians: "That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth."⁷³ It is the phrase "and under the earth" that has proven a matter of contention. As an additional source the first Epistle of St. Peter might be used. Here one can find a reference to this alternate condition that is not entirely in heaven and not entirely in hell: "In which also coming he preached to those spirits that were in prison: Which had been some time incredulous, when they waited for the patience of God in the days of Noe, when the ark was a-building."⁷⁴ This 'harrowing of hell' episode from the Book of St. Peter is similar to several scriptural verses used as an argument for a purgatorial state. This reference to a 'third' place can even be found in the book of the Apocalypse (Revelation):

And no man was able, neither in heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth, to open the book, nor to look on it . . . And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them.⁷⁵

The strongest scriptural evidence used in support for a purgatorial doctrine can arguably be said to be 1 Corinthians 3. Here St. Paul explores an

⁷² Le Goff, 27-28.

⁷³ Phil. 2:10, DV.

⁷⁴ 1 Pet. 3: 19-20 DV; The Douay version provides a footnote for verse 19: "Spirits that were in prison. See here a proof of a third place, or middle state of souls: for these spirits in prison, to whom Christ went to preach, after His death, were not in heaven; nor yet in the hell of the damned: because heaven is no prison; and Christ did not go to preach to the damned" (DV, 272).

⁷⁵ Apoc. 5: 3, 13 DV; Juris, 136.

individual's judgment at the time of his death making reference to a man's 'work' being put to the test or, as he states, "revealed in fire." "Every man's work shall be manifest; for the day of the Lord shall declare it because it shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." He goes further to make the inference that it will be by this fire that one may be 'saved:' "If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved yes so as by fire." As some scholars have stated, this passage cannot be in reference to hell, for a soul cannot escape from hell as this passage implies.⁷⁶

With these scriptural 'proofs' to build upon, the church used its deductive method to explain its doctrine on the soul's condition after death. Again, entering into this pattern of thought with the assumption that purgatory is in no way an unbiblical doctrine, but rather one that is biblically supported, one can more readily accept such a notion that between one's death and final judgment there must be some manner of purification. Building upon the basis of prayers for the dead from such passages found in 2 Maccabees 12, the early church Fathers then combined passages depicting a Christian's ultimate submission to justice before Christ, such as through fire as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3: 11-15. Upon this was added such arguments put forth by Jesus himself when in Matthew

⁷⁶ Takami Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry* (Massachusetts: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 7-8; Matsuda provides the following thought on this scriptural text: "Although there is no explicit biblical reference to Purgatory, the passage in 1 Corinthians 3.10-15, was traditionally interpreted as referring to the idea of purification by fire after death. Patristic writers offer various opinions on the possibility of purgation by fire after death with reference to this passage. Origen (d. 253/54) speaks of the baptism by fire for 'every man who wants to go to paradise when he departs this life and needs to be purified' (Matsuda, 7-8.); 1 Corinthians 3: 11-15 DV.

12:32, Jesus speaks of sins that will neither be forgiven in this life nor the next, making the implication that some transgressions can be redeemed in the afterlife. Christ next instructs his followers in Matthew 5: 25-26 that their time in this state of purging will last until their last transgression is paid in full.

With a certain degree of understanding of the church's use of scriptural evidence, one can now more easily see similarities with pagan influences from a broader viewpoint, a viewpoint that is not confined to a mind-set that is too entrenched in theological partisanship. Several scriptural passages bear a similar tone to passages of Orphic literature that speak of Orpheus descending into the dark night of the soul, Death. These include a passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew: "For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." There is the mentioning of David speaking of future events in the Acts of the Apostles: "Foreseeing this, he (David) spoke of the resurrection of Christ. For neither was he left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption." From this, the transition is easily made to Paul's letters to the Romans: "But the justice which is of faith, speaketh thus: *Say not in thy heart: Who shall descend into heaven? That is, to bring Christ down: Or who shall descend into the deep? That is to bring up Christ again from the dead.*"⁷⁷ This is also true of 1 Peter 3:19, already cited above.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Matt. 12:40 DV; Acts 2:31 DV; Romans 10:6-7 DV.

⁷⁸ Le Goff covers this line of thought in more detail (Le Goff, 44).

Additional examples of Christ's descent into hell or "harrowing of hell" episodes are found within the Gnostic texts such as *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. Other representations of eschatological variances are seen in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and *Apocalypse of Paul* where a multi-leveled heaven and hell are represented. No indication of expiation of sin after death is found within these Gnostic texts, yet the basis for beliefs in a third place other than heaven or hell is definitely evident. Lastly, *The Book of Enoch*, of Jewish Pseudepigrapha, reveals at least a second century B.C.E. conceptual interpretation of the underworld in which there is more than just 'one' location for the dead: "In those days the earth will give back what was entrusted to it, Sheol will return what it has received and Hell will give back what it owes."⁷⁹

From these beliefs it was an easy transition to believe in intercessory prayers for the dead, that prayers of the living could ease sufferings in this third place. Evidence for such beliefs in the usefulness of intercessory prayer for those souls in need of such prayer in the afterlife is evident in such literary works as *The Passion of Perpetua* from third-century Rome. Perpetua, soon to be martyred for her faith, prompted by a vision of her deceased brother Dinocrates, makes intercessory prayers on his behalf. In her vision, Perpetua reveals that she was "grieved thinking of what had befallen him. And I saw at once that I was entitled, and ought, to make request for him. And I began to pray much for him,

⁷⁹ Willis Barnstone, ed., *The Other Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 491; The Gnostic texts do allow for a more detailed version of events depicted in The Holy Bible. For more information pertaining to Gnostic as well as Coptic literature influencing Medieval eschatological concepts see John A. MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable*; Miriam Van Scott argues that Origen's "ideas evolved into the concept of Gnostic Hell," in *Encyclopedia of Hell*, 240.

and make lamentation to the Lord.” Through her prayers, Perpetua’s brother is released from the suffering that she beheld in her vision. Both Le Goff and Matsuda offer the opinion that this particular work from 203 C.E., is the first glimpse of what the doctrine of purgatory ultimately becomes.⁸⁰ Yet, other examples exist prior to Perpetua’s Passion.

Written c. 190 CE The Apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* offers a late second century example of the efficacious nature of prayers for the dead. The story finds Thecla, the young virgin maiden, following Paul into Antioch where she is condemned to the beasts for spurning the advances of the citizen Alexander. At the same time, Thecla is welcomed into the home of Tryphaena who had previously lost her own daughter to the embrace of death. After miraculously surviving her first encounter with the wild beasts, Thecla is again welcomed into the home of Tryphaena as the following will detail:

And after the exhibition, Tryphæna again receives her. For her daughter Falconilla had died, and said to her in a dream: Mother, thou shalt have this stranger Thecla in my place, in order that she may pray concerning me, and that I may be transferred to the place of the just. And when, after the exhibition, Tryphæna received her, at the same time indeed she grieved that she had to fight with the wild beasts on the day following; and at the same time, loving her as much as her daughter Falconilla, she said: My second child Thecla, come and pray for my child, that she may live for ever; for this I saw in my sleep. And she, nothing hesitating, lifted up her voice, and said: God most high, grant to this woman according to her wish, that her daughter Falconilla may live for ever. And when Thecla had thus spoken, Tryphæna lamented, considering so much beauty thrown to the wild beasts.⁸¹

⁸⁰ For extended explications of the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas see Barnstone, ed., *The Other Bible*, 176-177; Le Goff, 48-51; MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable*, 155; and Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory*, 6.

⁸¹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American reprint of the Edinburgh edition, vol. VIII, *The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The*

Tryphaena has 'faith' that Thecla's prayers will assist the soul of her deceased daughter; a pagan daughter at that. To live forever connotes the immortality of the soul in Christ as taught by early Christians.

Discovered by the late archeologist W. Ramsay in 1883, the *Epitaph of Abercius* offers another late second century example of prayers for the dead. Whether written for or by a Christian Bishop is of little matter. Either situation presents an example of early Christians offering prayers or requesting prayers for the souls of the faithfully departed. Joseph B. Lightfoot asserts that the following epitaph is indeed in reference to Abercius, Bishop of Hieropolis, dating from the end of the reign of Commodus (180-192 CE):

The citizen of a notable city I made this (tomb) in my life-time; that in due season I might have here a resting-place for my body. Abercius by name, I am a disciple of the pure Shepherd, who feedeth His flocks of sheep on mountains and plains, who hath great eyes looking on all sides; for He taught me faithful writings. He also sent me to royal Rome to behold it and to see the golden-robed, golden-slippered Queen. And there I saw a people bearing the splendid seal. And I saw the plain of Syria and all the cities, even Nisibis, crossing over the Euphrates. And everywhere I had associates. In company with Paul I followed, while everywhere faith led the way, and set before me for food the fish from the fountain, mighty and stainless (whom a pure virgin grasped), and gave this to friends to eat always, having good wine and giving the mixed cup with bread. These words I Abercius, standing by, ordered to be inscribed. In sooth I was in the course of my seventy-second year. Let every friend who observeth this, pray for me. But no man shall place another tomb above mine. If otherwise, he then shall pay two thousand pieces of gold to the treasury of the Romans, and a thousand pieces of gold to my good fatherland Hierapolis.⁸²

Clementia, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1951), 490.

⁸² J. B. Lightfoot, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed., Pt. 2, Vol. 1, *Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), 496-497.

It is distressing that the reader is not enlightened as to just what “every friend” should pray for. It is certain these prayers are requested for the soul of Abercius, but to what effect are these prayers requested; fear of an afterlife like that of Hades, or fear of judgment? Speculation might ensue, yet the importance lies in the fact that some early Christians held that prayers for the dead were beneficial to their plight in the afterlife.

Traditional prayers for the dead evolved within the church itself until ultimately finding official sanction in large part through the collective works of the church’s monastic orders throughout Europe. For example, the church soon followed the example set forth by the Benedictine order in commemorating the dead in the eleventh century, on November 2.⁸³ Yet, this not-so-new tradition continued to express its pagan ancestral influence. This ‘Day of the Dead,’ All Souls Day, can be traced back to earlier traditions of the Celtic tribes conquered by the Roman Empire. In the Celtic tradition a festival of Samhain was celebrated each year to celebrate the end of summer and the advent of winter while at the same time commemorating their dead.⁸⁴ The Celtic culture held the belief that the spirits of their fellow clansmen had the ability to visit the land of the living during this festival. With the encroachment of Roman influence came the

⁸³ In the eleventh century (1024-1033) the Cluniac order extended the benefit of liturgy (masses) to all the dead instead of only aristocratic families (Le Goff, 124-127).

⁸⁴ For a more in-depth discussion of the festival of Samhain see Helen Sewell Johnson, “November Eve Beliefs and Customs in Irish Life and Literature,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, 81, no. 320 (April – June, 1968), 135; also see Muir, 71.

assimilation of cultural rituals and traditions.⁸⁵ The Roman calendar of festivals has many similarities with the Celtic calendar of festivals. The Romans held it to be a reality that those spirits who were properly given their tribute and offerings in no way affected their daily lives. Romans believed that those who did not fulfill their duty to their ancestors (such as offerings already mentioned) provoked spirits to become angry and to cause injury in numerous ways.⁸⁶ The later Christian assimilation of the feast of All Souls passed on the idea that those souls of the faithfully departed did have the ability to return to the land of the living. In fact, Helen Sewell Johnson goes further to assert that the Catholic church's creation of the feast of All Soul's Day was nothing more than an attempt "to draw attention away from the pagan feast of Samhain."⁸⁷

Just as with the myth of Orpheus's descent into the underworld, myths and ritualized custom are instrumental in a process that rendered a populace's sub-conscious mind to be more readily susceptible to the idea of a purgatorial state. A pre-existing cultural acceptance of purgatorial concepts was necessary in order for any church based doctrine to be successful. To understand how this intermingling produced such a profound impact upon purgatory some background is necessary. The doctrine of purgatory was not created and shaped by the efforts of early church fathers through their scholastic disputations during

⁸⁵ For a similar occurrence within the confines of Christianity see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 587.

⁸⁶ Warde Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 108.

⁸⁷ Peter Marshall, ed., *Beliefs and the Dead* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 14; Johnson, "November Eve Beliefs," 139-40; for a counter opinion to Johnson see Muir, 71.

the first centuries of the church's infancy. Instead, purgatory was shaped not only by the efforts of religious clerics but more importantly by the culture within which it found itself immersed. Although neither the doctrine, nor the word 'purgatory' itself, was put forth until the thirteenth century, the underlying beliefs that would lead to its establishment as a doctrine were widely held throughout the Greco-Roman world.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY DISCUSSIONS TO THE LATE EIGHTH CENTURY

The early growth and evolution of the purgatorial doctrine was explicitly debated and discussed by some of the church's greatest theologians during its first centuries. What is clear from these writings is that early church theologians held a belief in a third state other than Heaven or Hell in which the soul resided, however temporarily, before entering final judgment. For example, Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullianus (CE 160-225), the first church father to espouse a certain belief in a purgatorial state after death, believed in the immortality of the soul and stated that the soul does not sleep at the death of the body but rather the soul "is always in motion." Sometimes referred to as the Father of Latin Christianity, Tertullian was a prolific writer whose writings were motivated in large part by the challenges posed by local heresies or persecutions from the Roman state. While his *Apologeticum* is considered to be his greatest work, his *De praescriptio haereticorum* is vital to understanding Tertullian's approach to the concepts of the afterlife. In it Tertullian discusses the manner by which heretical arguments are to be handled. And it is here that the reader can also view one of the two main causes for criticism of Tertullian – his anti-intellectualism or anti-philosophic stance. In Chapter VII of *The Prescription Against Heretics*,

Tertullian attacks the influence of philosophy within Christianity and goes so far as to assert that philosophy is the origin of all heresies:

For (philosophy) it is which is the material of the world's wisdom, the rash interpreter of the nature and dispensation of God. Indeed heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy... What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the Church? What have heretics to do with Christians? Our instruction comes from the porch of Solomon, who had himself taught that the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart. Away with all attempts to produce a Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic Christianity! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after receiving the gospel! When we believe, we desire no further belief. For this is our first article of faith, that there is nothing which we ought to believe besides.⁸⁸

This is quite ironic considering that Chapter LVIII of Tertullian's *A Treatise on the Soul* offers the reader a very Platonic interpretation on the geography of Hell /

Hades:

All souls, therefore, are shut up within Hades: do you admit this? (It is true, whether) you say yes or no: moreover, there are already experienced there punishments and consolations . . . In short, inasmuch as we understand "the prison" pointed out in the Gospel to be Hades, and as we also interpret "the uttermost farthing" to mean the very smallest offence which has to be recompensed there before the resurrection, no one will hesitate to believe that the soul undergoes in Hades some compensatory discipline, without prejudice to the full process of the resurrection, when the recompense will be administered through the flesh besides.⁸⁹

Tertullian argued that at the time of death, "all souls are kept in Hell until the Second Coming of the Lord." Citing Matthew 5: 25-26, Tertullian asserts that not only were all souls relegated to hell, but there they also received either punishments or rewards depending upon the condition of their souls: "There will

⁸⁸ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American reprint of the Edinburgh edition, vol. III, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian: Three Parts: I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical* (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 246.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 234-35.

be no doubt that the soul suffers in Hell some retributory penalty, without denying the complete resurrection, when the body also will pay or be paid in full.”⁹⁰ This position taken by Tertullian should not be confused with the ancient concept of Sheol or the Bosom of Abraham, since punishment is not present in these locations. Nor should we assume Tertullian is speaking of Hell as a one dimensional condition, as those souls relegated to Hell, according to Christian doctrine, cannot escape that state of existence.

As to Tertullian’s thoughts concerning the nature of prayers for the dead, look no further than his treatise *On Monogamy* (c. 217 CE). Chapter X of this text finds Tertullian explaining the duties of a wife to her deceased husband, specifically as it relates to future marriage. In doing so the author is asserting that it is a wife’s duty to remain chaste and not marry since she is still bound to her husband. Concerning the soul of her departed husband Tertullian states the following:

Indeed, she prays for his soul, and requests refreshment for him meanwhile, and fellowship (with him) in the first resurrection; and she offers (her sacrifice) on the anniversaries of his falling asleep.⁹¹

Eastern church theologian and Neo-Platonist, Origen (185-254 CE), also believed in a period after the death of the individual when the soul was tried by fire. In his *De Principiis* (c. 225 CE) Origen speaks of “an abundance of sins” being consumed by fire and that the “fury of God’s vengeance is profitable for the

⁹⁰ Rudolph Arbesmann et al., trans., *Tertullian Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix Octavius* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), 300, 309.

⁹¹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American reprint of the Edinburgh edition, vol. IV, *Tertullian, Part Fourth: Minucius Felix: Commodian: Origen, Parts First and Second* (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 67.

purgation of souls.”⁹² Further into this work, Origen quantifies his thoughts concerning the geography of the afterlife:

For perhaps as those who, departing this world in virtue of that death which is common to all, are arranged, in conformity with their actions and desserts – according as they shall be deemed worthy – some in the place which is called ‘hell,’ others in the bosom of Abraham, and in different localities or mansions; so also from those places, as if dying there, if the expression can be used, do they come down from the ‘upper world’ to this ‘hell.’ For that ‘hell’ to which the souls of the dead are conducted from this world, is, I believe, on account of this distinction, called the ‘lower hell,’ by Scripture, as is said in the book of Psalms: ‘Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.’ Every one, accordingly, of those who descend to the earth is, according to his desserts . . .⁹³

Origen’s eschatological outlook placed our life on Earth in what might be considered a purgatorial condition. Hinting at thoughts expressed by Augustine on Predestination, Origen argued that God predetermined the fate of humankind on Earth. But unlike Augustine, and later Calvin, belief in predestination was not due to humanity’s lack of free will. Rather, it was due to an ever continuing recycling of ages: a process of reincarnation if you will. A soul that bore too much sin was relegated to Hell for curative purposes only, while those souls unencumbered with such sin flew to Heaven. Those souls “purged” of their sins in Hell by fire, and those souls of the “middling” sort who had not sinned enough for Hell, but had not done enough good for Heaven, were consigned once more

⁹² Ibid., 295, 296; also see *Origen Against Celsus* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV; For yet another instance of fire as purging vehicle see Lactantius’ assertions in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American reprint of the Edinburgh edition, vol. VII, *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily and Liturgies* (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 217.

⁹³ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV, 372; For similar assertions see Epistle LI 17 and Epistle LI 20 of Cyprian in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol V., 331-32.

to Earth where they were tested again. The process repeated itself until finally all souls (with the exception perhaps of Lucifer) had cleansed themselves of all sin and were able to return to the Godhead.⁹⁴

One last element of Origen's impact on Christianity that must be pointed out was his insistence on the importance of classical / pagan writings. While Origen argued that Christianity was the "original" religion, the seeds of Christianity had been planted in all subsequent philosophies and faiths. Therefore, we see in Origen a bridge for Greek philosophical ideas into Christianity, well before the musings of Lactantius and of course of Augustine.⁹⁵

In *Against Plato, On The Cause Of The Universe*, (c. 205 CE) Hippolytus (c. 170 – 236 CE) presbyter of the church in Rome, describes the geography / topography of Hades. It is interesting to note that while the author places all souls in Hades before the final judgment, there are separate locations reserved for the righteous and unrighteous. The location reserved for the righteous is for Hippolytus none other than Abraham's bosom:

And this is the passage regarding demons. But now we must speak of Hades, in which the souls both of the righteous and the unrighteous are detained. Hades is a place in the created system, rude, a locality beneath the earth, in which the light of the world does not shine; and as the sun does not shine in this locality, there must necessarily be perpetual darkness there. This locality has been destined to be as it were a guard-house for souls, at which the angels are stationed as guards, distributing according to each one's deeds the temporary punishments for (different) characters.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Daniel P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964), 12-13, 62.

⁹⁵ Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 82-84.

⁹⁶ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V, 221.

Hippolytus concludes with an admonition against his Greek readers:

Thus far, then, on the subject of Hades, in which the souls of all are detained until the time which God has determined; and then He will accomplish a resurrection of all, not by transferring souls into other bodies, but by raising the bodies themselves. And if, O Greeks, ye refuse credit to this because ye see these (bodies) in their dissolution, learn not to be incredulous. For if ye believe that the soul is originated and is made immortal by God, according to the opinion of Plato, in time, ye ought not to refuse to believe that God is able also to raise the body, which is composed of the same elements, and make it immortal.⁹⁷

In *The First Apology* of Justin Martyr (c. 103-165 CE), Judaic accretions are pointed out by Justin in Plato's writings; specifically within the *Timaeus*. In chapter LIX and LX, Justin points to "Plato's Obligation To Moses" and "Plato's Doctrine of the Cross," both chapters asserting that Plato owes a debt to the writings of Moses for many of his philosophical ideals. For example, in Chapter LX Justin responds to accusations that Christianity was but borrowing from the philosophies of the ancients. Justin argues that Plato is not foreshadowing the Son of Man but in fact misinterpreting Moses in the following lines of the *Timaeus*: " 'He placed him crosswise in the universe,'" for Plato in fact "borrowed in like manner from Moses." Further into Chapter LX Justin asserts that Plato has misunderstood the writings of Moses concerning Numbers 21:8. This particular chapter of Numbers deals with the "brazen image of a snake" of which those who gaze upon it will be saved. This image is made in the form of a cross:

Which things Plato reading, and not accurately understanding, and not apprehending that it was the figure of the cross, but taking it to be a placing crosswise, he said that the power next to the first God was placed crosswise in the universe.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 222.

Continuing, Justin also makes the charge that the term logos that is used by Plato is yet again another instance of copying from the writings of Moses:

For he gives the second place to the Logos which is with God, who he said was placed crosswise in the universe; and the third place to the Spirit who was said to be borned upon the water.

Justin concludes by asserting that “It is not, then, that we hold the same opinions as others, but that all speak in imitation of ours.”⁹⁸

In Chapter XXXI of *Against Heresies* (c. 180 CE) Irenaeus, second century CE Bishop of Lyons, asserts the position or belief in something like an Abraham’s Bosom. He does not mention these words but does hold to an intermediate / third existence other than Heaven or Hell in which the souls of the departed are in respite. Criticizing heretical notions that upon death the soul goes immediately to its just desserts, Irenaeus states that the soul takes the same path as that of the Lord Christ Himself:

for three days He dwelt in the place where the dead were, as the prophet says concerning Him: ‘And the Lord remembered His dead saints who slept formerly in the land of sepulture; and He descended to them, to rescue and save them’⁹⁹

In Chapter XXIX of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus criticizes what appears to be a Gnostic heresy for its improper belief in the final condition of the soul after death. Irenaeus scrutinizes the position that these individuals have taken on the soul’s condition in an intermediate state:

⁹⁸ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American reprint of the Edinburgh edition, vol. I, *Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 182.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 560.

For it is manifest that those acts which are deemed righteous are performed in bodies. Either, therefore, all souls will of necessity pass into the intermediate place, and there will never be a judgment; or bodies, too, which have participated in righteousness, will attain to the place of enjoyment, along with the souls which have in like manner participated, if indeed righteousness is powerful enough to bring thither those substances which have participated in it.¹⁰⁰

He concludes by stating that humans “are in all points inconsistent with themselves, when they decide that all souls do not enter into the intermediate place, but those of the righteous only.”¹⁰¹

Writing in the early third Century (c. post 202 CE), St. Clement of Alexandria’s *The Stromata* presents yet another example of the benefits of prayers for the dead concerning the state of the soul. Book XI, Chapter XIV holds the following words by Clement:

Accordingly the believer, through great discipline, divesting himself of the passions, passes to the mansion which is better than the former one, viz., to the greatest torment, taking with him the characteristic of repentance from the sins he has committed after baptism. He is tortured then still more—not yet or not quite attaining what he sees others to have acquired. Besides, he is also ashamed of his transgressions. The greatest torments, indeed, are assigned to the believer. For God’s righteousness is good, and His goodness is righteous. And though the punishments cease in the course of the completion of the expiation and purification of each one, yet those have very great and permanent grief who are found worthy of the other fold, on account of not being along with those that have been glorified through righteousness.¹⁰²

Historian of Late Antiquity and religious culture, Peter Brown put it best when considering the concepts of third-century Christians concerning the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 403.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American reprint of the Edinburgh edition, vol. II, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)* (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 505.

afterlife. Through extensive examinations of Christian writings and artwork contained within Christian Catacombs, Brown asserts most Christians identified with the concept of a heavenly 'repose' or *refrigerium* that might resemble concepts in this work relating to the Bosom of Abraham: a condition that was not Heaven nor was it Hell, but rather a waiting station until Final Judgment. While not identified with purgatorial fire as means of purifying oneself, artistic renderings do reveal Christians praying for salvation in these scenes.¹⁰³

Afterlife geographical connotations, such as the Bosom of Abraham, are also apparent in the writings of third century CE Bishop of Carthage - Cyprian. In a letter sent to Antonianus in c. 253 C.E., Cyprian seems to indicate a third place other than Heaven or Hell in which the recently deceased repose themselves. He also seems to indicate that while in this location their sins might be purged away with some form of fire:

it is one thing, when cast into prison, not to go out thence until one has paid the uttermost farthing; another thing at once to receive the wages of faith and courage. It is one thing, tortured by long suffering for sins, to be cleansed and long purged by fire; another to have purged all sins by suffering. It is one thing, in fine, to be in suspense till the sentence of God at the day of judgment; another to be at once crowned by the Lord.¹⁰⁴

The ability to assist those souls located in this third place is confirmed by Doctor of the church, Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 350 C.E). In *Catechetical Lecture* 23:9-10, Cyril gives the impression he is advocating what becomes known as the concept of *Psychopannychia* with statements like the following:

¹⁰³ Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 56-59.

¹⁰⁴ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol V., 332.

Then we commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us, first Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, that at their prayers and intercessions God would receive our petition. Then on behalf also of the Holy Fathers and Bishops who have fallen asleep before us, and in a word of all who in past years have fallen asleep among us, believing that it will be a very great benefit to the souls , for whom the supplication is put up, while that holy and most awful sacrifice is set forth.¹⁰⁵

Going further, Cyril indicates how beneficial it is for persons to offer up supplications for those souls already dead.

And I wish to persuade you by an illustration. For I know that many say, what is a soul profited, which departs from this world either with sins, or without sins, if it be commemorated in the prayer? For if a king were to banish certain who had given him offense, and then those who belong to them should weave a crown and offer it to him on behalf of those under punishment, would he not grant a remission of their penalties? In the same way we, when we offer to Him our supplications for those who have fallen asleep, though they be sinners, weave no crown, but offer up Christ sacrificed for our sins , propitiating our merciful God for them as well as for ourselves.¹⁰⁶

By 325 CE, the efficaciousness of Prayers for the Dead was commonly accepted within the Christian church. It was accepted to such a degree that this practice was included in the early fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*. The following example reveals that the *Constitutions* were essentially a clergyman's and layman's guidebook:

Let us pray for our brethren that are at rest in Christ, that God, the lover of mankind, who has received his soul, may forgive him every sin, voluntary and involuntary, and may be merciful and gracious to him, and give him his lot in the land of the pious that are sent into the bosom of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with all those that have pleased Him and done His

¹⁰⁵ Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, reprint of the American Edition, Vol. VII, second printing, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gergory of Nazianzen* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1999), 154.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

will from the beginning of the world, whence all sorrow, grief, and lamentation are banished.¹⁰⁷

Yet, it was St. Augustine (CE 354-430) who began discussing the soul being purged after death. But before discussing Augustine's writings concerning the soul's purging prior to its final Judgment, we must first put to rest any uncertainty his stance may seem to introduce at first glance when taking into account his concepts of Predestination. For, if God has pre-ordained souls for salvation or damnation, what purpose does a purgatorial state hold?

Augustine's thoughts concerning what would ultimately become the doctrine of Predestination begin in 427 CE in *Letter 194* to Sixtus. This letter was written during the tumultuous Pelagian controversy. In his biography of Augustine, Peter Brown writes the letter contains Augustine's thoughts on the ultimate dominance of God as it relates to human affairs:

The first stirring of men's own wills was 'prepared' by God, and God, in His timeless Wisdom, had decided to 'prepare' only the wills of a few.¹⁰⁸

This is as Brown asserts a very 'pessimistic' outlook on humanity.¹⁰⁹ Yet, when considering Augustine's own life journey, living as he did during the sack of Hippo by Vandals in 430 CE, pessimism is logical. One reason Augustine's ideas are represented here as they are was due to the static situation of Christianity in North Africa. Whereas in parts of Europe where missionary activities were making considerable inroads, Augustine's world had become one

¹⁰⁷ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, 497.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), 399.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 401.

in which his message to his flock was being received less than enthusiastically: “many listen to me, few take any notice.”¹¹⁰ Thus Augustine was attempting to find some means of separating those of the true faith out from those Christians who were in the apostle’s words “lukewarm.”¹¹¹

It should come as no surprise to the reader that Augustine eventually arrived at an idea such as predestination. For now, the church itself was pre-ordained for success. This speaks volumes when considering that Augustine’s work *On the Predestination of the Saints* was written in 429 CE amidst rumors of the Vandals approaching onslaught that would see Numidia sacked in 430 CE. Thus, Christians were now experiencing something that had long been absent from their worldview. They were now like their predecessors who were martyred for their faith throughout the empire. Christians now faced the real fear of extinction. Therefore this fear of the unknown outcome led individual bishops, like Augustine, to counsel their flock to persevere through this crisis. Augustine was not intending to “deny freedom” with his doctrine of predestination. He was only responding to “the harsh environment of a fallen world.”¹¹² Faced with the reality that not all would survive, Augustine had to find a manner by which to console his congregation; they were of a special element within humanity: a predestined order of individuals who were already consigned to Heaven.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 402.

¹¹¹ Apoc. 3:16 DV.

¹¹² Ibid., 404.

Concerning Augustine's true motives for developing a doctrine of predestination,

Brown has the following comments:

Predestination, an abstract stumbling-block to the sheltered communities of Hadrumetum and Marseilles, as it would be to so many future Christians, had only one meaning for Augustine: it was a doctrine of survival, a fierce insistence that God alone could provide men with an irreducible inner core.¹¹³

As for his concepts of the afterlife, the earliest evidence of Augustine's awareness of a "third place" is found within his prayer associated with the death of his Christian mother, Monica in 397-98 CE. In his prayer after her death, Augustine urgently expresses the following lamentations:

Thus, my Glory and my Life, God of my heart, leaving aside for this time her good deeds, for which I give thanks to Thee in joy, I now pray to thee for my mother's sins. Grant my prayer through the true Medicine of your wounds, who hung upon the cross and who now sitting at Thy right hand makes intercession for us. I know that she dealt mercifully, and from her heart forgave those who trespassed against her: do Thou also forgive such trespasses as she may have been guilty of in all the years since her baptism, forgive them, Lord, forgive them, I beseech Thee: enter not into judgment with her. Let Thy mercy be exalted above Thy justice for Thy words are true and Thou has promised that the merciful shall obtain mercy.¹¹⁴

Le Goff and Paul Juris provide evidence that Augustine continued his beliefs in a purgatorial state after death, one in which fire was to be experienced for the soul's cleansing.¹¹⁵ But like his predecessor Tertullian, we see in Augustine's *Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, and Love* a concept of the geography of the afterlife that indicates a Platonic influence:

¹¹³ Ibid., 407.

¹¹⁴ F.J. Sheed, trans., *Augustine: Confessions*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2006), 184.

¹¹⁵ Juris, 14; Le Goff, 3.

During the time, moreover, which intervenes between a man's death and the final resurrection, the soul dwells in a hidden retreat, where it enjoys rest or suffers affliction just in proportion to the merit it has earned by the life which it led on earth.¹¹⁶

As to what happens to the soul during its respite in this intermediate place

Augustine is fairly specific:

And it is not impossible that something of the same kind may take place even after this life. It is a matter that may be inquired into, and either ascertained or left doubtful, whether some believers shall pass through a kind of purgatorial fire, and in proportion as they have loved with more or less devotion the goods that perish, be less or more quickly delivered from it.¹¹⁷

Thus an anti-materialistic and dualistic (Neo-Platonic) influence in the writings and subsequent doctrines established by Augustine should come as no surprise to the reader. Augustine was admittedly heavily influenced by Plato's works: specifically the translations and commentaries of his works by Plotinus.

Christian Platonists of Late Antiquity did not see a disconnect between

Christianity and Platonic philosophy. On the contrary:

To a Christian Platonist, the history of Platonism seemed to converge quite naturally on Christianity. Both pointed in the same direction. Both were radically other-worldly: Christ had said, 'My Kingdom is not of this world'; Plato had said the same of his realm of ideas.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, reprint of the American Edition, Vol. III, second printing, *Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 272.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 93. See also Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980); here Ozment discusses the development of medieval intellectual thought in which "new political and social forms began" to emerge that influenced post Reformation Europe to a high degree (2). This is for Ozment a period in which "medieval thinkers first discovered the pains and pleasures of truly critical thought" (7). Instrumental to this early development were individuals the author refers to as "custodians of antiquity," one of which was

After immersing himself in the works and translations of Plato by Plotinus, Augustine was deeply swayed by the manner in which pagan authors viewed the world, especially when considering truth and beauty. Plotinus' influence is felt in Book VII of Augustine's *Confessions*:

I was now studying the ground of my admiration for the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or of earth, and on what authority I might rightly judge of things mutable and say, 'This ought to be so, that not so.' Enquiring then what was the source of my judgment, when I did so judge I had discovered the immutable and true eternity of truth above my changing mind. . . Thus in the thrust of a trembling glance my mind arrived at That Which Is.¹¹⁹

In his biography of Augustine Peter Brown asserts that through intense meditations upon the works of Plotinus, Augustine was able to overcome any shortcomings he may have had because of Manichaean lingerings. Therefore, according to Brown, the influence of Neo-Platonic writings upon Augustine "shifted" his spiritual understanding of God. No longer was he "identified with his God," rather Augustine now had to come to terms with an existence in which he was separate and distinctly different.¹²⁰ His thoughts from Book VII again speak to this as well a culmination regarding his search for *truth*:

'I am the food of grown men: grow and you shall eat Me. And you shall not change Me into yourself as bodily food, but into Me you shall be changed.'

Augustine, who was influential in providing the West with knowledge of Aristotelian, Platonic and Neoplatonic thought. This knowledge might have been lost if not for individuals such as Augustine during a period of history that is categorized with social and civil unrest. Ozment describes the early Middle Ages as an era in which scholars / theologians experimented with ideas and endeavored to preserve that which had come before, while the period that would follow, the high Middle Ages, would see humankind seek self-discovery and attempt to define explicitly all philosophical ideals.

¹¹⁹ Sheed, *Augustine*, 132-33; For more on Augustine's dependence upon Platonism see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 96.

¹²⁰ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 99.

. . . And I said: 'Is truth then nothing at all, since it is not extended either through finite spaces or infinite?' And thou didst cry to me from afar: I am who am. . . and there was from that moment no ground of doubt in me.¹²¹

Peter Brown asserts that after Augustine finally decides to fully embrace the Catholic form of Christianity, a true synthesis of theology and philosophy occurs.¹²² Augustine had finally found that elusive truth he so desperately had sought. Augustine could not separate Neo-Platonism from Christian truths.¹²³

In Book VII of Plato's *Laws* Augustine utilizes Plato's ideas concerning humanity as it relates to God. Here Plato foreshadowed literature to be written a millennium later when he compared the relationship of humans to their God as puppets on strings:

Telemachus, some things thou wilt thyself find in thy heart, but other things God will suggest; for I deem that thou wast not brought up without the will of the Gods. And this ought to be the view of our alumni; they ought to think that what has been said is enough for them, and that any other things their Genius and God will suggest to them—he will tell them to whom, and when, and to what Gods severally they are to sacrifice and perform dances, and how they may propitiate the deities, and live according to the appointment of nature; being for the most part puppets, but having some little share of reality.¹²⁴

As E.R. Dodds asserts concerning this brief passage, whether we are meant for serious or trifling concerns the reason for our existence is unknown. It is

¹²¹ Sheed, *Augustine*, 129; for additional material on this aspect of Augustine see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 100.

¹²² Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 111.

¹²³ Peter Brown puts forth the quintessential Eastern Church Father Origen as the model of how this type of assimilation might occur. For Origen the philosophy of the Greeks was in fact a seedling come to fruition under the guidance of none other than Christ Himself (Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*); Dodds makes the same case specifically pointing to Origen's *De Principiis* (Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*)

¹²⁴ Plato, *Laws*, Benjamin Jowett, trans. [book on-line] (eBooks@Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2005, accessed 9 April 2007); available from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/au/>; Internet, Book VII.

apparent that once again, Augustine has been swayed by his interest and admiration of pagan literature especially that of Plato.¹²⁵

Early British Christianity

In 590 CE, former Roman prefect and member of the Roman *gens Amicia*, Gregory, later to be referenced as the *Great*, assumed the Bishopric of Rome.¹²⁶ Gregory's eschatological insights concerning the geography of the afterlife are first evident in his commentary on the book of Job in the *Moralia in Job* (henceforth to be referred to as the *Morals on the Book of Job*.) LeGoff asserts that Gregory's exegesis upon this text provided theological writers in the thirteenth century a solid basis to construct a purgatorial doctrine.¹²⁷ Yet, in point of fact, Gregory's writings were well understood to early medieval thinkers as well as its laity.

In *Morals*, Gregory attempted to reconcile the paradox of all souls being relegated to Hell prior to the coming of Christ who will break down the doors of death, and the firmly held belief that the souls of the righteous did not enter into that part of Hell in which souls were tortured. Thus, *Morals* paved the way for a multifaceted geography of Hell in which there was room to allow for an antechamber of sorts where the souls of the righteous were allowed to rest in

¹²⁵ Dodds, 8-9.

¹²⁶ LeGoff considers Gregory "the Last Father of Purgatory," yet evidence points to the contrary as this dissertation will present (LeGoff, 88).

¹²⁷ LeGoff, 90.

peace until the Day of Judgment.¹²⁸ Commenting upon Job 14:13, where the author cries out “Who will grant me this, that thou mayst protect me in hell, and hide me till thy wrath pass, and appoint me a time when thou wilt remember me?”¹²⁹ Gregory asserts:

That before the coming of the Mediator between God and man, every person, though he might have been of a pure and approved life, descended to the prisons of hell, there can be no doubt; in that man, who fell by his own act, was unable by his own act to return to the rest of Paradise, except that He should come, Who by the mystery of His Incarnation should open the way into that same Paradise. For hence after the sin of the first man it is recorded, that a flaming sword was placed at the entrance of Paradise [Gen. 3, 24], which is also called ‘moveable,’ [*versatilis*, V.] in that the time should come one day, that it might even be removed. Nor yet do we maintain that the souls of the righteous did so go down into hell, that they were imprisoned in places of punishment; but it is to be believed that there are higher regions in hell and that there are lower regions apart, so that both the righteous might be at rest in the upper regions, and the unrighteous be tormented in the lower ones. Hence the Psalmist, by reason of the grace of God preventing him, says, *Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell*. [Ps. 86, 13] Thus blessed Job before the coming of the Mediator, knowing of his going down into hell, implores the protecting hand of his Maker there, in order that he might be a stranger to the places of punishment; where, while he is brought to enjoy rest, he might be kept hidden from punishment.¹³⁰

Gregory continues his discussion by drawing a clear distinction between those souls confined to Hell’s regions of punishment and an alternate location from which the souls of the righteous were to wait upon the arrival of the Mediator:

But because the souls of the righteous were one day to be set free by the coming of the Mediator from the regions of hell, though not the places of punishment, this too the righteous man foresees.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* (12.13), trans. John Henry Parker (London: J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1844, accessed 29 May 2010); available from <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralialIndex.html>; internet.; also see LeGoff, 89.

¹²⁹ Job 14:13 DV

¹³⁰ Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* (12.13).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, (12.14).

Finally in chapter thirteen of *Morals* Gregory put his thoughts on the geography of the afterlife to paper. Paragraph fifty-three of this chapter reveals the author's musings upon Job 17:16, which indicates a multi-chambered Hell: "All that I have shall go down into the deepest pit: thinkest thou that there at least I shall have rest?"¹³² Gregory goes to great lengths to explain the meaning of the words *deepest* or *lowest hell*.

Whereas it appears that among those below the righteous are held bound not in places of punishment, but in the bosom of tranquillity above, an important question springs up before us, why it is that blessed Job declares, saying, *All of mine shall descend into the lowest hell*; who even if before the Advent of the Mediator between God and man he had to descend into hell, yet it is plain that into the lowest hell he had not to descend. Does he call the very higher regions of hell, 'the lowest hell?' Plainly because in relation to the loftiness of heaven, the region of this sky may not unappropriately be called the lower region. Whence when the Apostate Angels were plunged from the seats of heaven into this darksome region of the air, the Apostle Peter says, *For if God spared not the Angels that sinned, but delivered them, dragged down with infernal chains, into hell, to be reserved for torments in the Judgment.* [2 Pet. 2, 4] If then relatively to the height of heaven this darksome air is infernal, relatively to the elevation of this air, the earth which lies below may be taken both as infernal, and as deep; and relatively to the height of that earth, even those parts of hell which are higher than the other mansions of the place below, may in this place not unsuitably be denoted by the designation of the lowest hell; in that what the sky is to heaven, and the earth to the sky, the same is that higher hollow of the regions below to the earth.¹³³

LeGoff would like his readers to believe that later writers, specifically those of the thirteenth century, interpreted Old Testament accounts of the afterlife along the same lines put forth by Gregory. Yet, to do so ignores the already held belief in a

¹³² Job 17:16 DV; LeGoff, 90.

¹³³ Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* (13.53).

storage chamber for souls that was believed in not only by the early Greeks, but by those of the Jewish religion (*Sheol*), the beliefs of whom the early church Fathers were most assuredly aware.

Book 4 of Gregory's *Dialogues* contains the author's strongest expositions upon the nature of the soul after death. In response to a question posited by the deacon Peter on whether one should or should not "believe in a cleansing fire after death," Gregory responds by asserting that "there must be a cleansing fire before judgment, because of some minor faults that may remain to be purged away." Citing Matthew 12:32 the author goes on to state the following:

Does not Christ, the Truth, say that if anyone blasphemes against the Holy Spirit he shall not be forgiven 'either in this world or in the world to come?' From this statement we learn that some sins can be forgiven in this world and some in the world to come.¹³⁴

Within paragraph 41 Gregory also delineates which sins may or may not be cleansed after death and specifically cites only those of the "venial or trivial sins which fire consumes easily."¹³⁵ The author also warns the reader that purification will only come about for those souls who have warranted such a cleansing in this life through good works. Paragraph 57 of the same book supports this concept. Here Gregory advises Peter that prayers for the dead are efficacious but only for those souls who's "sins can be pardoned in the life to

¹³⁴ *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Volume 39, *Saint Gregory the Great*, trans. Odo John Zimmerman (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 247-248.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 249.

come.”¹³⁶ These words echo thoughts put forth by Augustine that only those souls already in a state of grace will receive such a blessing of purification.

Gregory is also important due to his influence on future writers concerning visionary tales of the afterlife. As Richard Pfaff has shown, the legend surrounding Gregory’s vision of his deceased mother suffering in the afterlife and his subsequent offering of masses to alleviate said suffering of his mother was to have a tremendous impact on Bede and Alcuin.¹³⁷ The tradition of offering masses for the recently deceased soon came to be associated with the Gregorian Trental, but the Gregorian Trental should not be confused with the British St. Gregory’s Trental. The former involves thirty consecutive masses performed for the repose of an individual soul, whereas St. Gregory’s Trental refers to thirty masses spread over the course of an entire year and associated with various feast days. And finally, as Pfaff has revealed, the St. Gregory Trental is not associated with Gregory himself. But, by the thirteenth century, *exemplia* associated with Gregory (specifically his dream vision of his deceased mother) resulted in verse tales soon to become known throughout Europe as St. Gregory’s Trental.

LeGoff goes to great lengths when speaking of Gregory’s influence upon subsequent *exempla* visionary tales by Bede, Alcuin and other writers of the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 266; For more examples of Gregory’s concept of purgation of the soul after death see Gregory’s “On the Soul and the Resurrection” in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Volume 58, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, trans. Virginia Woods Callahan (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 237, 241, 267.

¹³⁷ Richard Pfaff, “The English Devotion of St. Gregory’s Trental,” *Speculum* 49, no. 1 (Jan. 1974), pp. 75-90.

Carolingian period. He goes so far as to state that the period between Gregory and the twelfth century was in his words a period in which there was little intellectual growth concerning the afterlife.¹³⁸ The author seems to imply that because of the variance in outlook upon the afterlife by following theologians, no articulated doctrine was accepted by the church or its laity. Yet, as seen in the following examples this is simply not the case.

After Gregory, the next name to discuss in the development of purgatorial thought is The Venerable Bede. We have discussed Augustine's doctrine or concept of the afterlife, specifically Platonic influences upon this particular doctrine and the syncretism that followed. We have also seen in detail the *exempla* offered up by Gregory that heavily influenced Christian thinkers. Therefore, the multiplicity of afterlife interpretations encountered within Bede's writings should come as no surprise.

Before discussing Bede's impact upon purgatorial notions in England after the seventh century, it is important to understand that Christianity was long introduced to Britain; followed by a long period of acculturation prior to the arrival of Augustine c. 595 CE. Many legends purport to describe the introduction of Christianity into Britain during the first century, such as, Simon Zelotes or St. Paul himself coming to Britain; or Joseph of Arimathaea being the founder of Christianity in Britain. These legends bear little historical accuracy, yet what can be derived with certainty are the writings of Tertullian (Second Century) who

¹³⁸ LeGoff, 96-97.

describes the spread of Christianity in Avalon “as so wide that parts which the Roman armies could not reach had been subdued to Christ.”¹³⁹ To be sure the British Bishops attending the Council of Arles in 314 CE were not representing Britain from afar. “The departure of the Romans, who carried off the flower of the population in their armies, and the arrival of the Saxons, affected the ruin of the Britons, and all but obliterated the British church.”¹⁴⁰

Bede was born in either 672 or 673 CE near the monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow. His early education came first under the guidance of Benedict Biscop, the ex-soldier turned monk and founder of the monastery at Wearmouth. Shortly thereafter he came under the tutelage of Ceolfrith, who in turn presented him to Bishop John of Hexham. By 703 Bede was ordained a priest and spent the rest of his life primarily within the confines of Wearmouth-Jarrow with the exception of short trips to York and Linddisfarne until his death in 735 CE. According to a brief biography of Bede’s life given by Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, the most important building within the monastery next to the church itself was his library. Found within these dusty walls were numerous tracts collected and left to the monastery and Bede by his former tutors—Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith. Therefore, Bede had at his disposal “the works of Ambrose, Augustine, Cyprian, Jerome, Gregory, Cassiodorus, Isidore, and others.” In addition to these works Bede was also familiar with classical authors,

¹³⁹ G.F. Browne, *The Venerable Bede: His Life and Writings* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1930), 81.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

specifically those of Virgil and Dionysius Exiguus. Also found in the library of Wearmouth-Jarrow were the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great.¹⁴¹

Bede himself spoke of Christians who had only just renounced their pagan ancestry and accepted the baptism of Christianity. D.H. Farmer states in his introduction: “Bede brought to his own primitive age much of what was best in the old world of Roman culture, both classical and Christian.”¹⁴² It is only logical that past traditions, rural traditions and ritualized customs, especially those surrounding the developing doctrine concerning that of an afterlife, were heavily influenced by a community’s previous mythologies.

There is not room to list and explicate all geographical examples of the afterlife and final resting place of the soul within Bede’s work. Those that have the most direct implications for a belief and or practice in prayers for the dead or a purgatorial state (a third place other than heaven or hell) are discussed. Bede’s writings at first glance seem to point to a sense of continuity of thought: a thought drastically opposed to any sense of resting in the grave, rather an affirmation that the soul immediately journeys to heaven at death. For example, in Book II Chapter I of the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede reflects upon the death of Pope Gregory the Great, making the assertion that upon his death the soul of Gregory immediately “entered the true life of

¹⁴¹ Colgrave, Bertram and R.A.B. Mynors, eds., *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), xxv-xxvi.

¹⁴² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. D.H. Farmer (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 31.

heaven.”¹⁴³ In Book II Chapter V, while describing the deaths of Ethelbert and Sabert he hints at souls traveling immediately to their just rewards in heaven.¹⁴⁴ By Book III, Bede begins to relate a quite different outlook on the afterlife.

Book III Chapter XIX holds a visionary account related to Bede concerning a monk named Fursa. The inclusion of the vision of Fursa into Bede’s *History* is of import due to its afterlife geography and imagery of fire. While being escorted by Angels through the afterlife during his vision, Fursa sees four distinct fires within a dark valley. He is told by the angel that these fires “were to kindle and consume the world.” They each respectively represent falsehood, covetousness, discord, and injustice. The angel continues his explanation and tells Fursa that these flames “test each man according to his deserts, and the evil desires of everyone will be burned away in this fire.” Bede relates a vision of not Heaven or Hell but some vague alternative where sins of man may be remitted after death. For those souls described in Fursa’s vision were not consigned to Hell.¹⁴⁵

Again in Book IV Chapter VIII, Bede recounts the story of a nun about to depart this life and claims she has received a vision that promises at death “she would depart to eternal light.”¹⁴⁶ Yet in Chapter XXVIII of the same book Bede’s account of the death of the Abbess Hilda strays from this concept of the soul’s condition at death. For at the news of her death her fellow nuns gathered

¹⁴³ Ibid., 102.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 111.

¹⁴⁵ Colgrave, Bertram and R.A.B. Mynors, eds., *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 273.

¹⁴⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 218; Cuthbert’s *Letter on the Death of Bede* also recounts the incident of monks praying and offering masses for the benefit of Bede’s soul, in Colgrave, Bertram and R.A.B. Mynors, eds., *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 585.

together and prayed for the soul of their departed Mother. This passage is significant. Whereas previously in similar death bed tales, Bede's comments concerning the souls of the righteous as having immediate entry in the light of heaven, here the state of the soul is rather vague. While Bede informs the reader that the soul of the abbess Hilda has passed from "death to life" he does not inform the reader as to the exact condition of that same soul. It may be understood as to have journeyed to heaven, but one cannot make that assumption in this case especially with previous examples doing just that. Although imagery presented by Bede hints at an immediate Heavenly reward for the Abbess Hilda, concurrent visionary tales associated with this legend offer contradictory information. Bede recounts a vision from a sister within the monastery where Hilda has passed away and upon discovering that her sister has died she immediately awakes the entirety of the monastery so that prayers for Hilda's soul might be offered.¹⁴⁷

Book V Chapter XII holds a very Platonic interpretation of the afterlife. Seeming to echo Plato's discussion of the condition of the soul after death in paragraphs 80e and 81-b of the *Phaedo*, Drythelm's vision of the afterlife also reveals an afterlife composed of more than just two conditions of heaven or hell for the soul. Drythelm's vision encompassed an afterlife composed of four levels of confinement and rewards for individual souls. The first level envisioned by Drythelm is one of expiation. Within this valley of two extremes, fire and ice,

¹⁴⁷ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 246-47; Colgrave, Bertram and R.A.B. Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 412-13.

souls are purged of their taint of sin but have a hope of reconciliation with God.

The following is Drythelm's angelic guide's account:

The valley that you saw, with its awful flaming fire and freezing cold, is the place in which those souls have to be tried and chastened who delayed to confess and make restitution for the sins they had committed until they were on the point of death; and so they died. But because they did repent and confess, even though on their deathbed, they will all come to the kingdom of heaven on judgement day; and the prayers of those who are still alive, their alms and fastings and specially the celebration of masses, help many of them to get free even before the day of judgement.

The second level visited by Drythelm and his guide is that of Hell itself where souls have no chance of escape; for it is "the very mouth of hell, into which whoever once falls will never be released from it through all eternity." Bede is very specific in relating that no soul may escape this condition. The third level is one very similar to the Greek and very Platonic idea of Elysian Fields where the souls of those individuals who had received grace yet are still tainted with sin remain until the last Judgment. Their plight was not one of pain or remorse rather it was one of joy. The final stage or level of Drythelm's vision is Heaven itself, where none but the truly righteous may venture. Therefore, with the *Vision of Drythelm*, Bede offers an eighth-century visionary account that clearly outlines a very firm concept of the geography of the afterlife: an afterlife that provides for not only a Heaven or Hell, but an alternate existence – a third place in which sin is remitted after death.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Colgrave, Bertram and R.A.B. Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 489-99; It is G.F. Browne's opinion that the *Apoc. Of Peter* influences the *Vision of Drythelm*, in which Drythelm recounts conditions of and degrees of torment and happiness. Thus, Bede's own idea of Purgatory may have been influenced from these accounts (Browne, *The Venerable Bede*,

If these visions were heretical or “new,” Bede would not have included them in his *History*. In point of fact, if these visions or *exempla* were indeed not accepted by the church, such practices would have been proscribed by Bede himself when given the opportunity in his penitentials. Remember, Bede is not only writing his history of Christianity in Britain but he also produces his own penitential, which does not denounce these views of the afterlife. What these penitentials do reveal is a world of heavy syncretism between pagan and Christian beliefs.¹⁴⁹ As one reviews the many penitentials of the Anglo-Saxon period of England as well as penitentials available from the continent during the Carolingian period, one will be hard pressed to discover any indications of heretical thoughts concerning the afterlife that resemble thoughts expressed by our authors.

Born the year of Bede’s death, 735 CE, Alcuin of York provides the next canvas of examination in the development of Purgatorial thought. The works of Alcuin are of import concerning the institution of purgatory, especially in light of his work on liturgical reform under Charlemagne. Carolingian intellectuals provide little in the way of evidence to discuss; yet, it is not as dry as some might indicate.¹⁵⁰ To understand the intellectual development of Alcuin it may interest

120). Much can be made of the fact that the *Apoc. Of Peter* is probably the earliest known visionary account of heaven and hell for early Christians.

¹⁴⁹ Penitentials will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

¹⁵⁰ LeGoff, 103; see also George Cross, “The Medieval Catholic Doctrine of the Future Life” in *The Biblical World*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (March 1912), pp. 188-199; although admitting the scarcity of materials, Cross does assert that scholars of the Carolingian Renaissance, such as Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, and Walafrid Strabo offer a defining nature to the purgatorial doctrine, 192.

the reader to know his academic pedigree. Alcuin was trained by Archbishop Egbert of York and later by Albert, both contemporaries of Bede. Together, they amassed an immense library at York which came into the hands of Alcuin.¹⁵¹

Not unlike his intellectual patron Bede, Alcuin had at his disposal the library at York. According to G. F. Browne, Alcuin had at his disposal a veritable treasure trove of ancient literary works that ranged from Jerome, Hilary, Ambrose, and Augustine, to Gregory the Great, Fulgentius, John Chrysostom, Bede, Aristotle, Lactantius and Virgil.¹⁵²

The scholar has at his disposal only three occasions in which Alcuin ponders a purgatorial condition: His commentary upon 1 Corinthians 3:13 *On the Belief in the Holy Trinity (De fide Sanctaie)*, and his *Expos. in Ps. 6, Ps. 37*. But it is Alcuin's *De fide*, where the author proposes the existence of a purgatorial fire after death – *ignis purgatories*; yet he asserts this fire will be present at the final judgement. Echoing comments made by Gregory in book 4 of his *Dialogues*, Alcuin asserts that certain minor sins will be purged prior to entry unto their “coronation.”¹⁵³ It seems Alcuin is not considering a place, but rather a condition of purgation before final judgment; a stance the church eventually adopts itself.

Thus continuing the line of belief seen early within Bede's History, it seems Bede and Alcuin, like other early church leaders, were defining the nature of the soul between that of death and final judgment. This process was one of an

¹⁵¹ Browne, *The Venerable Bede*, 3; also see p. 67 for more information on the library at York.

¹⁵² G. F. Browne, *Alcuin of York: Lectures Delivered in the Cathedral Church of Bristol in 1907 and 1908* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1908), 85.

¹⁵³ LeGoff, 103.

evolving nature; one that continues throughout the Middle Ages into the early modern era where it explodes in a series of pamphlets and essays reexamining the state of the soul after death by Protestant thinkers.

CHAPTER V

ANGLO-SAXON PENITENTIALS

The doctrine of purgatory was heavily if not totally influenced by cultural elements of the ancient Anglo-Saxon church via its penitential system. The impact of custom upon Germanic law codes has been well documented by medieval legal scholars such as John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer.¹⁵⁴ The same is true concerning the impact of such law codes upon the developing system of penitentials within the British Isles. This chapter will examine what if any effects this intermingling had upon the acceptance by the laity of not only paganistic attributes into their penitential system but also of their considerations of an afterlife. Another important element to keep in mind when reviewing the Anglo-Saxon penitentials is the close relationship the development of these penitentials had upon the ledger book mentality of medieval Christianity. This will become apparent with a closer examination of said penitentials.

The medieval scholar may name many sources in attempts to uncover the nature of Christianity during the early medieval period. Evidence for a society rich in what modern eyes might consider magical or paganistic influences are easily found within the penitential system developing within the British Isles in the

¹⁵⁴ John T. McNeill, and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales and Selections from Related Documents* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1938).

church's infancy. From works as early as the *Penitential of Finnian* (c.a. 525-550 CE), evidence points to an ecclesiastical attempt to correct the 'improper' actions of not only its adherents but its clergy as well:

If any cleric or woman who practices magic misleads anyone by the magic, it is a monstrous sin, but [a sin that] can be expiated by penance. Such an offender shall do penance for six years, three years on an allowance of bread and water, and during the remaining years he shall abstain from wine and meats.¹⁵⁵

Very similar in its make-up and distribution, the *Penitential of Columban* (ca. 600 CE), also has a very detailed proscription against the usage of magic by its clerics and laity:

If one destroys another by his magic, he shall do penance for three years with an allowance of bread and water, and for three years more he shall abstain from wine and meats, and then at last in the seventh year he shall be admitted to communion. But if anyone is a magician for the sake of love and destroys nobody, that person, if a cleric, shall do penance for an entire year on bread and water; a layman, half that time; a deacon, two years; a priest, three. Especially if by this means anyone deceives a woman with respect to the birth of a child; for this each [of the above] shall add besides six periods of forty days, lest he be chargeable with homicide.¹⁵⁶

Arguments made by scholars of a 'primitive' Christianity at best are easily understood when exploring these early penitentials, especially when so many are directed at clerical authorities. Yet, one cannot overlook the cultural impact upon Christianity in the British Isles as an answer to this infusion of paganistic attributes into Christianity.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 90.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 252-253.

Keeping to a chronological development of the penitentials in an attempt to determine the nature of alterations in ecclesiastical directives, *The Irish Canons*, or *Canones Hibernenses* (ca. 675 CE) are also beneficial to our examination. This late seventh-century work has several penances directed towards the elimination of pagan tendencies: “This is the penance of a wizard, or of one who is given over to evil, if he believes in it, or of a hawker, or of a cohabiter, or of a heretic, or of an adulterer: seven years on bread and water.”¹⁵⁷ A very telling instance can also be gleaned from the *Law of Adamnan* (ca. 697 CE). In the following citation one finds not only a penance for those finding recourse through charms but also the church itself utilizing the apotropaic powers of the church altar to further its own needs:

If it be charms from which death ensues that any one give to another, the fines of murder followed by concealment of the corpse (are to be paid) for it. Secret plunderings and . . . which are traced to the four nearest lands, unless these four nearest lands can lay them on any one particularly, they swear by the . . . of their soul that they do not know to lay it upon any one and pay it themselves. If they suspect any one and prove it, it is he who shall be liable. If the probability lie between two or a greater number, let their names be written upon leaves; each leaf is arranged around a lot, and the lots are put into a chalice upon the altar. He on whom the lot falls is liable.¹⁵⁸

For an example that is emblematic of many of the early penitentials and ecclesiastical canons there is the mid-eighth century *Council of Clofesho* (747 CE). As Catherine Cubitt relates, the *Council of Clofesho* and its subsequent canons were convened to first deal with outward signs of tensions between

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 119; the authors note that the term magus in these Irish penitentials often refer to populations of druids.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 137.

ecclesiastical officials and the laity of the church. The council was also addressing the manner by which those same ecclesiastics were to perform their pastoral care as well as educate the laity in Christian tenets. Pastoral care of Anglo-Saxon England was in its infancy during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. The idea that pagan or native customs not only made their way into magisterial matters but ecclesiastical matters as well should come as no surprise to the reader as already mentioned. But to further buttress this argument, one has only to consider those areas of England that received the Christian Faith at a late date, such as the West Saxon diocese of Sussex, which was evangelized last of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms. As Cubitt points out, it was still predominately pagan when the *Council of Hertford* was convened in 672 CE as well as when the *Council of Haethfeld* was held in 679 CE (both convened by Archbishop Theodore). According to Bede this region was still suffering from the lack of proper ecclesiastical leadership when in 731 CE he complained the region had been “for some years without a bishop.”¹⁵⁹

The *Penitential of Theodore*, perhaps the most well known of the English Penitentials, is an excellent source to study when attempting to ascertain the extent of Christianity during the seventh and eighth centuries. The *Penitential* may be considered a cleric’s “how to manual” in that many of the provisions found within this canon were “framed from experience.”¹⁶⁰ The *Penitential* not only

¹⁵⁹ Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 110, 114.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

prescribes penances for the laity but also for the clergy as well. This is enlightening given the fact many of the provisions reveal incidents of penance for those who commit heresy and a variety of pagan magical practices.

The Penitential of Theodore reveals a church combating outside influence upon its laity. Chapter V of this work has fourteen very detailed proscriptions against heretical actions of its laity as well as directives to take when heretical influence makes its way into auspices of the church itself. The following example reveals a seventh century conflict between the early English church and the outside influence of Jews within her jurisdiction:

If one flouts the Council of Nicaea and keeps Easter with the Jews on the fourteenth of the moon, he shall be driven out of every church unless he does penance before his death.¹⁶¹

Shortly thereafter there are found entries that point to conflict between customary traits lingering within the English church and her Roman master:

If one, without knowing it, permits a heretic to celebrate the Mass in a Catholic church, he shall do penance for forty days. If [he does this] out of veneration for him [i.e., for the heretic], he shall do penance for an entire year. . . If [he does this] in condemnation of the Catholic Church and the customs of the Romans, he shall be cast out of the Church as a heretic, unless he is penitent; if he is, he shall do penance for ten years.¹⁶²

There is also a provision for those of the laity who deny their faith and attempt to convert others away from Christianity:

If he departs from the Catholic Church to the congregation of the heretics and persuades others and afterward performs penance, he shall do penance for twelve years; four years outside the church, and six among

¹⁶¹ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 188.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 188.

the “hearers,” and two more out of communion. Of these it is said in a synod: They shall receive the communion or oblation in the tenth year.¹⁶³

There are penitential provisions of three years for those “who drink blood or semen;” any woman “who tastes her husband’s blood as a remedy shall fast for forty days, more or less;” for those that make sacrifices to false idols, spirits or demons shall do penance for one to ten years. Perhaps one of the more distinctive oddities concerns instances of women in the community placing their daughter “upon a roof or into an oven for the cure of a fever” – to do so results in penance for seven years. Lastly, the *Penitential of Theodore* provides harsh penalties for anyone practicing “diabolical incantations or divinations.” It seems this last offense was a distinct concern as it encompasses one of the lengthier penitential provisions:

He who celebrates auguries, omens from birds, or dreams, or any divinations according to the custom of the heathen, or introduces such people into his houses, in seeking out any trick of the magicians—when these become penitents, if they belong to the clergy they shall be cast out; but if they are secular persons they shall do penance for five years.¹⁶⁴

These practices lingered throughout the eighth century until finally being condemned at *Clofesho* in 747 CE; the *Legatine Canons* of 786 CE; and Alcuin himself who criticized weakness of Christian character witnessed by himself in the Northeast of England.¹⁶⁵

As further proof of this intermingling of paganism and Christianity one has only to look to the *Penitential of Theodore* and *Bede* once again and the

¹⁶³ Ibid., 189.

¹⁶⁴ Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, 119; John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 190, 197, 198.

¹⁶⁵ Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, 119.

numerous penitentials that make reference to magical practices and witches of the early eighth century or *those who conjure up storms (emissores tempestatum.)* In the *Penitential ascribed by Albers to Bede* there is the following entry: “Those who conjure up storms shall do penance for seven years.” There is a similar provision found within *The So-Called Roman Penitential of Haltigar* (ca. 830): “If anyone is a conjurer-up of storms he shall do penance for seven years, three years on bread and water.” These “weather makers” are evident in many of the penitentials of this time period. Examples are also found within Regino of Prum’s *Ecclesiastical Discipline* in the tenth century: “Hast thou done anything that the pagans do at the Kalends of January, in [the guise of] a stag or a cow? Thou shalt do paenance for three years.” Also within this work are a number of activities that are similar to those proscribed in the *Penitential of Theodore*. Compare the following from *Ecclesiastical Discipline*: “Has thou placed they child on a roof or on an oven for some healing, or hast thou burnt grains where there was a dead man? . . . Hast thou sung diabolical songs over the dead?” Once again, it must be remembered that these offenses were not written down for the pagan, but these penitentials are directed at correcting behavior of what is obviously paganistic elements from the Christian laity.¹⁶⁶

Written at the beginning of the eleventh century, Book XIX of the *Decretum* of Burchard of Worms, often referred to as the *Corrector*, lists detailed

¹⁶⁶ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 40-41; 227, 305.

penance for a variety of “superstitious beliefs and practices.”¹⁶⁷ It is fairly obvious that Burchard’s work borrows heavily from previous Anglo-Saxon penitentials. This deduction will prove a stumbling block for LeGoff in his chronological estimation for the development of purgatory. For example, within Chapter V there is the following entry that bears striking similarity to the previous works of Theodore, Bede, and Regino of Prum:

Hast thou observed funeral wakes, that is, been present at the watch over the corpses of the dead when the bodies of Christians are guarded by a ritual of the pagans; and hast thou sung diabolical songs there and performed dances which the pagans have invented by the teaching of the devil; and hast thou drunk there and relaxed thy countenance with laughter, and, setting aside all compassion and emotion of charity, hast thou appeared as if rejoicing over a brother’s death? If thou hast, thou shalt do penance for thirty days on bread and water.¹⁶⁸

Thus, there are found within the penitentials ample evidence to point to evident reality of a Christianity that was intermingled with what must be considered a very generous coating of paganistic attributes.¹⁶⁹ As John T. McNeill asserts: “Folk paganism was a hydra which no weapons of ecclesiasticism could slay.”¹⁷⁰

It is evident that the early church within the British Isles found itself in the unique position of not only absorbing, but also combating many paganistic attributes in an attempt to further its own influence. The slowly developing

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 333.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 43; Also see Rosalind and Christopher Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages: Western Europe 1000-1300* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of The Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 – c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992); Claire Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971); and Thomas, *Religion*.

¹⁷⁰ John T. McNeill, “Folk-Paganism in the Penitentials,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 13, No. 4. (Oct., 1933), 465-466.

tradition of prayers for the dead and a 'third place' other than Heaven or Hell that would eventually become the doctrine of purgatory was itself beginning to take root within these early centuries of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Yet, some scholars have asserted that any systematic development of a Purgatorial doctrine could not and did not develop until preceded by an equally articulated penitential system. These authors argue this development did not occur until the eleventh and twelfth centuries at the earliest. We now turn to their arguments for perspective.

In the introduction to his epic work *La Naissance du Purgatoire*, Jacques LeGoff asserts that a belief in purgatory chiefly begins with an individual's belief that something "new" will happen to a person's soul during the eschatological period between death and resurrection. According to LeGoff, this something new is a "second chance to attain eternal life."¹⁷¹ It is the use of terminology such as "new" and "second chance" with which this author finds objection. It is an understood fact within theological circles that to attain access to purgatory one must already have received grace. A soul destined for purgatory has obtained the grace necessary to reach Heaven, it is only a matter of time; time in an eschatological sense. There is no instance of the church or church fathers insinuating that souls in purgatory may indeed be relegated to Hell for failing to perform the necessary penance. It must be remembered that if a soul had transitioned to purgatory, it was already destined for an eventual release into

¹⁷¹ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 5.

Heaven. It was only a matter of time. Only those souls that had already received the grace of God were allowed entry into purgatory in order to cleanse the taint of residual sin before being allowed into the presence of its God.

The suggestion that the doctrine of purgatory developed or was ‘born’ during the twelfth century is called into question when elements of this doctrine are found within the earliest forms of penitentials originating out of the British Isles. Early penitentials of the fifth to ninth centuries were known for their extensive time allotments for penitential suffering as well as extensive forms of expiation for the penitent not unlike the allowed forms of expiation for the souls in purgatory. Penitential codes very often spell out very detailed prescriptions such as the actual numbers of prayers to be recited by the penitent; exact time allotments for penance to be performed; money commutations in lieu of physical penance; as well as the amount and duration of pilgrimages offered out as penance.¹⁷²

Yet, LeGoff makes the case that the belief in purgatory first and foremost required the “projection into the afterlife of a highly sophisticated legal and penal system.”¹⁷³ This system was composed of a variety of manners by which a soul might mitigate or commute its penalties.¹⁷⁴ This is true to some extent, but a notion of a highly sophisticated legal system of penance was something the medieval mind had no problem envisioning or accepting. If one accepts the fact

¹⁷² For a detailed explanation of the various forms taken by English penitentials see Thomas Pollock Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline and Anglo-Saxon Law in Their Joint Influence* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1923; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1969), 52.

¹⁷³ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

that the penitential system of the Christian church was in development as early as the late sixth and early seventh centuries, the idea that the reader should take LeGoff's words as a significant point in his developments of a doctrine of purgatory developing in the twelfth century is problematic to say the least.

Therefore, an examination of the development of penitentials and how they may have affected the future doctrine of purgatory is called for, especially in light of the fact that LeGoff himself asserts the close connection between purgatory and the "habitual" sins known to Augustine and Gregory the Great that LeGoff asserts emerges as venial sins shortly before the "birth" of purgatory in the twelfth century. LeGoff states: "indeed, this (*venial sins*) was a prerequisite for the emergence of the doctrine of purgatory." Yet, once again it seems LeGoff's argument that the development of an articulated system of venial sins and the purging process of these "slight" sins was an eleventh-century development is found lacking.¹⁷⁵ Evidence found in the writings of Augustine imply a belief and understanding of these "slight" sins LeGoff asserts were so instrumental to the development of purgatory. The author himself concedes the effectiveness of good works and penitence, so closely associated with purgatory, was "clearly stated for the first time by Augustine."¹⁷⁶

Arguments concerning the nature of sin and the remission thereof are of course a consistent feature of Christianity, even into antiquity. One has only to look to scripture and later to the early church fathers themselves. Theologians

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 69.

such as Tertullian, Origen, Hermas, and Clement of Alexandria all disagreed over the matter of “restoration by penitence of those guilty of the major sins of idolatry, fornication, and the shedding of blood,” with Tertullian and Origen condemning those who sought remissions and Hermas and Clement taking a more moderate path of understanding with certain remissions being allowed.¹⁷⁷

It should also be noted that to Tertullian and Origen patristic scholars first look in their discussions of the development of a purgatorial doctrine. Although Tertullian might seem to take a hard line as it were in relation to penance being efficacious, he did allow for a “variety of lighter everyday sins of Christians” being “dismissed by mere open acknowledgement in their assemblies.” Scholars such as McNeill have given Tertullian the credit of being the originator of future penitential practices throughout Europe.¹⁷⁸ Once again, the concept of a penitential system not meeting the criterion set forth by LeGoff for his *articulated* pre-cursor of purgatory is found to be lacking when examining these early sources.

LeGoff points to Bishop Gerard of Cambrai’s statements in 1025 at the synod of Arras in which Gerard points out the significant contributions of penitence to not only those of the living but also to the dead. This combined with the *Decretum* of Burchard of Worms (1025) constitutes for the author the “basis upon which purgatory was erected.”¹⁷⁹ One only has to review the evidence

¹⁷⁷ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 5.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷⁹ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 106-107.

presented above to see the error of relying upon Burchard's *Decretum* as a jumping off point of an articulated penitential system: the *Decretum* borrowed heavily from previous manuals of penance. By investigating the history of penance and the development of penitentials which the author himself admits dates back at least to the era of Augustine, one sees evidence of a belief in the benefits of penance and prayers for souls after death. According to McNeil and Gamer the system of penance was a rich element of the Christian church of the third and fourth centuries, a system that was not stagnant but growing and "becoming more systematized."¹⁸⁰ Therefore, how can we accept LeGoff's concept of the development of purgatory as a doctrine that begins to see its true development in the eleventh century with the above documents and see its 'birth' in 1274 CE with so much evidence pointing to the contrary?

Further evidence of early discussions concerning penance is also seen within the writings of Augustine of Hippo. While discussing Augustine's musings upon the nature of penitence and contrition being instrumental to the salvation of one's soul (*in melius quipped est vita mutanda-Enchiridion*), LeGoff notes that the theologian from Hippo also asserts that canonical penance was necessary in this life as well as the next.¹⁸¹ Augustine asserts that remission of sin might be purged via purgatorial fire (*per ignem quemdam purgatorium*). In Augustine's *City of God*, he asserts that some crimes (*criminal*) might be remitted through

¹⁸⁰ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 7.

¹⁸¹ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 69-70.

penitence, “provided they are not infamous (*infanda*).”¹⁸² The importance of this last statement has been lost on LeGoff, for we see in Augustine’s writings a distinct delineation between habitual crime (sin) and more serious offenses. Thus, the insistence that LeGoff gives to the development of venial sins just prior to the emergence of purgatory in the eleventh century seems unlikely in light of the fact that the idea of a delineation of sin was of utmost concern to church Fathers dating back into antiquity.

When discussing the writings of Peter Lombard, LeGoff focuses in on Lombard’s clarification of sins, which may be purged after death in purgatory – *venial sins*. Again, we can point to Augustine’s allowance for certain penances for crimes provided those crimes are not *infanda*.¹⁸³ While the adjective *venial*, not unlike the noun *purgatorium* itself, is not apparent in early writings, the intellectual origins are apparent.

The discussion over the importance and development of the category of venial sins is paramount in understanding the LeGoff’s chronological assertions made pertaining to purgatory. When discussing Peter Comestor (sometimes referred to as Peter the Chanter), who in LeGoff’s estimation is the first theologian to incorporate the doctrine of purgatory in the teachings of the church, LeGoff relies too much upon one man’s interpretation of historical events.¹⁸⁴ The author utilizes comments made by Comestor concerning the efficaciousness of

¹⁸² Ibid., 73.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 149, 73.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 165.

penitence towards that of venial sin. In his *De sacramentis*, Comestor asserts that early church fathers (whom he refers to as masters) taught that venial sin was purged via the fires of purgatory (*per poenam purgatorii*) and not through earthly penance.¹⁸⁵ Thorough research into medieval penitentials yields a very different conclusion, for there are ample examples of venial sins being remitted through earthly penance.

Shortly thereafter LeGoff comments upon the work of Alain de Lille whose literature concerning purgatory went a long way in developing the “penitential bookkeeping” associated by the author with purgatory. LeGoff insinuates that such bookkeeping was a new development of the later twelfth and early thirteenth century. Yet, the pervasive manner by which early penitentials were developed reveals this was a natural evolution in the doctrine of purgatory, not something instrumental in its emergence in the twelfth century.¹⁸⁶ According to penitential scholars, the best estimate for dating material from Alain De Lille’s Penitential Book is ca.1175-1200 CE. More importantly for our discussion are the words used to describe this document by the nineteenth-century pioneer of penitential studies John T. McNeill: “The *Liber poenitentialis* is not a code of penances like the older penitentials, but a more general guide to the confessor.” He continues and justifies his cursory glance at *Alain de Lille’s Penitential Book* by asserting that it was “so late and unoriginal a document.”¹⁸⁷ The reader should

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 172-173.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 351.

key on the words *late* and *unoriginal*. This penitential borrows heavily from such previous penitential sources as that of Gregory, Jerome, Theodore, Bede, and the *Roman Penitential*, which all pull from earlier Celtic sources.

We see in many of these penitentials instructional methods very similar to that which is apparent in Purgatorial elements of expiation. For example, the old-Irish treatise *On Commutations* spells out methods by which penitents might receive commutations. There are chapters concerning psalm singing, vigils, and prostrations as means for commutations to just name a few. All are similar elements seen in acts of expiation for souls in purgatory. The eighth century Old Irish *On Commutations* even has a chapter entitled *Arrea*, (Commutations), for saving a soul from Hell.¹⁸⁸

This author is not arguing for a developed doctrine of purgatory during the fifth to ninth centuries as seen during the thirteenth; but, there can be argued with effectiveness the well supported notion that elements of a future doctrine of purgatory were extant. Is it such a scholarly leap of faith to speculate that the Christian community was in fact aware and confident believers in a third place other than Heaven or Hell where blessed souls were confined until their souls were purged of sins attained after baptism?¹⁸⁹

LeGoff discusses the revolution in thought that occurred during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which he asserts was begun by Anselm of Canterbury. More importantly for our discussion the author highlights the effect seen upon

¹⁸⁸ See Appendix A.

¹⁸⁹ Oakely, *English Penitential Discipline*, 71.

penitentials during this revolution of thought. He asserts that this revolution in thought radically changed the manner by which the penitential system was practiced. No longer were the penitentials simply a means to dole out penance for sin regardless of the intent of the penitent. Rather, it was in fact the sinner's behavior – the sinner's intent – that became more of an issue for those considering penitential sentence.¹⁹⁰

Continuing his discussion of Anselm's importance from an investigation of Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*, LeGoff asserts that after Anselm the penitential system centered upon the examination of the intent of the penitent."¹⁹¹ Yet, one only has to refer to Thomas Oakley's seminal work on early English penitentials to see the English church's interest in the "intent" of the individual when determining penance.¹⁹² The interested researcher will discover that the church was intently interested in the *intent* of the laity as well as a deep interest in some parts of Christendom with private confession of the laity. Once again we find LeGoff reading too much into authors he qualifies as originators of *new ideas*.

LeGoff wraps up his look into evidence of earthly penance continuing into purgatory with an example from William of Auvergne (Bishop of Paris 1228-1249 CE). Concerning those penances left uncompleted at the time of death LeGoff asserts: "That something remains to be purged after death is, for William of Auvergne, an 'obvious fact' (*manifestum est*)." He then turns to the main point of

¹⁹⁰ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 213.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁹² Oakely, *English Penitential Discipline*.

his conception of purgatory, namely, that it is a continuation of earthly penance.

“The idea of purgatory as a place of penance, never more clearly expressed than here, is quite in line with twelfth-century tradition. . .”¹⁹³ William then gives one reason why purgation is an obvious necessity:

Those who die suddenly or without warning, for example, ‘by the sword, suffocation, or excess of suffering,’ whose whom death takes unawares before they have had time to complete their penance, must have a place where they may do so.¹⁹⁴

It seems here that LeGoff is insinuating that William of Auvergne was the originator of the novel idea of purgatory as a place of penance to be completed, yet this is something we see already being evaluated and debated by early church fathers such as Tertullian and Origen.

It is quite apparent that an articulated system of penance was well in operation prior to the twelfth century as LeGoff seems to insinuate. Thus, this chapter now focuses attention on examples within the penitentials to support the following thesis: the penitential system and purgatory were closely linked in that they both drew their development from the culture itself and not from clerical influence. To begin, this position is strongly supported by penitential scholars, such as Thomas Oakley, who assert very strongly the impact of religion upon the development of early Germanic law. Oakley goes so far as to assert that the majority of law was based upon custom itself. This is also the case for

¹⁹³ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 242.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

penitentials.¹⁹⁵ Many, if not all, of the penitentials and ecclesiastical councils reviewed thus far represent for the most part the metropolitan attempting to exert control over the laity through methods of expunging paganistic attributes found within their authority. As Oakley argues, once the secular authority began to assist the ecclesiastical institution through the passage of secular laws that spelled out not only the secular punishment but also prescribed penance for these same crimes, the ecclesiastical authority almost immediately saw its influence increase throughout its areas of influence and control.¹⁹⁶

As stated above, Oakley echoes many scholars when building an argument that religion influenced all institutions of medieval England, including legal procedure that developed out of that culture. Allen Frantzen concurs with the assertion made by previous authors to the historical importance of the penitentials – they tell a history of a particular period. They influence not only church history but secular custom as well and of course these institutions have a reciprocal influence upon one another.¹⁹⁷

A strong example used by Oakley to reveal the penitential system supporting and burgeoning the secular law system is seen in the church's requirement that penitents not only do penance prescribed by the church but also

¹⁹⁵ Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 136, 150; See also *idem*, "The Penitentials as Sources for Mediaeval History" *Speculum*, Vol. 15, No. 2. (April, 1940), pp. 210-223.

¹⁹⁶ Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 15; David Knowles supports this assertion and goes so far as to state that "nowhere in Europe were the functions of Church and State so inextricably interwoven as in England," in *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1971), 12.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 137; See also Allen Frantzen, "The Penitentials Attributed to Bede," *Speculum*, Vol. 58, No. 3, (July, 1983), pp. 573-597.

pay a secular remittance for any crime they may have committed. Failure to do so resulted in additional penance applied by the church.¹⁹⁸ The church and State worked with one another to enforce both secular and ecclesiastical law. It is a mistake to think the two separate, instead one must take a holistic approach of both church and state combating crime and sin.¹⁹⁹ Some penitentials that allow for money commutations do not have any allowances for monies received to be accepted by ecclesiastical authorities but instead only support or endorse those commutations “according to secular customs.” For instance, in the *Penitential of Finnian (Vinnian)* (c. 525-550 CE), instances of secular law observations are combined with observations of penance.²⁰⁰

According to Oakley, the Irish penitentials, seen in the form of the *Penitential of Finnian*, were responsible more than any other penitentials for furnishing the model the Celtic church would follow. Taken together with its cousin, the Irish Canons known as *Canones Hibernenses*,²⁰¹ the Celtic penitential system not only influenced and directed the penitential system of the British Isles but also influenced heavily the development of the system of penance on the continent. As supported by penitential scholars such as Oakley, McNeil and Gamer, the *Penitential of Finnian* was used as a source for future penitentials by such authors as Theodore, Bede and Egbert to name only a few.

¹⁹⁸ Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 54.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 69; According to John T. McNeill the earliest penitentials are those associated with the Welshman St. David who is probably the individual associated with the *Penitential of Finnian*. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 23-24.

²⁰¹ See also Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 69

Of importance for this discussion are Oakley's discovery that these penitentials "are chiefly devoted to detailed prescriptions of commutations and redemptions."²⁰² For example, in reference to striking another and shedding blood St. Finnian asserts the following:

But if he is a layman, he shall do penance forty days and give some money to him whom he struck, according as some priest or judge determines. A cleric, however, ought not to give money, either to the one or to the other.²⁰³

Continuing, St. Finnian's writings also reveal a close relationship between the secular and ecclesiastical when enforcing the usage of the oath:

But if one has sworn a false oath, great is the crime, and it can hardly, if at all, be expiated; but none the less it is better to do penance and not to despair: great is the mercy of God. This is his penance: first, he must never in his life take an oath, since a man who swears much will not be justified . . ."²⁰⁴

In terms of murder, St. Finnian also sets forth a form of penance that will echo in later penitentials. Finnian's penance for murder is at once a form that both expiates sin while at the same time ensuring the cultural tradition is upheld as well:

If any cleric commits murder and kills his neighbor and he is dead, he must become an exile for ten years and do penance seven years in another region. . . if he has done well and is approved by testimonial of the abbot or priest to whom he was committed, he shall be received into his own country and make satisfaction to the friends of him whom he slew, and he shall render to his father or mother, if they are still in the flesh, compensation for the filial piety and obedience. . ."²⁰⁵

²⁰² Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 37-38, 33-36, 39-41.

²⁰³ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 88; penitentials such as the *Penitential of Vinnian* offer not just penances for an individuals sin, but also the payment of wergilds to satisfy the kin.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

In the preface to a section covering capital offenses *The Penitential of Columban* (ca. 600 CE) offers the reader a reason for its contents: “We are about to make regulations concerning the offenses which are also punished under the penalty of the law.”²⁰⁶ Bearing a striking resemblance to *The Penitential of Finnian*, the *Penitential of Columban* goes even further in its obvious intermingling of secular and ecclesiastical penances. For example, of the thirty penances proscribed for capital offenses, many offer commutations in addition to the penance assigned for the expiation of sin as seen in the above examples of *Finnian* and *Theodore*, such as the following:

If one of the laymen sheds blood in a quarrel or wounds or incapacitates his neighbor, he shall be compelled to make restitution to the extent of the injury. But if he has not the wherewithal to make a settlement, he shall do his neighbor’s work as long as the latter is sick, and he shall provide a physician, and after the injured man is well he shall do penance for forty days on bread and water.²⁰⁷

It is interesting to note the complexity given this selection concerning the “restitution” for injuries compared to relatively brief penance for this sin. It seems the church was more concerned with the social order of its community than with the plight of their souls. Pre-Norman kings of the British Isles made use of these early penitentials as a means to bolster their efforts in bringing about order within society through crime prevention devices set forth in magisterial courts. This evolution did not come without struggle or opposition on the part of the inhabitants of England. Lapses of the populaces of pre-Norman England back

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 252

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 255.

into such things as paganism occurred. Therefore, this close connection was needed by both parties involved in order to ensure positions of leadership.²⁰⁸

Even more striking is the penance given for those who commit perjury as seen in the following proscription from the *Penitential of Columban*: “If any layman commits perjury . . . he shall do penance for three years unarmed in exile on bread and water.”²⁰⁹ Oakley goes so far as to assert that the “religious safeguards” present in the early penitentials concerning oaths are of utmost import in revealing the close connection between the ecclesiastical and secular courts. The penitentials offer an abundance of evidence that reveals ecclesiastical courts working with the state to limit the instances of perjury.²¹⁰ These are only a few examples from this early seventh-century penitential in which the cooperation between the secular and ecclesiastical governments within the British Isles, and as we shall see on the continent, were working in coordination to bring about some sense of social order.

The offense of perjury or violating an oath is once again found within *The Penitential of Cummean* (ca. 650 CE). Showing similarities of previous penitentials covered thus far in this work, Cummean (or Cominianus) asserts the following in response to oath breakers and perjurers: “He who makes a false oath shall do penance for four years. But he who leads another in ignorance to commit perjury shall do penance for seven years.” What is striking within this

²⁰⁸ Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 148-149.

²⁰⁹ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 255.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 157, 174.

penitential is that Cummean actually asserts that a secular or customary provision be attended to by the penitent prior to any penance for the remittance of sin being prescribed:

He who bears false witness shall first satisfy his neighbor, and is so far as he was wronged his brother, which such judgment shall he be condemned, a priest being the judge.²¹¹

Approximately twenty-five years later in ca. 675 CE, one finds another instance of the secular government assisting, even promoting the institution of penance in Ireland. In reference to a presbyter who has been attacked, leaving the presbyter bleeding, the *Irish Canons (Canones Hibernenses)*, following penances set forth by St. Patrick, prescribe the following penalty:

If it [blood] does not go to the ground, the striker shall pay the value of a female slave; if in specie, he shall pay the third part of it in silver; he shall make restitution for his blow with the value of a female slave, for his molestation he shall atone as we said above . . . everyone who has dared to steal or seize those things that belong to a king, a bishop, or a scribe, or to commit any against them, or to esteem them lightly and despise them, shall pay the value of seven female slaves or do penance for seven years with a bishop or scribe.²¹²

The *Penitential Writings of Adamnan* (ca. 679-704 CE) are considered to be a very meticulous move by ecclesiastical courts attempting to assist those courts associated with magisterial law by working to rectify unsanitary conditions in their respective areas of influence, in this case the Iro-Scottish kingdoms. There are provisions against eating foodstuffs contaminated by crows, leeches, as well as

²¹¹ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 106: for information concerning secular laws proscribing ecclesiastical penalties in relation to perjury see also Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 158.

²¹² John T. McNeill John T. and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 125.

animals that have been found drowned in water because of Biblical scripture asserting: "Thou shalt not eat carrion flesh."²¹³

In developing codes to encompass secular laws dealing with blood feud, the magisterial court of Edmund II (939-946 CE) offers an example of a court enforcing ecclesiastical penance for secular crimes. In his prologue, Edmund first informs the reader the reason for such action taken by himself and his court: "First, then, it seemed to us all most necessary that we should keep most firmly our peace and concord among ourselves throughout my dominion."²¹⁴ Item four of this enactment stresses the importance of enforcing penance:

Further, I make it known that I will allow no resort to my court before he [the slayer] has undergone ecclesiastical penance and undertaken the prescribed compensation to the kindred, and submitted to every legal obligation, as the bishop, in whose diocese it is, instructs him.²¹⁵

To be sure the evidence provided has revealed an apparent fusion between that of the secular and ecclesiastical courts. How much influence did the one have on the other? While discussing the matter of magisterial influence upon church synods, Catherine Cubitt navigates the narrations of synods by ecclesiastics, such as Stephanus, and asserts that while the church did debate at times independently, at times they also were under the influence of the king. One must remember, these individuals were "writing from the churchman's point of view, not from the king's, and might therefore emphasize in their portrayals the

²¹³ Loosely based upon Lev. 5:2, 17:15; Deut. 14 DV.

²¹⁴ Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents: c. 500-1042*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), 427-429.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*; A similar example is seen in the laws of Ethelred in Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 143-144.

authority of the church.”²¹⁶ Using the *Synod of Whitby*, Cubitt offers up evidence within the writings of Stephanus and Bede that King Oswiu held sway over any decisions to be made at this ecclesiastical assembly. Yet, the author is quick to point out that this type of control exerted by the king fluctuated depending upon the ruler and the area of the British Isles represented. In all though, Cubitt holds that what occurs at these synods was a *concilia mixta* of the “ecclesiastical council conjoined to a royal *witenagemot*.”²¹⁷ Evidence for this *concilia mixta* is easily discovered within Anglo-Saxon canon preambles.

Evident in many of these preambles and enactments of pre-Norman kings are what seem to be the attempts of kings to place themselves in positions of authority over that of any of the archbishoprics. For example, in 695 CE, Wihtrud of Kent presided over a gathering of “leading men. Brihtwold, archbishop of Britain . . . the bishop of Rochester, who was called Gefmund . . . and every order of the church of that nation spoke in unanimity with the loyal people.”²¹⁸ What follows are a series of twenty-eight laws solely concerned with secular pursuits.

To conclude, a brief examination of how commutations within the penitentials are yet once again an indication of customary influence not only upon the development of secular law but also upon the penitential system itself is conducted. Not unlike the accusations made by Reformers of the fourteenth and

²¹⁶ Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church*, 52.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50, 52; According to Oakley, there are cases in which some bishops influenced in great part many of these secular codes. Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 139.

²¹⁸ Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents*, 396-398.

fifteenth centuries that indulgences were being sold for the mere gain of money and not the benefit of souls in purgatory; ninth-century ecclesiastics protested against what was seen as too lax an enforcement of commutations and redemptions that were being allowed for the penitents.²¹⁹ As for money itself making its way into the penitential system, this occurrence well outdates the indulgence developments associated with purgatory.

What is very evident within these early penitentials are the many Celtic or Germanic customs reflected in the provisions given for penance. This is understandable given the fact that these texts were produced from within such societies. Referred to by McNeil as “survivals of primitivity” the strongest examples seen in our discussion are the incidents of composition in lieu of physical penance.²²⁰ The early sixth-century penitential referred to as the *Book of David* (ca. 500-525 CE) assigns the following composition in relation to a virgin’s *bride-price*:

But one who sins with a virgin or a widow not yet under vows, shall pay the bride-price to her parents and do penance for a year. If he has not the bride-price, he shall do penance for three years.²²¹

The seventh-century *Irish Canons* support customary law through the usage of composition in response to the following:

For the embarrassment of his scar or wound in a meeting or in any crowd to the third year or longer, if he does not waive his claim, he who committed [the deed] shall pay the value of a female slave.²²²

²¹⁹ Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 53.

²²⁰ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 35-36.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

²²² *Ibid.*, 124.

Another example of intermingling concerns how penitentials dealt with premeditated murder. Not only would the individual have to pay a wergild to the next of kin, but they also had to perform their penance to the church, which ranged from seven to fifteen years of any particular penance depending upon the penitential being cited.²²³

This is quite evident in *The Penitential of Theodore* (ca. 668-690 CE):

If one slays a man in revenge for a relative, he shall do penance as a murderer for seven or ten years. However, if he will render to the relatives the legal price, the penance shall be lighter, that is, [it shall be shortened] by half the time.²²⁴

It should also be noted here that in the time of Theodore it may be true that secular laws did indeed prescribe penances for various offenses, but the imposing of the actual penance itself was left up to clerical representatives.²²⁵ In all examples presented, the incidence of compositions within these penitentials represents a conscientious effort on the part of the ecclesiastical courts to support the customary law of its inhabitants.

Law and Custom

In his investigation into the background of the church and State in England prior to the Norman Conquest, Bryce Lyon argues there was a congenial relationship in which both entities worked together towards a mutually beneficial

²²³ Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 194.

²²⁴ John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 187.

²²⁵ Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline*, 77-78.

outcome. As Lyon States: “Together church and state governed secular and spiritual society and exhibited cooperation rare for the Middle Ages.” This changed as the Normans introduced to the small Island ‘church custom and tradition’ that did not integrate well with those practices long set in England.²²⁶

Lyon reveals that the relationship between church and state upon the Continent was similar to that of England up until the ninth and tenth centuries. It seems the gradual development of feudalization also developed the gradual separation of the church-state relations. Lyon asserts that the Norman Conquest occurred during a period which saw the church on the Continent involved in a reform movement with the ultimate aim of attempting “to secure independence from secular government . . . there occurred a determined onslaught on lay appointment and investiture, purchase of ecclesiastical benefices (simony), and clerical marriage which enabled ecclesiastics to pass on their offices to off-spring just as did lay feudal lords.”²²⁷ Although the church attempted drastic reforms, the inevitable outcome saw the Conqueror, William, not suffering any interference with his authority over Continental and English prelates.

William’s first step towards ‘reform’ in England was to have the Archbishop of England, Stigand, removed from office in 1070, and replaced by his confidant, Lanfranc. Within two years Lanfranc saw the Archbishopric of York (which previously had maintained a separate rule of the north) formally acknowledging

²²⁶ Bryce Lyon, *A Constitutional and Legal History of Medieval England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 200.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

the primacy of the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1072. By 1080 Lanfranc orchestrated all but one of the English Bishops replacements by either Normans or Lotharingians. The Archbishop of Canterbury now turned his attention to ecclesiastical matters in the form of a series of church councils called between 1072 and 1076. Lyon reveals that although these were councils of the church, in essence they were nothing more than the *witenagemot* of old, with William overseeing all reform.

Lyon also describes the conciliar legislation of 1076 as that legislation that had the most important ramifications for the separation of church and state. This particular enactment dictated the separation of spiritual courts throughout the English realm. The legislation called for an end of ecclesiastical cases being tried in the hundred court and also proscribed “spiritual pleas” being heard in public courts.²²⁸ This led to a loss of jurisdiction by the royal courts over the clergy. The irony of this decision in 1076 was that it led to something that future kings of England found somewhat troubling – papal intervention in the English church.²²⁹

This struggle began with the appointment of Anselm of Aosta as Archbishop of Canterbury under the reign of William Rufus. As Lyon states, Anselm was “a man more saint than statesman, a man unfamiliar with English church structure, and one completely in sympathy with the reforming papacy. The curtain was now raised for the drama of the investiture struggle in

²²⁸ Ibid., 204.

²²⁹ Ibid.

England.”²³⁰ Anselm was forced into a self-appointed exile from England through his struggles with Rufus over church-state relations. This tension was not settled until a church council was held in 1107 during the reign of England’s next monarch, Henry I. It was during this compromise that Henry relinquished his right of spiritual investiture. Although seen on face value as a significant win for the church, Lyon points to the truth beneath the surface. Although Henry may have allowed for free ecclesiastical elections, these elections were still to be held in a royal court that still answered to the king. Key to this compromise for Lyon was the following: “Homage must be rendered for the lay holdings before spiritual investiture occurred.” Whereas prelates may have been ‘freely’ elected, they were still considered royal vassals. The church was forced to only nominate those individuals that the king of England accepted and allowed to retain his lay holdings. Under the administration of Henry I, “the necessity of limited cooperation with the church” developed during the reign of his father.²³¹

This situation changed fairly quickly under the reign of Stephen due to compromises made by this weak king to gain the support of the church for his ascendancy to the throne. Although not intending to keep any of the promises made to the church that gave away royal authority in church matters, a civil war weakened the king’s position to such a point that “he could not make his authority stick.”²³² By Stephen’s death in 1154, papal power in England took great strides.

²³⁰ Ibid., 207.

²³¹ Ibid., 210.

²³² Ibid.

Lyon reveals that this period was witness to seeing “the English church the freest in its history.”²³³ This was short-lived freedom, for with the coronation of Henry II, the newly crowned King in no way recognized those concessions made by his weak predecessor. Henry now moved to curb the jurisdiction of England’s spiritual courts as well as place royal authority over the country’s clergy.²³⁴

Lyon reveals the true extent of Henry’s success in this endeavor only to see his strenuous labor undone in a moment of fury – the death of Thomas Becket. With the death of Becket came forth certain freedom of appeals and loss over various ecclesiastical affairs. Papal authority once again reigned supreme over the English church and canon law was stressed.²³⁵

Anglo-Saxon institutions, most especially its laws, were not done away with, but on the contrary, they were incorporated, utilized, and molded by the Norman conquerors through the institution known as feudalism. Therefore feudalism itself does not represent any particular set period, it in all actuality represents what can be seen as a progressive movement (albeit a gradual movement) towards a resemblance of organization. As Lyon states, the Norman developed feudal system, itself an inherited trait from the Germanic peoples of the continent, became “the most efficient government of western Europe.”²³⁶

As Frederic William Maitland has shown in his work, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, the feudal system was an ancient institution in England well before the

²³³ Ibid., 211.

²³⁴ Ibid., 300.

²³⁵ Ibid., 304.

²³⁶ Ibid., 129.

arrival of the Normans. Although Maitland's explanation can be boiled to down to essentially stating that a skeleton key of feudalism was waiting for William to expand upon, others argue that this was not the case and the 'skeleton key' was nothing more than manorialism. Yet, Lyon follows in the line of Maitland in insisting that the Normans were the recipients of an established order that provided dividends in the future. Lyon makes the argument that Normandy was a completely feudalized society by 1066, thereby placing them in a unique position to "to adopt new institutions and improve upon them." It was due to the Norman's ability to "preserve" rather than "destroy" established traditions, and perhaps having a more "clean slate" to work with, that Lyon makes the assertion that England become a more feudalized society than Normandy.²³⁷

Lyon asserts that along with the already large number of charters and writs, the *Laws of William the Conqueror*, are themselves evidence of the inherited nature of Anglo-Saxon customs into that of the Norman rule of law. For further evidence Lyon presents to the reader the *Les Williame* and *Laws of Edward the Confessor*. These two works provide a glimpse into the procedure of how the Normans interpreted Anglo-Saxon custom. This importance of the written charters is evident with the example of English land law given by Lyon. Lyon reveals how Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester was able to legally gain rights to portions of land by simply citing written evidence in 1070.²³⁸

²³⁷ Ibid., 136; Frederic William Maitland, *Domesday Book & Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987).

²³⁸ Lyon, *Legal History*, 110, 147.

The importance of tradition as it applies to the development of law in the thirteenth century is also revealed in the work of George Caspar Homans' *English Villagers of The Thirteenth Century*. Homans provides examples to support this assertion through such instances as family inheritance of land based upon what became an established association of the family's 'blood line' with the land itself. As Homans himself states, "especially strong was the feeling that a holding of land ought to remain in the blood of those who had held it of old."²³⁹ The land itself defined the family which in turn defined the local customs and so forth until a definitive set law is put forth.

The reader need look no further than Homans' revealing analysis of how ancient traditions affected the 'traditional' beliefs of the early church, or more precisely the early peasantry's superstitious beliefs concerning what Homans terms "popular cosmology."²⁴⁰ It seems that Englishmen linked compass directions of south and east with those things positive for these directions represented the direction from which the life giving rays of the sun are first seen; the sun being associated with life force and regenerative influences. This superstitious or 'traditional' method can be seen in the manner in which the church orientated its cemeteries as well as construction of buildings, most often facing the east. It is due to such instances that the reader can begin to understand the actions taken by Britain's thirteenth-century inhabitants in order

²³⁹ George Caspar Homans, *English Villagers of The Thirteenth Century* (New York; Russell & Russell, 1960), 3.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

to placate their internal desire to obtain a better understanding of the environment they found themselves within: “The pairing of the directions south and east and of the directions north and west as two contrasted halves of the horizon was a part of popular cosmology.”²⁴¹

In yet another example of custom becoming the societal ‘norm,’ the author reveals the church’s amalgamation of the trothplight ceremony into its own marriage sacrament. It is Homan’s assertion that the trothplight ceremony was itself not an imitation of any church ceremony; instead, “the Church took over the form of a secular marriage service which was ancient in Europe. . .”²⁴² The author goes further to show the church’s own admission that the troth itself constituted a valid marriage. This was stated in light of the fact the church was insisting that a marriage be performed by a priest once the necessary three banns had been proclaimed.

Although these examples are few, and Homan’s work deals more with particular matters of inheritance: it is quite clear from his work that all matters of community, whether they were tied to the land or to the social fabric of the community itself, were linked together in a never ending symbiotic environment. Homan asserts that this produced an environment in which a simple alteration in one aspect produced an alteration not in only one aspect of the community, but in all the community. They were all linked to one another and affected one another in an effort that ultimately produced what Homan calls a “social

²⁴¹ Ibid., 96.

²⁴² Ibid., 168.

system.”²⁴³ Although in a continual flux, the societies mentioned were themselves in essence stable, and as the author asserts, within these “stable societies” the core matter that produced all that follows, such as local / central government, was the basic element of the family unit.²⁴⁴

Eminent historian of feudal Europe, Marc Bloch, argued that the organization and framework of medieval institutions that were in positions of governance cannot be understood unless the historian has a firm grasp on the “human environment.”²⁴⁵ To highlight this fact he spends time relating communication methods and the concept of time as envisioned by the medieval mind. Finding what he argues was evidence of a distinct change in the structure of feudal civilization in the middle of the eleventh century, Bloch postulates a model of two distinct ages of feudalism. Although there is not a definite break between these two ages, Bloch feels there were enough differences in the “essential characters” to support two successive feudal ages.²⁴⁶ Northern invasions constituted for Bloch the end of one society, and their cessation for Bloch was the beginning of yet another society. Bloch’s second feudal age covered roughly the dates of 1050 to 1250.

Key features of the second feudal age were a growing population that brought more and more peoples into contact with one another, the revival of commerce and towns, the growing strength of the medieval church, the

²⁴³ Ibid., 28.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 218.

²⁴⁵ Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, Vol. 1 & 2, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), 59.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 60.

appearance of epic poetry and the philosophic works of such authors as Anselm of Canterbury, and finally the transition from a reliance upon customary law to that of written law and the subsequent usage of more Roman statute law. Although there was a distinct break with the previous age via the above examples, Bloch asserts that the individual of the second feudal age still retained many of the same characteristics of the individual of the first feudal age, such as his proclivity to violence. Yet, two distinct changes had developed amongst the individuals of the feudal age: they were better educated and more self-conscious. As to being more self-conscious, Bloch strongly highlights the evidence pointing to the ability for more and more individuals during the thirteenth century to enlighten themselves to current events and reflect upon them and how these events were affecting their own lives.

It becomes obvious for the reader that during this period and perhaps much earlier, society (if that is what we can call this rural environment) was ruled by long established customs. From these customs eventually emerged local governing precepts that in turn eventually became the law of the land. Therefore the community itself was more of an import on law and its development than law on the community.

It is evident that the early Christian church within the British Isles easily exploited the already established traditions held as custom by those inhabitants pagan and Christian alike. Intermingling is evident not only in the developing system of penance through persistent pressure offered by Hiberno-Scottish

monastics, but also from traditional and ancient pagan beliefs. These ancient beliefs encompassed ancestral prayers as demonstrated in Roman traditions, which heavily influenced in their own right how the early church formed its own doctrine of purgatory. The problem now to be discussed is one similarly faced by John Van Engen when he pondered the dilemma of “getting at the truth” and legacy of religious nature of the early medieval period of England. Was it one in which a Catholic Christianity reigned supreme or rather one in which an Indo-European mythology still held sway? The same question might be asked for those of the early medieval period as well. The answer is not as concrete as Van Engen might imply when he argued that magic more so than faith held sway over the minds of the laity. Nor will the scholar find the answer with those apologists of the Christian variety who argue a pure form of Catholic Christianity permeated society. The answer lies in a region of amalgamated and superimposed mythologies and scriptural beliefs.²⁴⁷ Might the scholar simply assert– there was an intermingling?

²⁴⁷ Van Engen, “The Christian Middle Ages,” 537-538.

CHAPTER VI

ENGLISH CHANTRY AND CULTURE

Continuing with the line of belief began by Tertullian and Origen that culminated in Augustine, early church leaders' defined the nature of the soul between that of death and final judgment. This process continued, with minor differences asserted by various theologians until the church made its first pontifical definition of purgatory in 1254 through a letter sent by Pope Innocent IV to the Bishop of Tusculum.²⁴⁸

The doctrine of the soul's experience after death was disputed throughout the early Middle Ages until theologians finally reached an official definition on doctrine in the thirteenth century. This came in 1254 when Innocent IV urged his Greek brethren to accept an official definition of purgatory. In this letter Innocent IV expressed the following sentiment:

And it is said that the Greeks themselves unhesitatingly believe and maintain that the souls of those who do not perform a penance which they have received, or the souls of those who free from mortal sins but with even the slightest venial sins, are purified after death and can be helped by the prayers of the Church. Since the Greeks say that their Doctors have not given them a definite and proper name for the place of such purification, We, following the

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 64, 66; Sheed, 169; Juris, 14; Le Goff, 3; for examples of prayers to the dead in seventh century England see The Venerable Bede, *The History of the Church of England* (Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1970), 52, 90.

tradition and authority of the holy Fathers, call that place purgatory; and it is Our will that the Greeks use that name in the future.²⁴⁹

Although first mentioned in an official capacity in this letter the doctrine of purgatory was not formally defined until the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 under Pope Gregory X. The following is a portion of the conciliar decree offered at the Second Council of Lyons, 1274:

the Church asserts and preaches that those who fall into sin after their baptism are not to be rebaptized, but are to receive forgiveness of their sins through true penance. If those who are truly penitent die in charity before they have done sufficient penance for their sins of omission and commission, their souls are cleansed after death in purgatorial or cleansing punishments, as Father John has explained for us. The suffrages of the faithful on earth can be of great help in relieving these punishments, as, for instance, the Sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, almsgiving, and other religious deeds which, in the manner of the Church, the faithful are accustomed to offer for others of the faithful.²⁵⁰

The church easily exploited the already established tradition of prayers for the dead. From these traditional and ancient pagan beliefs that encompassed ancestral prayers as demonstrated in Roman traditions, the early church formed its own doctrine of purgatory. As noted earlier, the notion that early Christians held firm beliefs in such practices is seen not only in literature, such as the *Passion of Perpetua*, but also as Nigel Pennick reveals, Christian artwork in the Roman catacombs. One might even say that the belief by the early Christians in a purgatorial condition appears to be part of the human need to connect with ancestors. A belief in a certain condition, in this case purgatory, which has

²⁴⁹ John F. Clarkson et al., trans., *The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translation* (Missouri: B. Herder Book, 1955), 347-48; Also see Le Goff, 283.

²⁵⁰ Clarkson, 348-49.

existed for time immortal in humanity and proven by the consistent renderings in literature and art from throughout the Indo-European world. It seems to be a universally held pattern in human behavior.

Culture

To say *culture* influenced or affected this doctrine or that trait seems superficial. Yet, the word culture encompasses a vast belief and organizational system. The world of pre-Reformation England was supported by such belief systems as magic, astrology, and witchcraft. The buttressing nature of these belief systems upon the medieval Catholic church as well as Protestantism is instrumental in understanding how medieval and early modern societies dealt with misfortune and inexplicable occurrences in their environment. These belief systems cannot be overemphasized considering how the inhabitants of early modern England lived in a constant state of fear and uncertainty.²⁵¹

The primitive aspect of a culture that regarded its “religion” as a means to obtaining its own “supernatural power” can simply be viewed as people’s attempt to gain a modicum of control over their surroundings. The gradual acceptance of Christianity by Anglo-Saxon pagan society can be seen in this same regard. The reality of England prior to the Reformation consisted of a society that possessed

²⁵¹ Thomas, 5.

a church that held the ability to bestow upon its followers a measure of its own “supernatural power.”²⁵²

The Catholic church did not define doctrine to suit its needs, but instead reacted to a need expressed by the laity. Although the doctrine of purgatory can very easily be viewed as the primary concern of the laity during the late medieval period, this was not a society composed of a “cult of dead” instead it was a society committed to life. To accept the alternative notion of medieval society calls for too simplistic an interpretation for the complex and rich cultural experience in late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century England. As Eamon Duffy has concluded, intercession for the dead was just as important for the living as for the dead, for it brought about a “a means of prolonging the presence of the dead within the community of the living, and therefore as the most eloquent of testimonies to the permanent value of life in the world of time and change.” Remembering and honoring those of your community was at the heart of intercession for the dead. As discussed previously in regards to purgatory, the souls located within the spiritual realm are not cut off from that of the living. They are a living portion of the greater mystical body of the church.²⁵³ Although seen as a counterpoint to such traditional apologists as Duffy, A. G. Dickens concedes that purgatory provided a cohesive element to communities of Christians.

²⁵² Ibid., 31.

²⁵³ Duffy, 8, 303, 327-328; John Bossy, *Christianity In The West: 1400 – 1700* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 30;

Dickens asserts:

When they discovered the slightness of its scriptural basis, Protestant zealots like Tyndale crudely denounced the doctrine of purgatory and indulgences as a worldwide plot by the priesthood aimed at fleecing poor and rich alike. Yet whatever the credentials of this doctrine, it was sincerely held, and it showed at least an uplifting sense of community with former generations of Christians.²⁵⁴

Duffy once reduced Catholic tradition (pre-Reformation) into what can be considered three essential components: the Mass, the parish community, and the saints.²⁵⁵ Although these three are separate in their outward appearances, all three contribute to a communal affect within the community. Compare this with Keith Thomas's comments in his work *Religion and the Decline of Magic* where he, either by omission or on purpose, did not to discuss the liturgy of the Catholic church in any depth. Yet, these particular elements of traditional society assisted its adherents as a "principal reservoir from which the religious paradigms and beliefs of the people were drawn." Eamon Duffy argues that traditional religion was not in a state of decline or decay, but in fact was very much alive and meeting the needs of its adherents. Because of the many ways in which the medieval church continually adapted itself to the needs of English society, it had a powerful hold over its adherents "up to the very moment of Reformation."²⁵⁶

While Thomas's work is an extremely enlightening and practical tool for any research into this period, some weaknesses do stand out. The assertions

²⁵⁴ A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation, 2d edition* (Pennsylvania: the Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1989), 30.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of The Altars*, 7, 2, 4.

made by Thomas, Jean Van Engen, and especially Jean Delumeau of a medieval society that was predominately one in which the inhabitants were only 'superficially Christianized' and that a truly "Christian faith and practice" did not emerge till after the Reformation and Counter Reformation, cannot be accepted without further examining the liturgy.²⁵⁷ The weakness of Thomas's work lies in his lack of liturgical examination, especially when attempting to explain the evolution of the Mass. For Thomas, the Catholic Mass had gone from being a ceremonial communion of the faithful to a ceremony that began to place more significance upon actual consecration of the host:

The ceremony thus acquired in the popular mind a mechanical efficacy in which the operative factor was not the participation of the congregation, who had become virtual spectators, but the special power of the priest.²⁵⁸

Liturgy was of paramount importance to medieval religion, and, as Duffy so emphatically contends, the Mass itself constituted the bulwark that supported the liturgy. The sacrificial nature of the Mass connected it with traditional ideas held before Christianity. With the deity's death comes forth renewal. This renewing element of the mass can easily be compared to other "renewing" myths of cultures throughout history.²⁵⁹ The importance of the Mass was increased because the celebration of the Mass was a good work through which souls in purgatory gained relief.

²⁵⁷ Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages," 519, 521; For a similar opinion concerning Christianity in the Early Modern Period, see also Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977); and William E. Monter, *Ritual, Myth and Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1983).

²⁵⁸ Thomas, *Religion*, 33.

²⁵⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 91.

The weakness of Delumeau's work lies in his inability to separate religion / theology from historical reality. Delumeau's *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation* does not set out to compare the theological variances of Catholic Christianity before and after Trent. Instead, this work attempts to unravel the perplexing question of why a "dechristianization" of the European laity took place during the eighteenth century following what historians long understood to be an unprecedented period of religiosity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As indicated above, Delumeau's thesis revolves around the notion that the European Christian laity only marginally understood their religion. The author argues that a true Christianization does not occur until after the two reformations of Luther and Trent, in which education of the laity began. The author boldly asserts a culture (pre- and post-Reformation) that was essentially non-Christian and attempts to support this thesis by way of a brief overview of traditions and customs that are held to be too polytheistic or too superstitious to be called Christian. But to make such an accusation, the author has revealed a preconceived bias that relies on a method of comparing two distinctly different models of Christianity and finding one lacking. Rather, one should refer to a culture as it saw itself; a Christian society as real and apparently satisfying to its adherents as many religions are to their adherents today.

The early church endorsed doctrine that evoked a "pagan continuity," and this was true for the Reformation era. Catherine Cubitt concurs with the above

statement in terms of the complexity in determining the extent to which any society has adopted Christian tenets. There simply can be no model for such a fluid and dynamic phenomena.²⁶⁰ The early church found itself living among such traditions and cultural beliefs. Historian John Van Engen states, “the great mass of medieval folk lived in a ‘folklore’ culture best likened to that observed by anthropologists in Third World countries. Forms of primitive magic and not faith largely governed religious-cultural attitudes and practices.”²⁶¹

Instructional Method

The instructional method of the church prior to the Reformation consisted in a variety of highly effective visual and spiritual aids. Instruction was expressed in art as well as verse. church interiors of this period and personal prayer books, such as the *Book of Brome* and *Kalender of Sheepehardes*, attest to this. One cannot underestimate the importance of saints’ lives, community guilds, and Miracle plays, such as the well-known York Cycle of Mystery Plays performed in celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi.

The Catholic religion was a central theme in the lives and the literature of the late medieval Englishmen. Much of the literature of the Middle Ages celebrates the truth and beauty that was known to emanate from God. The

²⁶⁰ Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, 120; Evidence of pagan continuity in Christian penitentials is explored and found within John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 25.

²⁶¹ Van Engen, “The Christian Middle Ages,” 519.

English mystery plays, a cyclic collection of short plays on incidents in biblical history from the creation to the Last Judgment, were dramas popular among the developing commoner class of medieval Europe. But the betrayal, death, and resurrection of Christ form the most important instances and the central core of these cycles and most of the other pageants can be seen to either foreshadow the Passion of Christ or reveal to the audience the results of His sacrifice as it pertains to humanity. These plays were sponsored by the local communities' craft guilds. The mystery plays not only had an entertainment purpose but a didactic purpose; they entertained the crowd of commoners and instructed them in their faith. This was drama created for the "common" people at large rather than for a courtly audience. The distinguishing features of medieval mystery plays were their Christian content and their moralizing purpose. The lives of the saints, stories from the Bible, and moral allegories were usually dramatized in the vernacular.

One of the most significant features of the York Cycle of Mystery plays involved audience participation within the plays themselves. These plays were performed on uniquely constructed wagons being drawn through the city streets, while part of the action occurred on ground level. This evolved into the use of heteroglossia²⁶² within these plays. This demanded the close involvement of spectators in the action of the play. This is best viewed in the York Mystery Play,

²⁶² A postmodern literary device in which various voices in a story express conflict when reacting to elements of a story; *The Literary Encyclopedia*. The Literary Dictionary Company, accessed 18 May 2006; available from <http://www.litencyc.com/index.php>; internet.

“The Crucifixion,” where the inclusion of the crowd in the performance provides a necessary element in revealing to the audience that they all are implicated in the death of Christ. The actors themselves support this implication. These actors were local figures well known to the audience as persons they saw on a daily basis, further suggesting that the Roman soldiers responsible for the death of Christ were not all that different from the townspeople themselves.

Another significant feature of the York Mystery Plays concerns the cyclical nature of these pageants. Performed each year during the Feast of Corpus Christi, each pageant paraded through town, stopping to give performances at appointed places, in an organized fashion. Each cycle had at its core a central common unity. In order to highlight the relationship between each pageant these pageants conducted themselves in a continuous cycle. These social outlets allowed for not only an opportunity to express oneself religiously, but also allowed individuals to feel one with their faith. This was surely an example of lay piety with little restraint from church authority.²⁶³

Keeping within the framework of visual instructional aids art served as an educational tool as well. A beautiful representation of art in this manner is Hieronymus Bosch’s conception of the Seven Deadly Sins (1485 C.E.). Bosch portrays the Seven Deadly Sins in the form of an eye surrounded by four circular ‘vignettes’ of the Four Last Things. Within the eye itself can be found the Man of

²⁶³ Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, eds., *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984); see also Muir, *Ritual*, 69-70.

Sorrows who has been “pierced anew by the sins of mankind.”²⁶⁴ The importance of these calendar events, both religious and secular, is also evident in such Books of Hours mentioned above, *Book of Brome* and *Kalender of Sheepehardes*. Such texts reveal the extent to which members of the laity from all walks of life familiarized themselves with their religion.

The Kalender of Sheepehardes, which first saw success in France during the later fifteenth century, found considerable success in England as well. Having first arrived in England in 1506, this work continued to have successive editions printed until 1656. Considered to have been “an everyman’s encyclopedia,” *The Kalender of Sheepehardes* was found in the hands of a wide range of the populace that cut across social barriers.²⁶⁵ Separated into five sections, *The Kalender of Sheepehardes* existed primarily as an instructional manual on Christian belief. The make up of instruction of this work consists was interesting. While perceived as an instructional booklet on Christian belief and practice, the book also contained a large section devoted to instruction in astrology and Latin incantational charms.²⁶⁶

Beginning with an examination of the make-up of the zodiac and its relation to humanity, the work then moves to its next section, which deals with the vices of man. Humanity’s vices are represented as branches on the ‘tree of sin,’ with the intention of demonstrating Satan as the true ‘root’ of all evil within

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 246-247.

²⁶⁵ S.K. Heninger, Jr., ed., *The Kalender of Sheepehardes* (c. 1585) (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1979), vi, vii.

²⁶⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 50.

the world. Each branch represents one of the seven deadly sins, which in turn produces any number of additional vices by their involvement. Moving from the realm of vice, the third section of *The Kalender of Sheepehardes* concerns itself with 'virtuous behavior' through its representation of a 'garden of virtues.' Found within this section are the seven cardinal virtues that serve to counter the evil effects of the seven deadly sins represented in the second section. The fourth section concentrates upon the health of the human body through medical advice based upon assumptions garnered through astrological examinations. This is dramatically represented in a diagram of the human body with the signs of the zodiac placed upon the corresponding portions of the human body they affect. The final section of *The Kalender of Sheepehardes* examines in detail the world in which the medieval person lived, which was based upon a Ptolemaic or geocentric conception of the universe. This medieval cosmological conception found the earth at the center of the universe was surrounded by a series of concentric circles, which ultimately ended beyond a tenth sphere where the 'Empyrean Heaven' was located.²⁶⁷

According to Lucy Toulmin Smith, the personal prayer book entitled *The Book of Brome* was the personal property of Robert Melton, himself a wealthy farmer during the fifteenth century. Within this prayer book are numerous religious educational tools such as the moralistic poem "The Catechism of Adrian and Epotys." The poem, attributed to St. John the Evangelist, contains a series

²⁶⁷ Heninger, Jr., ed., *The Kalender of Sheepehardes*, vi-x.

of questions and answers between the child Jesus and the emperor Adrian. Topics covered deal with such matters as Man's Fall, the nature of sin, and, of course, ways of avoiding Hell. Within is the story of St. Patrick's Purgatory, which claims that anyone able to spend an entire night shut up within Patrick's cave "should escape purgatory after death."²⁶⁸ There were also directions for practicing a Trental, a service of thirty prayers offered for the dead "to deliver those souls from torment."²⁶⁹ Also found is a religious play of Abraham and Isaac and a hagiographic account of St. Katherine.²⁷⁰

Of primary importance in this educational literature such as in *The Kalender of Sheepehardes* and *The Book of Brome*, were the religious instructions concerned with the avoidance of the fires of hell and purgatory. One surprising aspect of such Books of Hours concerned the actual stature of the individual using them. A wide range of examples of these study aids are found not only in the libraries of the educated clergy and nobility, but also within the collections of those we might overlook simply because we do not expect to find an educated lower class.²⁷¹ What these instructional aids reveal is the degree to which the English laity was truly in tune with their religion and fundamentally relied upon these structural supports for their culture, including the doctrine of purgatory.

²⁶⁸ Lucy Toulmin Smith, ed., *A Common-place Book of the Fifteenth Century: Containing A Religious Play and Poetry, Legal Forms, and Local Accounts* (London: Trubner, 1886), 80.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷¹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 74-75.

Keith Thomas suggests that the primitive aspect of a culture that regarded its “religion” as a means to obtaining its own “supernatural power” can simply be viewed as an attempt to gain a modicum of control over these surroundings. The gradual acceptance of Christianity by Anglo-Saxon pagan society occurred because Christianity seemed more efficacious. The reality of England prior to the Reformation consisted in a society that possessed a church that held the ability to bestow upon its followers a measure of its own “supernatural power.”²⁷²

The church exhibited its supernatural ability through the early church Saints and Holy Wells. Saints, which were often associated with wells, were seen as having the ability to cure and cause certain diseases. The hundreds of wells throughout England were matched with an equally numerous diversity in apotropaic abilities associated with them. The method by which the early church incorporated ancient pagan sites of worship into their own ritualized religion is seen in the use of these Holy Wells now associated with church Saints. There were many reasons for this assimilation and Robert Hope provides evidence that the simple need for a source of “pure water” for baptisms by the early missionaries in England proved to be a strong motivation for such a move by the church. Yet another reason offered by Hope holds that holy well locations supported by the church followed routes taken for pilgrimages to various holy shrines.²⁷³

²⁷² Thomas, *Religion*, 31.

²⁷³ For detailed examples of the immense variety of the supernatural abilities of these Holy Wells see Robert Charles Hope, *The Legendary Lore of The Holy Wells of England*:

The individual worship of saints was not unlike that of ancient deity worship, and was an essential component of medieval culture, one not easily discarded, as the early reformers were soon to discover. The importance of these saints is clearly seen within the words of the sixteenth-century reformer William Tyndale, who very critically claims that this “worshipping of saints, and praying unto them,” is paramount to placing these same saints higher than Christ himself in terms of hierarchy. Tyndale continued his criticisms of lay devotion to Saints in the following remarks: “We worship saints for fear, lest they should be displeased and angry with us, and plague us or hurt us, (as who is not afraid of St. Laurence? who dare deny St Anthony a fleece of wool, for fear of his terrible fire, or lest he send the pox among our sheep?)”²⁷⁴

The patronage of the saints by the English laity was a result of the laity’s need for assistance within a world of uncertainty and fear. It is important to understand the meaning of these so called “superstitious” traits of our late medieval ancestors. What may seem superstitious to modern humanity was only a Christian reality of the medieval period.²⁷⁵ E. William Monter also stresses the important nature of early modern European popular piety using vivid examples to

Including Rivers, Lakes, Fountains, and Springs (London: Elliot Stock, 1893), xxi; see also Thomas, *Religion*, 47-48.

²⁷⁴ Thomas, *Religion*, 25, 45, 27; William Tyndale, *Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of The Holy Scriptures. Together with The Practice of Prelates*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge: The Univ. Press, 1849), 163, 165; Also see MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable*, 26-27 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

²⁷⁵ It should be noted that criticisms of such lay devotion to Holy Wells and Saints did not appear with the advent of the Reformation. Indeed, these criticisms appear long before the sixteenth century. For a brief but poignant example see E.N. Dew, trans., *Diocese of Hereford: Extracts From The Cathedral Registers. A.D. 1275-1535* (Hereford: The Hereford Time, 1932), 97.

produce a rich understanding of lay devotion during the early modern period, such as the role of saints, the spread of confraternities, and the growth of purgatory. While discussing the nature of the “papally-authorized indulgence” Monter places himself in opposition to such Reformation scholars as A.G. Dickens when he asserts that the large profits received from indulgence sales suggested an equally large demand. Monter states that there was “not some sinister conspiracy between princes and popes, but genuine popular anxieties lay behind this phenomenon.”²⁷⁶

This is how a late medieval lay person viewed his liturgy. Comments by Campbell and Muir concerning the relationship between ritual and community bear weight when considering the tremendous influence these events, and many others, held over the laity. Within all could be found the universal instruction of life and renewal.

Chantries

When studying the phenomenon of purgatory in England, the manner in which members of the laity availed themselves of the rites associated with this doctrine is of paramount importance. The English chantry stands out as the most common means by which members of the laity participated in providing relief for the souls of their relatives. By strict definition a chantry was a perpetual ecclesiastical institution that received financial remunerations through such

²⁷⁶ Monter, *Ritual, Myth and Magic*, 15.

means as land endowments or 'rents' provided by its founder. The person providing the financial benefice was ultimately providing for masses and prayers to be offered in an endless succession by the chantry priests for the intercession of his soul in purgatory.²⁷⁷ The chantry's primary *raison d'être* was to provide relief for the soul of its benefactor in purgatory. During the sixteenth century administrations of Henry VIII and Edward VI English chantries were strategically dissolved. Perhaps the single most important factor to keep in mind while contemplating such events is that there was no precedent for the aggressive tendencies taken by Henry and Edward towards the intercessory institutions of England.

It is understood that as the regimes of Henry VIII and Edward VI begin their slow but inexorable move away from traditional Catholicism, there were some within England who welcomed such a change. Yet, for the majority of inhabitants the move away from traditions held for centuries came as a shock. This affinity to tradition was combated by the Reformers' view that these "superstitious" ideals held throughout England were the result of a corrupt Roman church leading its flock astray. Tensions over the issue of purgatory (as well as other 'popish' instruction) built until finally reaching a boiling point in the early sixteenth century. Add to this combustible mixture a political motive and there arose a very dangerous outcome. All that was needed was some polarizing figure to usher in a revolution in religious thought. That person emerged in the form of Martin

²⁷⁷ Relief was also extended to those individuals named by the benefactor within his will.

Luther and his thoughts on the doctrine of justification by faith. This German reformer's ideas on salvation convinced many that one's salvation was not determined by the amount of "works" accomplished while alive, nor was it determined by potential purgatorial suffering after death. Salvation for Luther was a divine gift rendered to all who professed Faith.

The chantries of England were the physical representation of a doorway between the world of the quick and the realm of the dead. Within this single entity there resided all the Catholic church's apotropaic power that was held over the laity. This ability was of course expressed primarily through the communion of saints and the sacrament of Mass. The chantry of England while existing to serve its primary function of delivering a constant outpouring of intercessory prayer also served as a visible symbol that Peter Cunich felt validated "ideas about purgatory and salvation through intercessory prayer."²⁷⁸ Chantries allowed for a continued intimacy between the living and dead. The dead, as Patrick Geary has stated, were their own separate class – an "age class."²⁷⁹

Howard Colvin estimates that in England chantries began to materialize during the later part of the thirteenth century (1279). Colvin attributes this emergence to the overwhelming burden of intercessory prayer placed upon the

²⁷⁸ Peter Cunich's "The Dissolution of the Chantries" in Patrick Collinson and John Craig, eds, *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 159-60, 167. See also Howard Colvin's "The Origin of Chantries," *Journal of Medieval History*, 26, no. 2 (2000): 163-173; David Crouch's "The Origin of Chantries: Some Further Anglo-Norman Evidence," *Journal of Medieval History* 27 (2001): 159-180; and Alan Kreider, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979).

²⁷⁹ For more information concerning the relationship between the living and dead and how this was an ever present struggle for the Church to control, especially the development of the *danse macabre*, see Nancy Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture," *Past and Present*, No. 152 (Aug., 1996), 7.

monastic institutions. Colvin also cites the work of Professor Dom David

Knowles who asserted the following:

[the] chantry may well have satisfied, in a way acceptable to the Church, the deep-rooted desire for a religious establishment under private control . . . Its flexibility in terms both of endowment and of duration enabled it – unlike the monastic foundation – to be adapted to the means of all ranks of society, so that what had begun largely as a form of seigneurial piety came in time to be adopted by the new squirearchy of the later middle ages and by self-made men like wool-merchants, who could identify with a parish church in a way that they perhaps could not with an old-established monastery of royal or baronial foundation.²⁸⁰

This theory was later supported by David Crouch who concurred with Knowles when asserting that a desire among the laity to have more control over the intercessory movement also led to the emergence of chantries; although he set the date of chantry emergence in England as early as the late twelfth century (1193).²⁸¹

There remains some question as to the total number of intercessory institutions in pre-Reformation England. Alan Kreider challenges the traditional number of 2,374 suppressed foundations in England, compiled and taken from William Camden's *Britannia*. In his own study of just over half of England's counties, and parts of Wales, Kreider arrives at what he terms a conservative estimate of 2,182 intercessory institutions. If this figure is accurate we can easily see the previous calculation by Camden as grossly underestimating intercessory institutions in pre-Reformation England.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Colvin, "The Origin of Chantries," 164-66, 172.

²⁸¹ David Crouch, "The Origin of Chantries," 177-78, 160.

²⁸² Kreider, *English Chantries*, 14; Peter Cunich also concurs with Kreider's interpretation of chantry numbers: "Professors Scarisbrick and Rosser have demonstrated that there were

Although it may be true that individual chantries were essentially “private and individualistic” on behalf of its proprietor, they were integrated into the overall community’s celebrations, especially during Holy Week. This exploitation by the community may seem contrary to the essential purpose of the chantry foundation, especially in light of the fact that the celebration of the Eucharist provided intercession for only one individual and his family. The primary function of a chantry priest was providing intercession for the benefactor in question, but the process provided by chantries and their priests were also intertwined with that of the local community. Testators knew that the establishment of chantries on their behalf provided ecclesiastical benefits to their local community. This was an active relationship between the benefactor and the local parishioners who benefited from the chantry. Evidence points to chantry priests in several parishes elected but later removed when not providing sufficient services to parishioners. This represents a reciprocal relationship in light of the fact that the local guilds along with church parishes supplemented needed income to chantry foundations in order to continue their contributions to the community.²⁸³

For those individuals not sufficiently wealthy to support the endowment of a perpetual chantry there was opportunity to join others within this same category and form religious guilds. Reaching the height of their popularity during the fifteenth century, religious guilds came in a variety of sizes and make-ups. Peter

thousands more fraternities and guilds than those which appear in the records of the Court of Augmentations.” Cunich, “The Dissolution of the Chantries,” 165.

²⁸³ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 140.

Cunich sets the number of confraternities in England conservatively at 30,000. Although their fundamental purpose was to provide intercessory prayer for their deceased members, guilds also served countless services for the community in which they resided. These services included, but were not limited to providing proper burials for members, sponsoring festivals for the community, and all in all providing an atmosphere of fellowship.²⁸⁴

Perhaps the single most inexpensive manner of obtaining perpetual prayer for one's name came in the form of the bede-roll. Recited at the annual obits and other festive occasions sanctioned by the guilds, the bede-roll offered what Duffy termed as a "form of immortality" for those who partook in this service. There were many ways in which to have a name placed upon such a roll. These included the simple donation of money or providing money for a specific item to be purchased or the item itself. Stretching for hundreds of years, the bede-roll offered the opportunity for a family name to be remembered for its contributions to the community in hopes prayers would be offered. The bede-roll was also a service offered by each parish, which recited a complete list of the names of its benefactors annually, while offering a somewhat edited list each Sunday during Mass.²⁸⁵

Although the primary function of the chantry priest was to provide intercessory prayers, the priest oftentimes found himself in the position of educator to the youth of the community as well as assistant to the local prelate.

²⁸⁴ Cunich, "The Dissolution of the Chantries," 163; Kreider, *English Chantries*, 6.

²⁸⁵ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 334.

According to Alan Kreider, the Edwardian chantries act not only stripped away the perpetual prayers being offered, but also did away with these much needed services for the community. This was made clear by the devastation imposed on the chantry colleges.

The chantry college provided three primary functions. The first function was to provide order among the community of chantry priests. The medieval college was also established to offer a location for education for the local youth. Yet, it is the third function that was the colleges' most important: "liturgical and intercessory."²⁸⁶ Medieval colleges constituted first and foremost a place for the worship of God and constant intercessory prayer for the souls of past benefactors.²⁸⁷ While not always considered to have sufficient abilities in the area of education, the chantry priest was the only recourse for early education in some communities. Evidence found within the crown's visitations by chantry commissioners during the years 1545 and 1548, reveal positive statements made by community leaders concerning their chantry priests in regards to their efforts in the community.²⁸⁸

By bringing to an end the function of the English chantry, royal authority destroyed a vital element of all funeral rites of the medieval period. The denial of purgatory by the Reformers inevitably led to a blurring of the afterlife in the minds of Christians throughout not just England but all of Europe. It also led to an

²⁸⁶ Kreider, *English Chantries*, 7.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ Andrew D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250-1550* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 106-107.

increased anxiety on the part of the laity, which overtime produced an unintended consequence – a waning of belief in the prospect of punishment in the afterlife.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Ralph Houlbrooke, ed., *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989), 40-41.

CHAPTER VII

ENGLISH DISSOLUTION: THE TRAGIC CHARACTER OF THE HENRICIAN AND EDWARDIAN CHANTRY DISSOLUTIONS

Intercessory institutions were, in fact, positive contributors to English society prior to the onset of the dissolutions, which is one reason why these intercessory institutions survived post-dissolution. Institutions that were considered of use under the Protestant administration, albeit in different form and given different rationale, were those that provided “pastoral, educational, and socio-economic assistance.”²⁹⁰ As the regimes of Henry VIII and Edward VI began their slow but inexorable move away from traditional Catholicism, staunch Protestant Reformers within England welcomed such a change. Yet, to many inhabitants the move away from traditions held for centuries, such as fear of a purgatory filled with pain after death, came as a shock. The reforms pushed upon England were viewed by many as nothing more than unwanted meddling with the soul’s final condition after death. Upon what basis did these reforms rest when attacking the doctrine of purgatory?

While at first vague upon the subject of purgatory, Luther himself finally rejected the notion of a purgatorial state in *A Recantation of Purgatory* (1530). The attack upon the notion of purgatory was furthered by the 1529 work of Simon

²⁹⁰ Kreider, *English Chantries*, 70.

Fish, *Supplicacyon for the Beggars*. Yet, it is interesting to note the method of Fish's attack. Instead of concentrating upon the theological weaknesses upon which the church had established its belief in this doctrine, Fish concentrated his attack upon the manner by which the clergy and the pope utilized this doctrine for financial gain. None other than Sir Thomas More in the *Supplycacyon of Soulys* (1529), answered Fish's attack. More took the opposite method of attack, relying on traditional and scriptural proofs. More's reply did not dispel further attacks, for by 1531 another Protestant, John Frith, attacked purgatorial beliefs in *A Disputacion of Purgatorye*. Following the methodology set by More, Frith argued from a theological point of view finding no scriptural proof for purgatory. It was in Frith's work, according to Kreider, that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith was convincingly used against the doctrine of purgatory.²⁹¹

Within this atmosphere of theological disputation, Henry VIII found that he could position himself against the church with assistance of anti-clerical sympathizers in his move to restrict the disappearance of English land into mortmain. After 1534 Henry's administration no longer allowed the further establishing of intercessory institutions, even though no official statement from the government actually forbade any further granting of such licenses.²⁹²

The official break from Rome in 1534 with the Act of Royal Supremacy brought the institutions of intercessory prayer under renewed attack. These attacks occurred because of the intrinsic link in the minds of the reformers

²⁹¹ Ibid., 96-99.

²⁹² Ibid., 84-85.

between purgatory and intercessory institutions, on the one hand, and the Roman papacy's claim to the ability to bind and loose, on the other. Kreider correctly dates the beginning attack upon intercessory institutions as 1534 when John Foxe made the comment "at what time purgatory and such trumpery began to grow in contempt."²⁹³

The anxiety of traditional conservatives was heightened in 1535 with the onset of royal visitations of the smaller monasteries. Royal commissioners reported findings to Thomas Cromwell, which he in turn used as ammunition against these ecclesiastical institutions in his mission to suppress these foundations. While some of these reports are undoubtedly based in fact, much of the 'evidence' reported back to Cromwell has been found by many historians to be of a dubious nature. Through this political matter, a purely spiritual institution suffered. The laity who relied on these places of worship for spiritual as well as communal affairs was never considered.²⁹⁴ Paraphrasing G.R. Elton, Lawrence Snell asserts that crown visitors of monasteries "looked for scandal and distorted the truth, and that even when the surviving reports are added up nothing resembling universal collapse can be said to emerge. The monasteries were not sinks of iniquity."²⁹⁵

A fascinating account of lay response to the suppression of monasteries under the Henrician government is seen with the suppression of St. Nicholas'

²⁹³ Ibid., 104-105.

²⁹⁴ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 383-385.

²⁹⁵ Lawrence S. Snell, *The Suppression of the Religious Foundations of Devon and Cornwall* (Great Britain: Wardens of Cornwall Limited Marazion and Penzance, 1967), 12.

Priory on September 18, 1536. The story revolves around the exploits of several women of the community who attempted to defy the crown's intentions. After taking possession of the suppressed institution, crown commissioners left one of their number to "pull down the rood loft of the church' while they departed for evening meal." It is at this point our local heroines come to play their part:

certain women and wives in the city . . . minding to stop the suppressing of the house, came and finding the man pulling down the rood loft, they all sought the means they could to take him, and hurled stones unto him, insomuch that for his safety he was driven to take the tower for his refuge, and yet they pursued him so eagerly that he was enforced to leap out at a window, and so save himself, and yet very hardly escaped the breaking of his neck; but yet broke one of his ribs.²⁹⁶

After a lengthy discourse between the agents of reform in England an "authoritative statement" on theological doctrine was completed in July of 1536, the Ten Articles. Looking to the sole authority of the Bible as supreme judge and instruction manual for all matters of theology, the Ten Articles broke with many traditional aspects of English society. The vagueness of the Ten Articles are without question and need not be discussed in detail at this time. Yet, the document's stance on purgatory is key to our understanding of the events to follow. While not officially denouncing the doctrine of purgatory, the Ten Articles took a very questionable stance in reference to purgatory. The word purgatory itself was prohibited by this work while at the same time not defining a true denouncement of this doctrine. The vague nature of this document ultimately led many to point to the political nature of this religious struggle. The moderation

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 52-53.

expressed within the Ten Articles can be understood when viewed in light of Henry's plight to try and appease not only his supporters but also citizens of the realm in his desire to stave off rebellion.²⁹⁷

Although vague on the subject of purgatory the Ten Articles still served to undercut the validity of the intercessory institution. For, although these articles still allowed for prayers to the dead, the beneficial nature of the sacrificial Mass was now in question. With the dissolution of the monasteries under the reign of Henry the daily routine of the English commoner was severely affected. The heretofore ample reservoir of daily masses and intercessory prayers for the dead was severely diminished.²⁹⁸

Following the disruptive reforming tendencies of the 1530s, the onset of the 1540s saw a conservative movement begin to creep into governmental policy. The years between 1536 and 1543 reveal a continual conservative reaction on the part of Henry in the doctrinal disputations over the Henrician formularies. In a period in which theological alterations were attempting some type of balance against social upheaval, these methods by Henry, albeit, often confusing, are easily interpreted in light of a society not ready for such upheaval. Yet, this conservative trend did not find its way towards that of the intercessory institutions.

²⁹⁷ Kreider, *English Chantries*, 117-118; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 392, 402.

²⁹⁸ Kreider, *English Chantries*, 124; For more information on the effects of Purgatorial dissolution on a local setting see Philip T. Hoffman, *Church and Community in the Diocese of Lyon 1500-1789* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984).

In 1539, Henry instituted his Act of Six Articles, in which he returned such items as transubstantiation, withholding the cup from the laity, celibacy to the priesthood, monastic vows, auricular confession, and private masses. While this was a conservative move on Henry's part the Six Articles were not a return to pre-Reformation religious doctrine. Referring to the topic of private masses, Henry intentionally omitted the reviving of private masses to provide assistance / benefit for departed souls.²⁹⁹

The year 1543 found Henry issuing a completely revised formulary on May 29, 1543: *The Necessary Doctrine and Erudition of any Christen Man*. Although the historiography relating to the *Necessary Doctrine* (commonly known as the King's Book) ranges from pro-Catholic to pro-Protestant, with some scholars calling for a new formula entirely, with the single exception of the doctrine of purgatory, the King's Book was extensively conservative in nature. The 1543 King's Book formally dropped purgatory from official church doctrine in England. The question must be asked as to why were the majority of trends during this period leaning towards a more conservative realm while that of intercessory prayers were not? The answer lies within Henry's desire for the monastic lands held in mortmain.

Continuing the process began with the Ten Articles of 1536, the "king's book" of 1538 brought about the moment where the Mass was no longer offered for the sake of any individual soul, but now, in accordance with the "mystical

²⁹⁹ Kreider, *English Chantries*, 127, 147.

body of Christ” aspect, all masses were said for the benefit for all Christian souls – alive or dead. Although vague in its wording, the King’s Book nevertheless sounded the death knell for the chantry system.³⁰⁰

It is of no wonder that citizens of Henry’s realm on their own began to dissolve intercessory foundations with which they were associated in the face of so many alterations to church doctrine and governmental response. In response to such actions the Henrician government (with a precedent set by the suppression of smaller monasteries beginning with the visitations in 1535) now moved to a more thorough provision to alleviate private suppressions, through the Chantries Act of 1545.

A second reason for the Act of 1545 was to stop people from taking action to suppress their own intercessory institutions out of fear of losing their investments to the king. Upon the passage of the Chantries Act there immediately followed an ever-increasing inquiry as to the availability of these newly acquired properties by court ambassadors and those individuals who had the king’s ear. According to Robert Whiting, by 1547, these wealthier laymen had purchased as much as two-thirds of the newly acquired monastic lands from the crown.³⁰¹

As to those historians who argue there may have been a religious motive behind the actions of Henry with the Chantries Act of 1545 one should only look

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 127, 151-152.

³⁰¹ Robert Whiting, *Local Responses to the English Reformation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 20.

as far as the former monarch's last will and testament. Henry requested many of the traditional aspects for his funeral that were reminiscent of pre-Reformation England; such as, masses to be said for the intercession of his soul. For other evidence to discount this proposal the lack of a methodical nature to the implementation of the 1545 Act can be seen as evidence of a non-religious intent. Unlike the Edwardian program of reform, which was primarily a religiously motivated dissolution, the Henrician Chantry Act of 1545 did not set a definitive date for wholesale closure. Indeed, the act not only omitted a date for closure, but no mentioning or allusion was made to all chantries to be suppressed. Although the Chantry Act under Henry was enforced in a piecemeal fashion, it set in motion a process that eventually resulted in intercessory institutions losing their reason for existence by the 1540s. It was left to Henry's son Edward to finish the process began by his father.³⁰²

The ascension to the throne by Edward proved a devastating event for the future well being of the intercessory institutions of England. Within just three short months of his coronation, the government of Edward began the process of suppressing all intercessory foundations. Whereas the government of Henry had approached these institutions with trepidation and caution, officials of Edward's administration had no such qualms. They moved forward with aggressive quickness.

³⁰² Kreider, *English Chantries*, 177, 93-94.

In December of 1547 a system of dissolution began to emerge under the administration of Edward VI. This bill, passed by the House of Lords on December 24, 1547, called for the “dissolution of chantries.” This momentous act ushered in the next move by Edward VI in his sweeping reform, resulting in yet more confiscations like that seen a decade earlier with the suppression of the monasteries under Henry VIII. It was apparent from the outset the intention and motive behind this move was not similar to that of the previous government of Henry. As defined by the preamble of this Act, this measure was an effort to curtail the intercessory movement in general. The final attack on the institution of intercessory prayers had now begun.³⁰³

Act for the Dissolution of Chantries

The king's most loving subjects, the Lords spiritual and temporal, and the Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, considering that a great part of superstition and errors in Christian religion has been brought into the minds and estimations of men, by reason of the ignorance of their very true and perfect salvation through the death of Jesus Christ, and by devising and phantasying vain opinions of purgatory and masses satisfactory to be done for them which be departed, the which doctrine and vain opinion by nothing more is maintained and upholden, than by the abuse of trentals, chantries, and other provisions made for the continuance of the said blindness and ignorance; and further considering and understanding, that the alteration, change, and amendment of the same, and converting to good and godly uses, as in erecting of grammer schools to the education of youth in virtue and godliness, the further augmenting of the universities, and better provision for the poor and needy, cannot, in this present Parliament, be provided and conveniently done, nor cannot nor ought to have any other manner person to be committed, than to the king's highness, whose majesty, with and by the advice of his highness's most prudent council, can and will most wisely

³⁰³ Ibid., 185, 1

and beneficially, both for the honour of God and the weal of this his majesty's realm, order, alter, convert, and dispose the same; . . . ³⁰⁴

The preamble to this act, quoted above, asserts in no uncertain terms that purgatory was what was deemed improper with the land's intercessory institutions. The act also reveals the financial motives hidden further within the document. The act also was employed for:

the relief of the King's Majesty's charges and expenses which do daily grow and increase by reason of divers and sundry fortifications, garrisons, levying of men and soldiers which at this present is so chargeable and costly unto his Majesty . . . ' and so that the commons ' . . . might thereby be relieved of the continual charge of taxes, contributions, loans and subsidies . . . which by reason of the wars they were constrained . . . to abide. ³⁰⁵

Confiscation and sale of lands already began under Henry reached new heights under Edward, especially after the Act of 1547. Traditional Catholics in England, already suspicious of the monarchy's intentions, grew even more concerned. This concern was further fueled by the crown's creating inventories of intercessory institutions beginning in 1547, and followed in 1549 and 1552. If there were any doubts to the crown's intentions before, they were made clear by these actions. ³⁰⁶

Some historians such as A.G. Dickens have argued that large scale looting of chantries and subsequent sale and or confiscation of religious relics and altar goods was a sign of rampant Protestantism. Yet, further examination

³⁰⁴ Henry Gee and William John Hardy, eds., *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (London: Macmillan, 1914, accessed 26 April 2005); available from <http://home.freeuk.net/don-aitken/ast/e6.html#159>; internet.

³⁰⁵ Cunich, "The Dissolution of the Chantries," 159-160.

³⁰⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 484, 517.

reveals a traditionalist populace wise to future confiscation of their treasures by the crown. Dickens has overlooked these actions as being practical in light of the reformer's agenda. To be sure some instances were the result of greed and an iconoclastic attack led by reformers; yet the vast majority can be attributed to those individuals who simply did not want their investments / donations to these chantries to be appropriated by the crown. The crown followed the example set by Henry and moved to interrupt the loss of possible revenue by increasing its efforts in confiscation.³⁰⁷

Churchwarden accounts of the period record the extent to which the chantry commissioners went to further the crown's acquisition of financial goods. Within the churchwarden accounts for the town of Ludlow in 1548, Richarde Tomlyns was hired to render a certificate for the crown commission visitors, the visitors being "the king's visitors, who were sent here to examine the amount of superstitious usages existing in the church, and into the claims of the guild." This visitation resulted in the same year in the hiring by the parish of "William Marteyne for a dayes worke makynge the roode loft playne." Marteyne's duty was to remove any traditional images upon the rood that were offensive to the new religion. At this time it seems it was not necessary to completely remove the rood itself.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 122.

³⁰⁸ Thomas Wright, ed., *Churchwardens' Accounts of The Town of Ludlow, In Shropshire, From 1540 to the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth* (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 35.

Also reported by this same churchwarden account is the removal in 1548 of the private chapel dedicated to the Wyattes family of Ludlow. The parish employed two community members, Geres and Swift, for the task of “takyng downe of Wyattes chancelle” Two years later action was being taken by the parish to remove all representations of saints from the church windows. Combined with the iconoclastic tendency of the reformed movement, English chantries were now witness to the removal of all instruments used in furtherance of intercessory prayer.³⁰⁹

The significant variance between the Acts of Chantries under Henry and Edward lay with the two administration’s primary motivations. Whereas the government of Edward was interested in the monetary gain to be had by their actions, this was not the primary motivation as it had been for the administration of Henry. The government of Edward was primarily moved to religious reform as has been witnessed within the preamble to the Edwardian Chantries Act, 1547. While this preamble does set forth a very religious tone, it should not be assumed that the government was not just as interested in the acquisition of land and additional monetary gain. Edward VI found himself in the unlucky position of inheriting many of his father’s previous problems, one of which was an empty treasury. As Kreider reminds us, “War had been the source of Henry’s fiscal

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 36, 44.

embarrassments, and the fruits of his wars were a steady drain on Edward's slender resources."³¹⁰

Social Impact

There is a great question as to whether people were profoundly disturbed by these closures or whether these institutions were moribund. As was expected, Catholics during this period argued that although the people of England were stripped of their traditional religion, neither had they accepted a truly Protestant faith. Yet, there were staunch Protestants who sometimes concurred with the assertion that they (Protestants) were among a distinct minority in a nation that was indifferent to religion. "'Many', observed John Jewel at the start of Elizabeth's reign, 'will believe neither side, whatsoever they allege. Bring they truth, bring they falsehood; teach they Christ, teach they antichrist: they will believe neither, they have so hardened their hearts.'"³¹¹

The writings of the diarist Henry Machyn reveal the extent to which traditional aspects survived even after the Edwardian attacks against remnants of the Catholic religion. In 1554 Machyn records with enthusiasm the events of December 8, "wyche was the Conceptyon of owre blessed lady the Vyrghyn, was a goodly prossessyon . . .the prest carehyng the sacrament ryally be-twyne ys hands, and one deacon carehyng a senser sensing, and anodur the ale-water

³¹⁰ Kreider, *English Chantries*, 201.

³¹¹ Whiting, 121-122.

stoke, and a nombur of frers and prestes syngyng . . .” Or perhaps the next day when Machyn records that on this day “dyd pryche at Powlles crosse doctor Borne, bysshope of Bathe, and prayd for the pope of Rome (Julius) the thurde, and for alle the soles of purgatory.” It took another four years before the newly appointed Bishop of Salisbury, John Jewell, refuted his predecessor’s own teachings while delivering a sermon at a funeral “and ther dyd pryche master Juell the new byshope of Salysbere, and ther he sayd plainly that ther was no purgatore . . .” What stands out within Machyn’s diary is the interest taken on the author’s part when it came to the “pageantry and holidaymaking of the City.” Perhaps more importantly are the attitudes expressed by Machyn on matters concerning religion. It is from such material as provided by this sixteenth-century merchant-tailor that a better understanding of individual behavior is garnered during such an uncertain period in religious life.³¹²

Traditional aspects of pre-Reformation society did in fact find ways in which to survive and exist in a growing Protestant culture. Take for instance the community of Salisbury. Although officially purgatory was abolished during the reign of Edward VI, the civic elite of Salisbury continued to practice a commemorative act strikingly similar to that of intercessory prayers. It seems the burgesses of Salisbury found a way in which to make use of and perpetuate the endowments of the guild of St. George and the Trinity almshouse. Benefactors of the city still had their names added to the existing bede roll. Intercessory

³¹² John Gough Nichols, ed, *The Diary of Henry Machyn, Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London, From A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1563* (New York: AMS Press, 1968), vii, 78, 224.

prayer was no longer officially offered for the benefit of these benefactors' souls, but prayer was offered for their civic virtue and benefits awarded to the city on their part. The introductory prayer of the bede roll stated that these benefactors had "helped to increase 'love and charity' among the citizens so that they might 'after this life . . . be partakers of the life everlasting'."³¹³ Reformers quickly learned, like their Catholic predecessors, that much of medieval society's traditional ceremonies could be worked into their own pattern of worship in an attempt to attract adherents. Although Catholic doctrine may have been effectively stripped from English society, those 'pious practices' held to be most dear to the people of England found ways of surviving. A good example of this phenomenon can be found in the now abolished pilgrimage shrines. Pilgrims had once traveled to Pilton (Somerset) for the healing powers attributed to the shrine located there. By 1586, reformers were conducting regular visits to the same location to deliver sermons in hopes of compensating prior devotion. Adherents were still expecting to encounter a 'supernatural' occurrence from their experience.³¹⁴

Historians such as Keith Thomas have erroneously asserted that the medieval church purposefully established a doctrine of magical remedy for its adherents. Any magical tendencies encountered within church tradition were

³¹³ Brown, *Popular Piety*, 244-245; For additional information of Protestant attempts to rectify the Purgatorial dilemma see Nigel Llewellyn's theory of memoria in Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture In The English Death Ritual c. 1500 – c. 1800* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1991), 28; Ralph Houlbrooke provides a supporting conclusion in Houlbrooke, ed., *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement*, 12; for more on popular civic rituals as remembrances see Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*.

³¹⁴ Brown, *Popular Piety*, 247, 249.

only 'parasitic' in nature and ecclesiastical institutions attempted to quash them. In fact, much of the information we have on these 'superstitions' comes from those ecclesiastics that were denouncing them.³¹⁵

The previously mentioned ability of the church to bestow upon its followers a measure of "supernatural ability" was of course eliminated by the harsh opposition presented by the Reformers against such "superstitious" traditions. Yet, the early Reformers themselves were not to have an equally powerful replacement aside from their simple explanation that all misfortunes came from divine providence, not happenstance. Reformers attempted to replace a system that possessed a multitude of manners in which the laity deduced the mysteries of life with one in which their only recourse was to accept a divine doctrine of heavenly providence. For the reformer, happenstance simply did not constitute an option. A realm of apparent chaos was erased by the order exerted through the omnipotent sovereignty of God. Instead of reliance upon traditional measures that had been accepted for generations, Reformers now urged the laity to overcome their daily problems through prayer (to God alone) and through their own hard work.³¹⁶ Yet, this proved to be a difficult transition as many Catholic "pious practices" found ways of surviving.³¹⁷

This newly formed religion of the Protestants, which shed itself of any hint of magic and ritual traditions, became the very reason for an increase in sought-

³¹⁵ Thomas, *Religion*, 46.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107, 111.

³¹⁷ For examples of this during the Nineteenth Century see Michael Wheeler's *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990; reprint of abridged edition, 1994), 77.

after magical alternatives. The increase in magical alternatives cannot be simply attributed to a loss of traditional means of explaining the inexplicable, but rather might be considered a revival of those arts practiced in an era when the church was not in a position to render any alternative answers to questions being sought. The reformers, by casting aside the protective and intercessionary ability of the medieval saints while simultaneously preaching a new doctrine of earthly dominion of the devil, created for themselves an environment of opportunity for the cunning folk of rural England. As an example, the 1563 Churchwarden accounts for the parish church in Barnsley, Gloucestershire, reported:

there is one Alice Pinbury in our parish that uses herself suspiciously in the likelihood of a witch, taking upon her not only to help christen people of diseases strangely happened but also horses and all other beasts she takes upon her to help by the way of charming, and in such ways that she will have nobody privy of her sayings.³¹⁸

The conclusions reached by scholars, such as Keith Thomas and Edward Muir, hold that Protestantism placed its followers in an impossible position:

The new religion made the situation even bleaker by playing down the importance of guardian angels, and denying the intercessionary power of saints, while at the same time placing an unprecedented stress upon the reality of the Devil and the extent of his earthly dominion. . . . It is not surprising that many old Catholic formulae retained their value in times of emergency for Protestants who found themselves disarmed in face of the old enemy. . . . The cunning folk made extensive use of old Catholic formulae.³¹⁹

Protestants now found themselves presented with the dilemma of accepting witchcraft as a reality, yet not having recourse for protection.

³¹⁸ Colin W. Field, *The State of the Church in Gloucestershire, 1563* (n.p., 1971), 3.

³¹⁹ Thomas, *Religion*, 494; See also Monter, *Ritual, Myth and Magic*, 24; and Muir, *Ritual*, 181; for more information on English cunning folk see Monter, *Myth and Magic*, 30-31.

For example, a key element in the elevation of diabolic witchcraft concerns the same elevation of the Devil in prominence as seen by Christians when interpreting the New Testament. This was a result of the Protestant Reformation in which reformers such as Luther and Calvin viewed the Devil in near heretical dualistic concepts – nearly rivaling God in power over creation. It is not lost on the reader the importance of explaining in detail the nature of the Devil and all factors of his mythology since he is central to diabolical witchcraft. Brian P. Levack also attributes the transformation of the Devil's role in late Medieval society to the reliance by both Catholic and Protestant theologians upon the Ten Commandments as a basis for moral ethics. Levack asserts that this shift in reliance from the earlier emphasize upon the seven deadly sins contributes greatly in the connotation of witches being not only guilty of *maleficium* but now guilty of a far greater crime – devil worship.³²⁰ But again, with the dawn of the Reformation, Protestants in England were now left with no other recourse to protect themselves from anxieties of the daily lives, not to mention their afterlife.

Legacy

The Reformation was not itself the sole vehicle for the elimination of “superstitious” beliefs held by the church. While it is true that that early Reformers attempted to eradicate any hint of ecclesiastical ritual magic from the

³²⁰ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3d ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2006), 36.

church, those problems that had existed prior to the Reformation that resulted in such beliefs were still in existence. For though the Reformation may appear at first sight the instigator of the inevitable decline of the supernatural in England, Keith Thomas asserts that the early reformers were “forced against its own premises to devise a magic of its own” to replace what it had destroyed.³²¹ Ironically, these cast aside “superstitions” found themselves being brought forth in somewhat altered reincarnations under the influence of sectarians during the Interregnum. A post Reformation scenario emerged in which the laity still reverted to folk religious beliefs to alleviate those anxieties and concerns over everyday life issues that confronted men.

Within the rise of sects during the mid-seventeenth century, supernatural influences crept back in. Sectarians, in 1640, moved to fill the void left by reformers in an effort to provide an alternative outlet for answers for the supernatural. Sectarians practiced the arts of prophesying as well as that of healing. When referring to prophesying, sectarians utilized this as a means of predicting the future, not expounding on biblical texts. As an example one need only observe the statements made by the sectarian leader Thomas Webbe that “the clergy should not be heeded unless they could work miracles.”³²²

In the realm of miraculous healings the Quaker George Fox was responsible for countless acts of spiritual healings. Claiming to possess telepathic abilities as well as powers of healing, Fox was seen by many as a

³²¹ Thomas, *Religion*, 77.

³²² *Ibid.*, 125-126.

witch. Actions by men such as Fox were seen by contemporaries, such as William Prynne, as nothing short of a move backwards to those religions which had been so hard fought against. Prynne went so far as to charge the Sectarians for “working miracles and casting devils out of men possessed, by their exorcisms, as the Jesuits and Papists do.” Like the Catholic religion of pre-Reformation England, the Sectarians found themselves in the business of offering up explanations and remedies for daily misfortune. These remedies were connected to the supernatural in some way or fashion.³²³

Much evidence has been uncovered that points to an unruly conduct on the part of many ‘reluctant’ practitioners of the new faith. Individuals found themselves either voluntarily or forced to attend service on a regular basis. During time of worship there are reports that church members themselves offered up many distractions during service. There are reports of distractions such as fighting for position, spitting on the floor, sleeping in the pews, talking loudly amongst themselves, and if ecclesiastical court records are to be believed, even firing guns.³²⁴ Indications of service distractions are seen in the parish of Chipping Campden where members were reported to “talk and jangle at service time;” as well as the parish of Dymock where there was “much talking in time of service.” If talking during service does not suffice, what of the account taken from the parish of Windrush where raucous behavior in the town’s alehouse, “kept in their vicarage within the churchyard hard by the church,” disturbed

³²³ Ibid., 127-128.

³²⁴ Ibid., 161.

church services. This resulted in the ecclesiastical injunction “that no innholders or alehouse-keepers shall use to sell meat or drink in the time of Common Prayer, preaching, reading of the homilies or Scriptures.” Perhaps the most bizarre of these examples is found within the churchwarden accounts of the town of Ludlow, where the parish officials were forced to employ a local boy at their church for “whippyng doges out of the churche” due to the distraction made by these animals and their owners.³²⁵

The Reformers, who had once criticized former Catholic clergy of preaching in Latin to an “ignorant” audience, now preached in the vernacular a discourse too scholarly to be understood by their congregations. Although claiming to have made changes for the better, the problem only worsened. Examples of this can be seen in such areas as Gloucestershire where members of the parish church of Ninsterworth revealed their true impressions of their newly appointed curate when they stated “their curate ‘does weary the parish with overlong preaching’, and the spokesman for the common man in a 1581 dialogue was told that ‘if the preacher doth pass his hour bute a little, your buttocks begin to ache and ye wish in your heart that the pulpit would fall’.”³²⁶ Also there is George Gifforde’s imaginary representative for the common Englishman who complains in 1582: “Can we not serve God without so much preaching? I would have them leave talking and fall to doing.” It is this manner of instruction that

³²⁵ Field, *The State of the Church*, 8, 10, 27, 31; Wright, ed., *Churchwardens’ Accounts*, 15.

³²⁶ Peter Marshall, ed., *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1997), 244.

may have resulted in actions taken by the youth of Hinton on the Green who were criticized by their local wardens for not remaining in “their church at the time of service but will go out of the church before it is done.”³²⁷

We have seen how the inhabitants of early modern England lived in a constant state of fear and uncertainty due to their inability to understand their surroundings to a sufficient degree. Traditional religion through its own liturgy was able to offer its adherents a sense of confidence in their surroundings. The Catholic church also offered the laity social outlets such as the Mystery Plays, which allowed the laity to express themselves religiously, and also allowed them to be in communion with their faith; this was lay piety in action. The church, as well as laymen, made available many works of literature and art in an effort to educate the laity about their religion. Much of this literature and art for laity concerned the destination of the soul after death. For many Christians, departed souls were not cut off from the living and Purgatory provided a cohesive element within these communities. The dissolution of intercessory institutions by the administrations of Henry VIII and his son Edward VI combined with doctrinal attacks against purgatory by reformers quickly stripped the laity of an ability to commune with the dead. Yet, many pre-Reformation practices that were dear to the people of England found ways of surviving.

³²⁷ Field, *The State of the Church*, 15, 12; George Gifforde, *A Briefe discourse of certaine points of the religion which is among the commō sort of Christians, which may bee termed the Countrie Ciuinitie: With a manifest confutation of the same, after the order of a Dialogue* (London: n.p., 1582), 27; Also see Marshall, ed., *English Reformation*, 244; Keith Thomas also arrives at this conclusion; Thomas, *Religion*, 165.

CHAPTER VIII

ESCHATOLOGICAL DISPUTATION

Under the administrations of Henry and Edward, intercessory institutions in England found themselves under attack. Yet, even the church and State may agree that a Purgatorial condition did not exist, third place concepts began to re-emerge almost immediately in an effort to fill the void left by the Reformers. England now entered into a long period of eschatological confusion, as Protestant ministers began asserting a wide range of afterlife explanations in an effort to appease the concerns of their laity.

Before discussing the various lay and theological debates surrounding the state of the soul after death, a moment is needed to once again point out the importance of previous sentiments concerning the immortality of the soul: specifically, Renaissance ideas that influenced the theological debates of the Reformation period. To answer this we must once again travel into the distant past and in order to do so the vehicle of travel will be one of the highest intellectual philosophers of the Renaissance period — Pietro Pomponazzi.

The importance Renaissance writers gave to the condition of the immortality of the human soul is made evident in the work of Pietro Pomponazzi. Pomponazzi's work reveals a very strong Aristotelian tradition in that the author

attempts to support many of the philosophical underpinnings of Aristotelian thought when it comes to concepts of the soul after death. Yet, his work *Tractatus de immortalitate animae* (1516 CE) reveals that the author did not adhere strictly to Aristotelian concepts, rather there are many instances when Neo-platonic ideals emerge.³²⁸ Pomponazzi's work is no doubt an endeavor to clarify Aristotelian concepts of the afterlife. His central premise is that current interpretations of Aristotle's writings (seen through the lens of Aquinas) are in error. This interpretation holds that Aristotle did indeed support the belief in the immortality of the soul. Pomponazzi clearly is against such a conclusion, not because the author does not believe in the soul's immortality, but that Aristotle's writings have been misinterpreted through the work of Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

Pomponazzi is therefore arguing against a tradition that was widely understood, if not widely accepted due to Aristotelian scholars. The largest distinction that can be drawn between the two approaches is clearly put forth by John Randall in his introduction to Pomponazzi's *Tractatus de immortalitate animae*. Randall asserts that not unlike the Platonists, Aristotelians also discussed the concept of immortality "in relation to the individual soul," but only arrived at this conclusion via the alternate route of naturalistic conclusions.³²⁹ For instance, Aristotle agrees with his teacher (Plato) that the soul is "perpetual"

³²⁸ Ernst Cassirer, et al., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1948).

³²⁹ Pietro Pomponazzi, "On the Immortality of the Soul," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, Ernst Cassirer et al eds (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1948), 260.

in that it is the form of the human intellect that is immortal — it renders “knowing” to the mortal conscience.³³⁰

Pomponazzi is quite clever in that he pays homage to Thomas Aquinas’ interpretation of Aristotelian thought but at the same time takes issue with some of his interpretations. He fundamentally challenges the notion that Aristotle believed in the immortality of the soul except in only a very limited sense. His interpretation of Aristotelian psychology did not allow room for any supernatural occurrences in nature, such as miracles, angels and demons or apparitions. Instead, he holds to the Aristotelian conception of the cosmos in which reason precludes any such beliefs.³³¹ This culminates in his last chapter, where Pomponazzi indicates that his entire treatise is from an Aristotelian perspective and that “truth” can be found in the church dogma that maintains that the human soul is in fact immortal. Therefore, having begun his treatise with the admonition that he was to remain with the natural limits of Aristotelian thought, he ends his work with a decidedly religious and spiritual take on the matter — immortality of the soul is for Pomponazzi (as it has always been) an article of faith:

only with the resurrection of the body, with supernatural grace and redemption, is immortality consistently conceivable. Indeed, were the soul by nature immortal, how would grace be a merit?³³²

Pomponazzi’s main goal is to prove that from an Aristotelian standpoint the soul was mortal and could not stand apart from the mortal body. In fact, this

³³⁰ Ibid., 261.

³³¹ Ibid., 277.

³³² Ibid., 275.

combination was instrumental in the soul's ability to function, for the body allowed the soul access to "knowing." The individual soul needed the mortal frame to engage in the natural world and provide for it the necessary images or *phantasmata*. Therefore, thought cannot exist with the body which was in itself a concept taken from Aristotle's *De Anima*, I. 1, 403a8-9.

The majority of Pomponazzi's work involves the author challenging preconceived notions of Aristotelian philosophy. Yet, in chapter fourteen, Pomponazzi discusses the effect his treatise will have on the doctrine of punishments in the afterlife; indicating his foreknowledge of religious concerns over such an interpretation upon the morality of humanity. Interestingly enough, this is very similar to the reaction Adeimantus has in Plato's *Republic* as revealed in Chapter I.³³³

Pomponazzi's work is better understood through the pious philosophy of Marsilio Ficino. Ficino's pious philosophy or Platonic theology can simply be stated as a smooth combination of Platonic philosophy and Christian theology. For Ficino, you could not have one without the other. Yet, this is not merely an effort on Ficino's part to utilize Platonic philosophy as a means to help Christian theologians interpret and defend their religion, for Ficino it is much, much more involved.

It is not too extreme to say that Ficino placed Plato on a pedestal nearly equal to if not equal to that of Christ. If not, he surely placed his writings on par

³³³ See page 19 of Chapter I.

with Holy Scriptures and the writings of the early church fathers. Ficino read into Plato's writings some foreknowledge of the coming Christ figure; at the very least, Ficino felt that Platonic Philosophy was helping to prepare mankind for the future emergence of Christianity.

Therefore, for Ficino, Platonic Philosophy was instrumental in understanding the poetic verses of Holy Scripture — it should be read through the lens of Plato for a proper understanding. This background bears fruit for this study when considering Ficino's brief essay "Five Questions concerning the Mind."³³⁴ For in this essay, Ficino, in his own particular manner, attempts to prove the soul's immortality.

Ficino's "Five Questions" are as follows: 1. Is the motion of the mind directed towards some definite end? 2. Upon obtaining that end is there motion or rest? 3. Is that end a particular end or a Universal end? 4. Is the mind strong enough to obtain that definite end? 5. Upon obtaining that end can it be lost?

The answer to question one is yes. Ficino asserts that the motion of the mind (soul) is constantly driven towards that which it originally came from — infinite goodness, the God Head.³³⁵ Therefore the soul is at all times desiring to return, but the material element will at all times distract and often times preclude that from happening. As for question two, Ficino asserts that there will be rest.

³³⁴ Marsilio Ficino, "Five Questions concerning the Mind," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, Ernst Cassirer et al eds (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1948), 193- 212; see also Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1955), 469-70.

³³⁵ Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Early Humanist Reformation 1250-1500* (Canada: Eden Press, 1985), 872-873.

He argues that if the soul is striving (motion) to return to infinite goodness, upon obtaining that the desire (motion) will be removed. In question three, Ficino asserts that there is a universal end, in that the soul is moving towards a universal end. In question four, Ficino asserts the soul is strong enough since God would not create something that could not accomplish its created goal. In question five, Ficino asserts that once obtaining the end it cannot be lost because of two things: the inability of God to lose that which it has captured unto itself, and the mere fact that the soul, perfect in being at this point, has nothing to reject itself from God — infinite goodness.

Turning to Lorenzo Valla, we discover that his conceptual realization concerning free will is of utmost import in this discussion. In his tract “On Free Will,” Valla (using a Socratic approach) attempts to clarify why God’s foreknowledge does not preclude Free Will. Admitting that God’s decision to harden some men’s hearts and not others may be a stumbling block to many, Valla urges one to concentrate on the mercy of God, not the unjustness.

Valla argues that since God sits outside of time (there is no past or future) there is only present for the God-Head. Thus, God is aware of all we might do or commit in our lifetimes, but this does not mean we do not have Free Will. God simply has the benefit of knowing what we will do before we in fact do it. This is an extremely important element of the Renaissance. Humanist writers concentrated on the individuality of the human spirit and thus proclaimed his or her extreme uniqueness in the universe.

Without Valla, and other humanist writers' reliance upon free will, all individuality might be lost. If God has pre-determined the course of our lives before our birth, we then have no control over the course of our lives — no individualism. How could the Renaissance ideal of self-interpretation in an attempt to better oneself and one's surroundings survive in such a light? And this then is the principal element to be derived from these writings. The spirit of individuality — *Dignity of Man* — is the key to the ever growing disparity of arguments concerning the condition of the soul after death. To understand this phenomenon we turn to the original source of Renaissance studies — Jacob Burckhardt.

Jacob Burckhardt asserted that during the Middle Ages medieval consciousness was influenced by “faith, illusion and childish prepossessions.”³³⁶ Medieval man was only consciousness of himself as part of an orderly system and did not think of himself as a unique individual. Too many constraints were placed upon his or her person to allow any room for individuality, such as central authorities, feudal obligations, and the authority of the church, which permeated all aspects of medieval life. Yet, this condition began to alter during the *quattrocento* in Italy, where Burckhardt asserts that the individual spirit first emerged. Burckhardt argues that it was in Italy first that the human mind became self aware. The author considered Italy a unique location and asserted

³³⁶ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 98.

this emergence of individuality could not have occurred anywhere else. He attributes this to the particular political nature of the Italian state.

The key attribute of the Italian state Burckhardt cites was the despotic nature of some of the fourteenth-century city-states. The author indicates that the individuality of certain despots was unquestioned when examined, but that in and of itself did not answer the question. What was of import was the effect such despotism had upon its subjects. In addition to despotic regimes, Burckhardt also valued highly the impact of political party associations in the growth of individuality in Italy. People existing within such a political climate were placed in a position in which they were forced to look within themselves and discover their own character. Therefore, oppression and political opposition were key elements in the emergence of the individualistic nature of the Italian world. Combined with an abundance of wealth and culture, the private individual was able to afford the “leisure” time necessary to look inward and contemplate the worth of his own individuality. Thus emerged the *l'uomo universale*.

While these points made by Burckhardt are appealing they have been challenged by some. Peter Burke points out that many historians have criticized Burckhardt's emphasize on the individuality of the Renaissance as a feature of the Renaissance that set it apart from the previous Middle Ages. Examples such as Abelard's and Guibert of Nogent's autobiographies are indicated, which, both reveal in-depth self introspection. Another individual's writings that can be placed within this same genre are the works of Gregory VII. While there may be

room to criticize the usage of individuality as a key hallmark of the Renaissance (especially given the fact that Burckhardt in later writings admitted he no longer believed in the individualism of the period himself), there is something to be said of the effect of the concept of individuality and its effect upon the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Whether or not individualism was the distinguishing characteristic of the age is another question entirely. But what is important to this discussion is the dangerous nature Platonic ideals held for Protestant theology. The Protestant drive to get closer to the original intention of the Apostles and resemble the early church led to questions Protestant theologians were not prepared to answer. Reformers claimed to be basing their beliefs on the “original” sources, yet this led to the questioning of the validity of several dogmas they held dear, such as the Trinity. Many of the core Protestant beliefs were not pre-Augustinian.³³⁷

The Debate Begins

Protestant eschatological expressions were influenced by Renaissance writers, whether they were continental reformers such as Luther and Calvin, or Protestant theologians in England such as Hugh Latimer and John Frith. Concepts surrounding the immortality of the soul were known to these theologians, especially Luther. Thus, Protestant eschatological expressions

³³⁷ Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, 16.

began with Martin Luther's evolving thoughts upon the nature of the soul. In a letter written in 1522, Luther admits his inability to ascertain the true nature of the soul after death – "Concerning your 'souls,' I have not enough [insight into the problem] to answer you."³³⁸ Yet, the Reformer does concede the existence of purgatory as well as the possibility that the soul exists in a state of sleep after death. The following statement by Luther provides a unique insight into the early thoughts of this Reformer:

On purgatory I have this opinion: I do not think, as the sophists dream, that it is a certain place, nor do I think that all who remain outside heaven or hell are in purgatory. (Who could assert this, since [the departed souls] could sleep suspended between heaven, earth, hell, purgatory, and all else, just as could happen with the living, when they are in a deep sleep?)³³⁹

Lecturing on Chapter twenty-three of Genesis, between 1539-1540, Luther continues his criticisms (first laid out in 1517) towards the papacy for claiming the ability to remit sins for those souls in purgatory. Luther lays the charge of simony against the pope stating "he merely carried off the money, while the wretched souls were left under the power of sin, hell, and the devil."³⁴⁰

Luther's hesitancy to fully reject the doctrine of purgatory highlights a key feature in future Protestant uncertainty concerning the afterlife. Luther's initial attack was solely towards the practice of indulgences and the penitential connotations associated with purgatory. This points to earlier comments

³³⁸ Gottfried G. Krodel, trans. and ed., *Luther's Works*, vol. 48 of *Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 360.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 362.

³⁴⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, eds., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 4, *Lectures on Genesis* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 203.

concerning the importance of ritual and custom. European Christian difficulty with the abandonment of purgatory is critically linked to the past generational belief in some dynamic afterlife other than Heaven or Hell. In fact, Daniel P. Walker has shown the difficulty seventeenth-century Christian writers had when trying to draw distinctions between their concepts of the afterlife and the Catholic version. His examination of the concept of limbo is a great example of this. Limbo, as opposed to purgatory, is not for those who have received grace, but for those damned – specifically infants not baptized. What is interesting in Walker's research is his findings that most Protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were allowed to believe in this doctrine whereas the Catholic church worked to dispel this belief amongst its adherents.³⁴¹

In a sermon preached before the Convocation of the Clergy, in 1537, Bishop Hugh Latimer also attacked the Catholic church's doctrine of purgatory, specifically the ability of the pope to remit the sins of souls in purgatory. In this sermon Latimer held a firm belief that the Catholic church had invented purgatory purely for a financial gain: "I dare boldly say, there hath been no emperor that hath gotten more by taxes and tallages of them that were alive, than these, the very and right-begotten sons of the world, got by dead men's tributes and gifts."³⁴²

By 1545, Luther's partial acceptance of purgatory was abandoned and, in

³⁴¹ Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, 60-61.

³⁴² Hugh Latimer, *The sermon that the reuerende father in Christ . . . Our Souerayne Lorde Kyng Henry the VIII* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1537), 40.

an effort to counter the Catholic church's doctrine of purgatory, the reformer put forth as a substitute the concept of *soul sleep*. Luther's explanation of this concept was at times vague as is evident in lectures delivered on chapter forty-nine of Genesis in 1545. Rather than attempting to clarify his stance on this subject, Luther instead asked his fellow Christians to "not pry with too much curiosity into the manner of their [souls] rest."³⁴³ Through his interpretation of Matt. 22:32 and Isaiah 57: 1-2, Luther affirms that the soul was an immortal substance and that at the moment of death the soul does not journey into purgatory or hell, instead "our souls are living and are sleeping in peace."³⁴⁴

In contrast to Luther's assertions concerning the state of the soul after death, John Calvin argued strongly that after death the soul did indeed retain "sense and understanding."³⁴⁵ In his tract entitled *Psychopannychia*, written in 1534, Calvin looks to scriptural evidence to support his position of the soul remaining aware after death. His position is evident when explicating such scriptural passages as 1 Peter 1:19 where Christ's descent into Hell is related by Peter. Calvin states that the Apostle Peter shows "that, after death, the soul both

³⁴³ Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, eds., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 8 of *Lectures on Genesis* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 318.

³⁴⁴ Pelikan and Hansen, eds., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 4 of *Lectures on Genesis*, 312; Luther cites Ecclesiastes 9:5 as evidence for his position on the condition of the soul after death in Jaroslav Pelikan and Hilton C. Oswald, eds., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 15 of *Notes on Ecclesiastes* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1972), 147; for further explication of scriptural passages concerning the condition of the soul after death being as that asleep see Martin Luther, *An Exposition of Salomon's Booke, called Ecclesiastes or the Preacher* (London: Printed by John Daye, 1573).

³⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Psychopannychia; or, a refutation of the error entertained by some unskillful persons . . .*, Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, eds., *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, Vol. 3, Tracts Part 3 [CD-ROM] (Albany: AGES Software, 1998), 383; for an analysis of Calvin's *Psychopannychia* see George H. Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000).

exists and lives, when he says that Christ preached to the spirits in prison.”³⁴⁶ In reference to Matthew 22:32 Calvin laments the inability of Anabaptists to understand Matthew’s statement that “He (God) is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”³⁴⁷ Calvin’s sarcasm comes through on this subject when commenting on chapter 6, verses 10 and 11 from the book of the Apocalypse. In reference to white robes given to martyrs at the foot of the altar of heaven, Calvin asks “O sleeping spirits! what are white robes to you? Are they pillows on which you are to lie down and sleep? You see that white robes are not at all adapted for sleep, and therefore, when thus clothed, they must be awake.”³⁴⁸ Calvin concludes by asserting those who hold to the soul sleeping after the death of the body “cannot produce one syllable concerning sleep” from scripture.³⁴⁹

The debate over the soul’s path after death was not concluded with Luther’s nor Calvin’s exegeses, but instead evolved in bursts and fits throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, producing some unique insights into the afterlife debate.³⁵⁰ Protestant uncertainties concerning the afterlife are borne out via the following examples. By dismissing the concept of purgatory, while not at the same time offering a definitive statement as to the plight of one’s soul at the time of death, Protestantism only contributed to a worsening of anxieties amongst its adherents.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 391.

³⁴⁷ Matt. 22:32 DV; Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 407.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 408.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 425.

³⁵⁰ For an in-depth discussion surrounding the decline of beliefs in eternal torment and the subsequent debates concerning an intermediate state in the seventeenth century see Walker’s *The Decline of Hell*.

Concentrating on the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, William M. Spellman examines conflicting manners in which Protestant eulogists approached the question of the afterlife. He reveals the complex nature of interpreting the impact of death and the soul's subsequent travels to an audience that simply was not able to grasp such an intricate matter. Spellman echoes themes put forth by Keith Thomas when explaining efforts by English Protestants to develop alternatives to the medieval church's doctrine of a middle state. It is in this attempt that the early Reformers found themselves in a position where they were unable to provide an alternate explanation for the soul's experience at death.

In their efforts to define an emotionally satisfying alternative to the Roman Catholic story, however, English Protestants formulated an increasingly wide variety of disparate—and sometimes contradictory—accounts of life after death, each of which was normatively based upon a personal understanding of scripture.³⁵¹

Eventually this inability to arrive at any consensus led to the eighteenth-century theories of Mortalism and Annihilationism.

The effects of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* of 1646 which asserts that “the bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them,” is found in such eulogies as the one for Anne Dudson. In this eulogy the newly established Protestant eschatology of

³⁵¹ William M. Spellman, “Between Death and Judgment: Conflicting Images of the Afterlife in Late Seventeenth-Century English eulogies,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 1 (Jan. 1994), 49.

immediate judgment upon death is evident. The author of this eulogy, Nathaniel Hardy, hints at this early within his sermon when he states the following:

In every *local* motion, there is a *double* term, to wit, a *quo*, and *ad quem*; *from whence*, and *to which*. It is so in this *Departure* whereof my *Text* speaketh, the term *from* which is not mentioned, but hath been already supplied; the *soul* departs out of the *body*, and the *man* out of the *world*: the *term* to which he *Departs* is plainly and punctually expressed, *to be with Christ*.³⁵²

It is further into his sermon that the reader garners a true understanding of Hardy's eschatological concept. Still discussing the voyage of the Christian after death, Hardy asserts that "When we die, the souls of all go *ad deum Judicem* to God a just Judge; but only of the good *ad Christum redemptorem*; Christ a merciful Savior." Hardy finishes his sermon by stating that "at the *Resurrection* shall be the *reunion* of *soul* and *body*, and so the *compleat* glorification of our persons with *Christ*; but *immediately* after *death*, the *souls* of all them who were *in Christ* by *faith*, are *with him* by *sight*."³⁵³

Further into Hardy's eulogy the reader finds the doctrine of *Psychopannychia* itself under attack: "The *Psychopannychists*, That the *soul* does *not die*, nor *yet sleep* with the *body* until the *Resurrection*; for the *souls* of the *good* are *with Christ*; and by the *rule of contraries*, the *souls* of the *bad* with *the Devil*, *neither* of them are *with the body*."³⁵⁴ Also given its fair share of

³⁵² Nathaniel Hardy, *The Pilgrims Wish, or, the Saints Longing . . . Anne Dudson* (London, Printed by A.M. for Joseph Cranford, 1659), 7, 10; also see Thomas Reeve, *Lazarus His Rest . . . in London* (London: n.p., 1647), 22.

³⁵³ *The Confession of Faith: The Larger and Shorter Catechisms with the Scripture Proofs at Large together with the sum of saving knowledge* [Westminster Assembly 1643-1652] (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1973), 123; Hardy, *The Pilgrims Wish*, 10.

³⁵⁴ Hardy, *The Pilgrims Wish*, 11.

acrimony is the 'Papist' doctrine of purgatory. Yet, here it seems Hardy does allow for the existence of a Third Place, albeit only in once instance:

The Papists, that there is no purgatory after death, through which the souls of penitent sinners pass before they be with Christ; for if they be immediatly with Christ, it is in Paradise not Purgatory; and if any one should have passed through a Purgatory, in all probability it must have been the Thief, whose life had been so flagitious, good works were so few, and conversion so immediatly before his death.³⁵⁵

Compare this to the seventeenth-century pamphleteer and materialist,³⁵⁶ Richard Overton, who through "Considerations from Natural Reason" endeavors to disprove "the common opinions of the soul, and proving man wholly mortal."³⁵⁷

The effects of the Renaissance are made apparent within the first pages of Overton's treatise. The author traces the evolution of thought concerning the state of soul beginning with Zeno, Cleanthes, Antipater and Possindonius. Also included in Overton's brief summary are the considerations of Plato, Aristotle, Dinarchus, Nemesius, and Ambrose. Overton concludes his summary with the following: "Augustine and Athanasius say it is a substance created, a spirit intelligent, is visible, immortal, incorporeal, like the angels."³⁵⁸

As a materialist the author holds to the opinion that at death the material body ceases to exist – perishes:

And so whole man being matter created, is elemental, finite, and mortal: and so ceaseth from the time of the grave, till the time of the Resurrection

³⁵⁵ Ibid.; for additional criticisms of Psychopannychia and Purgatory see Thomas Manton, *The Blessed State of them that die in the Lord . . . Jane Blackwell* (London: n.p., 1656); also see Richard Resbury, *Pauls Soul Panting for a better life . . . Life and Death* (London: n.p., 1655), 4-5.

³⁵⁶ Materialists deny the existence of any deity or the existence of a human soul.

³⁵⁷ Richard Overton, *Man Wholly Mortal: or a Treatise wherein . . . better judgements* (London: n.p., 1655), 1.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 2, 4.

. . . Therefore, no immortality in fallen man: as he is wholly elemental, so is he wholly dissoluble: Every element returns to its Center; his earthly part unto the earth . . . and so there is no more time to him after his death to the Resurrection, or recomposition of his elements, then there was to him from the creation to his birth, which is none at all.³⁵⁹

Following this line of logic, Overton continues:

And so it is impossible for one man to have two Beings . . . Therefore, if he have not two beings, he hath either none, or but one; and if but one, that must be all mortal, or all immortal . . . if he be all mortal, then he must all die; if all immortal, then he must all live forever; but our dying natures witness against that : therefore this must be the sum of all, That whole man is mortal . . . Therefore, well says Tertullian, in his Book *de Anima*, that the Soul and Body of man are both one.³⁶⁰

Overton responds to the Church of England's position which divides the Soul and Body into two separate entities of which the body dies at death and the soul remains immortal:

O monstrous Resurrection! I hope the Soularly Champions, the Priests of the Church of England, may be ashamed longer to assert the soul to have all life in it, and the body to be but the souls instrument whereby it acts and moves; and henceforth cease to delude and stop the mouths of the people with a bare verbal Resurrection; that the end of their faith may be suitable to Christ Jesus the foundation, on which it is to be built, both real and infallible.³⁶¹

He goes further to challenge the church's interpretation of 2 *Cor.* 5. 6, 8. Overton asserts that the Church of England infers from this scripture that the soul enjoys "Glory immediately after death." Overton asserts that this verse only refers to the soul's condition after Resurrection.³⁶² The materialist holds to a version of the soul's existence that is very akin to Luther's Soul Sleep: "For though there be

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 22-24.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 26-27.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 52.

³⁶² Ibid., 58-59.

long time to the *Living* till the *Resurrection*, there is none to the *Dead*: for from *Adams death* to his *Resurrection* at the end of the World, will be to him, as the twinkling of an eye to the *Living*.”³⁶³ He goes on further to say:

Therefore, it is well figured in *Scripture* by *sleep*, as, *slept with his Fathers*, I *Kings* II. 43. *fallen asleep in Christ*, I *Cor.* 15. 18. &c. not that is so long a time to the dead, but that in nature there is nothing so represents death, or *nonbeing*, as *sleep*.³⁶⁴

The Church of England points to the example of the Thief on the Cross as evidence from scripture for the immediate glorification of soul at death. Overton counters by saying that same reference also implies that Christ descended into Hell and on the third day rose again, thus the Church is contradicting itself:

And further, if Christs soul was that in Paradise, then the Apostles Creed may be questioned as untrue, which together with Scripture affirms, that Christ that day was both *dead and buried*; neither of which can be true, if his soul (the principalest part of his humanity) remained alive, and ascended that day into Paradise. Besides, if that fancy had been true, then it ought, and without doubt should have been put as an Article of the Creed, to have been believed by all Christians.³⁶⁵

Although claiming that the soul does indeed immediately journey to its final abode at the time of death (Heaven or Hell), Protestant eulogists often differed as to the exact nature of that final existence. To be more specific, did the soul require the culminating event of body and soul re-united at Final Judgment to experience full pleasure or full torment? Take, for example, Thomas Manton’s statement in his sermon in 1656 on the occasion of the death

³⁶³ Ibid., 59.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 60.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 77. Overton also resorts to using Pliny (55th chapter of the 7th Book of his *Natural History*) in order to refute previous pagan thoughts on the immortality of the soul (Overton, 128.)

of Jane Blackwell which hints at this as well as expressing an indecisive nature as to the exact nature of the soul after death: “They (souls) are completely blest at the Resurrection. What their blessedness shall be then, we cannot now know to the full. We shall understand it best when the great voice calls us to come up and see . . .”³⁶⁶

Spellman reveals a majority of Protestant ministers of this period asserting that the soul goes to immediate judgment at death while waiting a reuniting of the body at the Day of Judgment. Yet, it seems Spellman may have overlooked the interpretations of one particular Divine – Anglican preacher and poet John Donne. Donne’s eschatological position is at times ambiguous. It seems Donne is in fact purporting to hold to the doctrine of *Psychopannychia*, while at others he appears to be denouncing the same doctrine. Yet, Donne’s interpretation is quite evident within a sermon delivered before the king at White Hall in 1630. While appearing to denounce the theory of Soul Sleep, Donne instead puts forth a theory of instantaneous glorification that appears to be coupled with the doctrine of Soul Sleep:

*we shall all be changed in an instant, we shall have a dissolution, and in the same instant a redintgeration, a recompacting of body and soul, and that shall be truly a death and truly a resurrection, but no sleeping in corruption . . .but for us that die in corruption; but for us that die now and sleep in the state of the dead, we must all pass this posthume death, this death after death, nay this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrifaction.*³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Thomas Manton, *The Blessed State*, 3, 8-10.

³⁶⁷ John Donne, *Deaths Duel . . . Death of the Body* (London: n.p., 1630), 20.

Yet, some Protestant ministers felt that complete satisfaction or terror was not gained while separation of body and soul existed. For instance, William Perkins asserts that the soul upon death immediately journeys to heaven to enjoy its fruits. Yet, the author also explicitly held that the soul severed from the body was in no way capable of enjoying complete blessedness:

The beginning of Glorification is in death, but it is not accomplished and made perfect before the last day of judgment. The death of the Elect, is but a sleep in Christ, whereby the body and soul is severed. The body, that after corruption it may rise to greater glory, The soul, that it being fully sanctified, may immediately, after departure from the body, be transported into the kingdom of heaven.³⁶⁸

So once again we have a very Platonic interpretation of death with the soul, unhindered by sin moving on to beatitude, while the mortal frame, encumbered by sin, remains on this Earthly plane. Concerning the final resurrection of the dead, Perkins concludes by saying:

Now at the sound of the trumpet, the Elect, which were dead, shall arise with their bodies: and those very bodies which were turned to dust, and one part rent from another, shall by the omnipotent power of God, be restored, and the souls of them shall descend from heaven, and be brought again into those bodies . . . And at that time, the bodies shall receive their full redemption . . . The last judgment being once finished, the Elect shall enjoy immediately blessedness in the kingdom of heaven. Blessedness is that, whereby God himself is all in all his Elect.³⁶⁹

Perkins' final exhortation reveals a belief that the individual will not receive ultimate blessedness until Final Judgment and the reunification of his body and

³⁶⁸ William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine: or The Description of Theologie . . . Afflicted Consciencs* (Cambridge: n.p., 1600), 141-142; also see Thomas Woolnough, *The Dust Returning to the Earth* (London: n.p., 1669).

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

soul. With this final absolution, the body, now free of sin, may journey with the soul to eternity.

In his exposition of the Apostles Creed, English theologian, scholar, and former Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, John Pearson provides a similar viewpoint concerning the state of the body and soul:

after the Resurrection our glorified bodies shall become spiritual and incorruptible, but in the resurrection of our mortal bodies, those bodies, by reason of whose mortality we died, shall be revived.³⁷⁰

Whereas Pearson does not offer up his position on the condition of the soul at death, his statements do bear some familiarity with those of Perkins.

Similar concepts are found within eulogies for James Janeway and Nathanael Vincent. Within these examples the newly established Protestant eschatology of immediate judgment upon death is evident. The author of this eulogy, John Ryther, hints at this early within his sermon when comparing life to a seafaring voyage: "*Believers, when their Voyage is finished, and completed, they are with Christ.*" It is further into his sermon that the reader garners a true understanding of Ryther's eschatological concept. Still continuing the voyage of the Christian through life, Ryther asserts the following: "That believers, upon finishing the voyage, they depart and are with Christ; having a desire to part, and to be with Christ . . . The being with Christ, or enjoying of him in a glorified State, is an immediate being with him, an immediate enjoying of him . . ." Ryther

³⁷⁰ John Pearson, *An Exposition of the Apostles Creed* (London: n.p., 1659), 759.

finishes his sermon with the question “whither do you go when you dye? Do you go to be with Jesus? What will God say to you, when you appear before him?”³⁷¹

An even stronger example of this particular method of instruction can be found in the death eulogy given for Nathanael Vincent in 1692. In the opening lines of the text, Nathanael Taylor begins his instruction to the audience on the importance and true meaning of the Day of Judgment: “the Day of every particular Man’s Death, and the Day of the Universal Judgement, is to him in Effect one and the same.”³⁷²

Yet even with this consensus of the exact path of the soul at death, ambiguity still remained among Protestant eulogists. Take for example Thomas Manton’s statement in his sermon in 1698 on the occasion of the death of Elizabeth Fisher: “That as yet we are very much in the dark as to our future State: I do not mean as to the certainty of such a State, for Life and Immortality is brought to light thro’ the Gospel. But we are left to uncertainties, as to the distinct nature, and compleat degrees and measures of its Happiness.”³⁷³

Spellman makes the point of indicating the position of the majority of all Protestant ministers of this period held that the soul goes to immediate judgment at death while waiting for a reuniting of the body at the Day of Judgement. This

³⁷¹ *The Confession of Faith: The Larger and Shorter Catechisms with the Scripture Proofs at Large together with the sum of saving knowledge* [Westminster Assembly 1643-1652] (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1973), 123; John Ryther, *A Funeral Sermon Occasioned by the Death of . . . James Janeway* (London, n.p., 1674), 7, 12-13, 19.

³⁷² Nathanael Taylor, *A Funeral Sermon Occasioned by the Sudden Death of the Reverend Nathanael Vincent* (London, n.p., 1697), 2.

³⁷³ William Milner, *A Sermon at the Funeral of Mrs. Elizabeth Fisher* (London: n.p., 1698), 3.

eschatological position is evident within a sermon delivered upon the death of the Reverend John Scott. Here the eulogist, Zacheus Isham, while preaching upon the greatness of God, asserts that it is due to this greatness of power that is should be of no surprise or point of debate that “he who hath done all this, is likewise able to recollect, and reanimate our purrify’d bodies, and to overpower all the obstacles that stand in his way.”³⁷⁴

Yet, some Protestant ministers felt that complete satisfaction or terror was not gained while separation of body and soul existed. For instance, while insisting that his position in no way supported any argument for a purgatorial state, Joseph Stevens does assert that “though the happiness, and misery of departed souls is not compleat, at the highest perfection, till that day, where-in Christ will come”³⁷⁵ Stevens goes so far to say that a soul’s condition in hell is much the same. While present in hell and undergoing torment, the soul has far worse torment to look forward to when reunited with its body.³⁷⁶ And as Spellman points out this position did find its way into official church doctrine with the publication of Bishop Gilbert Burnet’s *Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*. Here Burnet reminds his flock that upon death “some have thought upon very probable Grounds, that the blessed, though admitted to

³⁷⁴ Zacheus Isham, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the Reverend John Scott* (London: n.p., 1695), 15.

³⁷⁵ Joseph Stevens, *The Whole Parable of Dives and Lazarus, Explain’d and Apply’d* (London: n.p., 1697), 91; Nathanael Taylor offers similar statements in *A Funeral Sermon on the Decease of the reverend Mr. Richard Mayo* (London: n.p., 1695), 12.

³⁷⁶ Stevens, 90.

Happiness immediately upon their death, yet were not so completely happy as they shall be after the Resurrection.”³⁷⁷

At the opposite end of the spectrum could be found the eschatological outlook of William Shippen who agreed in principle that there was a time displacement between the moment of death and judgment but went further to assert that the soul experienced nothing during this state of being. Shippen refers to the grave as a “Repository, wherein the Sacred Dust of the Saints are to be inshrined, till the last Trump shall call them again.”³⁷⁸

The examples do not end with death eulogies alone. There is ample evidence depicting an ongoing debate as to the nature of a ‘third place’ occurring during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are numerous tracts promoting and supporting the doctrine of purgatory or a state of limbo by such authors as John Hamilton³⁷⁹ and Thomas White,³⁸⁰ countered by an equally large amount of tracts that denounce such practices in a thorough fashion.³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ Gilbert Burnet, *Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London: n.p., 1699), 221.

³⁷⁸ William Shippen, *The Christians Triumph Over Death* (Oxford: n.p., 1688), 29.

³⁷⁹ John Hamilton, *The Belief of Praying for the Dead* [book on-line] (London: n.p., 1688, accessed 1 September 2005); available from <http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2069/home.html>; Internet.

³⁸⁰ Thomas White, *The Middle State of Souls: From the hour of Death to the Day of Judgement* [book on-line] (London: n.p., 1659, accessed 1 September 2005); available from <http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2069/home.html>; Internet.

³⁸¹ See John Hartcliffe, *A Discourse Against Purgatory* [book on-line] (London: n.p., 1685, accessed 1 September 2005); also see William Wake, *Two Discourses: Of Purgatory and Prayers for the Dead* [book on-line] (London: n.p., 1687 accessed 1 September 2005); available from <http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2069/home.html>; Internet; for additional negative comments made against the doctrine of purgatory see *The Gentleman's Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, Vol. LXXXIV, p. 442; Vol. LXXXVI, p. 215; Vol. XCV, p. 252; Vol. XCVIII, pp. 150, 557, 559, 654; Vol. CIII, pp. 223, 251-252, 488; Vol. XIX, p. 610; Vol. XXVI, pp. 56, 121, 287; this final

To find the lingering effects of purgatory one has to look no further than that bastion of curiosities and everyday public discourse – *The Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle*. Writing to this publication in 1786 in response to a previous letter by fellow Protestant denouncing the doctrine of purgatory, the individual only known by his initials, *A.B.*, delivered a very passionate plea to examine and debunk many elements of *Popery* including the concept of purgatory. The author's primary concern lies with the statement made in a previous letter where a *Mr. Spec* states that "*It's no matter when Purgatory Doctrine first began.*" *A.B.* warns his fellow Protestants not to belittle this practice, and instead truly look to the works of the Early Fathers and scripture to refute this practice and not to take it lightly. In response to *Mr. Spec's* letter, *A.B.* states that in reference to purgatory "it's not certain from Scripture: And, unless he can farther prove that it is certainly against Scripture, he'll scarce justify its Disbelief. Now, to evince a Practice to be againft Scripture, which is granted to have been begun and taught by the First Fathers, is a most difficult Task; nay, impossible in the present Case, since there is no clear positive Text in scripture againft Purgatory or a Third Place."³⁸²

Perhaps more interesting to our consideration of these death eulogies is yet another instance of that 'intermediate' state after death being discussed, even later than the illustrations covered thus far. In a letter to the editor of the

volume is significant in that individuals are debating issues surrounding prayers for the dead being acceptable and yet not contradicting any stand against Purgatory; [books on-line] available from <http://books.google.com/bkshp?ned=us&hl=en&tab=np>.

³⁸² *The Gentleman's Magazine: And Hiftorical Chronicle* VI. Sylvanus Urban, ed. (London, n.p., 1736), 7.

Gentleman's Magazine, Sylvanus Urban, in 1736, J. Ties renders his "reflections on an active intermediate state between death and the resurrection." Picking up on themes covered already from the various eulogies mentioned, Ties attempts to decipher the soul's experience after death through defining the notion of time as held by his contemporaries.

The most perfect notion we can form of time or duration, is, that it is the measure of all successive existence, and is therefore rather a mode than a substance, but differs from all other modes in this, that it may be asserted, as well of that which is not extended, as of that which is, and of pure nihility as of any thing positively existing. Consequently it is so far from depending on the ideas of any one for its existence, that it cannot be even supposed not to exist.

Ties does not accept the eschatological theory that holds there is no concept of time in relation to God. Specifically Ties argues against the belief that between the time of death and resurrection the soul, since now out of time, cannot think or exist in an active state. This eschatological concept is comparable to death eulogies visited above by William Shippen. Instead, Ties, using biblical texts from 2 Peter 3:8 and Rom. 4: 17, states that "but it will by no means follow from hence, that with God there is no distinction of past, present, or future."³⁸³ Following this argument to its logical conclusion, Ties by asserting his first premise as the soul having the ability to exist outside of death but not referring to heaven or hell, must necessarily come to the conclusion of an intermediate place, a third place. "If there be a resurrection there must be an intermediate state, and the only question is, whether this intermediate state will

³⁸³ Ibid., 173.

be active or not.”³⁸⁴ In fact Ties comes to a conclusion that is in direct opposition to those ministers who hold to the belief that the soul and body must be united to experience fully the joys of heaven or sorrows of hell. For Ties, the soul remains active after death, fully capable of experiencing its state of being. Explicating 2 Corinthians 5:8, Ties states that he understands this particular scripture to mean the following: “We know, that though this our earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved, yet, at the general resurrection, we shall receive from God another building, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Using Paul’s writings again, Ties quotes 2 Corinthians 12: 2-3, where Paul is speaking of being caught up in heaven, “Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth.”³⁸⁵

Ties also examines Paul’s usage of the terms “*third heaven* and *Paradise*.” “Supposing them to be the same place, yet, as we do not read of the third heaven any where else in scripture, how do we know what place that is? As the phrase itself implies a plurality of heavens, how know we that the third is the highest? Or why must this once-read phrase determine the meaning of *Paradise* to be different from what is evidently the most natural meaning of it in *Luke*?”³⁸⁶

Numerous tracts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries carry ongoing debates concerning the reality of purgatory, in which contributors, such as John Dowden, affirms his belief in the efficaciousness of the doctrine of purgatory: “I

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 174.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 175.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 176.

constantly hold that there is a Purgatory.”³⁸⁷ Former Rector of Elford, Francis E. Paget, published in 1845 *The Living and the Dead: a course of Practical Sermons on the Burial Service*. Within this work Paget offers twenty lectures on the liturgy surrounding burial for the dead. Chapter sixteen concerns “The Question of Prayers for the Dead.” Paget’s intent is to challenge his readers to consider the efficaciousness of prayers for the dead while at the same time distancing this practice from the Roman doctrine of purgatory:

prayers for the dead have no certain warranty of Holy Scripture, yet that they are in no way repugnant to the teaching of the word of God: that they have the authority of Catholic tradition, and were the practice of the Universal Church for many ages: that in the Early Church, prayers for the dead did not involve any idea of purgatory; that the Church of England has excluded from her ritual prayers for the dead which she at first adopted . . . but that, at the same time, she nowhere condemns them . . .³⁸⁸

Herbert M. Luckock, former Canon of Ely Cathedral, in *After Death* argues for the continued consciousness of the soul after death in an intermediate state. Citing the XI article of the Forty-two articles put forth in Edward VI’s reign, Luckock denounces soul sleep – *Psychopannychia*:

. . . the souls of the departed, in the intermediate state, are possessed of consciousness, memory, and sensibility to pain and pleasure; that the life of all men, whether good or bad, is continued without interruption after the separation of the soul and body; and that retribution commences between

³⁸⁷ *Notes and Queries: A medium of Inter-Communication for Literary Men, Artists, Antiquaries, Genealogists, Etc.*, vol. XII. [Book on-line] (London: John Francis, 1873, accessed 2 March 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=FE-C-BzRdMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=editions:0itlt1g8zkwoxvmFV#PPP4,M1>; P. 77.

³⁸⁸ Francis E. Paget, *The Living and the Dead: A Course Of Practical Sermons On The Burial Service* (Cambridge: John Thomas Walters, 1845), 280-281; also see *The Gentleman’s Magazine: And Historical Chronicle XXVI* [book on-line] (London, John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1846, accessed 3 March 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=dOwIAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=editions:OCLC01570611>; Internet, p. 287; see also J. P. F. Davidson, *The Wonders of Grace in the Unseen World* (London: The English Church Union Office, 1893), 5.

death and the judgment. And all of these conclusions are in direct antagonism to the theory that the soul falls asleep when the body dies, and will not awake again till the resurrection of the dead at the last day.³⁸⁹

Luckcock also asserts that after death the soul undergoes some element of “progressive sanctification of the soul.”³⁹⁰ He does not argue that penance performed after death (whatever that may encompass – he does not state) alters the final judgment of the soul - that was rendered in life. But, nevertheless, some purification of the soul is being argued prior to entry into Heaven.

After having argued for the condition of an intermediate state as well as the potentiality of the soul undergoing change during its repose, the author turned to the question of whether or not prayers for the dead are efficacious for those same souls in an intermediate place. He concludes that prayers for the dead are indeed beneficial: “. . . if the whole body of Christians, both those in the flesh and those out of the flesh, are but one family, then it seems hard to believe that separation by death can interpose a barrier to our intercessions.”³⁹¹ He cites Christian church fathers and their acceptance of the efficaciousness of prayers for the dead as well as the familiar Christian scriptures that are held up in defense of such practices. He also cites the ancient Hebrew practice of intercessionary prayers as evident in the *Commemoration of Souls*, a prayer said

³⁸⁹ Herbert Mortimer Luckcock, *After Death: An Examination of the testimony of primitive times respecting the state of the faithful dead, and their relationship to the living* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 29; Luckcock also cites 1 Peter iii. 18-19 as proof of consciousness after death; J. P. F. Davidson also argues for the existence of an Intermediate place after death in *The Wonders of Grace in the Unseen World*, 5; for a contradictory opinion see John Kitto, ed., *The Journal of Sacred Literature*, Vol. III, No. VI. (London: Robert B. Blackader, 1853), 452-453; in a chapter entitled ‘Who Are The ‘Spirits in Prison?’ Kitto challenges the notion that 1 Peter iii. 18-22 is supportive of any argument for an Intermediate State.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 46.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 52.

on the Jewish Day of Atonement.³⁹²

Luckock spends a great deal of time explaining the widespread belief and practice of prayers for the dead in Jewish culture prior to and during the life of Christ. This is evidence enough for the writer to state:

We may then fairly accept this testimony as sufficient indication that our Lord's silence upon the practice is not attributable to its non-existence; and when all things are considered, there seems to be no alternative but to interpret it as a sign of the Divine acquiescence.³⁹³

In Luckock's sequel to *After Death*, he reasserts many of his same arguments. The major difference in this work has to do with Luckock's statements regarding the condition of the soul after death within an intermediate place. Luckock asserts very strongly that some type of purification occurs during the soul's temporary passage through an Intermediate Place. "It seems almost impossible to form any other conclusion than that the souls of the departed pass through some purifying process between death and judgment. . . . every one who dies with the blemishes and stains of a sinful nature unefficed, even though he may have received pardon and forgiveness, will obviously require spiritual cleansing and purification."³⁹⁴

After citing several early church fathers, such as Clement, Origin, Ambrose, Gregory, and Augustine, Luckock asserts that the writings of these individuals all indicate a general belief in a "cleansing ordeal" after death that was

³⁹² Ibid., 57.

³⁹³ Ibid., 65; Luckock also contributes two chapters summing up the belief in and the benefits of the Catholic belief in the Intercession of the Saints, 153.

³⁹⁴ Herbert Mortimer Luckock, *The Intermediate State Between Death and Judgment: Being a Sequel to After Death*, 3^d ed. (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1891), 62-63.

held in early Christianity.³⁹⁵ Therefore, for Luckock, the essential concept surrounding the Roman doctrine of purgatory (an intermediate state consisting of some type of purification) was not in and of itself in error, only the accretions heaped upon it by the Roman such as indulgences.³⁹⁶ While arguing for the acceptance of a condition of an Intermediate place, Luckock takes issue with several features of the Roman doctrine of purgatory. The first concerns the time spent within the intermediate state. Purgatorial doctrine permits those souls who have “paid their allotted penalty” and some souls of extreme holiness to bypass the intermediate state altogether and immediately “pass into the Presence of God without awaiting in either case the day of judgment.”³⁹⁷ Luckock also challenges the Purgatorial concept first asserted by Aquinas as being more painful than any pain suffered in this life. Lastly, Luckock criticizes the corruption of an intermediate state and Purgatorial suffering (which he accepts) with the Roman perpetuation of Indulgences.³⁹⁸

Whereas Luckock may have only inferred, F. F. Irving boldly asserts that the doctrine of purgatory is not inconsistent with the Church of England’s condemnation in the Twenty-Second Article. Pointing to the Council of Trent, Irving asserts that the Church of England’s stance upon an intermediate state is not in contention with the Council’s statement upon purgatory: “‘There is a purgatory,’ i.e., a state of purification, ‘and the souls therein detained are helped

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 68.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 69-70.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 77.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 94, 84.

by the prayers of the faithful, and above all by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar.”³⁹⁹ For Irving, the Church of England’s acceptance of the practice of praying for the souls of the faithfully departed implies the existence of a purgatory – an intermediate place. It is interesting to note that in his apologetic concerning the doctrine of purgatory Irving actually asserts that purgation of the soul begins prior to death:

And for such an one as our deeply-venerated Vice-President, the Reverend Canon Carter, of Clewer, so recently laid to rest, whilst we dare not put aside the tones of tremulous supplication in which the Church teaches us to pray for souls called to their last account, yet we feel and know that for such the time of waiting in the outer court cannot be long, the work of purification is well-nigh accomplished, and the words of divine welcome will not long tarry, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’⁴⁰⁰

Irving concedes that for the great majority this will not be the case and souls will need purification after death before entering the bliss of paradise.

A similar position to that of Luckock and Irving is also held by H. Lloyd Russell, in his sermon - *The Intermediate State and Prayer for the Departed*. Russell (tell who he is) is a proponent of an Intermediate state and argues that the Church of England’s XXII Article is not a denouncement of this concept. Answering concerns anyone might have regarding his statements bordering on the “*Romish Doctrine of Purgatory*” Russell states:

But the ‘*Catholic*’ doctrine of an intermediate state, and the ‘*Romish*’ doctrine of Purgatory, though to a certain extent based upon the same foundation, parted company many, many years ago. . . when later on, she

³⁹⁹ F. F. Irving, *A Doctrine of Purgatory: A Sermon preached at St. Mary Magdalene’s, Munster Square, At the E.C.U. Requiem for Departed Members, on November 13th, 1901* (London: Office of the English Church Union, 1901), 8.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

associated this place with gloomy, purgatorial fires, and openly in the market places sold indulgences which should give relief to the suffering souls . . . then it was time the Catholic Church should enter her protest. . . What our protest is levied at is not against the *Catholic* doctrine of an Intermediate State, but a peculiar view which was held for a certain object, and which is called by the Article 'The *Romish* doctrine.'⁴⁰¹

One must bear in mind that Russell did not agree with the Roman church's interpretation of an intermediate state composed of purgatorial fires, rather this state is one of pleasure – beatific pleasure that results from knowing one is closer to the Divine.⁴⁰² If this seems familiar it is. Russell's Paradise / intermediate place is composed of several chambers. This is a very Neo-Platonic ideal - a multi chambered afterlife.⁴⁰³

Russell points out the Church of England "sanctions prayers for the faithful departed."⁴⁰⁴ When followed to its logical conclusion, Russell claims this doctrine itself points to the existence of an alternate place between Heaven and Hell. Going further, Russell explicates a specific prayer within the Church of England's office for *Holy Communion*. He draws his reader's attention to the following sentences: "through faith in His Blood, we, and *all Thy whole Church*, may obtain remission of our sins."⁴⁰⁵ Russell claims that the words *Thy whole Church* includes not only those souls alive but also those souls departed the

⁴⁰¹ H. Lloyd Russell, *Two Sermons Preached Before The guild of All Souls* (London: The Guild of All Souls, 1892), 12; see also Frederic W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope: Five Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey, November and December, 1877* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1894), xvii – xix.

⁴⁰² J. P. F. Davidson also envisions an Intermediate state that is free from pain and suffering in *The Wonders of Grace in the Unseen World*, 9.

⁴⁰³ The term paradise was not synonymous with what one might associate with the Christian Heaven – the abode of the saved. Many in the nineteenth century associated this term with an intermediate state; Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians*, 775.

⁴⁰⁴ Russell, *Two Sermons*, 14.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

world of the living. Russell is arguing for acceptance of the belief in the *Communion of Saints*. Continuing his examination of prayers within the office of *Holy Communion*, Russell asserts that the prayer “remember *our* offences, *nor* the offences of our *forefathers*” also constitutes a belief in the ability to remit sins after death, which also lends credence to his argument in support of the belief in an intermediate place.⁴⁰⁶

With the New Testament and ancient thanatomological practices of the Jews as source material, Russell spends several paragraphs on the antiquity of the practice of prayers for the dead.⁴⁰⁷ Russell goes so far as to claim that since Jesus himself was a practicing Jew and was aware of such practices, the fact that nowhere in scripture does Christ nor his Apostles speak out against such practices is itself proof of its acceptance. Russell states the following:

No one could have attended Temple or Synagogue without having this truth forced on their attention. Our Lord, as we know, was a regular worshipper at both these places, and must not only have heard, but must *Himself have joined in those prayers*. And yet we have not one word from Him or His Apostles condemning or discouraging this pious practice.⁴⁰⁸

Although speaking to a crowd that was receptive to many of his claims, the *Guild of All Souls*, Russell’s comments are important when placed in their proper context. The simple fact that Russell was going to great lengths in this

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 15; Seeming to echo thoughts expressed by Russell, J. P. F. Davidson argues that the Church of England’s *Prayer of Oblation* in the Office of Holy Communion implies a relationship between the quick and the dead that is efficacious to both parties; *The Wonders of Grace in the Unseen World*, 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

apologetical text reveals the importance of this issue at such a late date in the nineteenth century.

In a sermon entitled *What knowledge do the Departed possess*, Russell defends his position in the reality and efficaciousness of the doctrine of the *Communion of Saints* and goes into detail explaining the importance of the relationship of the quickened and the dead.⁴⁰⁹ What is interesting is that while there are still elements within this sermon that point to his belief in an intermediate place, Russell's comments imply a belief in *psychopannychia* –soul sleep. For instance Russell asserts the following:

But for all that he knew and felt that those who had fallen asleep in Christ, and we who remained to tread the weary way which they had now ceased to tread, were still one; that they who were now resting from their labours and had ceased to be anxious and worried about all those trials and burdens which weigh so heavily upon us . . .⁴¹⁰

Although not explaining whether or not the soul was truly asleep or conscience of their existence after death Russell is not clear, yet he does assert some type of purification of the soul transpires in this condition.⁴¹¹

Russell was not alone in his latent belief in soul sleep. In *The Blessed Dead*, E.H. Bickersteth takes a position that seems to reveal a support for Luther's concept of soul sleep in which the soul *sleeps* in the earth awaiting the second coming of Christ. Interpreting Isaiah lvii. 1,2; Daniel xii. 2; Acts vii. 60; and 1 Thessalonians iv. 14, Bickersteth asserts that the soul rests (sleeps) in the

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 28-29.

grave. He asserts this rest is a conscious state: “it is no state of unconscious slumber, as some have supposed; not the rest of a stone; but conscious, intelligent life . . .”⁴¹² Bickersteth also asserts that this intermediate place was not only a place of experience, but a physical locality he placed in the region of Hades. Paradise for Bickersteth was an ante-chamber in which the souls of the righteous awaited the final judgment.⁴¹³ In Bickersteth’s Intermediate place there is an allowance for purgation of sins.⁴¹⁴

The discussion surrounding an Intermediate state and the condition of the soul after death also made its way into secular works. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Anne Brontë’s heroine, Helen Huntingdon, is overcome with emotion at the death of Arthur while at his deathbed. The dialogue of Helen indicates that Brontë herself may have harbored Universalist sympathies and at the very least believed in an Intermediate state that involved purgation of sins. Speaking on the condition of Arthur’s soul after death Brontë has Helen speak the following:

But thank God I have hope—not only from a vague dependence on the possibility that penitence and pardon might have reached him at the last, but from the blessed confidence that, through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass—whatever fate awaits it, still, it is not lost, and God, who hateth nothing that he hath made, *will* bless it in the end!⁴¹⁵

There also emerges from Philip James Bailey’s *Festus: A Poem*, another example of a continuing dialogue in literature concerning the state of the soul

⁴¹² E. H. Bickersteth, *The Blessed Dead: What Does Scripture Reveal Of Their State Before The Resurrection?*, 2^d ed. (London: John F. Shaw, 1863), 4.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 17-20.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11, 26.

⁴¹⁵ Acton Bell, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, vol III (London: T.C. Newby, 1848), 251; See also Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians*, 75.

after death that suggests a wide belief in the concept of an Intermediate place. Written primarily as a counter to English skepticism in things spiritual,⁴¹⁶ Bailey's poem holds examples of not only prayers for the dead but also an Intermediate place. As proof of Bailey's belief in the efficaciousness of prayers for the dead there is the following:

We dare to pray for all that live, or die.
Man dies to man; but all to thee, God, live.
We therefore pray thee for these dead to us,
Man's universal race, in flesh extinct;⁴¹⁷

When Bailey's poem moves to thoughts of the soul after death Bailey's words envisions a state in which the soul not only rests in an Intermediate state but also undergoes some type of purification:

God works by means. Between the two extremes
Of earth and heaven there lies a mediate state, --
A pause between the lighting lapse of life
And following thunders of eternity; --
Between eternity and time a lapse,
To soul unconscious, though age-lasting, where
Spirit is tempered to its final fate;
Within or between worlds, repose or bliss
Divested, man shall mix with deity,
And the eternal and immortal make
One being.⁴¹⁸

In any society, especially one that covers such a lengthy time period, one expects to encounter variances in the pervading orthodoxy when it concerns the definitions of such institutions in society that this issue covers. But this is exactly

⁴¹⁶ Philip James Bailey, *Festus: A Poem* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1903), 1; see also Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians*, 98.

⁴¹⁷ Bailey, *Festus*, 89.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 610-611.

where the heuristic value lies. By comparing approaches taken by ecclesiastics over theological disputations concerning the afterlife, in this case a Third Place, the scholar finds that the concept of a purgatorial state has survived the Reformation and is still being explicated.⁴¹⁹

Largely due to the Henrician and Edwardian chantry acts of the sixteenth century, the stripping of the doctrine of purgatory away from the laity of England left the laity with no recourse to care for a soul's condition after death. As Claire Gitting states, this was a monumental shift in communal relations within the community of the living as well as the dead. It was no longer a *communion of saints*, but instead, there emerged from rural England "a more individualistic philosophy" on the part of the lay person.⁴²⁰ The argument can be made that sermons of this period that provide evidence for the existence of time or a place between heaven or hell show a psychological need being met by the preacher to a needy audience. Yet, the important significance to take away from these works and those of similar subject material is not the theological splitting of hairs contained within their pages, but rather the fact that this issue was still being debated amongst the English Protestants.

⁴¹⁹ Spellman, "Between death and judgment," 49.

⁴²⁰ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, 39-40; Thomas also offers this opinion in, *Religion*, 603.

CHAPTER IX

THE SIN-EATER

Perhaps an example of the early Reformers finding themselves in a position where they were unable to provide an alternate explanation for the soul's experience at death comes in the form of a very peculiar institution called 'Sin-Eating.'⁴²¹ First reported by the late seventeenth-century antiquarian, John Aubrey, this phenomenon has led to many differing opinions between folklorists and historians alike. Aubrey reported in 1686-87, in the county of Herefordshire in Wales, the unique phenomenon of individuals taking the sins of recently deceased upon themselves in return for some form of compensation. Aubrey reports that this occurrence was popular under the late seventeenth century Presbyterian government of Wales:

In the County of Hereford was an old Custome at funeralls to hire/have poor people who were to take upon them all the sinnes of the party

⁴²¹ For general comments on this subject see Van Scott, *Encyclopedia*, 262-63.; Jacqueline Simpson & Steve Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000); Elizabeth Mary Wright, *Rustic Speech and Folk-Lore* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1913; republished, Book Tower, Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1968); Eleanor Hull, *Folklore Of The British Isles*, Methuen's Anthropological Series, ed. R.R. Marett (London: Methuen, 1928; reprint, Norwood Editions, 1977); Thomas Gwynn Jones, *Welsh Folklore And Folk-Custom* (London: Methuen, 1930; reprint, Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1976).

deceased. One of them I remember lived in a cottage on Rosse-high way. (He was a long, leane, ugly, lamentable poor rascal.) The manner was that when the Corps was brought out of the house and layd on the Biere; a Loafe of bread was brought out, and delivered to the Sinne-eater over the corps, as also a Mazar-bowle of maple (Gossips bowle) full of beer, which he was to drinke up, and sixpence ill money, in consideration whereof he tooke upon him (ipso facto) all the Sinnes of the Defunct, and freed him (or her) from walking after they were dead. This custome alludes (methinkes) something to the Scape-goate in ye old Lawe. Leviticus, cap. xvi. verse 21, 22. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goate and confesse over him all ye iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fitt man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities, unto a land not inhabited : arid he shall let the goat goe into the wilderness." This Custome (though rarely used in our dayes) yet by some people was observed / continued even in the strictest time of ye Presbyterian goverment: as at Dynder, volens nolens the Parson of ye Parish, the kinred / relations of a woman deceased there had this ceremonie punctually performed according to her Will:⁴²² and also the like was donne at ye City of Hereford in these times, when a woman kept many yeares before her death a Mazard-bowle for the Sinne-eater; and the like in other places in this Countie; as also in Brecon, e. g. at Llangors, where Mr. Gwin the minister about 1640 could no hinder ye performing of this ancient custome. I believe this custome was heretofore used over all Wales.⁴²³

Although individuals such as Wirt Sikes hold a critical opinion of the actual factual nature of this report, he can offer no evidence to dispute his claim other than to say that he has "searched diligently for it."⁴²⁴ Sikes seems a bit short sighted especially in light of several reports by reputable folk-lorists such as

⁴²² For an additional example of similar occurrences in 1686 see Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins: Welsh Folk-Lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions* (London: Sampson Low, 1880; reprint, East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England: EP Publishing, 1973).

⁴²³ John Aubrey, *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, ed. James Britten, Publications of the Folk-Lore Society, vol. IV (London: W. Satchell, Peyton, 1881), 35-36.

⁴²⁴ Sikes, 327; *In Shropshire Folk-Lore: A Sheaf of Gleanings*, vol. I, ed. Charlotte Sophia Burne (London: Trubner, 1883; reprint, East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England: EP Publishing, 1973), 306-308, Georgina F. Jackson makes a similar accusation as Sikes and makes a similar error in not referring to the many occasions of reports upon this subject. Jackson does concede that if this phenomena was indeed factual, in her opinion it evolved from the practice of Doles in Medieval Wales.

Eleanor Hull, J. Ceredig Davies, and Ella Mary Leather who report similar occurrences of sin-eating activity in England and Wales into the nineteenth century. M. Moggridge of Swansea in a presentation to the Cambrian Archeological Association in 1852 placed the practice as existing as late as the mid-nineteenth century in the parish of Llandebie in Carmarthenshire.⁴²⁵ Even the Folk-Lorist Jonathan Ceredig Davies, who leans towards Sikes interpretation, has to concede that there are other reports of sin-eating not only in England during this period (Pembrokeshire as well as the Highlands of Scotland) but also in places such as Archag, Armenia.⁴²⁶

Three decades after Aubrey's initial account of the Sin-Eater, John Bagford, related a very similar occurrence within a letter dated February 1, 1714 / 1715. Although Bagford admits that his material was pulled from notes taken by Aubrey at a later date than his previous mentioning of Sin-Eating in 1686, the mentioning of this occurrence is still significant in that persons were still discussing this phenomenon. According to Jacqueline Simpson the notes themselves have been lost subsequently.⁴²⁷ In his letter Bagford states the following:

⁴²⁵ Hull, 225; Ella Mary Leather, *The Folk-Lore of Herefordshire* (Hereford: Jakeman & Carver, 1912; reprint, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England: S.R. Publishers, 1970); For other nineteenth century accounts of sin-eating see Enid Porter, *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969); For a 19th Century East Anglia report see Simpson & Round, *English Folklore*; For a late 18th / early 19th Century account in Little Ouse, East Anglia see Enid Porter's *The Folklore of East Anglia* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974).

⁴²⁶ Jonathan Ceredig Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales* (Aberystwyth: Printed at the "Welsh Gazette" offices, Bridge Street, 1911), 46.

⁴²⁷ Jacqueline Simpson, *The Folklore of the Welsh Border, The Folklore of the British Isles*, ed. Venetia J. Newall (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), 124.

Within the memory of our Fathers, in Shropshire, in those villages adjoining to Wales, when a person dyed, there was notice given to an old Sire (for so they called him) who presently repaired to the place where the deceased lay, and stood before the door of the house, when some of the Family came out and furnished him with a Cricket, on which he sat down facing the door. Then they gave him a Groat, which he put in his pocket ; a Crust of Bread, which he eat; and a full bowle of Ale, which he drank off at a draught. After this, he got up from the Cricket and pronounced, with a composed gesture, *the ease and rest of the Soul departed, for which he would pawn his own Soul.* This I had from the ingenious John Aubrey, Esq., who made a Collection of curious Observations, which I have seen, and is now remaining in the hands of Mr. Churchill, the bookseller.⁴²⁸

As much as a century later, in 1822, the phenomenon of sin-eating was once again a debated topic in British periodicals. In the January to June edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1822), the editor responds to several inquiries asking for further information about the sin-eater. The editor does not add material that has not been put forth to this point, merely reviewing those assertions already made by Aubrey and Bagford.⁴²⁹

Many periodicals and tracts continued to report the phenomenon of sin-eating. Such was the case with William Hone's annual *Year Book*. Hone refers to the practice of sin-eating as described by John Bagford and John Aubrey, even quoting in great detail their accounts from the *LeLand Collectanea*. Of interest is an individual mentioned by Hone - Lawrence Howell. The editor asserts that the recently deceased Howell had written a *History of the Pontificate*,

⁴²⁸ Quoted in Jackson's, *Shropshire Folk-Lore*, 307; Also see George Laurence Gomme, *Ethnology in Folklore* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1892), 109-32; In 1852 Matthew Moggridge provided an additional account of Sin-Eating found within the parish of Llandebie (Sikes, *British Goblins*, 326-27).

⁴²⁹ *The Gentleman's Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, vol. XCII [book on-line] (London, Printed by John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1822, accessed 9 April 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=bQ6ljTMInyUC&printsec=frontcover&lr=>; Internet. P. 222.

in which he speaks of sin-eating. Howell attributes the practice to lingering Romish traditions associated with penance. Howell it seems felt this practice was an imitation of the practice of priests remitting sins of the penitent. Now that the Roman Catholic Church was no longer an authority in England this practice had become a profession for some – sin-eaters.⁴³⁰

It should come as no surprise that such a practice might still exist at such a late date. One contributor to *The Visitor*, writing about his travels along the Wye river, felt it necessary to comment upon the customs of the region he felt too pagan and bemoans the status of Christianity.⁴³¹ Writers of the later nineteenth century still criticized inhabitants as being ignorant of many of their traditions:

Even in the centre of Methodism, at Bala, it was customary within the memory of middle-aged people for lads to solicit ‘*bwyd cenad y meirw*,’ or food for souls to leave purgatory, though doubtless they no more knew the origin of the custom, called ‘souling’ in England, than they devoted the pence they obtained in payment for prayers for the alleviation of suffering souls.⁴³²

Although individuals such as Wirt Sikes criticized the factual nature of any report of Sin-Eating, he offered no evidence to dispute his claim other than to say that he has “searched diligently for it.”⁴³³ Sikes seems a bit shortsighted especially in light of several reports by reputedly folk-lorists such as Eleanor Hull,

⁴³⁰ William Hone, *The Year Book of Deaily Recreation and Information* (London: Printed for Thomas Tegg, 1841), 857-858.

⁴³¹ *The Visitor, or Monthly Instructor, for 1841* [book on-line] (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1841, accessed 9 April 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=0Ac2AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+visitor&ei=Znr9R--6M4-4zQTLi9jBAw#PPP5,M1>; p. 381.

⁴³² *The Red Dragon: The National Magazine of Wales*, vol. VI. Charles Wilkins, ed. [book on-line] (Cardiff: Daniel Owen and Company, 1884, accessed on 3 March 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=3flGAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&lr>; p. 437.

⁴³³ Sikes, *British Goblins*, 327; see also Jackson, 306-308.

J. Ceredig Davies and Ella Mary Leather who report similar occurrences of sin-eating activity in nineteenth-century England and Wales. Even the folk-lorist Jonathan Ceredig Davies, who possibly leans towards Sike's interpretation, has to concede that there are other reports of sin-eating not only in England during this period but also in places such as Pembrokeshire, the Highlands of Scotland, and Archag, Armenia.⁴³⁴ Even Sikes himself points out similar instances of sin-eating. Citing Eugene Schuyler's survey of Turkistan, Sikes reveals that Schuyler mentions a "corresponding character in Turkistan" called an *iskatchi* that takes upon himself the sins of the recently deceased and thereafter prays for the deceased soul for a payment.⁴³⁵

The existence of the sin-eater finds itself once again at the forefront of scholarly debate when M. Moggridge of Swansea, in a presentation to the Cambrian Archeological Association in 1852, placed the practice as late as the mid-nineteenth century in the parish of Llandebie in Carmarthenshire.⁴³⁶ During his lecture Mr. Moggridge reported that the phenomenon of the sin-eater was of

⁴³⁴ Davies, 46.

⁴³⁵ Sikes, 327; see also Charles I. Elton, *Origins of English History*, 2^d ed. (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1890), 177.

⁴³⁶ Hull, 225; Leather; For other 19th Century accounts of sin-eating see Porter, *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore*; For a 19th Century East Anglia report see Simpson & Round, *A Dictionary*; For a late 18th / early 19th Century account in Little Ouse, East Anglia see Porter's *East Anglia*; the 1852 edition of *Notes and Queries*, the writer "E.H.B." while referencing Vol. III, pp 239 and 288 from this same work and p. 858 of *Hone's Year Book*, mentions *Sin-eaters* and relates Aubrey's account, in *Notes and Queries: A medium of Inter-Communication for Literary Men, Artists, Antiquaries, Genealogists, Etc.* IV July – December, 1851 [book on-line] (London: George Bell, 1852, accessed 3 March 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=DuX6reRuEaMC&pg=PA211&dq=notes+and+queries+and+sin+eater&lr=&ei=-oL9R-X6loPUzASI2OiSBg#PPP5,M1>: p. 211.

ancient origins according to his research and was in practice throughout a “large portion of Wales and its Marches.”⁴³⁷

After relating the essential portions of Aubrey’s seventeenth-century account as well as additional information he had gathered of more recent occurrences of this activity, Moggridge makes note of the difference in fees for the souls of a Caermarthenshire and Herefordshire man. It seems the soul of the Caermarthenshire man was worth a good deal more than his Herefordshire counterpart. Moggridge jokingly asks the reader if this may have something to do with the Marcher’s sins being more numerous. Thereafter the editor resumes his notes on the meeting that found a “Mr. Allen” questioning whether or not a custom brought to his attention one year prior at a meeting of the association bore striking similarities to Moggridge’s comments. Allen gave testimony to funerals in Pembrokeshire where there was placed upon the breast of the deceased body a plate of salt and a burning candle. He asked Mr. Moggridge if in his opinion this was something similar to that of the phenomenon of sin-eating. Moggridge felt that the salt was simply a purification element for the soul and the candle was “for keeping evil spirits away.”⁴³⁸ What followed was a very intense debate that produced a series of scalding comments: not directed towards Moggridge but towards the condition of religion in England.

⁴³⁷ *Archaeologia Cambrensis, a Record of the Antiquities of Wales and its Marches, and the Journal of The Cambrian Archaeological Association*, vol. III (London: W. Pickering, 1852), 330; the report of Moggridge was given at the Cambrian Archaeological Association’s Sixth Annual Meeting, Ludlow, August 23rd to 28th, 1852. The transcripts here are from the evening meeting on Friday the 28th; also see Appendix A.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 331.

For instance Jelinger C. Symons was adamant in knowing whether or not the custom of sin-eating was now extinct: “If not, to send missionaries abroad would be a farce, while they had customs so disgusting at home.” A minister present, I. Burleigh James “suggested as the origin of the custom the scapegoat mentioned in the Bible.”⁴³⁹ In response to the intensity of the questions asked and comments made Moggridge suggested “Far be it from him to desire that anything he should advance should not be combated, for all he wished to get at was truth.” Commenting further on writings of Aubrey, specifically a portion of Aubrey’s account that mentions a sin-eater residing in Herefordshire and Shropshire, Moggridge reported that he had in fact visited these regions and discovered “that the more odious part of the custom had been removed, but portions thereof still remained.” Therefore, according to Moggridge the custom was still in existence just prior to this lecture.⁴⁴⁰

In 1866 *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Members of the English Church* the sin-eater is discussed via dialogue between a Mr. Parry and a Mrs. Anqyl. It is obvious the author is relying upon the Aubrey account of 1686-87, yet, by including in its monthly readings a dialogue concerning the sin-eater, *The Monthly Packet* points to a continuing interest in this folklore belief among Church of England parishioners. A portion of Chapter Two’s discussion

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 332; see also John Kitto, ed., *The Journal of Sacred Literature*, vol. III, no. VI. (London: Robert B. Blackader, 1853), 512.

over Funerals is as follows:

'To what custom do you allude, Mr. Parry?' . . . I am thinking of the heathenish custom of hiring poor people to take upon them the sins of the deceased. . . . [The Sin-Eater] declared that he took upon him all the sins of the deceased person, and would save them from walking after they were dead.⁴⁴¹

Volume VI of the 1883 edition of *The Red Dragon* once again brought up the issue of the sin-eater and asserted that people of the vale of Cwm-Aman, in Carmarthenshire, held to the superstition of the sin-eater. Citing the Rev. Paxton Hood, the magazine reports that the sin-eater receive a fee of two-and-sixpence for his services. These services included the following:

when a person died the friends sent for the Sin-Eater of the district, who, on his arrival, placed a plate of salt and bread on the breast of the deceased person; he then uttered an incantation over the bread, after which he proceeded to eat it, thereby *eating the sins of the dead person*.⁴⁴²

One unusual feature noted by Hood concerns the sin-eater's exit. After receiving his fee, the sin-eater is assisted in his exits by "blows and kicks" from the relatives of the deceased. This ritual act may in fact be cultural survival of Medieval European fears of contact with those individuals considered to be tainted with sin or evil.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Members of the English Church*, vol. I [January-June, 1866] (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1866), 179; *Walter Southey's Common-Place Book* actually prints the entirety of Aubrey's manuscript in a section entitled "English Manners and Literature." This section is filled with strange accounts and oddities in England: John Wood, ed., *Walter Southey's Common-Place Book* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman's, 1849), 532; There is the exact same reference in John Wood, ed., *Walter Southey's Common-Place Book* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1876), 532.

⁴⁴² *The Red Dragon: The National Magazine of Wales*, vol. III. Charles Wilkins, ed. [book on-line] (Cardiff: Daniel Owen and Company, 1883, accessed on 3 March 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=XOcGAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&lr=>; p. 282.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

The similarity of this ritual, with that of the notion of purgation or expiation of sin after death, is at once evident. Although there is no official ritualistic component to this occurrence, the many examples provide similarities in their make-up and design. It is a mistake to draw too many parallels with the doctrine of purgatory as the church viewed it, but the similarities of expiation of sin are essentially there. It is not so much of a leap of judgment to draw a simple deduction that certain communities were reacting to the dissolution of the Purgatorial Doctrine by whatever means was necessary.

Sikes, and others,⁴⁴⁴ have made the claim that the Sin-Eater phenomena can be explained away through its similarity to the Jewish (Biblical) scapegoat. This is of course a simplistic deduction on Sikes' part, for Aubrey himself concedes this point when referring to Leviticus 16: 21-22:

And putting both hands upon his head, let him confess all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their offences and sins: and praying that they may light on his head, he shall turn him out by man ready for it, into the desert. And when the goat hath carried all their iniquities into an uninhabited land, and shall be let go into the desert,⁴⁴⁵

Also, the scape-goat theory was debated at length shortly within British periodicals such as *Notes and Queries*. Writing in response to Mr. "Muggridge" of Swansea, Jelinger C. Symons requests additional information about the "horrid practice still subsisting in parts of England or Wales" - the sin-eater. The papers

⁴⁴⁴ Hole, Christina, ed, *The Encyclopedia of Superstitions* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996), 309-10; also see *Folk-Lore: A Quarterly Review of Myth, Tradition, Institution, & Custom*, vol. III [book on-line] (London: David Nutt, 1892, accessed 9 April 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=ikYKAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&lr=#PPA3.M1>; pp. 145-157.

⁴⁴⁵ Leviticus 16:21-21 DV

editor responds in edition 130 of volume VI by referencing the supposed connection to the scapegoat ritual mentioned in Leviticus 16. 21-22. The editor also cites Aubrey's account of the sin-eater from the Lansdown MSS and Brand's *Antiquities*, mentioning of the sin-eater in 1849. A few months later in edition 136 of the same volume Alexander Leeper responds to Symons by citing not Leviticus but Hosea 4.8 as a possible biblical reference to the sin-eater phenomena: "they shall eat the sins of my people and shall lift up their souls to their iniquity."⁴⁴⁶

Some interpreters of this concept make the claim that although similar there are some distinct differences between the Biblical scapegoat and the seventeenth-century Sin-Eater. These hold to the idea that while the scapegoat from Leviticus is responsible for carrying away the sins of the community, the Sin-Eater from Aubrey's notes only benefits the soul of one individual. Yet, if the Sin-Eater's position in the community is seen as an instrument of the community as a whole, than a similar relationship can be viewed to that with that of Aaron's scapegoat. As to one relieving sin before while the other expiates sin after death, it is simply a matter of how one examines these issues in matters of time. Is this to be discerned through the lens of a linear or synchronic viewpoint? Depending upon which is chosen a different result can be garnered.

Sikes makes the assertion that this practice reminds him of former rites of charms and magic associated with many of Wale's Holy Saints' Wells. His only

⁴⁴⁶ Osee 4.8 DV; *Notes and Queries: A medium of Inter-Communication for Literary Men, Artists, Antiquaries, Genealogists, Etc.*, vol. VI (London: George Bell, 1852), 390 , 541.

evidence is to state: “The custom is associated with the ancient Druids as well as with the Jews, and its resemblance to the scapegoat is suggestive.”⁴⁴⁷ More information is needed here to make such a bold claim. It is too simple to associate this custom with other pre-Reformation apotropaic customs.

Claire Gittings, while not making the same broad and general claims regarding Sin-Eating, does in fact make her own broad generalization without factual evidence to support such a claim. Gittings, while discussing the importance of eating and drinking at funerals as a communal affair, dismisses the Sin-Eating phenomenon as nothing more than an “altered and distorted” Roman Catholic belief without providing evidence to support such a statement. Gittings even while asserting this statement will in the same paragraph compare the custom to non-Christian tribes studied by anthropologists.⁴⁴⁸ Therefore, we are left with authors who found it necessary enough to include this occurrence within works on death ritual and early modern custom, but when unable to offer any logical explanation for its existence, simply relate it to quaint superstition. Yet, when examined along with other important aspects of this period (within the realm of death ritual and custom) an alternate and seemingly justifiable explanation begins to emerge.

As to the legacy of the Sin-Eating phenomena in England some assert that the tradition lives on in albeit modified form. P.H. Ditchfield reports that in late nineteenth-century Yorkshire it was still customary to send funeral biscuits, or

⁴⁴⁷ Sikes, 329-30.

⁴⁴⁸ Gittings, 154-55.

what was known as *arvel* bread to the family of the deceased. Ditchfield asserts that this practice is associated with funeral feasts practiced by pagans of old and is still known throughout England. He also connects this practice with the duties of the Sin-eater: “The eaters of funeral biscuits in modern times little reflect upon the extraordinary superstition of which these dainties are a relic.”⁴⁴⁹ Commenting upon a funeral held near Market Drayton in 1893, Ditchfield states that wine and funeral biscuits were passed to visitors across the deceased body (which lay in a coffin). It is here that Ditchfield quotes an assertion made by the folklorist E. Sydney Harland in *The Times* that there was an existing belief that “that every drop of wine drunk at a funeral is a sin committed by the deceased. Hence wine is drunk at the funerals in order to release the soul of the dead from the burden of sin.”⁴⁵⁰

Former Gregynog Chair in Welsh literature (1919) at University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, Thomas G. Jones, is vital in our understanding of the ritual associations of the sin-eater. In his travels throughout the region of Herefordshire in the later Nineteenth and early Twentieth century’s, Jones discovered evidence of “sin-eating.” Jones reports that his research revealed that the local sin-eater would enter the deceased home (where the body was

⁴⁴⁹ P.H. Ditchfield, *Old English Customs Extant at the Present Time: An Account of Local Observances, Festival Customs, and Ancient Ceremonies yet Surviving in Great Britain* (London: George Redway, 1896), 202-203; see also Bertram S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs* (n.p., 1926; Reprint, Forgotten Books, 2008), 70-71; these are the same comments made by E. Sydney Hartland in *Folk-Lore: A Quarterly Review of Myth, Tradition, Institution, & Custom*, vol. III [book on-line] (London: David Nutt, 1892, accessed 9 April 2008); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=ikYKAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&lr=#PPA3.M1>; pp. 145-157; see Appendix B.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

lying in wake), and while repeating the Lord's Prayer, consume the quantities of salt and bread that had been previously placed upon the deceased chest by his relatives. Having consumed the bread and salt, which had in turn consumed the deceased sins, the sin-eater left the home "carrying with him the sins of the deceased."⁴⁵¹

Jones agrees with M. Moggridge in that he could find no evidence of this phenomenon in Wales, yet he still asserts the probability that it did indeed spread there sometime during the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. In support of this assertion he points to a very similar ritual during the later part of the nineteenth-century. While not actually involving a "sin-eater," the ritual described by Jones is remarkably analogous.

Jones asserts that during a funeral, a female was responsible for passing loaves of white bread and cheese across the body of the deceased to the poor of the community. She also passed across the body a cup of wine to be drunk by the poor as well.⁴⁵² It seems this is yet one additional manner to pass on the sins of the deceased to the community. As the bread and wine move across the body they mysteriously absorb the sins of the deceased. As to the obvious question of where or why this particular custom originated, perhaps John A.

⁴⁵¹ Jones, *Welsh Folklore*, 214.

⁴⁵² This practice was known as the *diodles* in Ireland; warm ale handed out to the poor across the body of the deceased. Similar rituals persisted well into the nineteenth century in areas such as Derbyshire. For more information see Simpson & Roud, *A Dictionary*; also see Burne, *Shropshire Folk-Lore*, 309-310; for evidence that the wine drunk at these funerals was thought to remove the sins of the recently deceased see Leather, *The Folk-Lore of Herefordshire*, 121; Monter also makes a strong case for remembrance well into the nineteenth century with families commemorating their dead on the ninth day after their death, *Ritual, Myth and Magic*; finally, the work of Stuart Clark is vital in helping to understand the mentality of the early modern individual, *Thinking with Demons*.

MacCulloch is correct when referring to medieval folklore customs he asserts the following:

Many of these, still surviving in remote places, have long lost their original meaning. They survive as folklore, and as things which it would be unlucky to leave undone. But, to judge by certain survivals which come to light now and then, the tradition of them must have been handed down from generation to generation, and they were carried out as occasion arose.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵³ MacCulloch, 26.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

The early Reformers caused serious deterioration to the ritualistic aspect of the Catholic church (of the original seven sacraments only two now remained), yet they did not cause a complete decline of traditional aspects of religion in England. This decline seen in the seventeenth century was not solely due to the presence of Protestantism, but rather a combination of this new religion with that of a new mentality spreading through the consciousness of Europe's inhabitants. The European mentality of the seventeenth century was not only being affected by Cartesian doubts, but also by the widespread emergence of mechanical philosophy. This later philosophy, expounded by philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and Robert Boyle, held that the physical world operated not unlike that of a machine – moving in accordance with a set of immutable laws – never changing. Such a concept had the obvious effect of reducing the power of the Devil in the world and resulted in what Keith Thomas has termed the 'triumph of mechanical philosophy.'⁴⁵⁴ The increase in scientific knowledge gradually broke down traditionally held beliefs in many of the

⁴⁵⁴ Thomas, *Religion*.

examples we have covered. Beliefs in magical alternatives now became increasingly unacceptable to a society that was itself gradually becoming more knowledgeable through science.⁴⁵⁵ In fact, as Brian P. Levack points out, the fact that many peasants remained fixed within a world of traditional popular beliefs may in fact have helped spread scientific beliefs among the elite.⁴⁵⁶

Thomas Munck asserts that the various social and intellectual developments during the seventeenth century (ranging from the English Civil War, to the theories of Milton, Hobbes, and Locke), offers a glimpse of a society evolving from a world centered upon a Ptolemaic concept of the universe to a more geocentric concept where nature was beginning to reveal its secrets. Munck holds that there should not be, nor can there be any general assumptions made about neither social hierarchy, inequality nor the assumed vast gulf between rich and poor. For Munck there was no significant change in these institutions from the Reformation to the late Enlightenment except in the realm of economics. As economic patterns changed throughout Europe there was the expected change in communal relations in the local community. These changes then resulted in variations in the above-mentioned political and corporate levels of complexity within each European state, which in turn resulted in a corresponding rise in social demarcation variables.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 643-644.

⁴⁵⁶ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 269.

⁴⁵⁷ Thomas Munck, "Society" in Joseph Bergin, ed., *The Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

Thus, it is only with an increased devotion to the scientific arena for explanations for their surroundings that the inhabitants of early modern England began the slow process of shifting their reliance from the realm of the supernatural for answers to the inexplicable. Yet, although the advances made by science and discoveries of new technologies may have alleviated many fears and made past interpretations seem irrelevant, Thomas concludes: "If magic is to be defined as the employment of ineffective techniques to allay anxiety when effective ones are not available, then we must recognize that no society will ever be free from it."⁴⁵⁸

While agreeing that there is an undeniable link between religion and science in England, John Henry, in "The Scientific Revolution in England," chooses to examine the exact nature of England's religious development in its entirety instead of trying to associate a particular sectarian group as more important than another. Henry first considers the empirical nature of England's natural philosophers as having been a direct result of their informal gatherings. Add to this the ability to communicate between and among these groups and the author asserts that something distinctly unique begins to emerge among the English natural philosophers as it applies to their empirical methodology. Henry states, "although Continental natural philosophers experimented, only English natural philosophers can be said to have been experimentalists."⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 668; See also Monter, *Ritual, Myth and*, 127.

⁴⁵⁹ John Henry, "The Scientific Revolution in England," in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *The Scientific Revolution in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 182.

Henry views Latitudinarian Anglicanism as the preferable theory in explaining the increase in natural philosophy in England during the seventeenth century. By considering Anglicanism as the middle road approach to ensure the salvation of souls in England one comes to a better understanding of this relationship put forth by Henry. As natural philosophy adopted this method of *via media* where dogmatism and disputation was frowned upon, a move towards the ability to arrive at a collective understanding and agreement soon emerged.

When trying to understand this shift in perception it is vital to not get ahead of oneself. For example, simply because an individual considered himself a man of science does not necessarily mean he did not believe in the supernatural. Take for instance individuals like Francis Bacon, Jean Bodin, Reginald Scot, Thomas More, Joseph Glanvill, Robert Boyle and William Whiston, all rational men of letters who found the study of demonology to be of immense value in their attempts to understand and fathom the natural world. Even the most outspoken critics of such supernatural elements as witchcraft or that of a sin-eater, still confirmed the existence and ability of the Devil and demons to interact with humanity. Through such works as Lynn Thorndike's *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, it is quite obvious how "marvels occupied a place of distinction on the agenda of topics of serious research" during the seventeenth-century.⁴⁶⁰ This preoccupation with "puzzling

⁴⁶⁰ Clark, 268.

phenomena” continued well into the eighteenth century as seen in the cosmology of Abbe Pluche and Buffon.

The laity was ever concerned over the *maleficium* that may or may not be present in society. The laity was also consumed with anxieties over their afterlife experience. Thus they looked to the church to eradicate all traces of their fears. Yet, the clergy (Protestant and Catholic alike) were more concerned with the laity’s reliance upon superstitious methods to relieve their anxieties. It is here that the work of Stuart Clark bears weight. Clark is quick to clarify what is meant by the word superstition by placing it in context. For the early modern writer, superstitious elements were those things that were violations against God’s law. Clark warns the reader to be wary of viewing the past through the lens of modernity. Many of the phenomena discussed by Clark may in point of fact seem out of the realm of possibilities today but were seen as well within the realm of natural science to the early modern intellect. Clark is able to discern the importance in understanding that even the most ardent skeptic such as Reginald Scot may offer up numerous polemics against witchcraft persecutions, but never does he discount the ability of demonic intervention in human affairs.

Clark asserts that the intense drive to eradicate all superstitious elements found within the Christian laity stemmed from both the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. The push to educate the populace led to an increased knowledge of suspect heresies and known violations of the Ten Commandments. Clark also attributes the transformation of the Devil’s role in late Medieval society to the

reliance by both Catholic and Protestant theologians upon the Ten Commandments as a basis for moral ethics. This is evident in Luther's *Decalogue* sermons given between 1516 and 1517. Here Luther lists those sins against each of the commandments. When discussing the first commandment he lists, among others, the sin of "witchcraft, magic, or the black arts."⁴⁶¹ The Catholic catechisms offered by the Jesuit Peter Canisius followed Luther's lead in determining witchcraft, magic, etc . . . to be a sin against the first commandment. Clark asserts that this shift in reliance from the earlier emphasize upon the seven deadly sins contributes greatly in the connotation of practitioners of such apotropaic powers of being not only guilty of *maleficium* but now guilty of a far greater crime – devil worship.

According to these Christian theologians the Christian was harmed not so much by *maleficium*, but rather their plight is due to a lack of faith. They must turn to the penitential offerings of the church not cunning folk or the superstitious answers given in the *Malleus*. To the Protestant theologian, *maleficium* was allowed by God as a test of the Christian's true faith. The biblical accounts of Saul versus that of Job are in abundance in these early writings. A great example of this is found in the writings of Anglican Divine Meric Casaubon (1599-1671). Casaubon, a devout royalist, was deprived of his office with the execution of Charles I but was re-appointed during the Restoration of Charles II. From his Prebendary stall Casaubon wrote many tracts that set out to both support and

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 490.

confine belief in the supernatural.⁴⁶² Casaubon's work is an attempt to enlighten his reader to the dangers of too much credulity and too much incredulity in matters supernatural. As to which is more a danger to the inhabitants and government of England, Casaubon asserts the later – incredulity posits more harm. The background to Casaubon's writing is important to note. Casaubon is writing this particular tract during the tumultuous days after the Restoration. Prosecution of witches in England during the Interregnum was associated with the parliamentary cause. Casaubon now stresses the need to not be too incredulous when it comes to England's customary beliefs.⁴⁶³ Therefore, Casaubon's work is not a demonology but rather a commentary upon current social beliefs and their effects upon society and religion.

It is evident throughout this work that Casaubon is well attuned to scholars of the early modern period who were intensely debating the nature of demonic powers. Were they natural or supernatural? To what extent did they really influence the lives of humans? Casaubon holds a familiar view concerning these questions – demonic powers were preternatural. Demons were confined to nature; they worked within the confines of the natural world. The demon has no supernatural abilities outside of nature, yet due to its immortality had accrued an immense knowledge of nature itself and was able to offer knowledge that escaped human capabilities. Therefore, events produced by demonic spirits

⁴⁶² Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations, c. 1650 – 1750*, ed. John Elliott et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 55.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 66; see also Meric Casaubon, *Of Credulity and Incredulity, In things Natural, Civil and Divine, . . . all along proved, and asserted* (London: n.p., 1668), 15.

were not miracles but were only wonders. Although not stating explicitly that *Spirits* have no memory, Casaubon asserted demons have no memory themselves, but rather held the ability to predict the future or interpret the past due to their ancient character. The Demon, having existed and observed humans for centuries can predict with accuracy what will happen in the future.⁴⁶⁴

Even the most outspoken critics of witchcraft still confirmed the existence and ability of the devil and demons to interact with humanity. Casaubon spends a great deal of time describing the ability of the Devil and Spirits to command the forces of nature. In every example given by Casaubon, he feels the need to reaffirm the inferior position of the Devil to God. The Devil, according to Casaubon, only has that power that is given to him by God.

Casaubon's tract reveals a society rich in *wondrous* events. He warns the reader to be wary of those individuals who hold to an Aristotelian foundation when it comes to miracles. This point of view holds that miracles are related to a natural causation. He criticizes those who discount completely the phenomenon of witchcraft and other supernatural wonders. Yet, Casaubon is quick to point out the diabolical nature of witchcraft and other diabolical wonders in the world such as divination, oracles, and prodigies. His intent is to warn those who disregard such occurrences. Such a course in his opinion leads to the worst form of incredulity imaginable – Atheism.

⁴⁶⁴ Also see Armando Maggi, *Satan's Rhetoric: A Study of Renaissance Demonology* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), 21-53.

He writes against those in England who think that through the new sciences all “*mysteries and miracles*, even of Religion” are being discredited. This form of incredulity was going too far.⁴⁶⁵ To deny the existence of devils, spirits, magicians, sorcerers, and witches was at once to support the course of atheism.⁴⁶⁶ Although it may seem rational to his readers to assume such instances to be too incredible to believe based upon the large amounts of tracts written on the subject, nevertheless, incredulity led to atheism.

For example, Casaubon relates stories of “rational” men in the northern sections of England who considered it possible for some to “turn into very wolves” in an attempt to show the hypocrisy of some who denounce witchcraft as a fallacy. A personal favorite amongst Casaubon’s numerous folk-lore accounts encompasses the ancient legends surrounding Romulus and Remus who were nurtured by a she-wolf. Casaubon asks his readers “can we wonder at it, and think it incredible?” He does so at the same time reminding his readers that many within England believed in the legend of the young Prince, Charles II, finding refuge and nourishment within the Boscobel Oak during the Restoration. Casaubon’s underlying motive here is to imply that credulity in one implies credulity in others. In terms of what allowed witches or magicians to perform their incredible arts Casaubon is very clear it was due to the intervention of the Devil.

⁴⁶⁵ Casaubon, 16.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 29.

For Casaubon nothing was incredible in his world. He asserts that he was witness to “many strange effects” that revealed the power of the Devil to him: a power he knows was only proportionally given to a “created Spirit.”⁴⁶⁷ For instance, Casaubon refers to the execution of Charles I as an *incredible* event and ponders why men do not believe in other *incredible* events in other lands when they believe in the supposed supernatural occurrences revolving around the sovereign’s death.⁴⁶⁸

Casaubon delivers numerous biblical examples of witchcraft, divination, and prophecy that will be familiar to witchcraft students and scholars, but it is when the author utilizes classical sources this work becomes enjoyable to read. Casaubon mines the rich resources of writers of antiquity such as Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Herodotus, Pliny, Livy and Josephus providing examples of credulity and incredulity. For example, Casaubon refers to Seneca’s mentioning of peasants beliefs in the efficaciousness of charms and spells to ward off hail storms, which the Devil had given power to witches to raise. A constant theme throughout this work, one that is repeated over and over again through the use of numerous and different examples, is Casaubon’s concern for his fellow Englishmen’s temptation to deny all possibility in the existence in “*Spirits* and all *Supernatural* effects.”⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 82.

The complex nature being discussed can perhaps be better understood with the assistance from the work of the anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski. According to Malinowski, magical beliefs held by man are a direct result of man's inability to understand or better yet, control his surroundings. By substituting the unknown realm with an identifiable and fixed system of belief, man is able to gain confidence and control.⁴⁷⁰

This opinion held by Malinowski was echoed in 1973 by the English literature professor turned mythologist, Joseph Campbell. When writing about the function of myth and ritual, Campbell asserts that their function was to decipher the true meaning of humankind's existence in the universe. What these magical beliefs tell us is that society desperately desires and needs ritual, transcendence, and myth in order that fulfillment can be achieved. Campbell reveals the importance of these rituals in our lives when he states: "The function of the ritual, as I understand it, is to give form to human life," and it is our myths "that are the mental supports of [these] rites."⁴⁷¹

The most important aspect revealed about pre-Reformation society was the manner in which the traditional roles of such things as the realm of intercessory prayer, magic, astrology, witchcraft, and other aspects of traditional society worked together to produce for the inhabitants of England an alternative recourse to understand the world in which they lived. A society that held to a firm belief in the efficaciousness of ritual magic performed by local sorcerers,

⁴⁷⁰ Thomas, *Religion*, 647.

⁴⁷¹ Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), 43, 45.

magicians, cunning folk and yes witches; a belief system that also believed that the natural world might be bent to their will through such practices, at times resulting in the harm of individuals – *maleficium*. The Christian church of pre-Reformation England was only reacting to the needs of the populace, not the other way around. What we deem superstitious now was not so then – it was a reality that served a purpose.

What then was the true effect of the dissolution of the Purgatorial doctrine on the English laity? If the reader is to accept the assertion of such scholars as A.G. Dickens then perhaps these acts only ‘impinged’ upon the fabric of English society slightly more than that of the suppression of the monasteries. Or, the work of Eamon Duffy may prove to be more agreeable, which put forth the notion that this dissolution eventually became a complete ruin for traditional society in England. Although positing much evidence to support their own conclusions, both authors miss a fundamental element to this phenomenon. There is no argument that the eradication of the intercessory institutions of England left a vacuum to be filled, a vacuum the Protestant reformers attempted to fill with their own justifications. Yet, the element missing from many of these authors’ works lies within the realm of which body of beliefs would emerge: A completely new and Protestant faith, or an amalgamated version of traditional beliefs and practices with the newly put forth Protestant faith?⁴⁷² As stated above the later example proved to come to fruition. It seems Dickens was correct when referring

⁴⁷² Duffy, *Stripping of The Altars*; Cunich, 166-167.

to the suppression of the intercessory institutions during the reign of Edward VI when he stated: “We have nowadays begun to take more interest in the psychological and religious aspects of Tudor social history, and with some confidence we may maintain that this revival of secularization tended to lower the cohesion and morale of the nation.” Therefore it is no wonder that a complete ‘stripping’ of any traditional religion in England would prove to be impossible during this period.⁴⁷³

So, what do the divergent views concerning eschatological disputations and surviving elements of a traditional culture in post-Reformation England covered have to tell us within the context of our subject of myth and purgatory? As humanity tries to understand and come to grips with its own plight in the universe, myths, which are dependent upon universal archetypes,⁴⁷⁴ are able to allow those truths found deep within humanity to come forth. Although separated by culture, these various symbols all tend to have the same meanings. These archetypes constantly recur throughout the history of humanity. By interpreting the various meanings of these different forms of the archetypes in literature and in life, humanity is able to decipher the meaning of its existence in the universe. What these archetypes tell us is that society and all humanity within it desperately desire and need ritual, transcendence, and myth in order for

⁴⁷³ Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 240.

⁴⁷⁴ These images/symbols are commonly referred to as Archetypes. See Wilfred L. Guerin, et al. *A Handbook Of Critical Approaches To Literature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 222; which has the following definition: “an image, motif, or thematic pattern, which has recurred so regularly in history, literature, religion, or folkways as to have acquired transcendent symbolic force.”

fulfillment to be achieved. They also represent something eternal . . . timeless. These are stories set beyond the limits of a linear time line, but one of a synchronic time line.⁴⁷⁵ Protestant Reformers encountered a tremendous flaw in their theology, they attempted to try and explicate and understand certain rituals instead of simply experiencing them and their communal value to village and society. In doing so, as we have seen, Reformers actually propagated many rituals inconsistent with their own teachings.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ “The nature of ‘time’ in purgatory was an ontologically and theologically complex question, but there is no doubting that late medieval Christians were taught to expect that the experience of the next life was to be a temporal, diachronic one, measurable in that highly potent quantity, ‘thousands’ of years. They also understood that the sources of relief available to them from this world partook of an essentially quantifiable and attritional character. In these circumstances the aspiration for a ‘perpetual memory’ made sense. The logic of purgatory wove assertions of perpetual remembrance across the fabric of ‘natural’ processes of forgetting. (Marshall, 41).

⁴⁷⁶ For an in-depth study on the relationship of Protestant practices and their impact on ritual and the Christian laity see Muir, *Ritual*, 151-152, 181.

APPENDIX A

AN OLD IRISH TABLE OF COMMUTATIONS (8TH CENTURY)

1. The *arreum* for saving a soul out of hell, viz. 365 paternosters and 365 genuflexions and 365 blows with a scourge on every day to the end of a year, and fasting every month saves a soul out of hell. For this *arreum* for redeeming the soul that deserves torments in the body has been made according to the number of joints and sinews that are in a man's body.

2. Another *arreum*, viz, the three fifties every (lay, with their conclusion of the Beati to the end of seven years, saves a soul out of hell.

3. Another *arreum* which is no longer, viz, a Lauda and the Beati and a pater noster after each psalm to the end of three years.

4. Each of these *arrea* saves a soul out of hell, if it can be interceded for at all.

5. Now, every penance, both for severity and length of time in which one is at it, depends on the greatness of the sin and on the space of time which one perseveres in it, and on the reason for which it is done, and on the zeal with which one departs from it afterwards. For there are certain sins which do not deserve any remission of penance, however long the time that shall be asked for them, unless God Himself shortens it through death or a message of sickness; or the greatness of the work which a person lays on himself; such as are parricides and manslaughters and man-stealings, and such as brigandage and druidism and satirising, and such as adultery and lewdness and lying and heresy and transgression of order. For there are certain sins for which half-penances with half-*arrea* atone. There are others which an *arreum* with one third of penance atones for. There are others for which an *arreum* only atones.

6. For these are the four things which the wise man has recounted for which the *arrea* are made, viz, for a speedy parting from the sin after its commission, for fear of increasing the sins, for (fear of) life being shortened before the end of the penance which the confessor adjudges be attained, for (fear of) chastising the body of Christ and His blood through the chastisement of penance.

14. An *arreum* of pure prayers for seven years of hard penance to save a soul from the tortures of hell, viz, one hundred offerings, hundred and fifty psalms, one hundred Beati, one hundred genuflexions at every beatitude, one hundred paternosters, one hundred soul-hymns.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁷ McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 142-145; here is a strong example of the early penitentials providing a pathway for a future doctrine of Purgatory well before the eleventh and twelfth century development described by LeGoff in *The Birth of Purgatory*.

APPENDIX B

REMAINES OF GENTILISME AND JUDAISME

In the County of Hereford was an old Custome at funeralls to hire/have poor people who were to take upon them all the sinnes of the party deceased. One of them I remember lived in a cottage on Rosse-high way. (He was a long, leane, ugly, lamentable poor rascal.) The manner was that when the Corps was brought out of the house and layd on the Biere; a Loafe of bread was brought out, and delivered to the Sinne-eater over the corps, as also a Mazar-bowle of maple (Gossips bowle) full of beer, which he was to drinke up, and sixpence ill money, in consideration whereof he tooke upon him (ipso facto) all the Sinnes of the Defunct, and freed him (or her) from walking after they were dead. This custome alludes (methinkes) something to the Scape-goate in ye old Lawe. Leviticus, cap. xvi. verse 21, 22. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goate and confesse over him all ye iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fitt man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities, unto a land not inhabited : arid he shall let the goat goe into the wilderness." This Custome (though rarely used in our dayes) yet by some people was observed / continued even in the strictest time of ye Presbyterian goverment: as at Dynder, volens nolens the Parson of ye Parish, the kinred / relations of a woman deceased there had this ceremonie punctually performed according to her Will:⁴⁷⁸ and also the like was donne at ye City of Hereford in these times, when a woman kept many yeares before her death a Mazard-bowle for the Sinne-eater; and the like in other places in this Countie; as also in Brecon, e. g. at Llangors, where Mr. Gwin the minister about 1640 could no hinder ye performing of this ancient custome. I believe this custome was heretofore used over all Wales.⁴⁷⁹

John Bagford's Letter of 1714/1715 as quoted in Georgina F. Jackson's, *Shropshire Folk-Lore: A Sheaf of Gleanings*, vol. I, ed. Charlotte Sophia Burne (London: Trubner & Co., 1883; reprint, East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England: EP Publishing, 1973), 307; Also see George Laurence Gomme, *Ethnology in Folklore* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1892), 109-32.

⁴⁷⁸ Wirt Sikes states further in his *British Goblins: Welsh Folk-Lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions* (London: Sampson Low, 1880; reprint, East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England: EP Publishing, 1973):

AD. 1686 : This custom is used to this day in North Wales. Upon this, Bishop White Kennet made this comment : 'It seems a remainder of this custom which lately obtained at Amersden, in the county of Oxford ; where, at the burial of every corpse, one cake and one flaggon of ale, just after the interment, were brought to the minister in the church porch.' (324-26)

⁴⁷⁹ John Aubrey, *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, ed. James Britten, Publications of the Folk-Lore Society, vol. IV (London: W.Satchell, Peyton, 1881), 35-36.

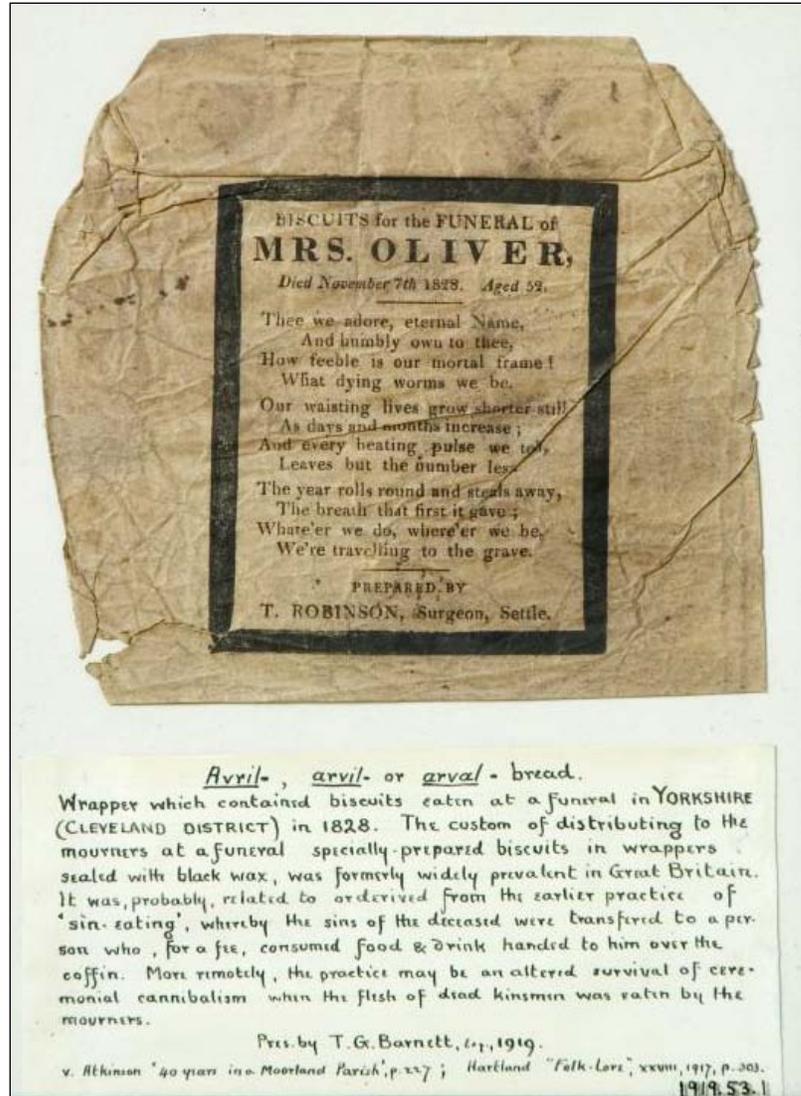
Within the memory of our Fathers, in Shropshire, in those villages adjoining to Wales, when a person dyed, there was notice given to an old Sire (for so they called him) who presently repaired to the place where the deceased lay, and stood before the door of the house, when some of the Family came out and furnished him with a Cricket, on which he sat down facing the door. Then they gave him a Groat, which he put in his pocket ; a Crust of Bread, which he eat; and a full bowle of Ale, which he drank off at a draught. After this, he got up from the Cricket and pronounced, with a composed gesture, *the ease and rest of the Soul departed, for which he would pawn his own Soul*. This I had from the ingenious John Aubrey, Esq., who made a Collection of curious Observations, which I have seen, and is now remaining in the hands of Mr. Churchill, the bookseller

M. Moggridge's comments as reported in the *Archaeologia Cambrensis, a Record of the Antiquities of Wales and its Marches, and the Journal of The Cambrian Archaeological Association*. Vol. III. New Series (London: W. Pickering, 1852), 330; The report of Moggridge was given at the Cambrian Archaeological Association's Sixth Annual Meeting, Ludlow, August 23rd to 28th, 1852. The transcripts here are from the evening meeting on Friday the 28th.

When a person died, the friends sent for the sin-eater of the district, who on his arrival placed a plate of salt on the breast of the defunct, and upon the salt a piece of bread. He then muttered an incantation over the bread, which he finally ate – thereby eating up all the sins of the deceased. This done he received his fee of 2s. 6d., and vanished as quickly as possible from the general gaze; for, as it was believed that he really appropriated to his own use and behoof the sins of all those over whom he performed the above ceremony, he was utterly detested in the neighbourhood – regarded as a mere Pariah – as one irremediably lost. In Caermarthenshire, not far from Llandebie, was a mountain valley, where, up to the commencement of the present century, the people were of a very lawless character. There the above practice was said to have prevailed to a recent period, and going thence to those parts of the country where, from the establishment of works, and from other causes, the people had more early become enlightened, he found the more absurd portions of the custom had been abandoned, while some still remained. Thus near Llanon, within twenty years, the plate, salt and bread were retained, -- near Swansea (and indeed very generally) only the plate and salt. In a parish near Chepstow it was usual to make the figure of a cross on the salt, and cutting an apple or an orange into quarters, to put one piece at each termination of the lines. There were other slight variations in those parts of the custom still extant, as indeed variations existed in old times when it prevailed in all its profane absurdity, an instance of which

might be found in the adjoining county, as mentioned by Aubrey in the Lansdowne MSS. At the British Museum. (330)

APPENDIX C
FUNERAL BISCUIT



First reported by E. Sidney Hartland in *Folklore*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Sept. 30, 1917), the following image of a funeral biscuit (*Avril / Avrel Bread*) was taken from the English Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum: <http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-funeral-food.html>

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