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The Aesthetic of the Ascetic

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The Aesthetic of the Ascetic

Abstract
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The Aesthetic of the Ascetic

This study examines the casuistry of William Perkins in order to reconcile differing contemporary representations of the puritan tradition. These differing conceptions centered on whether puritan doctrine produced comfort, or despair. Puritan divines acknowledged that despair was a serious issue among their flock, and the varied works read and composed by the godly indicate a sustained engagement with despair, which was often precipitated by uncertainty over the assurance of one's election. In Reformation theology, however, the doctrine of election was viewed as providing uncommon comfort to the believer. Reading Perkins' casuistry allows us to understand that puritan divines did believe that the doctrines they espoused represented comfort, but that they also realized that, paradoxically, the more developed one's conscience, the more likely one was to realize more fully the wretchedness of one's sin and thus fall into despair. The casuistry of Perkins, specifically, his Cases of Conscience, are emblematic of a conscious and concerted effort on the part of Elizabethan divines in the 1590s both to preempt and treat a specific malady, despair, among the godly.

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The Aesthetic of the Ascetic

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INTRODUCTION

Despair forms an inextricable part of the Christian tradition. When Christ hung on the cross at Golgotha, he cried out in spiritual anguish. Those desperate cries express both keenly felt isolation and somber finality, yet Christ's sufferings were merely the first in a long historical progression in which the highest form of spiritual agony – despair – was contemplated, theologized and combated.

The practical divinity of William Perkins, an eminent Elizabethan puritan divine, is instrumental to understanding despair as experienced by puritans in the late sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century. Puritan divines acknowledged that despair was a serious issue among their flock, and the literature, treatises and sermons read and composed by the godly (one of the chief terms used by puritans to define themselves) indicate a sustained engagement with despair, which was often precipitated by uncertainty over the assurance of one's election. The practical divinity of Perkins, specifically his *Cases of Conscience*, are emblematic of a conscious and concerted effort on the part of Elizabethan divines in the late sixteenth century both to preempt and to treat a specific malady, despair, among the godly.

The evidence points to a four part conclusion. (1) Despair, particularly that linked to worries about the doctrine of predestination, was critical to the experience of the godly. (2) The seeds of this despair grew out of the particularly dynamic relationship between the divines and their flocks. This relationship, as pointed out by Christopher Haigh, was mediated by the godly belief that it was the "preacher's job to cause a stir, to bruise consciences, to divide the godly from the profane and set them up against another."[1]

[1] Christopher Haigh, *The plaine man's pathways to heaven: kinds of Christianity in post-reformation England, 1570-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 40; A powerful example of this notion is

However, some of the most empathetic statements written by Perkins deal with despair and how to lift believers from that miserable estate. (3) The mechanism for understanding this relationship is the practical divinity of Perkins. (4) The result we find is an ambivalent view of despair – it is at once valorized and maligned, necessary yet terrifying. One rendering of this ethos is found in a teaching manual composed by Perkins for other divines. In speaking of the 'affectations' aroused by sorrow, grief and horror, Perkins admits that "though it be not a thing wholesome and profitable of its own nature, yet is it a remedy necessary for the subduing of a sinner's stubbornness, and for the preparing of his mind to become teachable."[2]

The first chapter lays out evidence that an aspect of Reformed theology, the doctrine of predestination, produced despair among the godly. This is done through a close examination of the response of the godly toward one specific case of despair. The next chapter draws back and examines the construction of the theological framework that led some of the godly to despair. Calvin, Theodor Beza and Perkins all taught double predestination, the belief that God chose some to salvation and some to perdition. But with Beza and Perkins there is a shift in emphasis. Calvin declared that predestination should only be considered in relation to Scripture and in Christ; Beza and Perkins insisted that believers could ascertain certain signs of their election through outward works and the use of the practical syllogism.[3] Temporary faith is another common thread among the

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found in one of George Gifford's (d. 1600) dialogues, in which a papist complains that godly divines bring 'disagreement and division.' The protestant stoutly replies 'yet he says he came not to send peace but a sword, and to set the father against the son and the mother against the daughter.' George Gifford, *A dialogue betweene a papist and a protestant* (London, 1582), 36

[2] William Perkins, *The arte of prophecying, or, a treatise concerning the sacred and onely true manner and methode of preaching*, trans. Thomas Tuke, (London, 1607), 109

[3] The practical syllogism is a type of deductive reasoning that consists of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. Thus Perkins' practical syllogism concerning 'whether a man be in the state of damnation or in the state of grace.'

three. This was the chief fear of the godly, the notion that they did not actually have God's saving grace, but merely a false or temporary grace that would eventually be cast off to reveal their reprobation. This theological edifice, the crossbeams of which were formed by Calvin and Beza, upheld Perkins' theology. There are other influences, for instance the Heidelberg theologians and earlier English divines, but Calvin, Beza and Perkins form the 'trinity of the Orthodox,' and are essential to understanding the despairing postures of some of the godly. [4] The third chapter focuses tightly on Perkins, specifically his practical divinity as it relates to the conscience and temptation. In concert with this analysis, in the fourth chapter, the lives of Katherine Brettergh and Sarah Wight are examined. Brettergh was a godly woman who became ill, fell into despair and recovered, though she ultimately died of her illness on 31 May 1601. Her life was recorded as *Death's advantage little regarded, and the soules solace against sorrow* (1602). Wight was a godly child of fifteen who fell deeply into despair in the midst of Civil War London. Her trials, and ultimate redemption, were recorded by Henry Jessey in 1647 as *The exceeding riches of grace advanced by the spirit of grace, in an empty nothing creature, viz. Mris. Sarah Wight lately hopeles and restles, her soule dwelling far from peace or hopes thereof: now hopefull, and joyfull in the Lord.* What is revealed in

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Major Premise: Every one that believes is the child of God.
Minor Premise: But I do believe.
Conclusion: Therefore I am the child of God. (William Perkins, *The workes of that famous and worthy minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M. VV. Perkins.* (Cambridge, 1631) [originally published 1608-9].)

[4] The chief Heidelberg theologians were Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), Kaspar Olevianus (1536-87) and Girolamo Zanchius (1516-90). With regard to English precursors, the most notable are William Tyndale (d. 1536) and John Bradford (d. 1555). See William Tyndale, *Doctrinal treatises and introductions to different portions of the Holy Scripture & An exposicion vppon the v.vi.vii. chapters of Mathew*. John Bradford, *A brife and faythfull declaration of the true fayth of Christ: made by certeyne men susspected of heresye in these articles folowyng* (London, 1547) & *An exhortacion to the carienge of Chrystes crosse: wyth a true and brefe confutacion of false and papisticall doctrine* (London, 1545); Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and revolution: studies in interpretation of the English revolution of the seventeenth century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958), 216

this final analysis is a deeply ambivalent view of despair. By examining Perkins, along with these narratives, we can glean a fuller understanding of the particular way the godly despaired. Perkins was intent on relieving the despair suffered by the laity, yet he also believed that despair was necessary for a full apprehension of God's glory and entrance into salvation.

A brief aside needs to be taken to define the dual focus of this study, despair and puritans. Luther despaired. Beza despaired. Perkins despaired. These eminent men who oversaw the birth and maturation of the Reformation felt themselves within its suffocating grasp. When Luther wrote of despair, it is in a distinctly theological context. It is not simply a deep sadness or intense melancholia; rather, it is a somber description of a spiritual state. So too it is with Beza, 'Calvin's Elisha,'[5] whose letters from Geneva stirred the godly throughout Elizabeth's reign. And even though apocryphal, it is recounted by various biographers that Perkins, on his deathbed, cried out in desperation.[6] What we see, then, is that despair, though intensely personal, is something that all are heir to.

Protestants held fast to the Roman Catholic notion of despair as a sin, best elucidated by Thomas Aquinas. In *Summa theologiae*, SS, Q. 20 Art. I, Obj. 2 it is posited that "despair seems to grow from a good root, viz. fear of God, or from horror at the greatness of one's own sins. Therefore despair is not a sin."[7] Aquinas counters with the argument that despair leads to other sins (making it a sin) and that despair conforms to the false opinion about God – that he "refuses pardon to the repentant sinner, or that

[5] Collinson, *Elizabethan puritan movement*, 80
[6] *Thomas Fuller's the holy state and the profane state*, ed. Maximilian Graff Walten (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938) Vol. II, a facsimile of the first edition, 1642, 91
[7] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), SS, Q. 20 Art. I, Obj. 2

He does not turn sinners to Himself by sanctifying Grace … and is thus vicious and sinful."[8] Despair also actively prevents one from attaining hope and faith, which are necessary for salvation. This is why Aquinas declares despair a more dangerous sin than even unbelief or hatred of God, for despair "consists in a man ceasing to hope for a share of God's goodness."[9] Aquinas is also keenly aware of the insidious nature of despair; in particular the emotional quality impressed upon one by despair (he defines despair as an appetite). With regard to the dreadfulness of despair, in SS, Q. 20 Art. 3, Aquinas quotes the gloss on Proverbs 24:10 which states: 'Nothing is more execrable than despair. For he who despairs loses his constancy in the daily labors of this life, and what is worse, loses his constancy in the endeavor of faith."[10] For Aquinas, despair is dreadful not only because it leads one away from God, but also because of the terrifying emotional complex it creates. For this, he directs the reader to Isodorus, who declares, "To commit a crime is death to the soul; but to despair is to descend into hell."[11] This idea courses through European literature, from the words emblazoned above the entrance of hell in the *Divine Comedy*, to Mephistopheles' despairing soliloquy in *Doctor Faustus*, to Satan's terrible, and sorrowful, rage in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.[12] Thus, the godly would have understood despair as both sinful and emotionally terrifying. As Perkins comments, **"**For

[8] Ibid. SS, Q. 20 Art. I, Obj. 2
[9] Ibid., Art. 3
[10] cogitatio stulti peccatum est et abominatio hominum detractor *si desperaveris lassus in die angustiae inminuetur fortitudo tua* erue eos qui ducuntur ad mortem et qui trahuntur ad interitum liberare ne cesses
[11] De Sum. Bono ii, 14
[12] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Henry Wordsworth Longfellow (New York: Modern Library, 2003), Canto III [originally translated 1882, originally published 1321]; Christopher Marlow, *The tragicall history of D. Faustus (*London, 1604) Act. I, Sc. 3; John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), I.84-124 [originally published 1667]

he which despairs, makes all the promises of God to be false: and this sin of all other is most contrary to true saving faith."[13]

With regard to terminology, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, 'despair' and 'desperation' could be used to define the same spiritual state, or they could be used more narrowly, to refer to lesser or greater states of agony. The result is that at points – in the sermons, treatises, biographies used in this study – it is relatively easy to understand what is specifically being referenced. At other times it must be inferred, based on the context, tone or imagery utilized, that what is being discussed is despair.

This increased engagement with despair was felt more keenly by puritans because of their pronounced emphasis on 'heart religion,' an outgrowth of the 'experimental' nature of their tradition, which is discussed in the second and third chapters of this study.[14] At times we even see despair bleeding into suicide, and this was of particular concern to divines. An examination of suicide, however, with its accompanying social, political and economic factors, is not within the purview of this study.[15] Neither will literary treatments of despair be a focal point.[16]

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[13] William Perkins, *A treatise tending unto a declaration whether a man be in the estate of damnation or in the estate of grace*, ch. 40.

[14] The term "experimental predestinarianism" was first used by R.T. Kendall. He uses this term because, firstly, 'experimental' was the word used by puritans themselves. Secondly, because of its 'useful ambiguity' since it refers to experience as well as the 'testing [of] a hypothesis by an experiment,' referring to the godly use of the syllogism. cf. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 8-9. See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The precisionist strain: disciplinary religion and Antinomian backlash in puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 63-105; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The practice of piety: puritan devotional disciplines in seventeen-century New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), intro; Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's caress: the psychology of puritan religious experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 137-201

[15] See Michael MacDonald & Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless souls: suicide in early modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 15-87, 144-176, Figures 1.1, 7.1; Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan malady: a study of melancholia in English literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State College Press, 1951) 143-175; S. E. Sprott, *The English debate on suicide: from Donne to Hume* (La Salle, Il., Open Court, 1961)

[16] Winfried Schleiner, *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance* (Wiesbaden : In Kommission bei Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), 317-330, 112-123; W. I. D. Scott, *Shakespeare's Melancholics* (Folcroft, Pa.:

Puritans are often described as the 'hotter sort of Protestant.' What does this mean? For them the 'sensible world comes with a reinforced brilliancy and relief – all the redness turned to blood, all water into tears.'[17] Any definition of puritans must take into account this heightened spiritual dynamic, which not only manifested itself physically – in, for instance, the smashing of 'popish' relics like stained glass in churches – but mentally as well, in their despairing postures. An incident, indicative of the perennial tensions between puritan and state during the reign of Charles I, took place in 1633 in Salisbury. Henry Sherfield, a devout puritan, was brought before Archbishop Laud in the Star Chamber for breaking a stained glass window at St. Edmundsbury, Salisbury. The records show that "the stained glass – said to be very 'ancient and fair' – depicted the story of Creation in a way which greatly offended Sherfield, who sat in the church facing it for 20 years."[18] He cited the 'profane representation of God the Father – represented as a little old man in a blue and red coat' as affronting him such that he 'picked out with his staff the part of the window' with the offending image.

With this intensity in mind we should understand that puritan – as a modern descriptor, as a contemporary jeer, as a term loaded with nostalgia – is structurally difficult to define. Lake, in "Defining Puritanism – Again?," singles out three approaches to defining puritanism. The first is derived from Patrick Collinson, and defines puritanism as a movement, specifically one which "involves a commitment to further reformation in the government or liturgy of the Church."[19] This is a particularly precise

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Folcroft Library Editions, 1973), ch. 1 & 3; Bridget Gellert Lyons, *Voices of melancholy: studies in literary treatments of melancholy in renaissance England* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1971), ch. 2.

[17] Walter Horatio Pater, 'Aesthetic poetry' from *Appreciations* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1889), 4

[18] *The culture of English puritanism, 1560-1700,* eds. Christopher Durston & Jacqueline Eales (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 107

[19] Peter Lake, 'Defining Puritanism – Again?' in *Puritanism: transatlantic perspectives on a seventeenth-century Anglo-American faith,* Francis J. Bremer, ed., (Boston: Massachusetts historical Society, 1993), 3-

definition, because it places actions of non-conformity or reform within the sphere of puritanism, while actions that benefitted the status quo can be set aside as non-representative of puritanism. The issue that arises with such an approach is that it neglects the experimental and emotional aspects peculiar to the puritan tradition. And if puritanism was predicated on attempts at reform in relation to the English Church, it would simply "appear and reappear like the smile on the face of a Cheshire cat, according to the circumstances of local or national politics."[20]

The second approach, seen in R. Greaves, focuses on puritanism as a "style of piety … producing distinctive structures of meaning whereby the world and the self could be construed, interpreted, and acted on."[21] Within this approach there are two thrusts. One sifts through various godly approaches to such things as Sabbath observance, household worship, experimental predestinarianism and particular types of providentialism, and points to puritanism as a "distinctively zealous or intense subset of a larger body of reformed doctrines and positions.[22] The focus of the second thrust is on examining the tendencies that construct a distinctive puritan style, which is accomplished by an appraisal of puritan thought.

29; See Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan puritan movement* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967), 71-92; Nicholas Tyake, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 29-58

[20] ibid., 4; This phrase originated with Conrad Russell, See C. Russell, *Parliaments and English politics, 1621-1629* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 121

[21] Lake, 'Defining Puritanism,' 5; See R. Greaves, *Society and religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1981)

[22] Lake, 'Defining Puritanism,' 4; See *The English sabbath: a study of doctrine and discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

The third approach was developed more recently and can be seen in Collinson, M.G. Finlayson and J.C. Davis.[23] It focuses on "puritan style" as too closely linked to other forms of reformed or protestant thought, and as a result argues that

> Contemporaries' use of the word puritan and the deployment of images or characters of the archetypal puritan are now best seen as exercises in literary game playing and polemical maneuver, rather than as references to any very stable or coherent puritan position existing in the world independent of those literary and stereo-types.[24]

Such an approach is seductive. Many of the caricatures of puritans obviously worked to marginalize them politically and socially. But this approach does not place the emphasis on the mentality crucial in any discussion of the godly. Lake utilizes an amalgam of the second and third approach, which is the most useful way of describing the godly. Puritanism can be drawn as a "distinctive style of piety and divinity," which is not composed of distinct 'puritan elements,' but rather should be viewed as a synthesis of certain elements, found among the godly as well as in other reformed movements, that when combined result in a certain 'puritan style.'[25] The result is that "puritan" emerges as something ideologically and polemically constructed. It is an unstable construct but it can be broadly looked at as a variety of Reformed protestantism dedicated to reforming England, and (particularly after 1590) to crafting a new type of Reformed devotion (containing such elements as sabbatarianism, household worship, fasting and an experimental predestinarianism that "encourages … believers to seek assurance that they

[23] See Patrick Collinson, *The puritan character; polemics and polarities in early seventeenth-century English culture*, William Andrews Clarke Memorial Library Paper (Pasadena, CA, 1989), ch. 3; M.G. Finlayson, *Historians, Puritanism, and the English Revolution: the religious factor in English politics before and after the Interregnum* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), ch. 4.
[24] Lake, 'Defining Puritanism,' 5
[25] Ibid., 6

were chosen by God for salvation”).[26] But of chief importance is the intensity of their religious experience. Robert Greene, a puritan writing in the early seventeenth century, recounts how he told his companions that “the preacher’s words had taken a deep impression upon my conscience … [and] they fell upon me in a jesting manner, calling me puritan and precisian.”[27] This remark is telling in that it reveals the dialectic between the two sides of protestant religion – the objective realm of doctrinal truth and the subjective religious experiences of the godly.[28] These two elements of protestant religion collided, with spectacular results, in the practical divinity of Perkins.

[26] See John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim, ‘Introduction’ in *Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-18
[27] quoted in John Spurr, *English puritanism, 1603-1698* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998, 18
[28] Peter Lake, *Moderate puritans and the Elizabethan church* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1982), 155

CHAPTER ONE: PREDESTINATION AND THE DESPAIR OF SPIRA FRANCIS

And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again.[29]

A central aspect of Reformed theology – the doctrine of predestination – produced despair among the godly. This doctrine was not the sole cause of godly despair, but the links between this doctrine and the despairing postures of the godly can easily be understood – both by the modern interpreter and by puritans themselves in the early modern period. The furor surrounding one story of despair, centering on the psychic trials of a mid-sixteenth century Italian protestant, is evidence for a sustained engagement with despair by the godly.

Though the doctrine of predestination is differently emphasized in Calvin, Beza and Perkins, certain features predominate. Predestination, as defined by Calvin in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) is

> God's eternal decree, by which he determines with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal conditions; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others.[30]

The former are the elect, the latter, the reprobate. The number of each cannot be increased or decreased.[31] This doctrine, which has been termed double predestination, serves as an explication of God's grace, since, as Calvin wrote, "our salvation comes

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[29] William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, ed. John Margeson (Cambridge: Cmbridge University Press, 1990), III.ii.

[30] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III.xxi.5

[31] Predestination is not predicted on foreseen works. As Calvin notes in his commentaries on Romans (9:11): 'We have then the whole stability of our election inclosed in the purpose of God alone: here merits avail nothing, as they issue in nothing but death; no worthiness is regarded, for there is none; but the goodness of God reigns alone. False then is the dogma, and contrary to God's word, — that God elects or rejects, as he foresees each to be worthy or unworthy of his favor.' John Calvin, *Commentaries on the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Romans*, ed. & trans John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, no date), Romans 9:11

about solely from God's mere generosity … God of his mere good pleasure preserves whom he will, and moreover … he pays no reward, since he can owe none."[32] This is because of God's sovereignty, which itself provides reason enough for the notion that God owes nothing to humanity. But even beyond this is the reality that all of humanity welters in a state of damnation, a relic of Man's first disobedience, and thus deserves nothing.[33] Calvin used Augustine's analogy of a lender to describe God's mercy and righteousness.[34] Just as a lender can remit payment from one debtor, or exact it from another, so too can God extend mercy or act as a just judge.[35]

Perkins adopted this characterization of predestination. *A Golden Chaine* states, "Predestination hath two parts: election and reprobation. Election is God's decree, whereby on his own free will he hath ordained certain men to salvation, to the *praise of the glory of his grace*."[36] Perkins hammers in the notion of God's grace further in a section enumerating "the uses which may be made of this doctrine of predestination." Use III is to show that "God is most wise, omnipotent, just and merciful."[37] In relation to

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[32] *Institutes*, III.xxi.1

[33] 'Damnation' should be differentiated from 'reprobation'. Both elect and reprobate are born into damnation, because of Adam's Fall, but it is only the elect that can climb out of this state. Thus, the title of Perkins' first widely disseminated work: *A treatise tending unto a declaration whether a man be in the estate of damnation or in the estate of grace: and if he be in the first, how he may come out of it: if in the second, how he maie discerne it, and persevere in the same to the end* (1589). See R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3-5 for a discussion of the misuse of these terms.

[34] See Pseudo-Augustine, *On Predestination and Grace* iii.3; Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance* xii.28, in *Institutes* III.xxiii.11.

[35] *Institutes* III.xxiii.11; Beza is also in line with this characterization of predestination. He presents the argument: Question: But must they needs perish that are ordained to damnation? Answer: What is more rightful, than that God should punish sin? And to whom is he bound to shown mercy? Therefore I am not wont to marvel that any man perish, but rather I marvel that God's goodness be so great, as that all do not perish. Theodor Beza, *Questions and answers* (London, 1574), 85-6

[36] full title: A golden chaine, or the description of theologie: containing the order of the causes of saluation and damnation, according to Gods woord. A view of the order wherof, is to be seene in the table annexed. …. Hereunto is adioyned the order which M. Theodore Beza used in comforting troubled consciences. Perkins, *A Golden chaine*, (London, 1600), 23 [originally published 1590 in Latin as *Armilla aurea* , and in English in 1591], italics mine

[37] Perkins, *A golden chaine*, 23

this point, Perkins cites Ephesians 1:5, which states that God, 'hath predestinate us, to be adopted through Jesus Christ in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.' An examination of this verse in the Geneva Bible (1560) reveals that Perkins – in relaying the doctrine of predestination as indicative of God's mercy – is in accord with the gloss on this particular section of Ephesians, which states 'The principle end of our election is to praise and glorify the grace of God.'[38] The main features of predestination are thus (1) God foreordained some to salvation and some to hell – the elect and the reprobate respectively, (2) this number cannot be increased or decreased and (3) this doctrine is an explication of God's will and divine grace.

The Elizabethan puritan response to a particular story, the life and agony of an obscure Italian protestant who died in 1548, is evidence of a sustained engagement with despair in relation to this doctrine – an engagement that took the form of a continuous dialogue between divines and their flocks. The record of this life marks the inflorescence, if not the beginning, of the godly's engagement with specific cases of despair. That Italian, Francis Spira, had "worldly goods, offices and promotions abundantly," but because of avarice – he was promised power and position by Catholics to convert – recanted his protestant faith twice.[39] He fell deeply into despair, believing that he was numbered among the reprobate, and for eight weeks argued passionately – with himself

[38] The Geneva Bible first appeared in 1560 and was translated by William Whittingham, Anthony Gilby, Miles Coverdale and William Cole – all Marian exiles who even though Calvinist in temper, as Patrick Collinson has pointed out, it would be anachronistic of us to label puritans. It was the main Bible read and studied by puritans. Its many 'profitable annotations', which were distinctly Calvinistic in temper, were instrumental in crafting how the godly understood the Bible. Though first printed in 1560, it was not printed in England until 1575. Within two years two pocket and four folios editions were produced, and between 1578 and 1583 sixteen editions of the Geneva Bible were printed. Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) , 35 & 165

[39] Matteo Gribaldi, *A notable and maruailous epistle of the famous Doctor Mathewe Gribalde, professor of the law, in the vniuersitie of Padua: concerning the terrible iudgement of god, vpon hym that for feare of men, denyeth Christ and the knowen veritie: wyth a preface of Doctor Caluine*, 1550. Attached is a 'godly prayer against Desperation.'

as well as with others – for his own damnation. This drama was witnessed firsthand by prominent protestants of the time, such as Pietro Paolo Vergerio, Matteo Gribaldi, Henry Scrymgeour and Sigismund Gelous.[40]

The despair evinced by Spira is a despair rooted in Reformed theology, specifically concerns over election. The Calvinist footprint in the narrative is readily apparent. For instance, Spira is quoted as crying out:

> This is my case … God hath deprived me of hope, this brings terror to my mind and pines [*sic*] this body which now is so weak … for as the Elect have the Spirit testifying that they are the sons of God, so the Reprobates even while they live, do often feel a worm in their conscience, whereby they are condemned already, and therefore as soon as I perceived this wound inflicted on my mind and will, I knew that I wanted the gifts of saving grace, and that I was utterly undone.[41]

This mirrors Calvin's *Institutes*, which states that the "reprobate never receive anything but a confused awareness of grace, so that they grasp a shadow rather than the firm body of it."[42] Spira believed that he had grasped merely the shadow, since "nothing prevents God from illuminating some with a momentary awareness of his grace, which afterward vanishes."[43] The heterodox base of this despair is the notion that God is impotent, for the despairing soul cries out that God cannot save him, thereby challenging the supremacy of God.[44]

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[40] Celesta Wine, "Nathaniel Wood's Conflict of Conscience" in *PMLA*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Sep., 1935), 664; Michael MacDonald, "The Fearefull Estate of Franics Spira: Narrative, Identity, and Emotion in Early Modern England" in *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan., 1992) 33. See George Hunton William, *Radical Reformation*, (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992, 3rd edition), 580-635, for a useful look at mid-sixteenth century protestantism on the continent

[41] Nathaniel Bacon, *A relation of the fearefull estate of Francis Spira: in the yeare 1548* (London, 1638), 124-5

[42] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.ii.10.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Lake, *Moderate puritans and the Elizabethan Church*, 218-9.

Spira presented a troubling case for divines. Gribaldi, who published the first English translation of this narrative in 1550, argued in the preface that "Spira suffered himself to be led away to this false formulation … he fell into many traps, and entangled himself in many snares of desperation … he strangled himself.[45] In the narrative, Spira, attended by divines, argued that he was damned along with Judas and Cain. Gribaldi sought to comfort him, ineffectually, by telling him that these mental torments were merely the "illusions and motionings of the Devil." Gribaldi also argued that if all the sins in the world were in one man, it would be nothing compared the smallest part of God's mercy.[46] Spira was constantly urged to simply call out to God with all of his heart, but he continually refused, claiming that his heart was full of "hatred, cursing and blasphemy and that he was stricken in "heart, spirit conscience" by God who had sent into "his heart a gnawing worm and an unquenchable fire."[47] According to Gribaldi, at one point the varied divines gathered around Spira believed they had relieved him of his despair when Spira recited the Lord's Prayer and began to weep. Spira acknowledged God's mercy and grace at this point, but he persisted in the belief that it did not apply to him, and thus continued on in his despair. At this point the divines begin to debate among themselves the estate of Spira and whether his trespasses were mortal or not.[48] But what is of most interest is that the divines left Spira. Several days before Spira expired, one of the divines again commanded him to say the Lord's Prayer. But, according to Gribaldi, Spira said it 'no more with such affectation of heart."[49] He declared that he no longer called God father, but rather cursed him, and demanded that those seeking to comfort him

[45] Gribaldi, *Marvelous epistle*, preface (no page numbers – image 6 of 57)
[46] Ibid. image 9 of 57
[47] Ibid., Image 11 of 57
[48] Ibid., Image 16 of 57
[49] Ibid., Image 19 of 57

should depart, since they labored in vain. Along with these despairing statements, Spira also indicated that he might commit suicide. The divines departed after this, though they urged Spira's family to ensure that he was "continually [in] … the company of godly men, that the blessed God (if it were possible) by the continual prayer and comforting of good men, might vouchsafe to grant him his mercy."[50] The next day Spira was taken to Citadella, where he refused food and died short thereafter, in November 1548. Thus, not only did the divines leave at the moment when Spira was most vulnerable, they even doubted that he could be recovered to the kingdom of God. These two elements represent the failure of divines to both combat despair and comfort the troubled believer.

Various eyewitness accounts of Spira's trials were cobbled together, and a narrative was published in 1550 in Latin, with a preface by Calvin.[51] The first English edition of this story was published by Gribaldi the same year. Several English versions of the story were written during the Elizabethan period, most notably by John Foxe in his *Actes and monuments* (1564), popularly known as *Foxe's book of martyrs*, Nathaniel Woodes in his morality play *Cases of conscience* (1581) and Thomas Beard in his *Theater of gods judgment* (1597).[52] The most famous retelling of the story is Nathaniel Bacon's 1638 version, *A relation of the fearefull estate of Francis Spira*.[53]

The godly were quite familiar with Spira's tale of despair, as it was frequently used in polemics aimed at the doctrines of the Roman Church. These polemics crafted a world in which papists sought to corrupt the godly, through the lure of wealth and

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[50] Ibid., Image 20 of 57
[51] *Francisci Spierae, qui quod susceptam semel Evangelice ueritas professionem abnegasset, damnassetque, in horrdendam incidit desperationem, historia* (Basel, 1550).
[52] John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable* (London: Imprinted by John Daye 1583); *Nathaniel Woodes, an excellent new commedie, intituled, the conflict of conscience* (London, 1581; Thomas Beard, *The theatre of Gods judgement* (London, 1597)
[53] Wine, "Nathaniel Woodes," 668

influence, or by threat of force. In 1555, the protestant martyr John Bradford, made famous to the godly through *Foxe's book of martyrs*, linked together Lot's wife, Judas Iscariot and Francis Spira as among those who denied Christ, and he prayed that believers might not take their example, but instead be strengthened in God's grace to fight against Catholics that sought to corrupt them.[54] In 1570, Thomas Drant, chaplain to Edmund Grindal, Bishop of London (later Archbishop of York, then Canterbury) preached furiously against the Church of Rome, calling it a "foul strumpet … that will in the end plunge man's soul in desperation, in conflict, and in hell. Such peace tasted Francisus Spira … that died in desperation."[55]

Spira's despair, however, also presented a problem for divines, in that he represents the spiritual loss of one of their own. Godly divines sought to reconcile this disturbing narrative by stating that Spira *was* among the reprobate and thus received his due. This is seen in Gribaldi, writing in the 1550's, as well as by Thomas Rogers (d. 1618). He argued in 1581 that those who killed themselves, such as Cain, Judas and 'in our age Franciscus Spira' did so by the "testimony of their gnawing conscience, which accuses them continually of heinous and manifold crimes, in cursed state, and condition."[56] The same analysis of Spira is also found in speeches, sermons and treatises written by Walter Haddon (d. 1571), Edwin Sandys (d. 1588), Archbishop of York,

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[54] John Bradford, *An exhortacion to the carienge of Chrystes crosse wyth a true and brefe confutacion of false and papisticall doctryne*, (London, 1555), 151; See *The Writings of John Bradford edited for the Parker Society*, ed. Aubrey Townsend, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1848-53). Foxe, *Actes and monuments*; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), Ch. 12 & 13

[55] Thomas Drant, *Two sermons preached the one at S. Maries Spittle on Tuesday in Easter weeke …. and the other at the Court at Windsor*, (London, 1570), 35

[56] Thomas Rogers, *The general session conteining an apologie of the most comfortable doctrine concerning the ende of this world, and seconde comming of Christ*, (London, 1581), 77

William Charke (d. 1617) and Thomas Morton (d. 1659), Bishop of Durham.[57] In these instances Spira's background is not mentioned, merely his name in passing, which indicates the immediate familiarity his name and story would have held for the audience. Spira's agony did not belong to the puritans, but it was recognized that the godly clung to the story with singular fervor. Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London (1597-1604), Archbishop of Canterbury (1604-1610), who with John Whitgift (Archbishop of Canterbury (1583-1604) was grimly determined to bring the godly into conformity with the Church of England, mentioned Spira in a polemic aimed at the "seditious and conspiratorial propositions" of certain English ministers.[58] Bancroft claimed that these ministers stated that if people put certain of their doctrines in practice they will be comforted, if not, "their consciences shall be wounded with hell like torments, they shall despair and seek to hang themselves with Judas, to murder themselves with Frauncis Spira*;* drown themselves with Judge Hales, or else fall mad with Justice Morgan, at Geneva.[59]

In Chapter 40 of Perkins' magisterial *A treatise tending unto a declaration whether a man be in the estate of damnation or in the estate of grace* (hereafter referred to as *Whether a man*), Perkins acknowledged that there is great debate about Spira.

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[57] Walter Haddon, *Against Ierome Osorius Byshopp of Siluane in Portingall and against his slaunderous inuectiues An aunswere apologeticall,* (London, 1581), 83; Edwin Sandys, *Sermons made by the most reuerende Father in God, Edwin, Archbishop of Yorke, primate of England and metropolitan,* (London, 1585), 323; William Charke, *An answeare for the time, vnto that foule, and wicked Defence of the censure, that was giuen vpon M. Charkes booke, (*London, 1583), 95; Thomas Morton, *Two treatises concerning regeneration,* (London, 1597), 30. After the turn of the century Spira was still held up as an example of despair. See Cotton Clement, *The mirror of martyrs* (London, 1613), 121; Stephen Jerome, *Seauen helpes to Heauen Shewing …* (London, 1614), 20; Miles Mosse, *Iustifying and sauing faith distinguished from the faith of the deuils* (London, 1614); Thomas Wilson, *Saints by calling* (London, 1620), 25.

[58] Richard Bancroft, *Daungerous positions and proceedings published and practised within the iland of Brytaine* (London, 1593), 38; Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan movement* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1967), Part 8, 2-4; Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), ch. 7; Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), ch. 9 & 10.

[59] Bancroft, *Daungerous positions and proceedings*, 38

Despair of God's mercy is a dangerous sin, Perkins wrote, which can befall man through various ways. Spira, because of "abjuration of the truth, through compulsion and fear" fell into desperation.[60] Perkins argued, however, against the protestant consensus that Spira was a reprobate. *Whether a man* states that "they are much overseen that write of him as a damned creature." This is because in the midst of his desperation Spira cried out that "he felt his hardness of heart," which for Perkins indicated Spira was not 'bereft of all goodness.'[61] Perkins was aware that many among the godly experienced the same despair that Spira experienced, and he did not wish to resign them to the dismal fate. Throughout his various writing Perkins constantly emphasized that Spira was not a reprobate and should not be judged as such.[62]

Perkins and Rogers discussed despair more extensively than earlier divines. Part of the reason for this lies in the period. The 1580s and 1590s saw the formation of casuistry and other forms of systematization that framed how despair, and other theological concerns, would be discussed throughout the seventeenth century.[63] The effect of personalities should also be taken into consideration when considering the spike in works of practical divinity. Divines such as Perkins, Rogers and Richard Greenham (d. 1594) were uniquely placed to engage with such an issue. They were centered at Cambridge, which gave them access to not only the academic resources of the University but the laity as well, with whom they could put their rhetorical and apologetical talents to

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[60] Perkins, *A treatise tending unto a declaration whether a man be in the estate of damnation or in the estate of grace* (London, 1590), 46
[61] Ibid., 46
[62] cf. *A golden chaine*, 30-65 & *An exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles according to the tenour of the Scriptures* (London, 1595), 13-24.
[63] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The later Reformation in England 1547-1603* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 2nd edition, 49

good use in their frequent sermons.[64] The particular efficacy of Perkins in these matters will be discussed presently. General societal trends, such as the continual rise in literacy and the explosive growth of the printing press during this time also contributed to the popularity of these works of practical divinity.[65]

Even though there is a slight shift in Spira references, from the focus on temporal persecution in Bradford's time to inward spiritual trials in that of Perkins, the focus stays the same: Spira as representative of a particular type of despair protestants were uniquely vulnerable to. The tragedy of Spira resonated with the godly because the agonies he expressed, that "I have been always a reprobate and cursed … I am condemned to eternal death," are agonies peculiar to Reformed theology.[66] Spira became, as Michael MacDonald notes, a Protestant *topos*, an emblem of the struggles and agonies of despair.[67] We are at a disadvantage in chronicling such despair among the godly, since much of the evidence available is by those who create, rather than partake, of sermons and treatises. And much of the evidence is recorded second-hand after the turn of the century. But this narrative resonated and perplexed divines throughout the seventeenth

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[64] An example is found in Greenham. He would begin his weekday sermons at Cambridge at first light so that his parishioners could hear him preach before they had to go to work. His preaching was so enthusiastic that "his shirt would usually be as wet with sweating, as if he had been drenched with water." After his morning sermon he would change into dry clothes and "walk into the Fields, and … confer with the Neighbors as they were at Plough." Rylands MS 524, fols. 5v-6r, 43v in Eric Josef Carlson, "'Practical Divinity': Richard Greenham's Ministry in Elizabethan England" in *Religion and the English people 1500-1640*, ed. Eric Josef Carlson (Kirkville, Missouri: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1998), 147-201, 171-2

[65] However, David Cressey, using the ability to sign one's name as a measure of literacy, has argued that the period from 1560-80 was a period of educational growth in which literacy radically increased, while the period from 1580-1610 was a period of educational recession, marked by decreasing rates of literacy. David Cressey, *Literacy and the social order: reading and writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). But the oral nature of sermons, coupled with the cheapness of books allowed for divines to disseminate their knowledge widely (Watt notes that book prices were steady from 1560 to 1635 while wages rose by a half to two-thirds and other commodities doubled). Tessa Watt, *Cheap print and popular piety 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 260; Margaret Spufford, *Small books and pleasant histories: popular fiction and its readership in seventeenth-century England* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia press, 1981) ch. 2, 3 & 8

[66] Gribaldi, *Marvelous epistle*, 15

[67] MacDonald, *Sleepless souls*, 40

century. Richard Baxter, for instance, in his *Christian Directory* (1673) declared that the "The reading of *Spira*'s case, causes or increases Melancholy in many … contracted by the trouble of sinning against Conscience."[68] John Bunyan wrote that Spira's case "rubbed salt" into his "freshly wounded mind."[69] Spira merits mention in a narrative of despair by Robert Bolton, as well as a sermon by John Preston (where he remarks that Spira "died with those desperate words in his mouth, I am Damned as well").[70]

The unrelenting discussion around Spira's despair thus serves as an indication that divines were participating in a dialogue, particularly in the late sixteenth century, about why their flock was despairing and how to assuage that pain. The casuistry of Perkins was a natural outgrowth of these preoccupations. As Perkins noted in the dedication to *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 'there is no one doctrine … of greater use and consequence in the life of man [than that] which prescribes a form of relieving and rectifying the conscience … for it serves to discover the cure of the dangerous sore than can be, the wound of the spirit.[71]

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[68] Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory, or, A summ of practical theologie and cases of conscience directing Christians how to use their knowledge and faith, how to improve all helps and means, and to perform all duties, how to overcome temptations, and to escape or mortifie every sin* (London, 1673), 312
[69] John Bunyan, 'A few sighs from hell,' in the *Miscellaneous works of John Bunyan*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 259-264
[70] Robert Bolton, *The last conflicts and death of Mr. Thomas Peacock* (London, 1646), 2; John Preston, *Plenitudo fontis, or, Christ's fulnesse and man's emptinesse* (London, 1645), 14
[71] Perkins, *The first part of the cases of conscience,* 1604 [originally published 1596]

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONSTRUCTION OF DESPAIR

As it is written, I have loved Jacob, and have hated Esau. What shall we say then?
Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.[72]

Despair of one sort or another was infused into the puritan tradition. Predestination, as crafted by Calvin and filtered down to Beza and Perkins, was not specifically constructed to elicit despair (even though Calvin recognized that 'wrong' considerations of this doctrine could cast the believer into despair).[73] Nonetheless, despair was created among believers.

This element of Reformed doctrine formed the intellectual matrix within which the godly and the ungodly despaired. Calvin championed the notion of double predestination. Perkins upheld this idea, but with a marked difference. Calvin urged the believer to consider predestination strictly with regard to scripture, and to avoid extraneous consideration of it. Perkins, however, commanded a "descending into our own hearts" which would allow believers to know, conditionally, if they were among the elect.[74] The result was prolonged rumination on one's state of grace, which in turn could induce despair. This evolution from Calvin to Perkins is illuminated through an examination of Theodor Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva and a contemporary of Perkins.

Calvin, as well as Beza and Perkins, argued for the notion of 'temporary faith,' the belief that the reprobate could experience much the same feelings of faith and grace that the elect could. This 'taste of the heavenly gift' can be given by God in order to

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[72] Romans 9:13-14, Geneva Bible (1560)
[73] See *Institutes* III.xxiv.1-6
[74] William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creed*, 439; Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 75. In the *Cases of Conscience* Perkins declares one of the 'sundry and erroneous ground of doctrine' of the Papists is their belief that, "no man can be assured by the certainty of faith, either of the present favor of God, or of his own salvation." *Cases of Conscience*, 79

render the reprobate even more convicted and inexcusable.[75] The ramifications of this stance are obvious. Believers could become convinced that their faith was but a temporary one, and begin to despair. The trials of Francis Spira are a clear exposition of how these two elements could induce despair among protestants.

Before engaging with these elements, an aside needs to be taken to discuss the doctrine of predestination in more depth. Predestination is not a free-standing doctrine. It must be considered in relation to the doctrine of salvation. In the *Institutes*, the discussion of predestination follows Calvin's explication of salvation. As Richard A. Muller observes, this doctrine "naturally comes into relation with the doctrine of faith and church, of word and sacrament … it is a doctrine of central importance – but only in relation to its temporal anchor, the work of Christ."[76] This Christocentric balance stays the same in Beza and Perkins. However, there is disagreement in the current scholarship concerning the exact character of Perkin's theology.

Basil Hall argues that "with Perkins we can see, as with Beza, a more severe, more speculative, and less biblical version of the doctrine of grace, lacking Calvin's attempt to give it Christocentric emphasis."[77] Ian Breward argues that the second generation of reformed theologians (such as Zanchius, Beza and Perkins) consciously worked to knit up the gaps they perceived in Calvin's theology.[78] They thus "addressed themselves to the task of rendering the predestination citadel immune from attack … [and] the end product was a more speculative doctrine of predestination than Calvin's,

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[75] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), v. 2, III.xxv.9

[76] Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and predestination in reformed theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1986) 25

[77] Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. Gervase Duffield (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1966), 19-38, 25; Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 8

[78] *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Appleford, Abingdon, Berkshire, England: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 82-3

lacking his Christocentric emphasis."[79] In much the same way, the stated aim of Kendall's *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* is to "reassess the assumption that Calvin's soteriology was faithfully upheld by the venerable divines who drew up the Westminster Confession and the Shorter and Larger catechisms."[80]

What is central to the arguments of Hall, Breward and Kendall is a belief that Calvin's teachings were distorted by Beza and Perkins.[81] Muller, however, argues that this is a mistaken view, a direct result of these scholars defining Perkins's *A golden chaine* (1590) – which contains a detailed diagram on predestination – as a complete work of doctrine. Muller declares, working from August Lang, that *A golden chaine* should not be construed as a complete presentation of Perkinsian thought, but rather a portion of it.[82] *A golden chaine* only touches upon doctrines that deal with assurance, and Perkins' *An exposition of the creed* (1595) contains a much more expansive and comprehensive explication of his theology.[83]

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[79] Ibid., 82

[80] Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," 29

[81] For different views as to the character of Perkins' theology see Hill, who declares that Perkins' primary obsession was the "doctrine of justification by faith alone and the powerlessness of fallen man to work his own salvation" (Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and revolution: studies in the interpretation of the English revolution in the 17th century* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 217). Both August Lang and Heinrich Heppe argue for pietism as the overweening factor for Perkins, as well as striving for a mystical union with Christ. Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des pietismus und der mystik in der reformirten Kirche* (Leiden, 1879), 25; August Lang, *Puritanismus und pietismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 120, See Muller, *Christ and the decree*, 132. Even though Lang agrees that with respect to many of Calvin's doctrines Perkins is a 'good Calvinist theologian', he notes the independent nature of Perkins' theology: "So bewährt er sich im übrigen auch hier als ein gut calvinischer Theologe … Perkins' Calvinismus ist aber nicht so aufzufassen … Wir müssen vielmehr sagen: er hat sie sich in starker Eigenart selbst erarbeitet." Lang, *Puritanismus* 120

[82] Particularly if we consider that the phrase 'Golden Chaine' (*armilla aurea*) is the name that was traditionally given to the *ordo salutis* [order of salvation] of Roman 8:29-30. See Muller, *Christ and the decree*, 132.

[83] Richard A. Muller, "Perkins' A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo salutis?" in The Sixteenth Century Journal, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Apr., 1978), 81; Perkins, A Golden Chaine; Perkins, *An exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles according to the tenour of the Scriptures, and the consent of orthodoxe Fathers of the Church,* 1595. In *An exposition of the symbol*, Perkins does not discuss predestination until after salvation

A partial reconciliation, however, can be effected if we take into account how these scholars approach the theology of Perkins. Perkins' theology is Christocentric, but the emphasis reflects a deep engagement with predestination. This engagement was itself tied to Perkins' focus on practical divinity, in particular how to deal with those grappling with issues personal and terrifying.

As Hall has observed, "what Calvin had described as a profound mystery, a labyrinth to be avoided in ordinary pastoral oversight, Perkins had made into a commonplace of the religious life."[84] As a result, some believers focused on predestination; it stirred them, agonizing their consciences and haunting their ceaseless reflections on the eternal mysteries of God. In response to this desolation, produced by these teachings, Perkins produced sermons and treatises that focused even more intently on their struggle. This relationship between divine and laity is a dynamic one, for both were keenly aware of the movements of the other. This is what leads Breward, Hall and Kendall to place such an emphasis on predestination in their studies of Perkins, for this preoccupation of some of the godly is mirrored in his writings, and they pick up on this unease. Muller strictly appraises the core of Perkins' theology and finds it Christocentric, as it is. But there is a marked difference between the carefully marked out theology of a divine and what is preached, as well as what is emphasized and fixated upon by the believer.

We should recognize that predestination rests, however uneasily, within a "larger complex of soteriological motifs."[85] As Muller notes, "within that complex it functioned as the keystone of a doctrinal arch, having a unitive significance within the structure of

[84] Kendall, *Calvin against the Calvinists*, 30
[85] Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 22

Calvin's thought."[86] That keystone, hewn and laid down by Calvin, remains the same in Beza and Perkins. What shifts is Perkins' peculiar belief about how the believer should reflect upon that keystone.

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The central argument in Calvin's theology is for the sovereignty of God. This is the axis from which all his doctrines and dicta spin off.[87] In light of this, the reason for Calvin's insistence that believers consider predestination strictly with regard to Scripture and to seek assurance in Christ alone is clear.[88] Calvin's discussion of predestination in the *Institutes* is prefaced by a note of caution that prefigures the dilemma of the godly:

> Let them remember that when they inquire into predestination they are penetrating the sacred precincts of divine wisdom. If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit. For it is not right for man unrestrainedly to search out things that the Lord has willed to be hid in himself, and to unfold from eternity itself the sublimest wisdom, which he would have us revere but not understand that he might fill us with wonder.[89]

This passage links directly to Calvin's strenuous efforts to assert the sovereignty of God throughout the *Institutes*.[90] This distinction is drawn so that the believer will not search for signs of outward election – for this would lead to a "reducing [of] the quest for assurance to empiricism," which would result in both agonizing reflection and a

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[86] Ibid.
[87] See Richard A. Muller, *Post reformation reformed dogmatics: the rise and development of reformed orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), Vol. 2, 72-77 & *passim*
[88] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 14
[89] *Institutes*, III.xxi.2
[90] An example of this continuous and exhaustive effort can be seen earlier in the *Institutes* (II.xiii.4), when Calvin discusses how even though Christ came down in human form, his divine nature was never circumscribed within that 'narrow prison of an earthly body.'[90] He cites I Corinthians 15:47 to shore up this notion: 'The first Adam was of the earth, an earthly and natural man, the Second of the heaven, heavenly.' This characterization (later termed the *extra calvinisticum*) highlights "Calvin's ever present concern for maintaining the sovereignty of God while on the other it demonstrates his effort to underscore the reality of Christ's human nature and its identity with the nature of all men." (Muller, *Christ and the decree*, 20) Calvin thus effectively bridges Christ's 'two bodies.'

diminution of God's sovereignty.[91] Calvin argues "how insane are we to seek outside of [Christ] what we have already obtained in him, and can find in him alone?"[92] However, Calvin acknowledges that "this does not prevent believers from feeling that the benefits they receive daily from God's hand are derived from that secret adoption."[93]

Calvin is thus not particularly clear on the extent to which the believer should penetrate into the mysteries of predestination or the exact methods through which one can be assured of salvation. Even though he asserts continuously a 'learned ignorance' and for "us not to be ashamed to be ignorant of something in this matter," he recognizes that believers are curious and anxious about this doctrine, and seek to infer their estate through both inward and outward measures.[94] He thus advises that Scripture always be presented to the believer, since "Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know."[95] Calvin does not advocate ignoring the doctrine of predestination – in fact he argues scornfully against those who "desire to bury predestination in order to not disturb weak souls" – but rather that predestination should be considered strictly in relation to scripture and in Christ.[96]

His commentaries on the biblical verses that discuss predestination (most notably Romans 8:29-30) emphasize predestination as a form of succor, since it allows believers to understand that even though they are grieving and afflicted by sin, this anguish is

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[91] Muller, *Christ and the decree*, 26
[92] Institutes, III.xxix.5
[93] *Institutes*, III. xxiv.4
[94] Institutes, III.xxi.2
[95] Ibid.
[96] Calvin was most likely referencing certain ministers at Bern, where a policy was circulated 7 December 1551 calling for a "cessation of discussion of the predestination issue for the sake of the tranquility and peace of the church." cf. note by NcNeill, Institutes III.xxi.5

"conformity with the humiliating state of Christ [which] is for our good."[97] Calvin emphasizes the elect in these passages, rather than the reprobate, and his commentary is directly addressed to them:

> That the afflictions of the faithful, by which they are now humbled, are intended for this end — that the faithful, having obtained the glory of the celestial kingdom, may reach the glory of Christ's resurrection, with whom they are now crucified.[98]

In his commentary on Ephesians 1:5 Calvin emphasizes once again the elect, and argues again that election serves as succor, for it is given without merit. Calvin furthermore, in explicating Paul, asserts that it is through God's good pleasure that some are predestinate to life. He also argues against 'sophists' who try to 'mingle' other considerations into the doctrine of predestination. In Calvin's reckoning, the believer should consider predestination merely as an expression of divine grace and God's will.[99] In his commentaries on John he chastises those who fall prey to "foolish and pernicious curiosity … [and] attempt to go to God by indirect and crooked paths. They admit that there is nothing better than knowledge of God; but …. wander through their own speculations."[100]

This links once again to the sovereignty of God, for Scripture is the inspired Word of God to the Church, the "the Lydian Stone, by which she tests all doctrines."[101] However, such an explication of how the believer should consider predestination is

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[97] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Romans*, ed. & trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, no date), 8:29-30
[98] Ibid.
[99] To shore up this point Calvin quotes Paul, who "so strongly forbids us to look at anything else than the good pleasure of God" John Calvin, *Commentaries on the epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, no date), Ephesians 1:5
[100] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle, Volume 2, Christian Classics, (Grand Rapids, MI: Ethereal Library, no date), John 14:7
[101] John Calvin, "Reply by Calvin to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter," trans. Henry Beveridge in John Calvin, *Tracts Relating to the Reformation*, Volume 1, 25–68 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), 37

ultimately unsatisfying. Calvin essentially argues for mental restraint in considering Scripture, even though the mere act of reading Scripture involves intense reflection. And he advocates that believers should look to Christ, whom he calls "the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election."[102] These nebulous distinctions would be reworked by Beza and Perkins.

With Beza and Perkins there is a shift. Instead of avoiding 'wrong' discussion about predestination,[103] which Calvin likened to a "rock against which no one ever dashed without destruction" they advised believers to strike out boldly and discover for themselves the promises contained within.[104] This was accomplished through the use of the practical syllogism. To understand this shift we must return to Calvin. In brief, Calvin believed that Christ died for all men. [105] Beza did not. He believed that Christ died sufficiently for all the world, but efficiently for only the elect. This leads him to the conclusion that believers can search inwardly for confirmation of their election, using the practical syllogism, in the process supplanting Calvin's previous warning against such introspection. Perkins took up Beza's interpretation, and hammered in its use.[106]

As Beza argues in *A briefe and piththie summe of the Christian faith* (1565), Christ "is the onely [sic] whom the father hath ordained from everlasting … to save his elect and chosen by him."[107] In the same text, in the section chronicling the "Summe of the Accomplishments of our salvation in Jesus Christ" Beza declares that after Christ's death, he "ascended visible and verily into heaven, where he is set on the right hand of

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[102] Institutes, III.xxix.5
[103] That which is outside of Christ and Scripture
[104] Institutes III.xxiv.4
[105] In *Acta Synodi Tridentinae: cum antidote* (1547), a refutation of the decrees issued by the Council of Trent, Calvin states that he has no comment on the decree issued that Christ died for all men.
[106] This analysis drawls largely on R.T. Kendall's *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, chpts 1-2; See Beza, *Tractationes Theologiae* (Geneva, 1582) Vol. I, 344, 362, 418
[107] Beza, *A briefe and piththie summe of the Christian faith*, 1565

god his father and hath taken possession … of his eternal kingdom for us and for … whose sake also he is only mediator and advocate … until the number of [those] elected of god his father be accomplished and fulfilled.[108]

The grounds of assurance are thus shifted. The elect cannot look to Christ and make him, as Calvin states 'the mirror of our election,' because he died only for the elect. In Calvin's scheme Christ died for all, and so all are freely elected.[109] But in the Bezian scheme, this surety cannot be accessed. Beza thus advocates that believers look inside themselves.

> Now when Satan puts us in doubt of our election, we may not search first the resolution in the eternal counsel of God … but on the contrary we must begin in the sanctification which *we feel in ourselves.*[110]

This sanctification marks one as among the elect: 'Behold now both the effects, which if we feel working in us, the conclusion is infallible, that we have faith, and consequently Jesus Christ is in us unto eternal life as is aforesaid."[111] As Kendall notes, Beza has turned to the practical syllogism, "the *knowledge* of faith is the 'conclusion' deduced by the effects. It is as though Beza says: all who have the effects have the faith; but I have the effects, there (the infallible conclusion) I have faith."[112] We see this reliance on the practical syllogism in Perkins, specifically in *Whether a Man*, in which he states

> Major Premise: Every one that believes is the child of God.
> Minor Premise: But I do believe.
> Conclusion: Therefore I am the child of God.[113]

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[108] ibid, 22. This view, that the decrees of election and reprobation were crafted before the Creation and Fall, is known as supralapsarianism. The term was coined around the time of the Synod of Dort (1618-19),
[109] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 32
[110] Beza, *Briefe and pithie*, 36; Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 33
[111] Beza, *Briefe and pithie*, 26; Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 33
[112] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 33
[113] Perkins, *Workes*, i. 541.

The use of the practical syllogism opens the door to intense introspection, for it relies on the evaluation of an internal spiritual dynamic, rather than resting purely on an assurance in Christ.[114]

Another element that could cause the godly to despair was the notion of temporary faith. In *A golden chaine's* diagram (Appendix A), Perkins carefully lays out what constitutes temporary faith. The chart begins with three interconnected circles: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (which, even though this diagram is an explication of predestination, points to the Christocentric nature of Perkins' theology). Under the Trinity are two circles – in the first is written 'God's foreknowledge and his decree,' underneath the other is written 'Predestination.' Here is where the diagram branches off – a line goes from Predestination to a circle on the right in which is written 'the decree of Reprobation.' Another line goes from 'Predestination' to a circle on the left in which is written 'the decree of election.' These two paths – election and reprobation – dominate the diagram. It should be noted that predestination is placed before three circles in which is written 'Creation,'' the fall of Adam,' 'the state of unbelief' which was engendered by the Fall. This diagramming potently expresses Perkins' supralapsarian views.[115]

Under the 'decree of Reprobation' is a line going down into a circle in which is written 'God's hating of the reprobate' and from this statement branches off the two paths

[114] Muller argues against this reading of Calvin. He argues that in the Calvin points to an assurance derived not simply from Scripture and Christ but also from the effects of the "application of Christ's work and from the effects of the hearing of the gospel." He looks to the *Institutes* III.xxix.5 to shore up the argument that Calvin does not expressly deny the practical syllogism, but merely warns against its misuse. (Muller, Christ and the Decree, 25). However, Wilhelm Niesel (who, Muller argues, misrepresents Calvin's stance toward the practical syllogism) argues that Calvin expressly warns against the use of the syllogism (he cites, Institutes III.xxiv.4, where Calvin states that our "conscience feels upon consideration of our works more fear and despondency than confidence." (see Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 170, 175. I agree with Muller on this point

[115] This is the belief that God's decrees of election and reprobation are logically preceded by the Fall.

that reprobates can follow. Reprobates can either receive' no calling,' or a 'calling not effectual.' The latter includes a 'general illumination,' 'penitence,' 'temporary faith' 'a taste' and zeal'. But this is followed by the deceit of sin and the hardening of the heart, apostasy and relapse. The two paths – 'no calling' and 'ineffectual calling' – converge and lead ineluctably to death in eternal hell. After this the diagram shows that all of this is a 'declaration of God's justice,' while everything that those under the decree of election went through is a 'declaration of God's justice and mercy'. In the end the two main paths – reprobation and election – converge to show that all of this was for God's glory.

Much of this diagram is derived from Beza's *Tractiones theolgiae* (1570-82) (see Appendix B), which includes a chart titled *Summa totius christianismi, sive descriptio & distributio causarum salutis electorum & exitii reproborum, ex sacris literis collecta.* The most noticeable difference is the bareness of Perkins' diagram (Beza's diagram contains a snake, putti and scrolls, while Perkins' diagram merely contains texts within circles that are connected by lines of varying boldness).[116] Perkins' chart is an intellectual elongation of Beza's, though the core – two main paths (election and reprobation), along with a branching of reprobation (calling ineffectual and no calling), and an exit at '*gloria dei ex aeterno'* remains the same. The influence of Peter Ramus (d. 1572), a French protestant whose anti-Aristotelian logic became influential among Calvinist theologians in England and on the continent, is also readily apparent, though Beza was a fierce opponent of Ramist thought.[117] Ramus excelled at crafting dichotomies, and this overwhelming

[116] Richard A. Muller, "Perkins' A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo salutis?" in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Apr., 1978), 75-81; *Work of William Perkins*, 171
[117] Gordon Campbell, "The Source of Bunyan's Mapp of Salvation" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtald Institutes*, Vol. 44, (1981), 240; See Walter J. Ong, *Ramus: method, and the decay of dialogue; from the art of discourse to the art of reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958) for a more

emphasis on demarcation, as well as the practical nature of Ramist methodology (Ramus declared "the end of doctrine is not knowledge of things itself, but practice and exercise") appealed not only to Perkins, but to English divines before him (such as Laurence Chaderton) and after him (William Ames' *Marrow of Practical Divinity* is a striking example).[118] The results of this delimiting is seen in Perkins' construction of despair, to be discussed presently.

In the text of *A Golden Chaine* Perkins lays flesh to the bones of the diagram. In reprobates that are called ineffectually there is a threefold progression: acknowledgment of God's calling, a falling away again, and condemnation.[119] This acknowledgment includes five degrees. The first is an enlightening of the mind. The second is a certain penitence whereby the reprobate both acknowledges their sin, feels God's wrath, grieves for the punishment of that sin, confesses, acknowledges the justness of God, desires to be saved, and promises repentance in his misery. The third is a temporary faith, which interests us here. The fourth is a tasting of heavenly gifts, as of Justification and Sanctification, and the fifth is an outward holiness for a time, under which is "comprehended a zeal in the profession of religion."[120] That third degree is clarified by Perkins to be a state:

> whereby the reprobate does confusedly believe the promises of God, made in Christ, I say confusedly because he believes that some shall be saved, but he believe not, that he himself particularly shall be

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thorough examination of Ramist methodology; Ramus' major work was *Commentariorum de religione Christiana*, (Frankfurt, 1576)

118 Keith L. Sprunger, "Ames, Ramus, and the Method of Puritan Theology" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Apr., 1966), 136-146; See Richard Baxter, in the introduction to his *Methodus Theolgiae Christianae* (London, 1681) or John Bunyan's *A map shewing the order and causes of salvation and damnation* (London, 1692) for other examples of Ramist methodology (filtered through Perkins) among English divines.

119 A Golden Chaine, Ch. LIII 'Concerning the execution of the decree of Reprobation'

120 Ibid.

> saved, because he being content with a general faith does never apply the promises of God to himself, neither does he so much as conceive any purpose, desire, or endeavor to apply the same, or any wrestling or striving against security or carelessness and distrust.[121]

The differences, then, between this temporary faith of the reprobate and the faith of the elect appears to be that the elect apply the promises of God (through utilizing the practical syllogism), while the reprobate never do.[122] This explication is ambiguous, and Kendall sums it up fittingly, "If a desire to be saved is not a desire to apply the promise, one must ask of Perkins what such is."[123]

Thus, reprobates can go through many of the same motions – emotionally and intellectually, inwardly and outwardly – of the elect. All of this is done to render the reprobate even more inexcusable before God.[124] But the one thing that differentiates them is a nebulous distinction between applying the promise and not applying the promise, between believing that some will be saved and that they personally will be saved.

The shift in emphasis from Calvin to Beza and Perkins is important in that it opens the door to speculation on predestination, a doctrine which every Reformation theologian, from Luther to Perkins, acknowledged was fraught with complexities that could induce despair. Calvin dealt with this issue by sternly forbidding extraneous consideration of predestination, and to simply look to the Scripture and to make 'Christ the mirror of your election.' Such an approach is in line with his heavy emphasis on the sovereignty of God. In constructing predestination in such a fashion, however, he left

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[121] Ibid.
[122] The notion of temporary faith has its genesis in Calvin's *institutes* (II.ii.11). Calvin states that "experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected by almost the same feeling as the elect … although there is a great likeness and affinity between God's elect and those who are given a transitory faith, yet only in the elect does that confidence flourish." He continues that that main difference is that the "reprobate never receive anything but a confused awareness of grace, so that they grasp as a shadow, rather than the full body of it."
[123] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 69
[124] ibid. III.xxv.9

tantalizing lacunae that were quickly filled by Beza and sealed shut by Perkins. They too understood the dangers of predestination, but their solution was to not look upward, but inward, within the believer, to ascertain assurance of election. The fruit of this labor was a laity primed for desperation.

CHAPTER THREE: PERKINS AND DESPAIR

Let him … fall out of all love with himself, nay hate and abhor himself and his own baseness: and lastly, let him despair of his own salvation in or from himself: and thus doing, he forsakes himself, denies himself, and even looses himself.[125]

In examining Perkins three elements crucial to the understanding of godly despair emerge. (1) A distinction must be made between godly despair and ungodly despair, (2) the conscience figures in as an intermediary between God and believer, and as both comforter and chastiser and (3) various temptations, particularly by Satan, afflict the godly and foment despair.

Before engaging with Perkins' practical divinity, an examination of his life is critical to understanding why Perkins is instrumental to a complete understanding of despair. Perkins was the innovator of English casuistry, the "the science or art of resolving particular cases of conscience through appeal to higher general principles."[126] For instance, in the *Cases of Conscience* Perkins addresses what types of recreation are allowed, the 'right, lawful and holy use of apparel' and how one might 'rightly use meats and drinks.'[127] As his first biographer, Thomas Fuller, noted in *The Holy State and the Profane State* (1642), before Perkins protestants were deficient in case-divinity (casuistry) and often had to go the enemy (Catholics) to "sharpen their instruments."[128] Perkins' style of practical divinity and casuistry served as a template for later protestant casuistry, and greatly influenced the style and content of preaching throughout the

[125] William Perkins, *A cloud of faithfull witnesses, leading to the heauenly Canaan* (London, 1607)
[126] Thomas F. Merrill, *William Perkins 1558-1602, English Puritanist, his pioneer works on casuistry: a discourse of conscience and the while treatise of cases of conscience* (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. De Graaf, 1966), xiii
[127] Ibid., 192-213
[128] Thomas Fuller, *The holy state and the profane state*, ed. Maximilian Graff Walten (New York: Morningside Press, 1938), 88 [originally published 1642]

seventeenth century.[129] More importantly, Perkins seized upon despair and grappled directly with it. The subject was discussed by other influential divines of the period – Laurence Chaderton (d. 1640), Greenham, Thomas Rogers (d. 1616) and John Dod (d. 1645) are but four examples – but the clarity, elegance and popular appeal of Perkins' practical divinity make him essential to understanding despair among the godly.[130]

Perkins was born in Marston Jabbett, a Warwickshire village, sometime during 1558.[131] He was enrolled in June 1577 as a pensioner in Christ's College, Cambridge, where Fuller notes that there was an "uncontrolled tradition, that Perkins … was a great studier of Magic."[132] Fuller, however, quickly dismisses this charge, though he admits that Perkins "was very wild in his youth till God graciously reclaimed him."[133] In a later work by Fuller, *Abel Redivivus* (1651), a description of figures instrumental to the Protestant Reformation, Fuller heightens Perkins' involvement in magic, describing him as "much addicted to the study of natural magic … [such that] some conceived he bordered on hell itself in his curiosity."[134] This Faustian preoccupation with magic no

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[129] Perkins' influence was also felt through his disciples: Paul Baynes succeeded Perkins as lecturer at St. Andrew's Church in Cambridgeshire. William Ames's *Medulla Theologiae* (London, 1623) was immensely influential throughout the seventeenth century and served to link the thought of Perkins, Richard Greenham and Richard Rodgers to the divines of the early and mid seventeenth century, in old and New England alike.

[130] At Perkins' death, in 1603, his works were outselling those of Calvin, Beza, and Bullinger combined; see Laurence Chaderton, *An excellent and godly sermon, most needefull for this time* (London, 1578); *A fruitfull sermon, vpon the 3.4.5.6.7.&8. verses of the 12. chapiter of the Epistle of S. Paule to the Romanes* (London, 1584); Richard Greenham, *Paramythion tvvo treatises of the comforting of an afflicted conscience*, (London, 1598) & *Propositions containing answers to certaine demaunds in divers spirituall matters specially concerning the conscience oppressed with the griefe of sinne* (London, 1597); Thomas Rogers, A Pretious Booke of Heavenlie Meditations (London, 1581); John Dod, *Foure godlie and fruitful sermons two preached at Draiton in Oxford* (London, 1610)

[131] Louis B. Wright, "William Perkins, Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity'" in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Jan., 1940), 172; *Work of William Perkins*, 3

[132] *Holy State*, 88

[133] Ibid., 89

[134] Thomas Fuller, *Abel Redivivus, (London,* 1651), 432-3; *Work of William Perkins*, 7

doubt served, in a method favored of puritan hagiographers, to highlight how terrible man's lot was before he was reclaimed by God.[135]

Perkins received his B.A and M.A. degrees, and was soon drawn into the orbit of two eminent puritan divines: Chaderton, fellow of Christ's College, and Greenham, of Pembroke College. Both were part of the moderate puritan movement which Lake has detailed so exhaustively.[136] Perkins career, however, was more similar Greenham's. Not only did Perkins eschew Chaderton's fervent appeal for presbyterianism, but in Perkins' earliest published tracts we see an engagement with issues particular to Greenham.[137] Greenham was concerned about practical issues, such as hunger among the poor and not only do his writings reflect this engagement; he went out and sold corn at prices below market value to the needy.[138] Perkins' *A fruitfull dialogue concerning the end of the world*, published in 1588, argues against astrology, covetousness and other issues particularly important at the time. A dedication written in 1609 by the editor, W. Crashaw, indicated it was "first written again covetous hoarding of corn … and was published in a year of death."[139] In this treatise Perkins spoke plainly and evocatively of the issue at hand. Not only did he describe Satan as one that "goes about like a hunger-

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[135] Several of Perkins early work dealt with astrology – *Foure Great Lyers, A Resolution to the Countriman, A Fruitfull Dialogue concerning the End of the World* (London, 1587)
[136] Lake, *Moderate puritans*, chpt. 3 & *passim*
[137] See *Work of William Perkins*, 10; Collinson, *Elizabethan puritan movement*, 412-455 for evidence that Perkins was not closely associated with the classis movement, in particular evidence that he only attended one meeting at Cambridge.
[138] Concerning usury, for instance, Greenham writes, in his own exercise of practical divinity: A certain man that was an Usurer, asking him how with a good conscience he might use his money, he said: Occupy it in some trade of life, and when you can lend to the poor, do it freely & willingly, and that you may henceforth labour as well against covetousness in occupying that trade." Greenham, *Grave counsels and godly observations*, 1612; Wright, "Elizabethan Apostle", 172
[139] William Perkins, "A fruitfull dialogue concerning the end of the world" in *The workes of that famous and worthy minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins.* (1631), 460-6. See J.F.D. Shrewsbury, *A history of bubonic plague in the British Isles* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970) & Paul Slack, *The impact of plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1985) for an examination of responses to epidemic and famine during the period.

bitten lion, seeking whom he may devour," but the treatise is presented as a conversation between two plain-men, Christian and Worldly, who meet on the road to Cambridge. Perkins skillfully combined pathos: 'but in truth you are murders' says Christian to Wordly, 'because many are famished by your hoarding up of corn;' biblical imagery: 'you are the rich men of which it is said, *to be an impossible thing for them to enter into the Kingdom of heaven: and except with speed ye repent, ye shall find it to be so*' and rage: 'But these rackers of rents, and these inclosers, they are unmerciful men: surely they eat the bread of oppression: and the *very stones in the walls* and the *beams of their fair* buildings cry unto God for vengeance unto them.[140] In this we see that the rich simplicity of a Spenser or Bunyan is not simply relegated to high literature or popular apologetical works, but also the carefully plotted theological treatises of Perkins, to great effect.[141] One of his last published tracts, *A treatise of the vocations, or, callings of men, with the sorts and kindes of them, and the right use thereof*, was issued 1603, a year after he died, and in it we see this same populist emphasis. A pithy explication of Elizabethan bourgeois ethics, *A treatise of vocations* details the earthly and spiritual duties of believers.[142] Each should choose the vocation they are best suited to and stay there. To do so serves God, to do otherwise risks his wrath.

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[140] Perkins, "A Fruitfull dialogue," (461-465; Perkins misquotes (Matthew 19:23), in the process heightening the stakes for Wordly (and the covetous reader). Both the 1560 and 1587 editions of the Geneva Bible read: 'Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall *hardly enter* unto the kingdom of heaven.' italics in the original

[141] Lang notes the similarities between Perkins and Bunyan, with regard to the "warm, simple and vivid language" utilized by both - "Manche seiner Ausführungen lesen sich wie Bekehrungspredigten. An einer stelle wird man durch Perkins' warme, einfache und zugleich bildhaft packende sprache geradezu an bunyans pilgerreise erinnert." August Lang, *Puritanismus und Pietismus: Studien zu ihrer Entwicklung von M. Butzer bis zum Methodismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 122; For a discussion of the effect of Perkins' treatises see Lori Anne Ferrell, 'Transfiguring Theology: William Perkins and Calvinist Aesthetics' in *John Foxe and his World*, eds. Christopher Highley & John N. King (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002)

[142] Wright, "Elizabethan Apostle," 181. It was not until Richard Baxter's *A Christian Directory* (1673) that the ideas contained in *A treatise of the vocations* was significantly expanded

This attention to the needs of the everyman is a constant in the writings of Perkins, but it is also witnessed in what we know of his preaching. In discussing Perkins, another biographer, Samuel Clarke, cites Augustine's wish, that "Christ when he came might find him *aut precantem, aut praedicantem,* either praying, or preaching."[143] Fuller writes that after Perkins entered the ministry, "the first beam he sent forth shined to those which sat in darkness and the shadow of death," that is, prisoners at Cambridge who are further described as "wanting the means of their salvation, bound in their bodies … and feared in their consciences."[144] This preoccupation on Perkins' part, to reaching out and directly engaging with those at the very edge of losing their faith, is part of a peculiar puritan emphasis on preaching.[145] And Perkins excelled at this. The sternness and rigor of his preaching and written works was noted by contemporaries, and indicate Perkins' particular efficacy in rousing strong emotional responses from those who were touched by his ministry. As Perkins lay dying, John Cotton – who would become a godly minister to New England – heard the bells toiling for him at Cambridge and "was secretly glad in his heart, that he should now be rid of him, who had … laid siege to, and beleaguered his heart."[146] The anti-puritan poet and bishop Richard Corbett (d. 1635), in a poem titled *Distracted puritane* has his speaker declare: I observ'd in Perkin's Tables / The black lines of damnation: / Those crooked veins / So struck in my brains, / That I fear'd my

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[143] Samuel Clarke, *A mirrour or looking glasse both for saints and sinners*, (London, 1654), 56
[144] Fuller, *Holy State*, 89
[145] In 1559, when Thomas Sampson, Marian exile, was picked for the bishoprics of Hereford and Norwich he told Peter Martyr at Zurich "Let others be bishops; as to myself, I will either undertake the office of a preacher or none at all." This sentiment is mirrored in the words of another returned exile, John Parkhurst, who declared 'let others have their bishoprics, my Cleeve is enough for me." Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 46-7. Bishop Hugh Latimer (d. 1555), protestant divine and martyr, also declared "take away preaching, and take away salvation. Hugh Latimer, *Sermons and remains*, ed. G. E. Corrie (2 vols., Cambridge, 1844–5), i. 155.
[146] Clarke, *A mirrour*, 56

reprobation."[147] Fuller notes that in his sermons Perkins would pronounce the word "'*Damn'* "with such an emphasis as left a doleful echo in his auditors ears a good while after."[148] Fuller remarks as well that his fiery sermons were almost able to make the 'hearers' hearts fall down' and their hairs stand up.[149]

His treatises were also instrumental in crafting how divines conceived of and discussed despair, as well as other issues, with the laity.[150] Charles Richardson, a London minister declared four authors necessary for the godly minister: Perkins, Greenham, Dod and Andrew Willett.[151] James Usher, Arch-Bishop of Armagh, Primate, and Metropolitan of Ireland, is recorded as having taken down notes from Perkins "concerning the sanctification of the lord's day." They were so effectual that he strictly observed the Sabbath from that moment on.[152] Perkins' disciple, William Ames, declared in the preface of his *Conscience with the power and cases thereof* his thanks to the "most grave divine, William Perkins, who only of our countrymen has set forth a peculiar treatise of Conscience."[153] Richard Baxter in *A Christian Directory* also declared 'long have our divines been wishing for some further casuistical tractate: Perkins began well…"[154] In

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[147] Richard Corbett, "The Distracted Puritane," in *The poems of Richard Corbett*, J.A.W. Bennet & H.R. Trevor-Roper (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 57
[148] Fuller, *Holy State*, 89
[149] Ibid.
[150] The first three-volume folio edition of Perkins' complete *Workes* was published in 1608-9. Between 1600 and1635 eleven editions of his collected works were put on sale in London – *The foundation of Christian religion* had fourteen editions by 1638 and *A golden chaine* had three Latin and nine English editions by 1612.[150] *A garden of spiritual flowers*, an anthology (inclusion was a mark of an author's popularity), contained eight pages dedicated to Perkins' theology; See Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, "Practical Divinity and Spirituality" in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, eds. John Coffey & Paul C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1910205, 195; For a full listing of Perkins' works see A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave, *A Short-title catalogue of books … 1475-1640* (London, 1926), 450-53
[151] Charles Richardson, *A workman, that needeth not to be ashamed: or the faithful steward of God's house: a sermon describing the duty of a godly minister, both in his Doctrine and in his Life* (London, 1616), 29-30.
[152] Clarke, *A mirror*, 191
[153] Ames, *Conscience with the power and cases thereof* (London, 1639), 2
[154] Baxter, *Christian directory*, 48

New England, Increase Matter in 1693 wrote that among "our English divines there are not many greater Casuists than Mr. Perkins.[155]

Perkins' preaching and writings were aimed at constructing a better life for the laity. In the sermons and treatises addressed directly to them he used language that was accessible and evocative. In his instruction to divines, such as *The art of prophesying*, which became the most important and influential preaching manual for puritans in the seventeenth-century, he argued for the use of plain speech and emphasized direct engagement with the problems faced by the laity.[156] It is clear, then, why the conscience and despair figured so largely in his works. Despair is terrifying, perhaps among the most awesome spiritual experience the godly underwent, and as he declared in the dedication to *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (hereafter referred to as *Cases of Conscience*), the doctrine of relieving the conscience "is the most comfortable … it alone is available to pacify the mind, and to give full satisfaction."[157] Wrestling with despair was thus an inevitable part of Perkins' trajectory.

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In *Cases of conscience*, Perkins defined a 'preparatory despair' that is useful in illuming his view that despair could be either godly or ungodly. The *Cases of conscience* contains three interlocking books titled, respectively, 'Concerning Man simply

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[155] Perkins' writings even had a place in the New England witchcraft hysteria of 1692. Increase Matter declared, with regard to witchcraft, that no one had written "with more judgment and clearness of understanding" than William Perkins. Perkins' methods for discovering witches (found in his, *A Discourse of the damned art of witchaft; so farre set forth as revealed in the scriptures and manifest by true experience* (1609)) was commended by Mather. See Increase Mather, *Cases of Consicence concerning Evil Spirit* (1693), 31,67 and postscript & Wright, "Elizabethan Apostle," 187

[156] First published in Latin, it was translated into English in 1607 and was later attached to his popular collected *Workes* (1612-18).

[157] William Perkins, "The Whole Treatise of the Cases of the Conscience" in *William Perkins, 1558-1602, English puritanist*, ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1966), 81; *The whole treatise of the cases of conscience* was originally a collection of sermons, delivered by Perkins in his Holy-day lectures, and then revised by him and printed as treatises.

considered in himself, without relation to another,' 'Concerning Man as he stands in relation to God,' and 'Concerning Man, as he stands in relation to Man.' Bk.1, Chpt. V, Sect. 1, begins with the question: "What must a man do, that he may come into God's favor, and be saved?"[158] Perkins argued that "in the working and effecting of Man's salvation, ordinarily there are two special actions of God: the giving of the first grace and after that, the giving of the second." The former of these two has 'ten actions.' The first four of these Perkins terms the 'works of preparation.' First, God gives the 'Ministry of the word,' (so that persons have the outward means of salvation). To some God also sends inward or outwards crosses, to 'break and subdue the stubbornness of our nature.' Secondly, God makes believers think about the Law. This is done so that persons can understand what is good and what is evil. Thirdly, God makes believers see their own particular sins. Fourthly, God 'smites the heart with a Legal fear … he makes [them] to fear punishment, and hell, and to despair of salvation, *in regard of anything in himself*.'[159] What is critical here is that Perkins named despair as essential to salvation, yet he qualified it immediately by declaring that this despair is in regard of anything in himself, i.e. that the person despairs *of their own ability* and not that of God. As noted above, despair is otherwise a sin because it presumes that God's promises are false, thereby challenging his sovereignty. Perkins' preparatory despair does not challenge God. Even though all of these preparatory actions are instigated by God, the despair is not aimed at God; rather, it is a despair forged from believer's belief that they are inadequate and that they particularly lack the means of effecting their own salvation. Reformed theology had an incredible emphasis on God's grace as the only means to salvation; believers cannot

[158] Ibid., 102
[159] italics mine

do anything to enact their own salvation. Thus, this twofold conclusion – that the believer is inadequate and cannot do anything to attain their own salvation – slots in nicely with Reformed theology. Perkins' qualification concerning despair is further illumined in *A Golden Chaine*. There, he stated firmly that "doubtfulness and despair are most grievous sins" however, he makes a distinction between despair that is effectual and non-effectual despair.

> All kind of desperation is not evil. For when a man despairs of himself and of his own power in the matter of his salvation, it tends to his eternal comfort. But final desperation is, when a man utterly despairs of the pardon of his own sins and of life everlasting.[160]

Perkins thus neatly dealt, theologically, with the central reason why Aquinas declared despair a sin – the argument that God is not all-powerful. Other theologians made this distinction as well. William Willymat (d. 1615) observed, there is 'a wicked kind of Desperation of God's promises, power, goodness and mercy … [and another] holy desperation of man's own defects, infirmities, and corruptions."[161] Perkins is theologically sound in this arrangement, but for the believer, caught in the throes of despair, this splicing of terms can lose its coherence. In a fashion, the only difference between godly despair and ungodly despair is if the person recovers, since the motions of both are so similar.

So a distinction must be made between despairing about God and despairing over oneself. This is further complicated, however, by Perkins' statements, concerning the

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[160] Perkins, *Golden chaine*, 63

[161] William Willymat, *Cure for Desperation*, (London, 1604), 3

This 'splicing' of terms is not an innovation. Calvin described, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 7:11, a sorrow according to God, and a sorrow according to the earth. The sorrow of the earth is "when men foolishly, and without the fear of the Lord, exult in vanity, that is, in the world, and, intoxicated with a transient felicity, look no higher than the earth." That of God is "that which has an eye to God, while they reckon it the one misery — to have lost the favor of God; when, impressed with fear of His judgment, they mourn over their sins. This sorrow Paul makes the cause and origin of repentance."

‘works of preparation,’ that both the reprobate and the elect can experience them. So once again, just as one of the main differences between godly and ungodly despair is whether a recovery occurs, so too is one of the main differences between the reprobate and the elect whether or not they continue on to the next six actions, which are ‘the effects of grace (which the reprobate cannot experience),’ that begin with a stirring in the mind of the promise of salvation and culminates in an ‘endeavor to obey [God’s] commandments by a new obedience.’ This process is one that leads to salvation. This iteration of despair is highly subjective and relies heavily on the spiritual state of the believer. In carving out godly against godly despair and a mortification/vivification dialectic with regard to salvation, Perkins is not only systematizing doctrine but controlling how despair is conceived through defining the terms of the debate.

The right sort of despair is thus firmly affixed as a precursor to salvation. There are various permutations of this ‘preparatory despair’ in Reformation thought. Luther wrote of how he had “been offended more than once even to the abyss of despair, nay so far as even to wish that I had not been born a man; that is before I knew how beautiful that despair was, and how near to Grace.”[162] Tyndale wrote similarly that “except hast thou borne the cross of adversity and temptation and hast felt thyself brought unto the very brim of desperation … it shall not be possible for thee to think that God is righteous and just.”[163] This despair is necessary. The problem arises when believers do not emerge from despair, but instead are caught, trapped in a slough of despond into which they begin to sink under the weight of their own wretchedness.

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[162] Quoted by Gordon Rupp in *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), 282

[163] William Tyndale, “Prologue Upon the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans,” in *Doctrinal Treatises*, (London, 1525), 505.

In defining the conscience in *A discourse of conscience,* Perkins constructed the conscience as an element of central importance. Perkins argued that "God in framing the soul placed in it two principal faculties." These two faculties are understanding and will.[164] Understanding is the faculty that utilizes reason, and it dominates the will. The will is the faculty whereby one chooses or refuses something.[165] Understanding is itself divided into the theoretical and the practical. The theoretical 'contemplates between' (meaning it decides what is) truth and falsehood, the practical contemplates between good and bad. The conscience falls under the practical.

Part of the task of this definition is to defend and persuade. Perkins defended his view that the conscience is a distinct "part of the mind or understanding" and that it can thus issue forth judgments.[166] By placing the conscience thus, Perkins made it instrumental to salvation, for to the conscience is given the powers of 'accusing, excusing, comforting, terrifying.' Here already we see the ambivalence that will bleed into despair. The conscience works to both terrify and comfort, with the eventual aim of succor. But there also is Satan, who Perkins argued works to both plunge believers into despair and 'benumb the Conscience.' So despair (non-righteous, one must assume, since Perkins did not delimit here) can be fomented by the devil. But despair (righteous) is also a process engendered by the conscience that believers should accept.

Perkins continued to build up the conscience as indispensable to salvation. He argued that the conscience is more important than science (which judges things to be certain and sure), faith or prudence, because conscience 'goes further yet than all these.' In his reckoning the conscience gives sentence; it is a thing 'placed of God in the middest

[164] Perkins, *A discourse of conscience*, 5
[165] Ibid., 7
[166] Ibid., 7

between him and man, as an arbitrator.'[167] In describing the duties of the conscience, Perkins declared that it 'bears witness of our [secret] thoughts, of our affectations, of our outward actions.'[168] The conscience also passes judgment on things done. The mechanism whereby the Conscience gives judgment is the 'Binder of Conscience,' which has power to order the conscience. The 'Binder of Conscience' can be proper (that which has power – the Word of God, which is broken down into the law and gospel) or improper (that which has no power – human laws, an oath, a promise).[169] In considering how the law binds the conscience, Perkins noted:

> Such persons as are troubled with doubtings, distrustings, unbelief, despair of God's mercy, are to learn and consider that God by his word binds them in conscience to believe the pardon of their own sins be they never so grievous or many, & to believe their own election to salvation whereof they doubt.[170]

Here Perkins once again linked doubting and despair to believer's worries over the wretchedness of their sins. In this case the conscience serves as succor, to comfort believers in their time of distress. But the conscience also chastises, as Perkins noted: "Conscience gives judgment in or by a kind of reasoning … called a practical syllogism."[171] As discussed above, the practical syllogism was utilized by Perkins as a means of assuring one's salvation. But it also works to both accuse and condemn. An example of accusing is:

> Every murder is a sin [says the mind]:
> This thy action is murder [says the conscience assisted by memory]:

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[167] ibid., 7
[168] ibid., 7
[169] The Law itself is divided into moral, judicial and ceremonial. Perkins makes these claims more nuanced. For instance, even though God's authority is sovereign and absolute, he does ordain certain finite and limited powers to men. Thus, the authority of father over child, master over servant and master over his scholar can bind the conscience "as the authority of God's law does." Ibid., 30
[170] ibid., 22
[171] The biblical imperative is plucked from Romans 2:15: 'Which show the effect of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing one another, or excusing.'

> Ergo, this thy action is a sin [says the conscience, and so gives sentence].[172]

Or condemning:

> Every murderer deserves a double death:
> Thou art a murder:
> Ergo, thou hast deserved a double death.[173]

Perkins declared these two actions (accusation and condemnation) of the conscience to be forcible and terrible, for they are "compunctions and prickling that be in the heart."[174] These acts are further compared to stripes from an iron rod upon the heart and to a worm that never dies but always lies "gnawing and grabbling, and pulling at the heart of man … and causes more pain and anguish, then any disease in the world can do."[175] The conscience, which is centered in the understanding, in reason, has its most potent effects on the heart of believers. Perkins also argued that these feelings of anguish are engendered especially after a sin has been done and last long after it has been accomplished (like the consciences of Joseph's brothers, which accused them twenty-two years after they had sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt).[176] There are two elements of interest in Perkins' discussion of accusation and condemnation. First, he acknowledged that this anguish is a brutal and necessary part of the godly experience. Perkins did not seek to minimize the effects of sin, rather he heightens it. But he places this anguish as part of a positive process. The anguish is meant to convict believers, so that they can acknowledge their sins and ask God for forgiveness. This particular crafting of the role of the conscience and anguish gives meaning to the wretched state believers find themselves in. Thus, Perkins injected hope into the very depths of anguish.

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[172] Ibid., 38
[173] Ibid., 39
[174] Ibid., 39
[175] Ibid. 39
[176] See Genesis 42

The effect of this accusing and condemning is to "stir up sundry passions and motions in the heart," and Perkins, in *A discourse of conscience*, described five specific passions in a highly clinical, yet incredibly accessible, fashion.[177] First comes shame, "which is an affectation of the heat whereby a man is grieved and displeased with himself." This displeasure shows itself by blood rising from the heart to face, so that the believer blushes.[178] Next is sadness and sorrow, which Perkins differentiates from melancholy. Melancholy can be cured by physic. Sorrow can only be cured by the blood of Christ. After this is fear, in which all delights and pleasures are driven from believers. According to Perkins, "the guilty conscience will make a man afraid, if he but see a worm peep out of the ground: or a silly creature go cross his way; or if he but see his own shadow on a sudden."[179] These 'terrors of conscience' can even cause 'exceeding heat' similar to the ague, or make one's entrails to rise to the mouth. To shore up this point, Perkins quoted the author of the Book of Wisdom 17:10: "It is a fearful things when malice is condemned by her own testimony, and a conscience that is touched, does ever forecast cruel things."[180] After this comes desperation, whereby believers "through the vehement and constant accusation of [their] consciences come to be out of all hope of the pardon of [their] sins."[181] Perkins commented that this made Saul, Achitophell and Judas hang themselves, and "this makes many in these days to do the like." This process culminates in perturbation, in which believers cannot rest. This completes the first two actions of the conscience (accusing and condemning). From this dynamic springs two

[177] Perkins, A discourse of conscience, 39
[178] Ibid, Romans 6:25 is cited for this physical description: 'What fruit had you in those things, whereat now you blush, or be ashamed?
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.

more actions: excuse and absolve.[182] To excuse is when the conscience decides that something has been well done (such as asking for forgiveness) and to absolve is when the conscience gives judgment that believers are free from fault and punishment.[183] In crafting accusing and condemning in such a fashion, Perkins asserted control over the process of godly despair. These categories work to strait believers, to guide them through a treacherous process that he recognized can lead to ungodly despair. And in describing the physical manifestations of anguish Perkins brought immediacy to his categories and made them more identifiable. In referencing Judas and Saul, and leaving Spira off the list of those that committed suicide because of despair, Perkins once again has asserted that Spira did not die of despair. If believers saw Spira's case (which could closely mirror their own) and understand it as a narrative of a reprobate, they would plunge even deeper into despair. Part of Perkin's effort to control despair was to rework the Spira story, and this particular absence is quite telling.

In the *Cases of conscience*, published posthumously in 1606 (though elements of it are contained in sermons and treatises delivered and published while he was alive), Perkins isolated the causes of despair and lays out a specific treatment. Perkins first argued that distress of mind is "when a man is disquieted and distempered in conscience,

[182] In considering the properties of conscience, Perkins argues that 'an infallible certainty of the pardon of sin and life everlasting' is evident (*Cases of conscience*, 49). How can this be reconciled with the ravages described above? Perkins states that certainty can be either of faith or experimental. Faith can be broken into two types. General, which is to believe that the word of God is true, and Special, which is when by faith believers apply the promise of salvation and believe without doubt that Christ died for us. Experimental comes from sanctification and good works, as 'signs and token of good faith.' Perkins defends the difference between this view and that of 'papists' by declaring that the godly only count the works if they are done in 'uprighteousness of heart,' while Catholics count all works, many of which are done deceitfully. So believers can still despair, and go through the tumult of the various actions described, yet still possess surety. Again, a doctrinally sound assessment, but one that is quite hard to enact.
[183] Perkins, *A discourse of conscience*, 40

and consequently in his affection, touching his estate before God.'[184] Distress of mind has two degrees; the lesser is fear, when believers doubt their own salvation and fear condemnation and the greater is despair, which Perkins noted is not 'a distinct kind of trouble of mind … but the highest degree.' All distress comes from temptation, of which there are five. The first two are organized under the 'temptations of trial.' The first of these is combat of the conscience directly with God, and the second is the 'trial of cross' in which believers suffer, like Job, as examples to the righteous. The next three are organized under 'temptations of seducement.' The first of these springs from Satan and centers on blasphemy. The second results from believer's sins (original and actual), and the last from the believer's corrupted and depraved imagination.[185] Despair is crafted as a battle against temptation, which gives believers something to concretely focus upon, and implies a positive trajectory to the struggle (since it was constantly hammered in that Christ had triumphed over death, hell and the grave and victory was thus assured). In defining the causes of despair Perkins, just as he did in defining anguish and the right kind of despair as necessary preparations for salvation, sought to control despair.

The 'general remedy' is the blood of Christ. Three actions need to be performed to deliver this remedy. First, the distressed person needs to admit what is causing their distress. Once this has been ascertained by the comforter, it must be decided, by the comforter, whether or not the person is in a proper state to receive comfort. That is, are they humbled and sorry of their sin? If so, the comforter may proceed to the third step. If the person is not humbled and cognizant of their wretchedness, the comforter must "in friendly, and Christian talk and conference" bring the distressed person first, to an

[184] Perkins, *Cases of conscience*, 118
[185] Ibid., 119

understanding of their sins and secondly to grieve and be sorry of them.[186] A telling analogy is used here – the comforter must act as a surgeon applying a plaster to a tumor. The aim is to bring that sore to a head, so that the 'corruption may issue out at some one place.' Once this is done, healing can take place. The third action is the 'ministering and conveying of comfort to their mind.' Or, to extend the analogy, to apply healing plasters.[187] Perkins then laid out the 'right way of ministering Comfort to party distressed." This takes the form of four grounds of grace which if believers undergo, will relieve them.

(1) A desire to repent, and believe, in a touched heart and conscience, is faith & repentance itself.
(2) A godly sorrow whereby a man is grieved for his sins, because they are sins, is the beginning of repentance, & indeed for substance is repentance itself.
(3) A settled purpose, and willing mind to forsake all sin and to turn unto God is a good beginning of true conversion & repentance.
(4) To love any man because he is a Christian, and a child of God is sensible and certain note of a man that is partaker of the true love of God in Christ.[188]

Perkins thus controlled the beginning, middle and end of despair. And these grounds are deliberately crafted to be as basic as possible. These grounds do not require much effort. All of these steps hinge on desire – to repent, to forsake sin, to love one's fellow man. Perkins also has a list of six rules for the comforter, the most important of which is that the comforter not be discouraged.[189] The comforter must all never be left alone and never hear of any "fearful accident."[190] In these two rules to the comforter the failures of the divines attending Spira are evident. Near the end, once Spira declared that he no longer

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[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., 119
[188] Ibid., 122
[189] Ibid., 122 He that is the comforter must not be discouraged … the Church of the Canticles seeks for her beloved; but before she finds him, she goes about in the city, through the streets and by open places, passing by the Watchman themselves, and after she has used all mean without help or hope, at length, and not before, she finds her beloved, him in whom her soul delights.
[190] Ibid.

considered God a father, but cursed him, the divines became discouraged and left him. Spira died soon afterwards. And continually through Spira's spiritual agonies, the divines argued with him, rather than soothing him. The divines did not treat Spira as someone in need of concentrated and particular spiritual help, but rather as someone beset by a range of discursive issues. Perkins narrowed how despair was understood. By controlling its definition, its causes, and its solution, he enabled despair to be combated effectively. In doing so, however, he focused heavily on the harsh results of despair, an approach that was a byproduct of the experimental emphasis in puritan theology. That same experimental emphasis also allowed for a relatively straight forward way out of despair – simply desire to be saved, indeed simply desire to believe, and one has begun a process that will lead to comfort and salvation.[191]

[191] In *Whether a Man*, Perkins constructed a dialogue that uses the controlling elements discussed above. In it a character named Eusebius recounts his life, and how he "lived a long time, even as a man in a dead sleep or trance, and in truth I lived as though there were neither heaven nor hell, neither God nor Devil."[191] But Eusebius heard the law preached, and saw the judgments of God upon men and as a result began to consider his own estate and to "to perceive my sins, and my cursedness." As a result he became inwardly afraid, such that his "flesh trembled and quaked and he shed many tears." At this point Eusebius remembers the teachings of the Church, that "David's tears were his drink," but at this point the devil began crying in his ears that he was a reprobate, and "that this grief of my soul was the beginning of hell." But a godly preacher comes to him and prays and Eusebius "received comfort both by the promises of mercies … and by his fervent godly and effectual prayers." This section of the dialogue ends triumphantly, as Eusebius declares that he has "assurance (in spite of the Devil) that I do appertain to the kingdom of heaven, and am now a member of Jesus Christ, and shall so continue forever."

CHAPTER FOUR: DESPAIR WITHIN WIGHT AND BRETTERGH

My soul hath been compassed … with terrors of death, fear within, and fear without, the sorrows of hell were upon me, knots and knorres [sic] were upon my soul … and a roaring wildernesses of woe was within me; but blessed, blessed, blessed, be the Lord my God, who hath not left me comfortless, but like a good shepherd, hath he brought me into a place of rest.[192]

Patterns of despair emerge in the stories of Sarah Wight and Katherine Brettergh. At first blush, these stories appear to be radically displaced from each other. Wight's story is recorded as a biography by Henry Jessey, a divine with Independent leanings. Wight was a child when seized by despair, and the details of her story take place between April and July 1647, a time of crisis and tumult for England in general, and London in particular. The fragmentation of the godly and the growth of various sects, such as Baptists, are seen in the divided spiritual and political loyalties of the many ministers who came to see her.[193] Brettergh's story is contained in a funeral sermon, written and preached in 1601 by godly divines.[194] Brettergh was married with a child when she was overtaken by the illness that would plunge her into despair. Though she died of that

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[192] William Harrison, *Deaths aduantage little regarded, and The soules solace against sorrow Preached in two funerall sermons at Childwal in Lancashire at the buriall of Mistris Katherin Brettergh the third of Iune. 1601 …Whereunto is annexed, the Christian life and godly death of the said gentlevvoman* (London, 1601), 34

[193] For instance: Captain Edward Harrison, who was a Particular Baptist preacher and chaplain in the Fifth Monarchist Thomas Harrison's regiment and Joshua Sprigg, an antinomia; Henry Jessey, *The exceeding riches of grace advanced by the spirit of grace*. (London, 1647), 5. See also Barbara Ritter Daily, 'The Visitation of Sarah Wight: Holy Carnival and the Revolution of the Saints in Civil War London' in *Church History*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Dec., 1986), 451-455.

[194] Collinson wrote an influential article arguing against the use of funeral sermons as sources for the devotional lives of their subjects, because of the 'stringent constraints of the genre to which the authors had to conform' (Patrick Collinson, 'A magazine of religious patterns': An Erasmian topic transposed in English protestantism' in *Godly people: essays on English protestantism and puritanism* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983)). However, Carlson argues persuasively for a reevaluation of the efficacy of funeral sermons as sources, because even though they can contain formulaic language (such as comparisons to virtuous women from the Bible) oftentimes such assessments are shored up with personal anecdotes. Lake also observes that since funeral sermons were preached to members of a congregation that intimately knew the deceased, exaggerations and omissions would have been glaringly evident. See Eric Josef Carlson, 'English Funeral Sermons as Sources: The Example of Female Piety in Pre-1640 Sermons' in *Albion*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter, 2000); Peter Lake, 'Feminine piety and personal potency: The 'emancipation' of Mrs. Jane Radcliffe, in *The Seventeenth Century 2* (1987): 6

illness, she did not die of despair. Both stories have quite different political agendas – Wight's narrative is suffused with millenary overtones while Brettergh's is seeded with anti-papal imagery. The core, however, is one of despair. Perkins' discussions of the subject are easily laid upon these narratives and allow for a fuller understanding of the rigors and internal spiritual dynamics of the godly.[195]

In 1647, Wight was fifteen. She had been "trained at a young age by her grandmother in the scriptures" and had come to live with her mother in London at the age of nine.[196] Jessey emphasized her intense piety, noting that "from her childhood she was of a tender heart, and oft afflicted in Spirit."[197] At twelve, Wight had been asked by a superior to "do a small thing" which she thought was wrong. "She did it, doubtingly, fearing it was unlawful" and as she did it "a great Trembling in her hands and body fell upon her."[198] But the greatest challenge came a month later, when:

> After returning home, having been abroad, she had lost her hood, and knew she had lost it. Her Mother asked her. for her hood. She suddenly answered, My Grand-Mother hath it. Her heart condemned her instantly, and trembled again exceedingly … And upon this, she had cast into her Conscience, that she was both a Thief, and a liar, and was terrified ever since, that she was shut out of heaven, and must be damn'd, damn'd.[199]

Wight spent most of the next four years agonizing over her sins, believing, as the biographer gravely recounts, nothing but 'Hell and wrath.' She pursued this path, and

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[195] For a discussion of some of the difficulties in using early modern texts about women, yet written by men, see Collinson, "'Not sexual in the ordinary sense': women, men and religious transactions'" in *Elizabethan Essays*, ed. Patrick Collinson (London: Hambledon, 1994), 119-50.); Spufford, Small Books, chpts. 1,2 & 8; Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting communities: English villagers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), ch. 6, 8 &13;Martin Ingram, *Church courts, sex and marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 125-189; Watt, *Cheap Print*, 315-321

[196] Jessey, *Exceeding riches of grace*, 5

[197] It is recorded that some seven years ago her mother, Mary Wight, also underwent a 'deep terror and distraction of Spirit' that was also soothed. Ibid., 6

[198] Ibid., 7

[199] Ibid., 6

"remained in grievous horror day and night; concluding she was a Cast-away, a Reprobate." Her deliverance came in April of 1647, when she trembled, fell into a trance, and then emerged from her despair, refreshed, and gave a long sermon praising God.

Wight's despair follows the pattern laid out by Perkins. She underwent the 'trial of the cross,'(whereby God 'makes proof of the faith of his children') in that "In her despairing fits … several times [she] would turn to the places in Job, & in Jeremy, where they cursed the day of their birth.*"*[200] Jessey specified Job 3:3, Job 10:18 and Jeremiah 20:14 as the verses she went to continually.[201] These verses all center on spiritual agony, in which the speakers bemoan their spiritual and physical estate. For the speakers in these verses, and for Wight herself, the overweening feature in these despairing soliloquies is an acknowledgement of their smallness and impotence before God. In cursing the day of her birth she longed for nothingness, which she believed would bring the cessation of all spiritual agony. The trial of the cross is an existential crisis. Like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Wight felt herself trapped in Doubting Castle, and beaten down by Giant Despair. The agony expressed by Christian, that "The life that we now live is miserable. … [and] my soul chooses strangling rather than life, and the grave is more easy for me than this dungeon," is an agony felt keenly by Wight.[202] This is why she "oft attempted wickedly to destroy herself, as by drowning, strangling, stabbing, seeking to beat out her brains."[203]

The 'combat with God' (when the Conscience 'directly and immediately' combats with God) is witnessed in how Wight, "being strongly carried on in that temptation [that

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[200] Perkins, *A discourse of conscience*, 119
[201] Jessey, *Exceeding riches of grace*, 12
[202] John Bunyan. *The Pilgrim's Progress From This World to That Which is to Come; Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream*. (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), VII [originally published 1678]
[203] Ibid., 7

there was was no God, no Devil, no Heaven, and no Hell, but what she felt within her], that there was no other Hell, but here in the conscience" continually threw a cup against a wall declaring that if it broke it meant there was no other Hell. She threw the cup five times before a chip came loose.[204] In this passage Wight was challenging God by seeking to make the natural world speak against Him. But not only was she challenging God, she was declaring that nothing exists but her own particular agonies. Despair has blotted out everything else – it is more powerful than the Word of God, than the assurance that can be ascertained experimentally – and all she felt was pain. The 'temptations of seducement' are also present, particular the one from the Devil, the 'blasphemous temptation.' Jessey recorded that Wight "was very forcibly urged to blaspheme God and die, and so be out of her Torment; which yet she refused to speak it out: till at last, she could no longer withhold, but was even ready to utter forth that blasphemy.[205]

Wight's understanding of the temptations of trial is summed up in a conversation she had, once she was recovered, with another child who was in despair. Wight replied to the child, "When you are at the lowest, Christ is readiest to restore soul and body. If you see yourself nothing; and see all fullness in Christ, you are the nearest to comfort … His time is the best time, therefore wait for him."[206] Such a conversation ties in directly with Perkins' notion of why despair is necessary. Wight's mother also prayed that "that the Lord in his good time, would come in to her with his consolations."

Perkins emphasized constant godly care in the application of the 'general remedy,' the blood of Christ. Jessey emphasized how her mother "attend[ed] … on her continually day and night" and also hired a maid "that feared God" to watch over

[204] Ibid., 10-12
[205] Ibid., 60
[206] Ibid., 48

Wight.[207] A host of divines came to Wight to offer comfort, though it was "then hidden from her."[208] The statement that marks her recovery is:

> Now I have my desire; I desired nothing but a crucified Christ, and I have him … Hah, Had I known this, I would not have been in such a condition as I was… But Gods time is the best time, to reveal himself, and to open mine eyes to see, and mine ears to hear; and he gives power to wait.[209]

Much of the narrative is then taken up with Wight's preaching and conversation with other afflicted individuals in which she offers cheer and advice. Two points can be taken from Wight's narrative, as it relates to despair. First, despair is necessary. Wight *did* commit a sin, she lied to her mother and the conscience worked precisely as it should and accused and condemned her. Unfortunately, this trial lasted four years, a direct product of her intense piety. This is something that is noted by the biographer and that is perhaps one of the most paradoxical elements of despair: the most pious are the most vulnerable to it, because they are constantly examining themselves and are keenly aware of their actions. Secondly, Despair is terrifying, yet she never fell into ungodly despair. Her anguish – the trial of the cross, combat with God and temptations of seducement –

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[207] Ibid., 12-13

[208] Jessey provides an exhaustive list that includes not only divines, but also their spouses, siblings and cousins, as well as various godly members in London: Mr. Thomas Goodwin, Mr. Barker, Mr Lockyar, Mr. Palmer (who had been the family minister in Lawrence Pountney) Mr. Sprigge, Mr. Iohn Simpson, Mr. Hildersham of Felton, Mr. Paget Mr. Wright of Wellington, Mr. Smith, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Blake, Mr. Morgan Floyd, Mr. Moston, Mr. Peters, Mr. Charnock (of London), Mr. Atherley of the Charterhouse (with his wife,) Mr. Hide of Wighton in Yorkshire, the Lady Willoughby of Parham, the Lady Renula, the Lady Clotworthy, the Lady Vermuiden, Sir Ric. Philips, Sir Rich. Saltonstall, with his Lady, Capt. Price, with his wife, Dr. Coxe, Dr. Debote, Dr. Worsley, Dr. Paget, Mrs. Fines, Mrs. Harrison (wife to the Chamberlain of London), Col. Langhams wife, daughter to the Lady Roberts, Mrs. Sarah Iones (wife to Mr. Tho. Iones Esquire of Tower-hill), Mrs. Berney of Norsolk, Mr. and Mrs. Liggon, Mrs. Wilson at Nags-head-Taverne, Mrs. Thorp at Grave Maurice, Mr. P. Burbon and his wife, Mrs. Owen, and Mrs. Hannah Allen (Booksellers), Mrs. Manning of Tower-street, Mrs. Elizabeth Waldo (sister to Mr. Iohn Pocock), Mr. Ellis and Mrs. Ellis, Mrs. Hawkins, Mrs. Flood, and Mrs. Thare, Mr. Brigs Taylor and his wife, Mr. Lewes Merchant, Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Thurrel, Mrs. Grace Philips, Mrs. Dupper, Mrs. Aires, her Brother Mr. Ionathan Vaughan, of Alsoules in Oxford.

[209] Ibid., 22

followed Perkins' path, and never veered off into a belief that God cannot save her; rather, it is despair of herself that drives her outbursts.

These same elements are seen in Brettergh life's, which is the focus of a pair of funeral sermons written down as *Deaths advantage little regarded, and the soules solace against sorrow*. To it is affixed an anonymous biography, though it may have been composed by William Hinde.[210] Once again there is the setting up of the sufferer as one of great, even overweening piety. Brettergh's family, according to the biographer, was constantly harassed by papists, who would kill their livestock. But Brettergh simply "submit[ed] herself to [God's] good providence.[211] She would often pray that God would forgive those who harmed her and plead with her husband to do the same.

Brettergh, like Wight, was literate. She would "read some godly writer, or expositor of Scripture, or in the book of Martyrs" and weep at sections that 'touched her affections near.' She became sick with ague after about two years of marriage, and the biographer qualifies that this disease no doubt contributed to her 'descen[t] into a heavy conflict, with the infirmity of her own spirit.'[212] Many of her physical symptoms thus mirrored Perkins' explanation of the physical signs of despair.

Brettergh, in a clear exposition of the 'trials of the cross' would "say her sins had made her … a prey to Satan; a spectacle to the world; a disgrace to religion; and a shame to her husband, kindred, and all true Christians" and then bitterly weep.[213] The

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[210] See Retha Warnicke, 'Eulogies for Women: Public Testimony of Their Godly Example and Leadership,' in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, eds. Betty Travitsky & Adele Seeff (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 172. William Hinde wrote several biographies and devotional works throughout his life, including a joint publication with John Dod.
[211] William Harrison, *Deaths advantage little regarded, and The soules solace against sorrow Preached in two funerall sermons at … Whereunto is annexed, the Christian life and godly death of the said gentlevvoman* (London, 1601), 6
[212] Ibid., 11
[213] Ibid., 12

‘temptation of seducement,’ specifically the second one in which sins, original and actual, give one anguish.

> Sometime the original corruption wherein she was born, troubled her, and the sin of her parents, and the common parents of all, the eaters of the forbidden fruit*:* as if that had made her unworthy of God, and were then laid to her charge. Many times she accused herself of impatience, bewailing the want of feeling Gods spirit, and making doubt of her election, and such like infirmities.

The same existential crisis that Wight underwent is displayed here as well. “She wished, that she had never been born, or that she had been made any other creature, rather then a woman.”[214] Such phrasing is reminiscent of Luther’s despairing statement concerning predestination, which indicate that perhaps Brettergh or the biographer was familiar, not only with Perkins’ particular construction of despair, but Luther’s as well.

The careful attendance of the godly is seen in a Master Edward ‘a faithful professor of the truth’ who was with her constantly and ministered “heavenly instruction to her.”[215] The biographer also notes she had a “Christian friend’ who daily attended on her, thus ‘discharging the duty of a faithful Christian.” The applying of the general remedy, discussed above, are seen in the words of Edward. First, he told her that God was merciful, as her mere existence proved. Secondly, that she must confess. Thirdly, that she had been ‘touched by the love of God’ and had ‘well profited in the detestation of sin.’[216]

The experimental element in the godly tradition is seen in Brettergh’s comforter, who declared to her that the fault lies not in her will, because her assurance of salvation was proved in her ‘prayers, confessions, plaints, sighs, tears and groans to God for

[214] Ibid., 13
[215] Ibid., 14
[216] Ibid., 17

mercy.'[217] The biographer often inserted asides where he hammered in the chief points that should be considered. For instance, that to 'be without temptation is the greatest temptation' and that nothing happened to her that does not befall the holiest of God's children. He argued as well that it was the work of God to plunge her into this despair, so that she might better see the heinousness of her sins, to posses her sins and undergo a 'holy despair for them' before the comfort of God came to her. Like Perkins, the biographer emphasizes the necessity of despair, and qualifies that that despair is of a particular type, a holy type, that moves one toward the wicket-gate of salvation. And she did receive comfort. On a Tuesday, her temptations left her and she was filled with unspeakable comfort, such that "she took her bible in her hand and joyfully kissing it, and looking up toward heaven, she said that of the Psalm: O Lord, it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn thy statutes."[218] Her comfort continually increased until Whitsun, when she sang praises for some hours, then fell gently asleep, thus yielding up a 'sweet Sabbath sacrifice' at about four that afternoon. The two elements discussed with regard to Wight are thus seen here. Brettergh never strays into ungodly despair (in fact the biographer is careful to indicate that Brettergh always acknowledged God's majesty, and simply despaired of her own weakness and unworthiness) and on display is the great anguish caused by her despair.[219]

These convoluted trials and temptations of the godly were not purely individual efforts. Rather, they were informed by the practical divinity of godly divines, chief among them Perkins. With one hand his theology stoked the flames of desperation, but with the other it worked to snuff them out. Perkins believed that despair was necessary,

[217] Ibid., 18
[218] Ibid., 36
[219] Ibid., 17

but he was also painfully aware of its destructive nature. Like a surgeon who causes pain ultimately to heal a patient, Perkins inhabited a space – theologically sound, subjectively ambiguous – that was inherently problematic.

CONCLUSIONS

Christ's agonies on the cross can be drawn in comparison to the agonies of the godly. At that moment Christ was alienated from God, as Calvin writes in the *Harmony of the Gospels*. And this made that grief sharper than other torments, because "in his sorrows, he was not comforted with the aid and favor of his father, that he thought himself in some sort forsaken."[220] Perkins' practical divinity does not simply work to diagnose despair; it also seeks to treat it. Instrumental to his treatment is the community of the godly, who must work as comforters to forestall the isolation that heightens despair from deep sickness into death or apostasy.

Perkins lived and wrote in the sixteenth century. But he prefigured much of the issues surrounding despair in the seventeenth century. During the early modern period, there was a growing discussion and awareness of melancholy and despair and their perceived concomitant, suicide. The godly were bound inextricably to the tides and currents of contemporary thought and cannot, nor should they, be extricated from these troubled waters. It is not simply in Perkins that we find both reverence and repugnance for despair; rather, it was part of a long trajectory of Christian thought – sometimes agonizing, sometimes beatific – on this issue. St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* of how he had plunged into the depths of the sea, losing his faith and despairing of ever

[220] John Calvin, *A harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1972), 101

finding the truth.[221] Teresa of Avila described despair as the soul rending itself apart, and cried out that "this inward fire and despair are the greatest torments of all."[222]

Perkins inherited a tradition in which predestination primed believers for despair. Spira was an example of how worries over one's particular estate could lead to despair and suicide in certain instances. What lies at the heart of this despair is fear that one has been imbued with only a temporary faith. Perkins adopted Beza's differing conceptions of assurance, viz, that Christ died sufficiently for all, but only efficiently for the elect. This resulted in the adherence to the notion that believers could experimentally, through the use of the practical syllogism, ascertain their particular estate. This reliance on feeling, however, left the godly particularly vulnerable to despair. To forestall believers from being plunged into despair, Perkins sought to control it. He did this by discriminating between godly and ungodly despair, thus giving him room to hold up a particular iteration of despair (since he understood the some believers would despair) as an understandable, even laudable thing that believers must go through. He gave a reason for it (to bring one to salvation, thus giving meaning to the experience). He also defined the causes of despair, so that believers and those seeking to comfort them could adequately grapple with something concrete, as opposed to a discursive emotional complex. And most importantly, he drafted a solution to despair that relied on the community of the godly. The fruit of that labor is seen in the narratives of Wight and

[221] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. E. B. Pusey (Londo: Dutton, 1907), 86
[222] Teresa of Avila, *The collected works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), 176

Brettergh, which are cases of despair challenged and conquered through the use of godly ministry.[223]

Perkins oversaw the construction of doctrine that primed the godly for despair. But at the same time he constructed treatises and sermons to their comfort. This dichotomy is not surprising, for they reveal the ambivalence with which he viewed despair. A certain type of despair was necessary to start the reader onto the path to salvation, and to also keep them on that path. In this we see, as Perkins himself argued, that the godly life was more sour than sweet, its physic more acid than honey, and more a pilgrimage than a progress.[224]

[223] See Thomas Hooker, *The poor doubting Christian drawn unto Christ* (London, 1638) for a similar narrative of despair conquered, centering on the trials of Joan Drake.
[224] William Perkins, *The combat betvveene Christ and the Diuell displayed* (London, 1606), 5

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