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Introduction: Sin and Salvation in Reformation England

Jonathan Willis

Sin and Salvation were the two central religious preoccupations of men and women in sixteenth century England, and yet the reformation fundamentally reconfigured the theological, intellectual, social and cultural landscape in which these two conceptual landmarks were sited. The abolition of purgatory, the ending of intercessory prayer, the rejection of works of supererogation and the collapse of the medieval economy of salvation meant that it was impossible for attitudes, hopes, fears and expectations about sin and salvation to survive the reformation unchanged. This book is the first to address in a sustained and rounded form the transformations and permutations which the concepts of sin and salvation underwent over the course of the Reformation in England, as well as the practical consequences of these changes as lived.

The essays and the volume itself come out of from a major, multidisciplinary conference which took place in the summer of 2013.[1] The conference in question was prompted by a three-year Leverhulme-sponsored project on the subject of 'The Ten Commandments and the English Reformation'.[2] The connection between these two themes

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may not be instantly apparent, and so a word or two of explanation may be in order. That the Decalogue assumed an unprecedented prominence during the period of the reformation, finally displacing in the process the almost millennium-long ascendency of the framework of the Seven Deadly (or Cardinal) Sins, has long been appreciated.[3] However, the significance of the Ten Commandments in the history and historiography of the English reformation has so far been seen largely in moral and educational terms.[4] What has become increasingly clear upon closer examination, is that the Decalogue also came to assume a central and defining role in the evolution of reformed doctrine, practical divinity, and pastoral theology. Reformers such as John Hooper, the firebrand Edwardian bishop of Gloucester, viewed the Ten Commandments as containing 'the effect and whole sum of all the scripture', teaching 'how to know God, to follow virtue, and to come to eternal life'.[5] In other words, the Decalogue assumed a central role in the identification and condemnation of sin, and also in illustrating the manner of godly living, and ultimately, the path to salvation. The Decalogue was believed by Protestant reformers to have three essential functions or offices. The first of these was 'civil' and 'temporal', referring to the external obedience required to God's laws by civil magistrates, breaches of which were to be punished according to earthly justice. The second office was a 'ministration of death', referring to the absolute and perfect obedience to divine law required by God himself. This obedience was reckoned impossible, given man's inherently sinful and imperfect nature, and so the law in this aspect condemned mankind to eternal damnation for his failure to obey. These two offices applied both to the regenerate and

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[3] E.g. John Bossy: 'Moral arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments', in Edmund Leites (ed.), *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 214-234.

[4] See Bossy, 'Moral arithmetic', and also Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[5] John Hooper, 'A declaration of the Ten holy Commandments of Almighty God' (1548), in *Early Writings of John Hooper*, ed. Samuel Carr (Cambridge: CUP, 1843), pp. 271-2.

the unregenerate, but the third office applied solely to the elect. Those fortunate men and women who were predestined to eternal life were liberated from the law's 'ministration of death' by virtue of the grace won by Christ's redeeming sacrifice, and applied to them by God through the gift of faith. The third office of the law therefore set out for the elect the true path to sanctification and eventual glorification, acting as a way in which the godly could both demonstrate and advance their holy status. The second and third offices of the law were summarised by Hooper as being 'to inform and instruct man aright, what sin is' and 'to save them, if they come to Christ': in other words, they delineated the boundaries of sin and salvation.[6]

The Decalogue, then, had an important role in defining sin and salvation in reformation England, but it was not the only mechanism for doing so, and the broader significance of sin and salvation stretched far beyond the Ten Commandments.[7] This volume begins to sketch out some of the multiplicity of ways in which the theological, pastoral and popular notions of both sin and salvation were understood, reconfigured, discarded, attacked and defended over the course of the English reformation.[8] The history of doctrine and ideas is experiencing something of a renaissance in historical writing, and the historiography of the

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[6] Hooper, 'A declaration of the Ten holy Commandments of Almighty God, 1548', p. 282.

[7] For additional information regarding the Commandments, see Jonathan Willis, 'Repurposing the Decalogue in Reformation England', in Dominik Markl (ed.), *The Influence of the Decalogue: Historical, Theological and Cultural Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), pp. 190-204, and also Ian Green's essay in the same volume; and Jonathan Willis *The Reformation of the Decalogue: The Ten Commandments in England, c.1485-1625* (forthcoming).

[8] Broadly defined. The chronology adopted here is of a long reformation, stretching across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the terms 'reformation' and 'post-reformation' are used broadly interchangeably.

English reformation is no exception.[9] This may seem an odd claim to make, as theology has never exactly been *absent* from the study of the reformation, but there is an increasing interest in what Laura Sangha (amongst others) has called a 'social history of theology', and which Alister Chapman and John Coffey believe may 'provide the foundation of a sounder social history of religion and religious ideas'.[10] The best current historical writing on theological matters is moving beyond the limitations of an older tradition, which set out to explore issues of doctrine for their own sake, and is starting to explore the complex and multivalent web of connections between elite theological discourses, popular belief, and religious identities and practices.

We are therefore not speaking of a *return* of theology to reformation studies, but rather a redefinition of what constitutes theology in the context of the English reformation. A plenary discussion at the end of the 'Sin and Salvation' conference anticipated this trend, and began to identify a number of respects in which this is increasingly the case, which I will summarise here. Firstly, historians are gradually coming to realise that theology is rarely an individual endeavour – the lone theologian putting pen to paper as a result of his contemplation of the divine – but is often in practice a communal process in the very broadest sense. We accept as axiomatic that religion was everywhere in sixteenth-century England; so, in that sense, was theology. Nowhere is the notion of theology and theological change as a social and communal process more evident than in the phenomenon we call 'the reformation'

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[9] See, for example, Alister Chapman, John Coffey and Brad Gregory (eds), *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), and especially Alister Chapman and John Coffey's 'Introduction: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion', pp. 1-23.

[10] Sangha has not yet used the term in print, but has voiced it several times in other fora. For her approach to the subject, see Laura Sangha, *Angels and Belief in England, 1480-1700* (London: 2012). See also Chapman and Coffey, 'Introduction: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion', p. 18.

itself, during which an entire nation changed its fundamental ideas about sin, salvation, God, and faith. Secondly, that in coming to terms with the impact of formal religious change on their own lives, individuals – most notably but (emphatically) not only puritans – effectively *became* lay theologians; we should view their endeavours in this respect as a form of theological praxis. The reformation may not have quite made a priesthood of all believers, but it did provide, not only the opportunity, but also the imperative, for sophisticated lay engagement with doctrine and its consequences. Practical divinity was not just a narrow puritan preoccupation – we need to expand that term to include all endeavours to integrate the theological changes of the reformation into the course of everyday life. Thirdly, we should recognise that so-called 'country divinity' was not necessarily a product of theological ignorance, but rather an important and perfectly defensible theological position in its own right.[11] In other words, the rejection of certain ideas, such as the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, could itself constitute a positive theological choice. In accepting the notion of a 'Calvinist consensus' as the normative doctrinal position of the Jacobethan Church of England, we are drawing the membership of that Church much more narrowly than would have made sense to contemporaries.[12] If we start to regard the patchwork of beliefs held by

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[11] The term, of course, is taken from George Gifford, *A briefe discourse of certaine pointes of the religion wuich is among the common sort of Christians, which may bee termed the countrie divinitie*, which went through five editions in the 1580s, and was also republished in 1598 and 1612. Gifford was characterised as a 'Tudor anthropologist in Alan Macfarlane, 'A Tudor Anthropologist: George Gifford's Discourse and Dialogue', in Sidney Anglo (ed.), *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft* (Routledge, 1977), pp. 140-155. The term 'country divinity' is therefore often used as a shorthand for the beliefs of the common people.

[12] See, for example, Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism c.1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 1-3. The term was initially embraced by Peter Lake, but he has recently raised some questions over its use: see Peter Lake, 'Puritanism, Arminianism, and Nicholas Tyacke', in Kenneth Fincham

the majority of the population not only as idiosyncratic, but also as theologically significant, then our view of the religious complexion of post-reformation England is in need of substantial revision.[13] We are also coming to realise that understanding the thorny problem of how divines struggled to reconcile absolute theological truth with pressing pastoral necessity lies at the heart of our enquires into the nature, success, extent and pace of reformation-era religious change. Several of the essays in this volume touch explicitly upon this tension between the pastoral imperative and the theological, and it runs throughout the entire volume, and indeed the whole area of historical enquiry, as a fundamental underlying theme.

The remainder of this introduction will reflect on the significance of sin and salvation in Christian history, before describing briefly the essays which follow. A comprehensive anatomy of these two themes would require another book all of its own, and so what follows is necessarily partial and incomplete.[14] I will begin with an overview of the essential

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and Peter Lake (eds), *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), pp. 1-13.

[13] My thanks to those speakers and delegates not represented in this volume who also contributed to these discussions, including (but not limited to) David Anderson, Hannah Cleugh, Susan Cogan, Mark Dahlquist, Ian Green, Arnold Hunt, Peter Marshall, Matthew Milner, Susan Royal, and Lucy Wooding. The approach described here is similar to that pursued by Carlo Ginzburg, *The cheese and the worms: the cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller* (trans. John and Anne Tedeschi) (London: Routledge, 1980)

[14] There is not space here, for example, to provide anything more than a brief impression of the detailed development of these themes in the millennium and a half preceding the reformation. Most conspicuous by its absence, perhaps, is extended discussion of the central role played by the Church father Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), in laying much of the groundwork for Protestant beliefs about sin and salvation. Jean Delumeau, in his own monumental study of the subject, noted that Protestant development of 'the long-standing Augustinian notion that temptation is sin' was 'one of the deepest convictions of classic Protestantism', and also commented that 'Augustinism [w]as the predominant philosophical system of this period of Western history'.

continuities embodied in the concepts of sin and salvation, before going on to consider the extent to which these ideas were also subject to change, and constantly evolving. I move on to focus on the centrality of the redefinition of sin and salvation to the Protestant vision of reformed Christianity, before exploring the strange lack of attention this centrality role has received in recent reformation historiography (with the notable exception of the history of puritanism). Finally, I will describe the essays which form the remainder of the volume.

Continuities in Sin and Salvation

The concepts of sin and salvation lie at the heart of Christianity, and in that sense are often presented as the very embodiment of continuity and indelible religious truth. Looked upon from without, they provide the rationale behind the grand sweep of the great cosmic metanarrative of Christian history: from the creation, through original sin and the fall, via Christ's redeeming sacrifice, to the end of the world and the four last things of death, judgement, heaven and hell. The logical framework for the smaller and more intimate narrative of the human lifecycle is also structured by the imperatives to ameliorate the destructive effects of original sin; to avoid the continuing temptation to commit sin; to make amends for the deadly consequences of sins committed; and to strive for the ultimate salvation of the soul, in order to dwell in everlasting heavenly repose in the company of the creator. If we sidestep the question of the ultimate truth of religious belief as one which the historian is not best qualified to ask (and certainly not to answer) then these twin motors – the desires to avoid eternal damnation and to attain unending heavenly bliss – must surely rank as two of the most compelling reasons why the Christians of the past poured so much effort, energy and resource into their religious beliefs. These impulses were also, in effect, two sides

See Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear. The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture 13th-18th Centuries*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 499, 556.

of the same coin: to commit sin was to endanger salvation, while to strive toward salvation was to reject sin. This might be something of a crude oversimplification – faith has always been about more than just sin and salvation. For one thing, religion has historically provided important mechanisms for explaining and coping with the mysterious, the unexpected, the inexplicable and the downright terrifying, as experienced by people from day to day. But one of the most important differences between religion and magical and folklorish beliefs, was that while the latter provided similar explanatory frameworks and apotropaic powers in abundance, to act as remedies and panaceas in times of confusion or distress, the former also lent an overarching sense of meaning and direction to the human condition. Sin and salvation were not experienced discretely; they featured as events in an ongoing narrative, exerting a continuous pressure that helped to shape humanity's ongoing experience of both the everyday and the transcendent. It was this sense of significance for and relevance to the individual over the long term which allowed – in fact required – Christianity to develop codified doctrines and laws; no chances could be taken when souls were at stake. Over time, this facilitated the development of a hierarchy, institutions, structures, and wealth. The Christian religion comprised a matrix of beliefs which refused to settle for concerning itself with the everyday, or even with the life of the individual from cradle to grave. Rather, Christianity's business was to manage a vision of human existence stretching from conception to afterlife, contextualised within a sequence of events spanning from before the creation of the world to after the end of time.

The Church's doctrines regarding sin and salvation therefore imbued its institutions with great power, and provided them with both the means and the incentive to regulate the lives of believers. Temporal princes may have wielded the power of earthly life and death over their subjects, but the ordained spiritual hierarchy of the Church was the ultimate arbiter of everlasting life and eternal damnation for a spiritually anxious and sacramentally-

dependent laity. The identification, classification, punishment, treatment and amelioration of sinful behaviour came to be the rationale behind a series of doctrines and practices which became embedded within the very heart of religious belief and exercise, such as confession, absolution, penance and excommunication. Likewise, the recognition and codification of behaviours and actions designed to bring about salvation generated a vast range of theological concepts and pious activities within the western Church, from the sacramental system to the idea of purgatory, votive masses, indulgences, crusades, relics, pilgrimages, intercessory prayer, and so on.[15] The notion of a Christian society which consisted of those who were saved (past, present and future) formed the basis of the idea of the Church itself, and of the common conception of the community of the faithful as comprising three elements: the Church militant on earth, the Church suffering in purgatory, and the Church triumphant in heaven. Sin and salvation also underpinned contemporary understandings of human anthropology, while increasingly nuanced interpretations of the range of possible sins fed into elite and popular perceptions of orthodoxy, and of its mirror image, heresy. The group of Seven Deadly (or Cardinal) Sins was the primary classificatory system for considering sinful behaviour for much of the middle ages, and this septenary framework has been the subject of significant historiographical attention, much of it relatively recent.[16]

Looked upon from within, the fear of sin and the desire for salvation also provided the great motive force for much of Christian religious practice from the perspective of ordinary

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[15] See, for example, Jacques Le Goff, *The birth of Purgatory*, Arthur Goldhammer (trans.) (London: Scolar, 1984); R. N. Swanson, *Indulgences in late medieval England: passports to paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[16] Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan: State College Press, 1952); Richard Newhauser (ed.), *The seven deadly sins: from communities to individuals* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Richard G. Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (eds), *Sin in medieval and early modern culture: the tradition of the seven deadly sins* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2012).

people. Popular conceptions of the relative levity and gravity of certain sins and the difficulty

(or ease) of attaining salvation by various means might – and often did – differ widely, but

these were differences of degree and emphasis, not a questioning of the significance of the

broader categories themselves.[17] Revisionist histories of the late medieval Church in

particular have given us an extraordinarily rich and evocative understanding of the extent to

which the laity of Latin Christendom were engaged with and stimulated by the Church's

offering when it came to avoiding sin and acquiring salvation.[18] Masses, fraternities, guilds,

chantries, obits, bede rolls, confession, indulgences, relics, pilgrimage, saintly cults, material

investment in church buildings and furnishings, music and art: indeed, the great majority of

the multitudinous excrescences of late-medieval lay piety can be attributed, at least in part, to

a desire to make amends for the commission of sins, and to speed the journey of the soul

towards salvation; a desire which was 'popular' in every sense of the word.

Changes in Sin and Salvation

Sin and Salvation were therefore fundamental to Christianity, both in the sense that they

helped to define the structural concepts on which a plethora of theological ideas and religious

practices were based, and also because they remained vitally important organising principles

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[17] In his chapter in this volume, for example, Stephen Bates explores the surprising range (and severity) of sins

for which some individuals believed the Virgin Mary was might intercede on behalf of her *devotes*.

[18] Chief amongst these, of course, is Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven: Yale University

Press, 1992). The literature on this is vast, but see also (for example): Clive Burgess, '"A Fond Thing Vainly

Invented": An Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Late Medieval England' in S. Wright (ed.), *Parish,

Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750* (London: Hutchingson, 1988), pp. 56-84; Robert

Swanson (ed.), *Catholic England: Religion, Faith and Observance before the Reformation* (Manchester:

Manchester University Press, 1993); Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1991).

for religion, from its most intimate expressions to its most abstract. However, whilst their significance was unchanging, the concept themselves were in a continuous state of evolution and flux, both in relation to and independently of one another. Historians must always be wary of taking at face value the rhetoric of their objects of study, of assuming that constancy equals consistency, and of treating categories as axiomatic just because the things they described were considered by past societies to be eternal truths. Sin and salvation were in a theological sense great cosmic absolutes, but they were also historical constructs, born of particular social, cultural and theological contexts, their meanings subtly shifting as those contexts themselves underwent incessant transformation. I would like to suggest that it is often in those moments when we find historical actors strenuously defending the contingent as eternal – claiming subjective opinion as objective truth – that we come closest to understanding what they really thought about the things that really mattered to them.[19] In debates over sin and salvation, therefore, we can witness with crystal clarity the muddy difficulty with which reformers and those they were trying to reform grappled with the question of what it meant to be a Christian in a changed and changing world.

Sin and salvation have therefore never been constants. While for most of the medieval centuries official theological change regarding these matters was glacially slow, the slowest changes can often be amongst the most profound. The most significant of these was undoubtedly the development of the doctrine of purgatory, as described in the classic work of the subject by Jacques Le Goff; next to this startling structural innovation, developments in areas like indulgences and saintly cults were mere decorative additions.[20] But, aside from

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[19] I have made this argument previously, for example, in a consideration of polemical debates over the proper use of music in the English Church. See Jonathan Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism in Post-Reformation England: Discourses, Sites and Identities* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), chapter two.

[20] Jacques Le Goff, *The birth of Purgatory*, Arthur Goldhammer (trans.) (London: Scolar, 1984).

these formal shifts in doctrine, sin and salvation were in a sense negotiated and reconfigured on a much more intimate basis every time they were engaged with by a believer, either alone or in combination with a friend, a family member, a priest, or a heretic. The prescriptions and proscriptions of formal doctrine were hugely influential, but they did not dictate belief: they merely established and enforced (with various degrees of rigour) a framework within which beliefs could be formulated, expressed, challenged, modified, defended or abandoned. It would therefore be wrong to see the middle ages as a period of stasis. Indeed, as the fifteenth century wore on, the debate over sin and salvation was already become increasingly voluble. How should the Christian live a Christian life? What sorts of behaviours should they cultivate, and what actions should they eschew? What manner of 'religion' gave the individual the best chance of earning salvation, and was salvation even something which could be earned? These were the questions which were already exercising Hussites, Lollards, Christian humanists, followers of the *devotio moderna*, and consumers of the growing genres of didactic and devotional literature pouring off the presses of the great printing centres of late-medieval Europe.[21] In that sense, the Reformation was merely an amplification of existing trends.

The Reformation

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[21] J.F. Davis, 'Lollardy and the Reformation in England', in Peter Marshall (ed.), *The Impact of the English Reformation, 1500-1640* (London: Arnold, 1997); Rob Lutton, *Lollardy and orthodox religion in pre-Reformation England: reconstructing piety* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006); Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: a history of the Christian doctrine of justification* (3rd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially chapters 3-5; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, vol. II: The Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); John H. Van Engen, *Sisters and brothers of the common life: the Devotio moderna and the world of the later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

We should therefore resist the temptation to see sin and salvation as constants within the late medieval Church, but it is fair to say that with the onset of the Protestant reformation the gradual trickle of dissent and diversity of opinions soon became a raging torrent. As Peter Marshall has recently reminded us, we should view the first generation of reformers not as early Protestants, but as late-medieval Christians; by doing so the reformation starts to make a lot more sense, not as a reaction against but as a logical extension of pre-existing trends within the Christianity of the later middle ages.[22] Concerns about sin and – pre-eminently – salvation were therefore at the heart of the reformation, as a reflection of their centrality within the late medieval Church. Magisterial and radical reformers of varying dispositions disagreed fundamentally on the detail of some of these issues, with what would soon be labelled the 'Roman' Catholic Church, and also amongst themselves. But, as essential Christian preoccupations, sin and salvation remained at the heart of reformed faith, in England as throughout the Protestant world. The essential nature of this shift is as well-worn and familiar to us as a pair of comfortable old slippers. Championed by Luther, and supported by the vociferous and growing fellowship of reformers, Protestants rejected the increasingly nominalist soteriology of the late-medieval Church, which placed significant emphasis on the role of the individual believer in contributing towards their own salvation through the performance of meritorious works of various kinds. According to representatives of the so-called *via moderna*, such as Gabriel Biel, God was still the prime mover of salvation, but the individual also had a pivotal role to play. *Facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*: God would not deny grace to anyone who did that which lay within them.[23] The magisterial

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[22] Peter Marshall, *Reformation England, 1480-1642* (2nd ed. London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 3: 'in its first phases the historical process which would in time become known as "the Reformation" was an aspect of late medieval religious life, rather than something entirely external to it'.

[23] Cited by McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, p. 107.

reformers rejected this view of salvation, which was reliant both on divine grace and human actions, in favour of a model of justification by grace through faith alone. In the new theology, man deemed to be so corrupted by original sin that he was unable to do anything of his own accord but evil: man had been created good but, by reason of Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden, he was capable of his own accord of nothing but sin. As man could not contribute to his salvation, then sole agency in the process shifted to God.[24] This sea-change in the reformers' thinking brought with it the logical concomitant that if it was God alone who was responsible for bringing about justification, it was therefore also down to God to decide who were the lucky recipients of this act of incalculable mercy (election, or predestination to salvation), and who in contrast would feel the full force of divine wrath against sin, and experience the just punishment of damnation for such actions (reprobation, or predestination to damnation).[25] The key insight that man remained a cesspool of iniquity until (and even after) justification, and the redrawing of Christian morality and practice in line with a strict new interpretation of scripture, and in particular the Ten Commandments of the moral law, also significantly redrew the boundaries of what impulses, thoughts and actions did and did not comprise sin.

Historiography

This basic narrative is more or less standard fare and will be broadly familiar to anybody who has ever taught or studied the reformation, but there is a significant danger that the neatness

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[24] As Delumeau notes, 'it is worth recalling that the Reformers arrives at justification by faith via the path of "despair"'. Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, p. 497.

[25] Luther merely emphasised predestination to election, while Calvin and later Calvinists took the doctrine to its logical conclusion by stressing predestination both to election and reprobation (so-called 'double' predestination).

of the story of the shift from 'salvation by works' to 'justification by faith alone' gives an

artificial sense of these issues as somehow quickly 'settled' by the reformation. It is of course

impossible to give a comprehensive overview of scholarship on the English reformation here,

even as it has developed over the last few decades, but 'post-revisionism' has shown a

marked tendency to look for continuities and discontinuities of religious belief and practice

beyond the theological mainstream, in unusual, marginal, liminal or unstable locations. Not

all of the stories told are as downright bizarre as that of the Leicestershire woman who, in

1569, allegedly gave birth to a cat, but themes such as the magical and the monstrous,

tolerance and intolerance, death and the supernatural, and execution and theatrical

performance, are all healthily represented in the most influential works by leading historians

in the field.[26] Current scholarship within reformation studies can also be characterised by

another equally significant trend, which has been systematically considering different forms

of evidence from those considered by previous generations of researchers, such as visual and

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[26] David Cressy, *Agnes Bowker's cat: travesties and transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: OUP,

2001); Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the popular press: English almanacs 1500-1800* (London: Faber, 1979);

Julie Crawford, *Marvellous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins UP, 2005); Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge:

CUP, 2006); Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 1996); Angela McShane

and Garthine Walker (eds), *The extraordinary and the everyday in early modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2010); Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable hatred : tolerance and intolerance in England, 1500-1700*

(Manchester: Manchester University Press 2006); Luc Racaut and Alec Ryrie (eds), *Moderate voices in the

European Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the dead in Reformation England*

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Laura Sangha, *Angels and belief in England, 1480-1700* (London:

Pickering & Chatto, 2012); Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (eds), *The place of the dead, death and remembrance

in late medieval and early modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Peter Lake and Michael

Questier, *The Antichrsist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (Yale: Yale

UP, 2002), etc.

material culture, cheap print, music, popular festivities, and even the English landscape itself.[27] A third trend is largely concerned with thinking about what the post-reformation laity actually *did* to express their religion, alone and in company, in private and public, in the home and at church.[28] As valuable – indeed, indispensable – as all such work is and continues

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[27] Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010); Tara Hamling and Richard Williams (eds), *Art re-formed : re-assessing the impact of the Reformation on the visual arts* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007); Collinson, Patrick, 'From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: the Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation', *The Sternton Lecture 1985* (University of Reading: 1986); Watt, Tessa, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996); Adam Fox, *Oral and literate culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Alison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009); Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism*; Christopher Marsh, *Music and society in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Cressy, David, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); Hutton, Ronald, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford: OUP, 1996); Alexandra Walsham, *The reformation of the landscape : religion, identity, and memory in early modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[28] Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie (eds), *Private and domestic devotion in early modern Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Natalie Mears and Alec Ryrie (eds), *Worship and the parish church in early modern Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Christopher Marsh, '"Common Prayer" in England, 1560-1640: The View From the Pew', *Past & Present*, 171 (May 2001), pp. 66-94; Christopher Marsh, 'Sacred Space in England, 1560-1640: The View from the Pew', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53.2 (2002), pp. 286-311; Christopher Marsh, 'Order and Place in England, 1580-1640: The View From the Pew', *Journal of British Studies* 44 (January 2005), 3-26; John Doran and Charlotte Methuen (eds), *Religion and the Household* (Studies in Church History vol. 50. 2014); Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars restored: the changing face of English religious worship, 1547-c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Christopher Haigh, 'Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion in Post-Reformation England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (2000), pp. 721-40; Arnold Hunt, 'The Lord's Supper in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 161 (1998), pp. 39-83; Arnold

to be, in helping us to understand the complexity and nuance of post-reformation religious belief and practice, I would like to suggest that in some ways reformation studies has been neglecting the theological base of post-reformation religion, and focussing instead on the surrounding superstructure of religious practice and expression, and beliefs concerning the supernatural and liminal. This is not to advocate a crude 'back to basics' theological reductionism, or to deny the value of such rich and imaginative work, nor is it intended as a criticism of the methodological and interdisciplinary vitality of post-revisionism, which is heartily to be praised. Rather, it is an observation that we might learn much of value by re-examining some of the theological fundamentals of the reformation, and seeking to understand their instability, their porosity, their multiplicity of meanings, and the complex ways in which they were taught and received in particular social and cultural contexts. The contrast between the little we know about the impact of the reformation on elite and popular understandings of sin and salvation, and the richness of the scholarship on these same subjects for the late-medieval Church, is a surprising and sobering one. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, the adoption of the doctrine of justification by faith alone was not simple, clean, straightforward, or self-evident. The seismic shift in soteriology left numerous and serious questions, at the levels of theory and especially of practice. The old certainties were replaced by new uncertainties, as individuals struggled to define afresh the meanings of concepts that, once familiar, had become startlingly alien: sin, salvation, faith, works, virtue, vice, heaven, hell…

The Problem with Puritans

Hunt, *The art of hearing: English preachers and their audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

The great exception to this significant neglect of the concepts of sin and salvation in studies the English reformation has been in the field of research into puritan belief and culture. While the tendency has been to 'de-theologise' works on mainstream and 'popular' religion, puritanism as a phenomenon was so dependent upon and tied up with the cultural implications of a very particular theological understanding, that puritan studies has remained the area of English reformation history most explicitly concerned with theology.[29] Nobody reading the autobiographical writings of Nehemiah Wallington or Elizabeth Isham, studying the theological works of William Perkins or Richard Rogers, or perusing the pastoral and devotional manuals of Richard Greenham or Lewis Bayly, could fail to appreciate the enormous importance and absolute centrality of scrupulous (if hopeless) efforts to avoid sin, and of the careful (albeit impossible) attempt to tread the narrow path of salvation. Several essays in this volume explore aspects of the puritan experience of sin and salvation in detail, and there is much more on this topic that remains to be said. But what we are coming to realise, even more importantly, is that these were not just concerns for 'puritans', 'Calvinists', and 'practical predestinarians'. Much recent work on puritanism, and most particularly the oeuvre of Patrick Collinson, has demonstrated that puritanism was a religious tendency, not a movement, and one which existed as part of, not external to, the religious

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[29] R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*; Peter Lake, *The boxmaker's revenge : 'orthodoxy', 'heterodoxy', and the politics of the parish in early Stuart London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the emergence of an antinomian underground in pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Kenneth Parker and Eric Carlson, *'Practical divinity': the works and life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); Leif Dixon, *Practical predestinarians in England, c. 1590-1640* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Kenneth Parker, *The English Sabbath: a study of doctrine and discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

mainstream.[30] Puritans are often described – by the term made famous through repetition by Collinson and others – as the 'hotter sort' of Protestant. In other words, puritans obsessed about the same sorts of issues as everybody else; they just raised their obsessions to astonishing new heights. The psychological impact of puritanism should not be underestimated, but although it should not be taken as representative of post-reformation Protestantism more generally, it was born by contemplating the same theological uncertainties concerning sin and salvation faced by all of the inhabitants of post-reformation England.[31] In his recent book *Being Protestant in Reformation England*, Alec Ryrie has attempted to redraw the boundaries of puritanism even more radically, by talking about puritans as simply one element of a larger community of individuals who were 'serious about religion' in post-reformation England.[32]

This may be taking things too far: there is often something intangibly distinctive about puritans, and we must not ignore the sense that the godly themselves had of belonging to a very clearly defined community. Still, although the literate sources employed by Ryrie skew attention towards a fairly narrow social group – those who were disproportionately

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[30] Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, *The culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Patrick Collinson, *Godly people: essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon, 1982); Patrick Collinson, *The birthpangs of Protestant England: religious and cultural change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1988).

[31] John Stachniewski, *The persecutory imagination: English Puritanism and the literature of religious despair* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Paul Seaver, *Wallington's world: a Puritan artisan in seventeenth-century London* (London: Methuen, 1985); Nehemiah Wallington, *The notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618-1654: a selection*, ed. David Booy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); c.f. the situation north of the border as described in Margo Todd, *The culture of Protestantism in early modern Scotland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[32] Ryrie, *Being Protestant*. The scope of Ryrie's study is still quite socially limited, however, as it draws mainly upon works written by and for a literate and educated religious elite.

wealthy, well-educated, and had the time, resources and inclination to record their religious preferences and experiences for posterity – it is clear that concerns about sin and salvation were not the sole preserve of a small puritan minority, but were prevalent throughout society more broadly. Read one way, the character of Asunetus in Arthur Dent's *Plaine mans pathway to heaven* (1601), and the imaginary public scolded by William Perkins in the epistle prefixed to his *foundation of Christian Religion* (1590), can be interpreted as (at best) misguided, quite possibly as indifferent, and at worst as downright hostile to religion and to the Church.[33] But when Perkins criticised the 'poore people' for believing 'that God is served by the rehearsing of the ten commaundements, the Lords Praier, and the Creede', he was inadvertently demonstrating that the individuals in question were indeed concerned to serve God.[34] Likewise when he chided them for holding 'that yee have believed in Christ ever since you could remember', he was unwittingly testifying to a belief which was real, even if it did not accord to his own specifically Calvinist definition of what faith should entail. Perkins' remarks cannot be taken at face value, of course, but if anything it seems likely that he underestimated the religious literacy of his imagined audience. The theological complexity of Perkins' own creed meant that he ended up in the somewhat counter-intuitive position of attacking the popular belief 'that if a man be no adulterer, no theef, nor murderer, and do no man harme, he is a right honest man'.[35] The same sentiments were given voice through Dent's unlearned rural layman, Asunetus:

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[33] Dent's *Pathway* went through two editions in 1601, and was republished in 1602, 1603, 1605, 1606, and almost every year up to 1620 – there were more than 30 editions over the course of the seventeenth century. Perkins' *Foundation* also achieved more than 30 editions by the end of the seventeenth century. Publication information taken from www.estc.bl.uk [accessed 5 December 2014].

[34] William Perkins, *THE Foundation of Christian Religion, gathered into six Principles* (1591), sig. A2ʳ.

[35] Perkins, *THE Foundation of Christian Religion*, sig. A3ʳ. This is a rejection of the popular idea that it was possible to obey the Ten Commandments – for Perkins, the list of duties entailed by perfect obedience was so

> Tush, tush; what needs all this a doe? If a man say his Lords praier, his Ten
> Commandements, and his Beliefe, and keepe them, and say no body no harme, nor
> doe no body no harme, and doe as he would be done to, haue a good faith to God-
> ward, and be a man of Gods beliefe, no doubt he shall be saued, without all this
> running to Sermons, and pratling of the Scripture.[36]

The problem faced by puritan critics of popular belief was not irreligion *per se*; it was a different vision of religion, one rooted more in concrete social and cultural mores than in abstract theological 'truth'. In their own way, this silent majority of ordinary men and women, for whom Asunetus was a cipher, were just as concerned about sin and salvation, about doing the right thing and avoiding (or at least making amends for doing) the wrong thing, as any conformist or puritan, clerical or lay.

Sin and Salvation in Reformation England

As suggested previously, the essays in this volume examine and probe the shifting definitions of sin and salvation in reformation and post-reformation England, as well as the reality of the ways in which these beliefs were modified and negotiated in practice. Fourteen essays are arranged in four sections, moving outwards from the intellectual and abstract towards the more practical and concrete. The first section, 'Defining Sin and Salvation', considers some of the conceptual problems and uncertainties faced by reformers grappling with the new theological landscape created by the great tectonic shifts of the reformation. The section begins with an essay by Ralph Werrell on sin and salvation in the writings of one of the

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vast that it was impossible for man to fulfil, precisely because Christ was the only being with the capacity to fulfil God's Law.

[36] Arthur Dent, *The plaine mans path-way to heauen Wherein euery man may cleerely see, whether he shall be saued or damned* (1607), STC2: 6629, p. 25.

founding fathers of the English reformation, the reformer and biblical translator William Tyndale. Tyndale was a strong believer in the essential unity of the Old and New Testaments, and an early proponent of the notion of the total depravity of mankind after the fall. The central agent in his soteriology, however, was the blood of Christ, and a covenant made not between mankind and his creator, but between the persons of the Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This aspect of Tyndale's theology has not been properly appreciated before, and has implications for our understanding of the role and nature of the notion of 'covenant' at the outset of the reformation. André Gazal's and Angela Ranson's essays both deal with different aspects of the soteriology of the great defender of the early Elizabethan Church of England, bishop of Salisbury John Jewel. Gazal focuses on the centrality of the metaphor of being 'apparelled in' – literally, of 'putting on' – Christ in Jewel's theology. Jewel's soteriology in this respect, it turns out, owed less to Calvin than it did to his erstwhile friend and mentor Peter Martyr Vermigli, although Jewel's ideas also moved beyond Marytr's in several key respects. Ranson demonstrates that Jewel's polemical wranglings with the Catholic controversialist Thomas Harding forced him to clarify his doctrine of salvation in a number of important areas, developing a vision of the authority of the Church of England based on spiritual rather than physical universality; that is, through its membership of an international brotherhood of Protestant Churches, and its spiritual links to the primitive apostolic Church. The section is brought to a close with an essay by Jonathan Willis on the use of the Decalogue to redefine sin, and re-construct morality, over the course of the sixteenth century. The Commandments embodied the same paradox as the broader categories of sin and salvation, in that they were at once both permanent, eternal and unchanging, and yet at the same time enormously malleable, flexible, and negotiable, capable of embodying a plethora of constantly-shifting meanings. As such, the Ten Commandments formed the perfect mechanism through which divines could construct a new conception of sin, and of a

distinctively Protestant morality, that at once rested upon impeccable scriptural authority and yet was also carefully tailored to a set of very specific contemporary requirements. As well as providing important insights into specific issues, individuals and debates, these essays demonstrate that influential divines continued to struggle throughout the long English reformation and post-reformation with key issues of definition, in relation to the concepts of sin and salvation.

Section two, 'contesting sin and salvation', explores some of the ways in which concepts of sin and salvation were enforced, attacked and defended in vicious and polemically-charged situations of disagreement, persecution and violence. Lucy Nicholas explores the humanist and pedagogue Roger Ascham's use of the Ten Commandments to attack the Catholic Mass in his little known Latin treatise, *Apologia pro Caena Dominica*. In the process, she demonstrates that Ascham was a much more important figure in reforming circles and as a religious controversialist than has hitherto been appreciated. Margarita Leonti applies insights and methodologies brought from the social sciences, and specifically from the work of the sociologist Michel Foucault, to the question of the relationship between sin, salvation and female sexuality in Foxe's book of Martyrs. Women and heretics were both more often and more naturally associated with sin than salvation in the eyes of early modern contemporaries, and so Foxe had to work hard to present these women as virtuous and godly martyrs in his influential *Acts and Monuments*. The relationship between women, male agency, and the definition of sin, is further explored by Sheilagh O'Brien in an essay comparing the differing accounts of the confessions provided during the Essex witch trials of 1645. In these essays we see that one man (or woman)'s sin was another's salvation, and that one man's heretic was another man's martyr. This dissolution of supposed absolutes into relativity and porosity was in large part a product of the unstable nature of the categories of sin and salvation themselves.

The third section, 'reforming sin and salvation', looks at ongoing attempts to reform beliefs and behaviours concerning sin and salvation in broader society, through instructional, liturgical and devotional texts. Stephen Bates begins by looking at tensions within the late-medieval Church regarding the redemptive role of the Virgin Mary. By doing so, he is able to conclude that, in large part, post-reformation attempts to reduce Mary's soteriological significance were a continuation and amplification of pre-existing trends, as opposed to something entirely new and distinctively Protestant. Anna French's discussion of the reformation of Baptism with regards to child salvation in early modern England highlights some of the pastoral difficulties created by the continuing theological uncertainties over sin and salvation. Disagreement over the precise nature and function of baptism meant that the souls of unbaptised babies were metaphorically consigned to a soteriological uncertainty not entirely different from the Catholic 'limbo' which reformers so resoundingly rejected. Maria Devlin's essay takes us even further into the contradictions which were increasingly evident between pastoral and theological treatments of sin and salvation. The very forms – dramatic, pedagogical, dialogical – through which writers chose to engage with these theological concepts, dictated to a greater or lesser extent the message which readers took from them. What Devlin labels 'rhetorical theology' could differ markedly from the abstract interpretation of Calvinist doctrines: thus, texts offered a generic hope of salvation to all, even while theological truth held that such a state of affairs was impossible. Finally, Elizabeth Clarke considers the role of 'preparationism' in the writings of the scholar and translator Lucy Hutchinson. As both a Calvinist and a poet, Hutchinson wavered in her theological writings between the orthodox position of salvation as entirely a product of divine grace, and a very human need to recognise the presence of preparatory emotions in the believer in order to merit and receive that grace. Definitions of sin and salvation remained

fluid throughout the long English reformation, and attempts to reform them in both pastoral and theological contexts were ongoing.

The fourth and final section, 'living with sin and salvation' addresses some of the consequences of attempting to live with such unstable categories of sin and salvation, in a variety of contexts. Sarah Bastow explores the different aspects of sin and salvation emphasised by the former Marian exile, and Elizabethan bishop of Worcester and London and archbishop of York, Edwin Sandys. Sin and salvation were themes to which Sandys returned again and again in his preaching, but the aspects on which he chose to dwell when addressing the queen and court were very different from those he emphasised when speaking to large congregations in York or London. For preachers, it was important to be able to tailor their message to their audience, even when they were talking about theological absolutes. Tara Hamling's essay charts some of the ways in which concern with sin and salvation could be made visible within the post-reformation domestic interior, focussing on biblical images representing divine deliverance from fire. Such imagery was often depicted above – even within – the fireplace and, Hamling argues, this provided a particularly appropriate and convenient context for viewing, discussing and contemplating such iconography. Finally, Robert Daniel explores the importance of 'books of conscience' in early seventeenth century puritan pious practice. These records of sin and salvation were not only tools of individual piety; they could also be important communal resources, to be shared with friends and family, and even stood as a cosmic testament, to be opened and proclaimed at the day of judgement. The volume ends with a substantial afterword, written by Professor Alexandra Walsham. In it, she reflects upon the historiographical treatments of sin and salvation by 'traditional' and 'revisionist' historians, discusses the significance of the essays in the present volume, and identifies a range of themes and research areas which, while they fall outside the constraints of this book, might fruitfully become the subject of future investigations.

What these essays separately, and this volume as a whole, seek to demonstrate is that the theological changes brought about by the reformation caused individuals to question old certainties, and to come up with innovative new solutions to adapt or replace them. In this brave new world, nothing was certain, and the definitions of concepts central to the Christian faith were up for debate, and could be affirmed, rejected, modified and replaced, not just once, but over and over again. We too should question old certainties about the neatness of the theological changes of the reformation, and their effect on both popular and elite understandings of sin and salvation. The answers to those questions might well surprise us, and bring us even closer to understanding precisely what it meant to be Protestant in reformation and post-reformation England.