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Thomas Becon and the English Reformation: "The Sick Man's Salve" and the Protestantization of English Popular Piety

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THOMAS BECON AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION:

THE SICK MAN'S SALVE AND THE
PROTESTANTIZATION OF ENGLISH POPULAR PIETY

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Mary R. S. Hampson
1995
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Mary R. S. Hampson

Approved, May 1995

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(Supervisor)

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Michael McGiffert
TO MY FATHER

Who has given every shred of his energy to the cause of reform.

AND TO MY MOTHER

Who was never absent.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the thought of Thomas Becon (1512-67), an English reformer whose ecclesiastical and literary career spanned the reigns of four Tudor monarchs. As a popular preacher, tract-writer, and chaplain to both Protector Somerset and Archbishop Cranmer, Becon merits close study. The arguments here concern Becon's ideas as expressed in his best-known work, The Sick Man's Salve, a work indicative of the development of reformist lay theology and the evolving identity of English Protestants.

The thesis begins with a brief chronology of Becon's preaching and polemical career. Specifically relevant are his early exposure to Lollardy and reformist thought at Cambridge, his underground activities during the 1540s, his eminence as an Edwardian radical, his exile during the Marian reaction, and his gradual withdrawal under Elizabeth. Primary source material is used to trace central themes in Becon's writings. Biographical information is drawn largely from the work of his modern biographer, Derrick Sherwin Bailey. In addition to histories of the Reformation, data are drawn from analyses of Tudor social criticism, education, homiletic and literary technique.

The heart of the thesis is a systematic examination of the ideas in Becon's most frequently published work - part devotional, part propaganda, part civic guidebook - The Sick Man's Salve. What were Becon's primary concerns? What sort of man and woman, household, even commonweal was Becon striving to forge? The repeated theme of "sickness," the popular piety that Becon helped to cultivate, and his familial and civic sensibilities receive close attention. If the number of editions published serves as an index of a work's influence, what might historians infer about the mentality of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English readers? The Sick Man's Salve is an example of Tudor reformist mass-media; it is profitable to examine the selection and presentation of its ideas.

This thesis is at least one step removed from original manuscripts, relying on microfilms of early editions and the Parker Society's nineteenth-century publications of Becon's edited versions of his own works. Becon wrote sixty-nine known works, thirty-six of which have been published by the Parker Society. This thesis concentrates on one while drawing on portions of twenty-two others, selected for their usefulness to this analysis. The precise date of the composition of The Sick Man's Salve is unknown; Bailey places it before 1553 and certainly during Edward's reign. It had at least nineteen editions between 1558 and 1632, most of which were microfilmed in the twentieth century. There do not appear to have been any significant changes in content in any of the editions. Although he published several works under the pseudonym "Theodore Basille," all discussion of authorship in this thesis refers to him by his real name.

Becon's most original contribution to the English Reformation was as a reformist "propagandist" or rhetorician, for laymen. No attempt is made to glamorize him: his vulgarity and slanderous polemic were as much a part of his reformist efforts as his devotional instruction. The very fact of Becon's ambiguities, in both his literary style and
structure, makes him a suitable embodiment of the complexity of the forces at work in the lives of laymen. The aim of this thesis is therefore not to make final conclusions about Becon's impact in history or even discern his comparative uniqueness as a polemicist, since this study does not survey Becon's colleagues and competitors. Rather, the aim is to reconstruct one specific Tudor reformer's vision and prescription for ordinary men and women in Reformation England.

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THOMAS BECON AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION:

THE SICK MAN’S SALVE AND THE PROTESTANTIZATION
OF ENGLISH POPULAR PIETY
PART ONE:

BACKGROUND: THE ENGLISH REFORMATION AND THE LIFE OF THOMAS BECON
in all my sermons and writings I have not attempted matters of high knowledge and far removed from the common sense and capacity of the people, but I have been content at all times to handle such matters as might rather edify the brethren, than to drive them into an admiration of stupor at the doctrine of so rare, unwonted, high and unsearchable mysteries, and as might most make unto the avancement of virtue and unto the repression of vice. To teach the people to know themselves and their salvation in the blood of Christ through faith, and to walk worthy of the kindness of God. hath only been the stop and mark whereunto I have directed all my studies and travails both in preaching and in writing.

- Thomas Becon, Introduction to his Worekes, 1560
A. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Becon stood in the shadows of the great figures of the English Reformation. Throughout his career he remained somewhat in the periphery, coming to light usually only by virtue of his contact with better-known Protestant luminaries. He was born in 1512, became a student of Hugh Latimer's and chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer and Protector Somerset. As a clergyman, educator, and popular writer, he served the reformist cause as an acerbic rhetorician and a layman's apologist for Protestantism. In so doing, he became an instrument of forces that eventually severed England from its medieval religious heritage.

Although a controversial preacher and writer, Becon is generally considered a second-rate theologian. He received a bachelor of arts degree at Cambridge, taught grammar school, was ordained, and spent most of his life as a parish priest. He was not among the Protestant martyrs. He experienced Henrician persecution but recanted under pressure, and was exiled during the Marian backlash. Passed over for ecclesiastical preferment by Elizabeth I, he spent his final years quietly attending to local church needs until his death in 1567. His grave has not been found. He left little autobiographical information and still less introspective analysis. His thinking was not particularly original and it is easy to portray him as far more a product of his times than a framer of them. Historians have seemed satisfied to conclude that Becon was a reformer of moderate abilities and only modest historical significance. The present thesis contends that this traditional interpretation is only half the story.

Becon's obscurity has diverted most historians - except Derrick Sherwin Bailey at Edinburgh 1 - from attention to one crucial fact about his career. Becon wrote a book that went

1 Bailey, Derrick Sherwin, Thomas Becon and the Reformation of the Church in England (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1952). In 1952, Bailey wrote the most comprehensive biography of Thomas Becon to date, and before him the
through more than eighteen editions and remained in print on popular demand for six decades after his death. The book, composed during the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) and published in 1561, is *The Sick Man's Salve* and can be fairly considered a Tudor best-seller. Part devotional manual, part rhetorical device, part civic guidebook, *The Sick Man's Salve* was popular enough for printer John Day to secure a royal licence to keep Becon's works in print indefinitely. The book's enormous appeal - essentially unacknowledged by the historical community thus far - suggests that Becon's thought and influence may have been underestimated.

Becon wrote *The Sick Man's Salve* at a time when much of what had been considered secure in religious life had become unhinged and the foundations of English Christian culture were bitterly contested. Becon's readers digested his book in the religious tensions during the reigns of Elizabeth I and the early Stuarts. Since the facts of its print history indicate commercial and intellectual marketability, one may ask why. The answer is not simple. Becon's works display a clutter of apparently incongruent, discursive styles; they elude simple labels. His devotional writings are too serious to be dismissed as merely rhetorical exercises, but his vicious invective renders unbelievable any two-dimensional portrayal of him as a simple, pious devotional writer. Such stylistic duality reflects the confused times in which he lived. The English Reformation was an messy event; the adherence of many Christians to the doctrine of justification by faith did not automatically protestantize all aspects of religious life, and it took decades for English Protestantism to define itself. As will be shown, Becon's beliefs are essentially black and white, but his methods can be quite grey. Becon's dogmatic doubts and certainties have much to teach historians about the process of religious transition during the Tudor Reformation. It is therefore in the combination of his

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Rev. John Ayre edited his works for the Parker Society in 1844. Aside from these two historians, even cursory coverage of Becon in secondary literature is slim; there is an occasional citation or quotation, but rarely any analysis.

2 Although a somewhat clumsy word, I use "protestantization" to refer to the process by which Protestantism infiltrated, challenged and altered those aspects of people's lives and English culture that it touched. I take my cue from Christopher Haigh's use of the word "protestantising" (as in a "protestantising influence") in his historiographical summary in *The English Reformation Revised*. See Christopher Haigh, "The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation," *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 26.
ambiguities and his certainties that Becon’s representativeness lies, and in his representativeness lies his historical importance.

Although Becon’s works are of a type that invites oversimplification, *The Sick Man’s Salve* actually proves a complex exemplar of sixteenth-century religious culture. It is a sprawling, encyclopedic work, containing elements of the past and future popular religious culture. It derived from themes and styles that late medieval readers would have found comfortingly familiar. It is also loaded with ideas about theology, society, women, education, morality, fiscal ethics, familial relationships, sacraments, ceremony, the afterlife, salvation, the devil, and death that departed radically from traditional Catholic understandings. The work thus reveals striking continuities between reformist and medieval literary conventions of structure and tone. At the same time, Becon’s doctrine and soteriology are unambiguously Protestant in their adherence to the principles of justification by faith and *sola scriptura* in vehement opposition meritorious salvation and the traditional penitential and sacramental systems of medieval Roman Catholic Christianity.

As Becon’s books sold, so did his ideas, and his ideas were clearly intended for a wide, diverse audience. My thesis comprehends popular intellectual history, not just that of educated or exclusive groups. It begins with the assumption that ideas powerfully influence the direction of human, and certainly religious, history. It further assumes that the written word - including anything from academic treatises to cheap broadsides - has a major influence on the formation of people’s ideas. While the progression was neither clear-cut nor unchallenged, it is nevertheless true that English

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3 In this thesis, I use the word *radical* (as in "radical change" or "radical idea") to refer to a foundational departure from traditional understandings - not merely in form or mode - but at the very root (*radix*). I do not use it in the modern sense, to imply a necessary rebellion from an establishment (although in fact I often use it describe something that challenged established truths). Nor do I use it in any reference to the "radical Reformation".

Also, I use the word *Catholic* (capitalized) to imply Roman Catholicism, as opposed to merely "universal" Christianity or Christendom. When used generally, or in any specific reference to any time before the Council of Trent (1540s to 1560s), as in, "medieval Catholicism, I do not intend to posit the existence of a cut and dried doctrinal entity that has been authoritatively defined. Rather, I refer to an enormous cluster of understandings regarding doctrine, practise and ritual which accumulated into theological custom over the Middle Ages. See Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1967), 100.

4 This statement should not be misconstrued to imply that I believe history to be solely influenced by ideological forces and nothing else. People and events are naturally affected by innumerable forces, material and invisible. The argument of this thesis is simply that among the many powerful forces in history are ideas and the passions they generate. Perhaps the questions raised and answered here will point to further connections between book history and popular intellectual history.
religious culture became increasingly influenced by Protestantism as the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries unfolded. Owing to his authorship of such a marketable book as *The Sick Man's Salve*, Becon's role as a popularizer in the shaping of an increasingly Protestant piety in Tudor and Stuart England merits close scrutiny? His ideas, and the way he communicated them are the subject of this thesis.

Thomas Becon was an ordinary man in many ways. It is indeed his ordinariness and non-sophistication that make him a spokesman to us, for the mass of the English men and women who experienced the Reformation. This thesis first examines Becon the man in the context of his own life time (ending in the late 1560s). It considers aspects of his longer-term importance as a writer, attempting an assessment of his contribution to English religious culture. This entails looking at the literary genres in which Becon operated and the way in which he packed new content into largely medieval literary structures. By analyzing Becon's writing this thesis aims at illuminating his role as a conduit between elite and popular religious culture, and the method by which he translated high theology into laymen's language. The latter portion of the thesis involves an stock-taking of the ideas in *The Sick Man's Salve* and addresses the social implications of Becon's reformist prescriptions.

*The Sick Man's Salve* is a manual on how to believe as and how to be what might be termed a "good Protestant." If the book contributed to the "protestantization" of English religious culture, what was the vision, or model, of personal and civic Protestantism that Becon held up for his readers? How might it be connected to the shaping of a uniquely English, Protestant piety? Since historians have categorized (and by default somewhat condemned) Becon as predominantly a propagandist, special attention will be paid to his subtler notions and expressions in an effort to consider his softer side. Concentration on his devotional and evangelical impulses should enable his portrait to become - if not necessarily more likeable - at least less two-dimensional.

Although this essay employs such abstractions as a "good Protestant," "Protestant piety," or "Protestant identities," it does not necessarily suggest that such categories are clear, or that such entities even existed. They may be illusions, or constructs. But if *The Sick Man's Salve* created an
illusion of "the good Protestant," and it was popular enough to remain in print during such a formative period in English religious history, then that illusion must be studied.

**B. INTERPRETING THE ENGLISH REFORMATION**

Sixteenth-century English men and women did not romanticize innovation or revolution; they tended to perceive things new and strange as heralds of anarchy. The people who lived through the English Reformation witnessed the dismantling of institutions and relationships believed to be permanent. The definition of heresy in Tudor England was not constant; it changed with each monarch and if uttered to the wrong confidante, one's private thoughts might be considered treasonous or heretical. "Sixteenth century England was not a quiet place for a man with a conscience . . .," writes E. G. Rupp, "... men did not prudently noise abroad their secret thoughts."  

There was no doctrinal uniformity throughout most of the Reformation era, and therefore the lines between a "Catholic" and a "Protestant" were not always as clear as they would come to be. Both conservatives and reformers proclaimed the exclusive rightness of their doctrines and prescribed the eternal penalties for following all others, so that both reform and resistance to reform could be costly options.

Historians of the English Reformation face the task of understanding it in the terms in which the reformers themselves understood it: it was an age in which religion was woven into the fabric of all public and private life. Men and women in the sixteenth century believed not only in the reality of God’s existence but also in his intimate interaction in human history. Although the reformers formed a diverse group, differed widely in temperaments and abilities, and were divided on many

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issues, they were united by the urgency of the message, the fundamentals of which, if not specifics, they held in common. They all desired to establish a practice of Christianity that made justification by faith through grace the doctrinal axis around which assumptions about church and society would revolve.

Two historians, John Lawson and L. F. Salzman, divide the chronology of the English Reformation into three periods. The following outline combines their views. Between 1529 and 1534 the English Reformation was primarily political, jurisdictional, and anti-papal; at this stage, reformation was relatively widely supported. In the period from 1536 to 1540, reform was financial, distinctly anti-clerical, largely supported by members of the middle class and gentry, and characterized chiefly by the dissolution of the monasteries, which Lawson calls "...a stupendous act of nationalization." This was a time of intellectual ferment and absorption of the implications and possibilities of the new religious autonomy. Finally, the years between 1547 to 1560 brought a fully doctrinal, anti-sacramental, codified reformation, welcomed and radicalized by an aggressive minority. The finished product was a national, "Church of England" opposed by some Protestants who felt the Reformation had not gone far enough. The Church of England was equipped with a predominantly Calvinist liturgy but preserved its "ancient episcopal organization." The slowly developing character of English Protestantism was a unique hybrid of medieval forms of proto-Protestantism (i.e., following one interpretation, Wycliffite doctrinal reforms and the interiorization of spirituality of the *Devotio Moderna*), biblical humanism, and continental Protestantism.

Although England eventually became a predominantly Protestant nation, English religious culture did not absorb Protestant theology and its implications overnight. Robert Whiting holds...
that the decline of popular Catholicism during the sixteenth century is only partially attributable to a
displacement by fervent Protestant beliefs; much of the “verbal, financial, or behavioral declension
from traditional Catholicism,” says Whiting, “was not accompanied by any expression of Protestant
conviction.” 10 Not only was Protestantism not rapidly embraced in all parts of England, but there
were many points at which its permanent entrenchment could easily have eluded reformers. The
problem of how fast and how completely England became Protestant leads to the argument between
teleological causation and contingency, which in turn informs the current debate between the
traditional and revisionist schools of English Reformation studies. 11 The following is an abbreviated
summary of one of the primary arguments over the nature of religious change in sixteenth-century
England.

Two opposing schools of historical interpretation differ drastically in their hermeneutics of
reform, including vastly different sets of criteria for evaluating the state of the late medieval church
and the inherent appeal of Protestantism. Their differences of definitions of spiritual vibrancy
and their disagreement over the proper function of the Church determine how much the adherents
of each school perceive the English church to have needed reform. Christopher Haigh argues in The
English Reformation Revised that A. G. Dickens’ “romantic” interpretation of a grass-roots
Reformation built on a wide base of popularity and on a Lollard inheritance is no longer acceptable.
Haigh thinks Protestantism appealed only to a narrow band of cosmopolitan literates and that
historians cannot speak of any far-reaching conversion to a spiritual (not just official) Protestantism.
Indeed, it is not clear that Haigh even believes that the reality of conversion exists at all. England
was, he maintains, well served by the medieval Catholic church; he argues that since the primary
function of the church was to dispense sacraments and build communality, it was a highly successful,

10 Whiting, Robert, The Blind Devotion of the People (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 259, 155,
161. Whiting cited evidence from a regional study of wills.
11 A strictly teleological interpretation of the English Reformation would posit that a grass-roots
Protestantism was basically inevitable and that Henry’s twin divorces from Catherine and Rome were only
milestones on the way to the Thirty-Nine Articles and a Protestant England. The strict contingency argument
is that the coming of Protestantism had no overall connectedness to overarching, impersonal forces, and was
contingent solely on the peculiar turns of events. Protestantism, by this view, was in no way a cosmically
unstoppable result of official break with Rome, nor a guaranteed metaphysical goal of it. Both interpretations
partly represent reality and partly deny it.
vibrant institution that was in no grave need of reform. The Protestant legend propagated initially through John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, he urges, has covered up the truth of the vitality and effectiveness of the pre-reformation Church.

Dickens, representing the older school, argues that in the causal matrix of the European Reformation one must include the existence of powerful ideological and supernatural forces that gripped men and women in ways that elude documentation but are no less essential to explanation of passionate, confessional divisions and alliances. Haigh believes, and wants desperately for his readers to believe, that no such forces operate in human history. Taking a more functionalist, a-spiritual view of religion, he contends that the Reformation was merely a series of daily decisions on policy and organization that amounted in retrospect to a Reformation. Continuity, not reform, and circumstances, not forces, are the principal features of Haigh's revisionist interpretation of the English Reformation.

Although events combined to establish a strong, grass-roots Protestant spirituality alongside the official, jurisdictional Reformation, this was not a foregone conclusion to people when Henry broke from Rome.12 But Protestantism - not merely Protestantism, but Calvinist Protestantism - began to take root (albeit in varying degrees of commitment) during the religious sea-change from the 1560s to the 1630s. "If the Reformation is interpreted simply as an act of state, as emphatically a political revolution," says T. H. L. Parker, the fact of England's embrace of Calvinism "is inexplicable."13

The character of English Protestantism took form between the 1560s and 1630s. These years brought a rush of strongly reformist literature, including *The Sick Man's Salve*’s circulation. If there emerged such a thing as a distinctive popular English piety by the turn of the sixteenth century, it did not just bloom uncultivated; it required seed-planting and work. Thomas Becon's popular

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12 Parker, xvi-xix. T. H. L. Parker argues that since Henry was a committed anti-Lutheran, although the integrity of the Roman Catholic Church in England was attacked by Henry's break with Rome, a grass roots acceptance of Protestant spirituality would not inevitably follow. Catholicism itself was doctrinally ambiguous until the Council of Trent, and some form of truncated Catholicism may have survived for at least a little while had Henry lived longer.

13 Ibid., xvi-xix.
writings, by virtue of their timing, readability, and popularity were important “seeds” in the growth of this piety. Haigh claims that “in sixteenth-century conditions, Protestantism was not, and could not be, an attractive religion at the grass-roots level.”

C. THE LIFE AND CAREER OF THOMAS BECON

Derrick Sherwin Bailey’s doctoral thesis, written at Edinburgh University in 1952 and published that same year, is the only comprehensive biography of Thomas Becon. In the mid-nineteenth century the Reverend John Ayre wrote the brief biographical notes for the Parker Society edition of Becon's works and established a rough outline of Becon's life, bringing Becon out of historical obscurity. Building on Ayre’s outline, Bailey amassed a significant amount of data on Becon’s career; where evidence was sparse, made cautious, sensible suggestions. Despite these efforts, there remain serious gaps in our knowledge: details of Becon’s childhood and Cambridge years are unknown; he disappears from the records from 1533 to 1538 and again from 1538 to 1541. There is little documentation of his career in Protector Somerset’s household, his precise role in the Edwardian Reformation, his life under Northumberland’s regime and during Marian exile, or in the early years of Elizabeth's reign. Details of his private life and his death also remain obscure. Bailey concentrates on establishing the narrative of Becon’s life and correcting technical confusions that have clouded it. He offers superficial interpretations of major works, and much of his analysis begs more questions than he could answer in a book of its scope. He devotes only passing

14 Haigh, The English Reformation Revised, 6.
15 Bailey discussed past misunderstandings about Becon's position on adiaphora, role in the troubles among the Marian Frankfort exiles, and possible qualification as a proto-Puritan, among others.
attention to the ideas and implications of *The Sick Man's Salve*. The following is a synthesis of Ayre's and Bailey's accounts of Becon's life.

*  *  *  *

Becon was apparently an only child, born in 1512 to parents of simple means in a sheepfarming district of western Norfolk. His father must have died when he was young; he mentions only his mother and a step-father. He would have been five years old in 1517 when Martin Luther drafted the ninety-five theses. After that date, works on German reformed theology infiltrated England via maritime trade routes. Lollard ideas, the plague of late medieval English conservatives, were experiencing a revival in southeastern England, including the diocese of Norwich, of which Becon's home county was a part. Bailey concludes that Becon grew up in what he calls a "Lollard social stratum" in which anti-clericalist and Lutheran sympathies are likely to have run high. Becon was probably exposed to diverse, radical religious ideas from an early age; in 1526-27 Becon may even have attended the preaching tour of Protestant reformer Thomas Bilney. Whatever Becon's formative experiences had been until that time, they were about to become more defined when, at the age of fourteen, he entered Cambridge University.

Early sixteenth-century Cambridge was a nest of reformist thought. The intellectual ground tilled by conservative Christian humanists in the late fifteenth century began to manifest reformist leanings among a group of intellectuals who would eventually lead the English Reformation. Among the reformers and future martyrs in the so-called "White Horse Inn" group were Thomas Cranmer, Matthew Parker, William Tyndale, Thomas Bilney, Miles Coverdale, John Frith, Robert Barnes,

17 Bailey, 2.
18 Bailey suggests that Becon attended St. John's College at Cambridge, although admits that the evidence is inconclusive.
Rowland Taylor, and Hugh Latimer, who exerted an especially potent influence on Becon’s thought and populist approach to evangelism. "The reforming movement at Cambridge of which Erasmus was the precursor and Bilney the initiator had by this time taken on a pronounced Lutheran coloring," writes Bailey. "Its acknowledged leader was Latimer." Becon absorbed several of Latimer’s homiletic traits: his plain style, his social conscience and concern for the spiritual life of the uneducated, his emphasis on man’s unworthiness and the importance of moral conduct as the manifestation of a redeemed inner life. Apart from mentioning Latimer’s tutelage, Becon’s works are frustratingly silent about his Cambridge years. Bailey points out, for instance, that during the 1520s and 1530s Cambridge would have been enlivened by debate over the king’s divorce, but Becon’s thoughts at the time are unknown. His study of language is also unclear; although there is evidence that he learned Latin, it is uncertain whether he ever studied Greek. In 1530-31, Becon received a bachelor of arts degree and for unknown reasons proceeded no further with his formal education.

In 1532 Becon left Cambridge to take a position as a grammar instructor at the College of St. John the Evangelist at Rushworth in southern Norfolk. The college was intended at its founding in 1342 to be, according to Bailey, a “simple community of priests”, and a quasi-monastic foundation housing priests and a grammar school, all under episcopal oversight. This is the first evidence of Becon’s experience as an educator; his mature thoughts on the standards for education contributed significantly to the theoretical (if not always actual) foundation for Protestant educational reform.

On April 12, 1533, Becon was ordained to the priesthood. He then disappears from records. Although Bailey’s guess that he became a tutor or chaplain in the home of a gentleman is reasonable, there is no clear evidence for any of Becon’s activities between 1533 and 1538. These were crucial years: when England witnessed the drastic jurisdictional changes enacted by the Reformation Parliament, the initiation of the royal supremacy, the crowning of Anne Boleyn, and the dissolution of the monasteries.

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19 Bailey, 3.
In 1538 Becon resurfaces, in a letter of recommendation written for another obscure young
priest who was to fill a parish position for which a priest sympathetic to Henrician Supremacy was
needed. The conservative protest known as the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536), must have remained a
specter in the minds of reformers because one reformist gentleman, Lord Wentworth of Nettlestead,
wrote Thomas Cromwell a letter asking for the removal of a certain chantry priest in Ipswich on the
grounds that he was sympathetic to the rebels of 1536. Becon must have already established some
reputation as a reformist and supporter of Henry’s supremacy because Wentworth suggested Becon
as a suitable replacement, calling him “a discreet, honest preacher... a great setter-forth to the people
of the King’s most just and lawful title of supremacy.” Becon, by all appearances a rather simple
clergyman at this time, had several similarly unexplained associations with important reformist
gentlemen such as Wentworth. At any rate, for unexplained reasons Becon did not accept the post
and soon after Wentworth’s writing disappears from the records for three more years.

On July 12, 1539, parliament passed the Act of Six Articles, an ominous reminder of the gulf
between Henry’s jurisdictional reform and the theological reform many radicals hoped would
naturally ensue. In 1540-41, a commission headed by the conservative Bishop Bonner investigated
sources of heresies and potential heresies. Becon was arrested. Bailey mentions that John Mayler,
Becon’s bookseller, was imprisoned exactly three months before Becon’s arrest and was released on
the condition that he publicize a list of all the books he had bought or sold during the previous three
years. It is believable, then, that the authorities were acting on direct information from Mayler.
The commission was then able to summon Becon to Paul’s Cross and demand that he recant all
objectionable theological opinions he had expressed in sermons. Becon apparently recanted and
repented of his preaching against praying to saints, of complaining about clerical standards, and of
trivializing and criticizing some of the sacraments. These are fairly typical heresies; none was unique

20 Ibid., 13.
21 Ibid.
22 Becon did not actually take over the position as chantry priest; rather, the conservative, Catholic,
incumbent seems to have remained. As Bailey suggests, Becon may have declined, but the fact that the priest
remained speaks of either significant local support for a conservative priest or perhaps the protection of a
strong, conservative patron.
23 Ibid., 23.
to Becon, so it is not clear why he was rather specially selected. Bailey suggests that he was made to recant simply because of his growing popularity. Whatever the reason, the recantation changed Becon's career, for from 1541 on his modes of communication and opinions took on a defensive posture and tone. He went into hiding and changed his tactic from the more conspicuous medium of preaching to the stealthier business of tract-writing under a pseudonym. So it was that the first of Becon's sixty-nine religious and polemical works proceeded from the pen of "Theodore Basille."

Becon disguised himself as a layman and retired to Kent. Bailey argues that, although there is no proof, Becon's departure for Kent does not appear to have been arbitrary but was more likely part of a strategic plan formulated by some kind of elusive reformist "underground" or secret network of gentry and clergy who supported the reformist cause in opposition to official legislation. This theory would be more persuasive if Bailey cited some evidence, but he provides none because there is no proof. But the facts hint at a curious coherence to Becon's actions during his period in hiding. Becon traveled quickly and easily and did not lack places to stay. His journey seems to have been made comfortable by the hospitality of well-connected, reformist gentry who assisted his evasion of royal persecution. Also, Kent happened to be not only within Cranmer's episcopal fold but also within striking distance of London, and therefore within reach of the key printers in the reformist book trade.

In the period 1542-1546 Becon wrote his first tracts. Bailey aptly characterizes these works as primarily hortatory and devotional, emphasizing the "practical aspects of Christian belief and duty. They are not designedly controversial, though running through most of them is a note of protestant apologetic." Becon passed his remaining years in Kent teaching and writing. Beginning in 1542 he mentions a troubling illness and other serious but unnamed afflictions.

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24 Ibid., 17.
25 Ibid., 18.
26 Historians discuss "Protestant Underground" but usually in the later context of the congregations and groups that formed during Mary's reign, for which we have far more evidence. See Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 272-276.
27 Ibid., 18.
28 Ibid., 23.
Sickness, both as a physical ailment and as a paradigm applicable to the spiritual health of both man and country, became a central - albeit conventional - theme in many of Becon's writings.

Sickness was not Becon's only problem in the spring of 1543. In May, the reactionary *A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man*, more familiarly known as the *King's Book*, was published, enunciating the conservative position on doctrine. A third wave of persecution ensued under the guidelines of the Six Articles that brought Becon before the authorities again. The register at Paul's Cross on July 8, Relic Sunday, lists the recantations of three clerics: Robert Wisdom, Robert Singleton, and Thomas Becon. The combination of Becon's growing connections with the heretical gentry and radical London book traders, and his increasingly known opinions were the likely grounds for his arrest.

Becon's second recantation was a rather spectacular event; indeed, it is one of the few aspects of his story that has received any attention. It is necessary here only to outline Bailey's thorough assessment. Becon was accused of eighteen offenses. They included the promulgation of the doctrines of justification by faith alone; grace expressed, not received, through works; and the authoritative dominance of scripture over tradition (*sola scriptura*). The commission also cited Becon for advocating clerical marriage and for criticizing not only aspects of the sacraments (particularly the form of the Mass), but also the practice of venerating images.

The strict requirements of the Six Articles explain the appropriateness of punishing Becon for his doctrinal offenses, but the criticisms of him went beyond the plain letter of the Articles in charging him with excessive pride and arrogance in his books. Bailey suggests that the magnification of this point was a royal attempt to weaken the influence of a writer who began as a mere annoyance, but who now commanded enough of an audience to pose a threat. It is possible that the authorities only used Becon as a scapegoat to teach other more formidable - and more elusive - reformers a lesson. But if he were truly an obscure nobody it seems unlikely that the authorities would have

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29 Ibid., 30.
gone out of their way to discredit him. Some of the passages for which Becon was punished are clearly heretical by conservative standards; others seem, in Bailey's view, to have been singled out solely "with the object of discrediting him. . . [W]hen no express retraction could be extorted, a declaration. . . affirming a Catholic view of the Mass, would itself be damaging to the protestant cause when made by so popular a writer." 32

The account of Becon's second recantation is complicated. Although it would certainly mean different things to different people, a recantation of faith was obviously a serious matter. Becon's close friend, Robert Wisdom, is reported to have been deeply shaken and ashamed at his own recantation; he was traumatized by the horror of what damage his recantation would do to reformist morale among his friends and flock. Becon's recantation, on the other hand, far from being the odious event it was for Wisdom and others, was apparently faked. Not only did Becon fake it, he seems to have had fun faking it. In 1541, Becon may or may not have been nervous - or even terrified - at his first brush with the strong-arm tactics of Henrician episcopal authorities, but by 1543 he had acquired both experience and allies and seems to have been ready for a show. Bailey argues that there is a sense of theater in his words and what in hindsight looks suspiciously like a flourish in his actions. Not only did he confess to holding heretical beliefs and "naughtie and pestyferous opynyons" with overacted remorse and unnecessary thoroughness, he also proceeded melodramatically to tear up his own books one by one in front of the authorities. 33

Becon's actions are suggestive for the wider history of the early reform movement and the uses of persecution. The record of his behavior does not evoke the image of a man grieved and anxious about the popular reception of his recantation. Rather, he appears like a man who steps up to a firing squad, chuckling to himself because he knows that all the rifles' bullets have been removed. Whatever was going on under the surface of Becon's recantation, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that his smooth demeanor during a supposedly humiliating public denouncement of his sworn faith suggests a strong confidence in his own reputation and in the understandings shared.

32 Bailey, 33.
33 Ibid., 32. Also see Brigden, 351 for a similar account.
between himself and his following. For Becon to have been unruffled by his own display of apparent hypocrisy indicates to Bailey that he was simply going through the motions of the recantation as though it was understood to be a normal hazard of his occupation as a rhetorician. Such justified lying is reminiscent of the practise of Nicodemism, which John Calvin would later condemn. Becon seems to have known in advance that his actions would be understood in light of the cause of reform. “If Becon was in some sense an ‘official’ propagandist, it may well have been understood that should he get into trouble, no questions would be asked as to his manner of extricating himself,” says Bailey. Owing to his talents for persuasion, Becon probably perceived himself as more useful as a tool for the cause of Protestantism than as a martyr to it. “As a martyr,” concludes Bailey, “he would have been of little value to the protestant cause; alive, he had proved usefulness and great potentialities, . . . a recantation, if plausible enough, would satisfy the Council and the Henricians without deceiving Becon’s own party.”

Soon after his recantation Becon fled London for Norfolk in a second self-imposed exile. Thereafter he moved constantly through the Midlands, visiting supportive gentry families in Derbyshire, Dovedale, Alsop in the Dale, and the Peak. Becon reported the late Henrician period of conservative reaction as a “bloody boisterous burning time, when the reading of the holy bible, the word of our soul’s health, was forbidden the poor lay people.” In July 1546, thirteen of his books were condemned by royal proclamation.

34 Ibid., 47-48. Bailey’s interpretation of Becon’s recantation raises the issue of his character; it is not easy to establish his credibility with the knowledge of such examples of willful deceit. Becon said many outlandish things in his career, and it is difficult to imagine that even he believed some of his wildest, most emotional rhetoric. The fact that he obviously lied in his recantation, one could argue, throws doubt on other statements. The question is: did Becon believe all the things he said, or was he only trying to get others to believe what he said? How does the historian interested in Becon’s “true” thoughts distinguish his private opinions within his rhetoric?

Another character issue raised by Becon’s recantation is the possibility, supported by H. E. Jacobs, that Becon was an unprincipled coward, plain and simple, who just wanted to stay alive. His clever manipulation of the authorities had, after all, the convenient side effect of self-preservation. It is difficult to judge whether his “job” as a writer and what Bailey calls a “propagandist” demanded that he stay alive, or whether his desperation to stay alive pushed him to ennoble and justify his tactics of self-preservation. Bailey does not believe Becon to have acted cowardly by recanting. He thinks it is more likely that he was a shrewd pragmatist and that his pragmatism was a prerequisite of his rhetoric. Also, the charge that Becon was a coward is somewhat inconsistent with the total evidence of his life, which was lived with considerable boldness during an unstable and dangerous time. In the final analysis, whether or not Becon was a coward, and whether his actions were right or noble, will depend on the reader’s attitude toward sixteenth-century propaganda and the degrees of deception it necessitated. Ibid., 46.

While traveling, Becon claims to have keenly observed signs of the progress of reformation. He apparently found several private libraries in gentry homes containing his own reformist treatises and those by Tyndale, Fish, and Frith. That this pleased him greatly is evident in The Jewel of Joy. Around 1546, he may spent some time as a schoolmaster or tutor at gentry estates because he wrote at this time that his intent was to "engraft Christ and the knowledge of him in the breasts of those scholars whom God should appoint unto me for to be taught." He also reports without detail that he visited old friends, including Latimer. Later in 1546, Becon left his friends to take care of his mother after her second husband died.

At two o' clock in the morning on January 28, 1547, Henry VIII died, leaving the throne to his unrobust and rigidly reformist son. As Edward VI ascended, so did Thomas Becon. The drastic changes in England's doctrinal direction and religious culture that occurred during the Edwardian Reformation provided an official arena for Becon's talents, and he rose to become a chaplain in the house of the Lord Protector Somerset. Yet, strangely enough, there are better records of Becon's wanderings in the countryside than of his moment at the summit of the English state. The scant records show that he was promoted to positions that testified to his usefulness and ensured his security. He became a confidante and advisor in the Protector's household and was personally appointed Archbishop Cranmer's chaplain and one of six preachers at Canterbury. Cranmer also asked him to contribute to the Book of Homilies a sermon on adultery, a topic he attacked with customary relish. In the autumn of 1547 Becon attended the Convocation at which it was decided that married men could be ordained.

Bailey notes that the early period of Edward's reign witnessed considerable efforts to control preaching, and in 1548 many preaching licenses were withdrawn pending acceptance of the Act of Uniformity. Becon was among only eighty priests who retained their liberty to preach. In March, 1548, the Grocer's Company granted him a living as a parish priest at St. Stephens, Walbrook.

37 Becon, The Jewel of Joy, 420 - 422.
Several years later the Crown granted John Day a license to keep all of Becon's works in print. Becon could throw off his disguises and pseudonyms, at least for a while.

M. L. Bush's study of Somerset's troubled protectorate examines Somerset's religious beliefs and concludes that Becon's role in influencing his policies may have been far more important than is discernible from Becon's writings. Bush explains that the shape of Somerset's religious thought is best grasped by looking at his choices of subordinates. "The key to his religious beliefs in the period of the protectorate lies in his proteges and associates rather than in his words and reputation. They reveal him as much more than pious and anticlerical, far from moderate or ambiguous in his religious affiliations, and far removed from 'the Erasmian tradition.'"38 Somerset took into his own house as physician and family chaplains three outspoken reformists: William Turner, John Hooper, and Becon. Each was known for his religious writings, all were "fiercely committed, extreme and uncompromising in their religious opinions," and each was at least a one-time victim of Henrician persecution. All three had absorbed Zwinglian doctrine.39 Bush suggests that the three men in Somerset's household may even have been more radical than Somerset, and would have urged fairly intensive reform measures.40

Church reform, material and liturgical, was central to the Protector's and Becon's agendas. There is evidence that in Edward's reign Becon took part in the controversy raised by John Knox over the requirement of kneeling in the second Book of Common Prayer. Bailey argues that Becon's mild Zwinglianism may have predisposed him to work to bring about Cranmer's concession to the memorialists in the form of the "black rubric," which was the line in the second Prayer Book explaining that although kneeling is built into the celebration of the Eucharist, it in no way signifies adoration of the Sacrament.

39 Ibid., 104. Hooper and Turner had spent time in Zurich; it is not clear how Becon became a Zwinglian Protestant. Further research on Becon's Zwinglian tendencies would shed light on the shape of his thought as well as the dissemination of Zwingli's writings in England at this time.
40 Ibid., 108.
Somerset repealed stringent heresy statutes, including the Six Articles and freed the press from official censorship laws. John King, in his study of English Reformation literature, remarked on the close, even "symbiotic," relationship between Somerset and the beleaguered English printing community. In fact, the Edwardian years witnessed the highest rate of book printing in English history. Three out of four books printed were religious works, some of them reprints of previously condemned books, including Becon's. Among his Edwardian works were *The Jewel of Joy*, *Principles of the Christian Religion*, and *The Sick Man's Salve*.

The Reformation under Somerset was in many ways negative, violent, and destructive, extinguishing much of England's ecclesiastical artistic heritage and pageantry. Becon, however, rejoiced over what he considered to be more constructive successes of reform, such as the new freedoms in worship and vernacular scripture-reading. "O how blessed and godly fortunate are we," he sang out, "to whom it hath chanced, our realm, to have the dark clouds of papistical ignorance dispelled and put away from us!" The scant evidence suggests that, whatever his private feelings, Becon faithfully supported Somerset throughout the protectorate. He was also apparently supportive of Somerset's private circle; he honored Lady Anne Stanhope and Lady Jane Seymour, the women in Somerset's household, in tracts written during his tenure. John King believes Becon contributed to the legend of the martyred "Good Duke" by portraying a public image of piety for Somerset even after his governmental policies were in shreds, and enhanced his posthumous popularity by praising him as a devoted, "prayerful prisoner."

How loyal was Becon to Somerset? The evidence is confusing. Somerset was executed in 1552; it is strange that Becon barely mentions it. Had he secretly been unsupportive of Somerset, he might have been welcomed by Northumberland. There is no clear indication that he held any position in Northumberland's regime. Perhaps Becon also fell out of favor with Northumberland.

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41 King, 88-89.
43 King, John, *English Reformation Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 115. Although the details are unclear, Becon remained loyal to Somerset during the darkest days of the protectorate and even wrote a special prayer into his collection of prayers, *The Flower of Godly Prayers*, for a "faithful man being in trouble or endurance."
At any rate, Northumberland was not a particularly religious man; it is thus likely that Becon's strong Protestantism mattered little to Northumberland.

Soon even Northumberland's program did not matter. Edward VI, and with him many hopes of the reformers, died in 1553. Amid assurances of negotiation and clemency, Mary Tudor began her reign with plans diametrically opposed to those of the reformers. The Marian government acted quickly and defensively to restore England to the papal fold. On August 16, 1553, Becon was charged with seditious preaching and imprisoned in the Tower, which was at least a reunion since he joined Ridley, Sandys, Cox, Latimer, and Cranmer. "It was doubtless considered expedient to silence him as soon as possible... and his earlier record would mark him as a man to be watched," says Bailey.44 By this time Becon had married. There is no record of his wife, their courtship, or even her name. Becon's marriage would have offended Mary even if nothing else about him did, and he described his imprisonment as long and miserable, doubtless all the more so having left a bride. But "persecution," he wrote in Of David's Harp, "is a token of the true Gospel." After seven months he was released on March 22, 1554, and was permitted to flee to the continent in a third exile, outrunning the fate by which, in John Ayre's words, "so many sealed their doctrine with their blood."45

By 1554, not only was Becon married, but he had small children. He named them after biblical and patristic figures. Little is known about them: he eventually had three boys named Christophile (a recurring name in Becon's dramatic dialogues), Theodore, Basil, and possibly another son who died while the family was in exile. By 1559 he had a daughter named Rachel.46 After settling his family in Marburg, Becon went to Strasbourg to join the growing community of Marian exiles; among them were John Cheke, Peter Carew, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and John Ponet. These refugees in Europe formed what Bailey calls a "colony" for the production of propaganda. Becon and his colleagues produced anti-papal pamphlets designed to fuel reformist resistance at

44 Bailey, 77-78.
46 Bailey, 90.
home; they were to be smuggled across the Channel and distributed through the amorphous underground reformist network. Becon himself wrote two impassioned tracts encouraging Protestants in England to stand fast in the new tenets of their faith. The aims of the exiled propagandists were first to influence upcoming parliamentary decisions and to inflame English Protestant hatred of “popish” tyranny.\textsuperscript{47} Although Becon was well-suited for this task, he was not as prolific as Ponet, Bale, and Knox, nor did he make as many tactical mistakes. Some of the tracts were laden with semi-obscene invective and hints of tyrannicide. Several tracts also attacked the notion of female rule (such as Knox’s unfortunately titled \textit{First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women}) which some of the authors regretted when Elizabeth succeeded to the throne.

In 1554 the Frankfort exiles split over the Prayer Book; one group supported it, and one opposed it. Bailey explores the effect this dispute had on the Strasbourg exiles and its ominous foreshadowing of Elizabethan controversies. Becon remained a firm supporter of the Prayer Book and personally signed a letter to John Calvin expressing his party’s concern over the division in their endangered, nascent Protestant church. After the matter was submitted to formal arbitration the moderates triumphed and Becon was made a minister in the church in Frankfort. There is little record of Becon’s latter years in exile, although we know that in 1556 he moved to Marburg to take a tutorial position under the patronage of Phillip of Hesse.

In the fall of 1559, Mary I died childless. For the exiles Elizabeth’s succession to the throne on November 17 meant that they could return to their country and resume not only a safe life but also leadership of the realm. That Elizabeth did not prove to be the perfect fulfillment of the reformists' hopes is a separate issue; what is important for the Becon chronology is that she created the political and ecclesiastical conditions for Protestant security by promoting reformed clerics to leadership of the Elizabethan church.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 80.
Becon returned to England in the spring of 1559, but was passed over for clerical preferment by the new queen. Bailey suggests that his outspokenness regarding the inappropriateness of feminine rule during Mary's reign may have cooled Elizabeth's largesse. Becon did, however, become a prebend as a canon of Canterbury Cathedral and for the next four years - in a baffling act of pluralism - accepted the vicarage of at least five parishes.\(^{48}\)

Becon's life seems to have settled into peaceful routine at this time. His duties as a canon presumably drew him into activities that were important for the foundations of the young Protestant church, including participation in a royal visitation to southeastern England in the summer of 1559. During this time Becon also began to collect and edit his works for a folio edition, for which a royal license was granted to John Day in 1560. Becon revised his works to smooth his prose and make it less latinate but changed little of the content. The few works he did alter were those written either very early in his life or under the shadow of the Six Articles.

In 1559 the controversies that began among the exiles in Frankfort flared up among Elizabethan clergy. The 1563 Convocation discussed ceremonial requirements and vestments, and Becon's signature was one of many on a petition outlining requests for further ecclesiastical reforms, including omission of the sign of the cross at baptisms, a rule ensuring that ministers face the congregation when reading the service, the cessation of celebrations of non-principal holy days, and the removal of organs from the sanctuary. Becon also advocated the restriction of vestments to the surplice. After this petition was rejected, Convocation drafted another, with Becon's signature as the first. Among the more notable requests was one for fathers to be present at baptisms - one of Becon's favorite causes - and one for all images and roods be "taken away out of all places, public and private, and utterly destroyed."\(^{49}\) Of course, it is impossible to discern degrees of assent in a signature alone; the signing of a document does not necessarily prove the uncritical, unqualified

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\(^{48}\) While this is the same man who railed against pluralism and non-residence, it is possible that he accepted the positions because of the general urgency among Protestants that the Church was desperately short of sufficiently trained, reformed clerics. Also, however, as a father of four, he needed the money.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 101.
support of the signer. But the fact that Becon signed the petitions at all evidences his basic preferences as a mature reformer.

Becon's flexibility on *adiaphora*\(^{50}\) - specifically the vestarian issue that later flared into a bitter controversy - prevailed until the end. His most sensitive articulation of his long-held views on *adiaphora* comes from his *Catechism*: “But in things that be indifferent, we must take heed that we clog no man's conscience, nor make that a thing of necessity which is mere voluntary”.\(^{51}\) Although no lover of ceremony, Becon is reported to have worn the vestments of Canterbury when it was appropriate to do so.

Becon spent his last years quietly conducting church services, performing occasional clerical duties, and revising his works. His health was probably failing in the late 1560s for there is little record of professional or personal activity.\(^{52}\) On June 30, 1567, he died and was buried in an as yet undiscovered grave. He had lived through the reigns of four Tudor monarchs and had written sixty-nine substantial religious works in fifty-five years.\(^{53}\)

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50 "Things indifferent", or aspects of worship, liturgy or ceremony that, although possibly viciously debated, nevertheless remain peripheral to the most basic tenets of the faith.


52 Ibid., 103.

PART TWO:

BECON AND THE EMERGING REFORMIST LITERARY TRADITION
The Reformation, in a word, should be judged above all by its continuity and discontinuity with the Middle Ages, not with the twentieth century.

- Steven Ozment, *Age of Reform*
A. REASSESSING THOMAS BECON

Becon proves a far more complex figure than even Bailey’s portrayal suggests. Bailey fairly depicts him as a zealous Protestant reformer, a popular preacher, and a “prolific and influential propagandist.” He is at pains, however, to minimize the “intrinsic merit” in Becon’s works, their lack of either originality or “depth of theological perception.”54 The following paragraph best encapsulates not only Bailey’s assessment, but that view of most historians who have written about him. To appraise him based on originality or theological innovation, says Bailey,

is to miss his real importance. Becon excelled as a popular and able exponent of Reformation teaching who knew...how to attract and hold the attention of the ordinary reader. He was a propagandist - a vociferous shouter of slogans and battle cries who could kindle the enthusiasm which others were able to turn to account. He appealed to the emotions rather than to the intellect. His ability did not lie conspicuously in the elaboration of a reasoned apologetic (he was usually content with simple assertions), but few of his contemporaries surpassed him in the abusive, course and sometimes grossly vulgar polemic which was so congenial to the taste of the sixteenth century. Although his fame rested in part upon his devotional works, these do not stand in the mainstream of Christian tradition, and often reflect the intense but narrow piety of an incipient Puritanism. He was, in short, essentially the kind of man to make his mark during critical and troubled times, when party feeling ran high; one likely both to be appreciated and even over-valued by his contemporaries, and to be forgotten by their descendants, to whom he left no notable or permanent legacy either as constructive theologian or as ecclesiastical statesman, and not even a memory of great deeds wrought or great sufferings undergone. 55

This is the standing portrait of Becon: outside the mainstream, “intense” and “narrow,” "propagandistic," party-minded and “overvalued” in his time, simplistic, emotional and formulaic. The portrait, though respectfully drawn, is damning. While it is clear that Bailey wants Becon to be considered important enough to be studied, he does not seem to want Becon to be taken too seriously. Bailey’s research has broadened our knowledge of Becon considerably, but his conclusions invite reexamination. My thesis aims to nuance picture of Becon that Bailey painted in only broad

54 Bailey, xiii.
55 Ibid., xiii-xix.
strokes. This section highlights the major differences between Bailey's interpretation of Becon and my own.

The difference involves criteria for assessing Becon's historical significance. What makes a person important in history? Although Bailey's portrayal of Becon's blunt, unsophisticated qualities seems accurate, his evaluation of Becon's importance does not adequately explain Becon's appeal. By using different standards of significance, it is possible to examine the same man, even the same fact pattern as Bailey examined, and produce a strikingly different picture of Becon.

It is not entirely clear what Bailey means when he describes Becon's devotional works as standing outside the "mainstream of Christian tradition," since he does not define "mainstream." A glance through Becon's writings certainly reveals the tenets of a fairly straightforward, mid-sixteenth-century Protestantism. Perhaps Bailey's remark refers to Becon's alleged "puritan" leanings. Where discrepancies between Becon's and other reformers' thought occur, they do not concern fundamental doctrine. Furthermore, it does not seem sufficiently subtle for Bailey to deem what may be called Becon's proto-puritan piety as merely "narrow." After all, *The Sick Man's Salve* remained in print until only seven years before the outbreak of the Civil War. The very fact that strains of Becon's thought anticipate puritan thought argue further for his historical relevance in seventeenth-century English religious culture.

It seems inappropriate to evaluate a historical figure - particularly a disseminator of ideas to large numbers of ordinary people - solely on the basis of ground-breaking originality. This is simply too blunt an instrument for evaluation of historical worth, especially in the evaluation of religious figures, for whom originality often is not even a goal. Importance in history belongs not only to the creators but also translators: the person who most effectively communicates an idea to wide audiences is as important as the one who conceived them.

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56 Since a strict definition of the term "Protestant" refers to a specific group of reformists in the German states after the second Diet of Speyer (1529), a technical understanding of the term "Protestant" does not fit the English Edwardian time period. However, it may be used loosely throughout this thesis to refer generally to those views which embraced the Pauline and Augustinian doctrines of grace, transmitted first through Luther's teaching, and then amplified to include the Reformed theological traditions of the Swiss reformers.
That Becon as a man whose attributes were valuable only when "party feeling ran high" is only a partial truth, drawing only on evidence of Becon's polemical side. The cumulative effect of his many works - devotional works, plays, catechisms, prayers, primers and household manuals - that for more than five decades proved the most durable agents of lasting reform. If he was, as Bailey suggests, "over-valued" by his contemporaries during the heated days of Marian persecution (which is not an entirely convincing assertion), it is equally true that he has been under-valued by historians for his contribution to popular intellectual and religious culture in the years of Protestant development. John Ayre argues that Becon was important because he "gained a vast influence over the public mind," evidenced by several facts: "that his editions were numerous, and that his name was eagerly seized on by a printer to recommend a book, but also from the more specific fact, that [John] Day thought it worth his while to apply for a royal licence to print Becon's works." Ayre concludes that "the plain inference is that the sale must have been considerable."\(^{57}\) Ayre also notes that the Stationers' Company kept Becon's works in print into the seventeenth century. Quite apart from the sheer number of book sales, Bailey himself claims, rather off-handedly, that in his books Becon "furnishes his readers with the sort of arguments likely to be of most use to them."\(^{58}\) Bailey does not go on to explain what he means by "of most use," but if his statement is true, it represents a significant achievement. Bailey also says Becon's works were "a mine of information" about Protestant opinion in England. "If he wrote for the humbler supporters of the Reformation, he also reflected their views."\(^{59}\) Hence he was an important conduit between two realms not always as easily bridged by other reformers.

Bailey also describes Becon as having preferred simple, emotional formulae to "reasoned apologetic." This is not quite true on two counts. First, to criticize a careful apologetic for being interwoven with "simple emotional formulae" or rhetoric is to posit an artificial incompatibility between various methods of religious communication in the sixteenth century. Bailey's categories

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\(^{57}\) Ayre, xv.

\(^{58}\) Bailey, 116-117.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 117.
do not fully allow for the permeability of various persuasive vehicles in Reformation-era media. Rhetoric can be disguised as reasoned, and apologetics can be expressed simply and passionately. Becon's rhetoric, apologetic, and exhortation are all tied up in each other; he happily conflates them in almost all his works. But one thing is clear: Becon always used his rhetoric in the service of his exhortative instruction, never the other way around.

The other argument against Bailey’s assertion that Becon relied more on emotionalism than reason can be tested by examining Becon's outlined tenets of the reformed Christian faith. Bailey is correct that the outlines are not the academic work of theologians such as Cranmer, Vermigli or Calvin. Yet, they possess an orderliness, a simple, but systematic quality, that is neither purely rhetorical nor purely apologetic. Becon's doctrinal explanations are not only "elaborate" (contrary to Bailey's contention) but are also ingenious in their mutation into easily comprehended lessons. His style of explaining theology testifies to his commitment to render his work understandable for many different types of people. This art of transmission, far more than his acidic polemic, was Becon's primary talent. His writing displays painstakingly earnest and practical religious instruction, but his readers must be patient with him; he builds his points slowly, weaving anecdotes and tangents into a larger apologetic framework. Skimming Becon, or taking him out of context, leads only to caricature. While he can definitely get side-tracked by pet peeves into rhetorical outbursts, he always returns to sober and detailed exhortation. It is difficult to sustain confidence in Bailey's reduction of Becon to a mere "shouter of slogans" when there are literally thousands of pages of evidence to the contrary.

As for Becon's widely acclaimed "vulgarity," it is perplexing that a historian can see this as a strike against Becon's significance as a sixteenth-century reformer, since Martin Luther himself raised the practise of vile anatomical and bestial references for rhetorical, religious purposes almost to the level of a Protestant art form. It would seem from Becon's popularity as a writer and preacher that it is his very earthiness and "vulgarity" that contributed to his contemporary effectiveness. Far from being a weakness, Becon's courseness was part of his appeal - his marketability - in the effort to reach masses of people whose lives were anything but genteel.
Bailey's summaries do Becon some justice, but for the truest advertisement one must turn Becon's own texts. He states his goals as a reformer and pastor very clearly in the first volume of his Worckes, saying that he aimed not at cultivating learnedness or erudition, but at equipping his readers with basic religious knowledge.

In all my sermons and writings I have not attempted matters of high knowledge...far removed from the common sense and capacity of the people, but I have been content at all times to handle such matters as might rather edify the brethren, than to drive them into an admiration or stupor at the doctrine of so rare, unwonted, high, and unsearchable mysteries, and as might most make unto the avancement of virtue and unto the repression of vice...To teach the people to know themselves and their salvation in the blood of Christ through faith, and to walk worthy of the kindness of God, leading a life agreeable to the same, hath only been the stop and mark whereunto I have directed all my studies and travails both in preaching and in writing.60

After quoting this passage, Bailey comments that Becon certainly did achieve these "modest aims." Are they so modest? Communicating a supernatural message to natural man is among the least "modest" of tasks. Moreover, even if Becon's aims were modest (which I do not believe them to be), they should be considered with similar gravity as those reformers' aims which are considered lofty. Therefore, historians should seek Becon's importance neither in originality nor in a consistently scholarly tone, but in his knowledge of his audience and his success at transmitting a thorough education in Protestant doctrine through his writings. It took all kinds of reformers to bring about a Reformation; different audiences required that the reformers adopt different voices, different modes of communication. Becon's gift was cultural, not merely theological, fluency.

The popularity of Becon's ideas generated an impressive commercial demand for his works during his life; copies of his works and tracts were scattered in homes throughout England for decades after his death. Can it consequently be said that he left "no notable or permanent legacy"? Some of the most important legacies in history may be quiet or even invisible. If as historians we judge greatness in the field of religious and intellectual history only on the basis of originality, unusual intellectual prowess, or valorous acts, then much of what makes up that history may pass us

60 Ibid., 120
by. It is true that Becon was neither a great theologian, nor a great ecclesiastical statesman like Cranmer; nor a beloved personality and martyr like Latimer. But neither was he just a great "propagandist." His propaganda, or rhetoric, to use the better, less anachronistic term, was only one facet of his effectiveness. There are more levels of religious influence and more kinds of effective reformers than stereotypes allow. This thesis contends that there is a middle ground between seminal theologians and crude pamphleteers. Although his expertise in emotional persuasion was considerable, Becon was more than the sum of his rhetoric; a close reading of Becon's own writings suggests that he was far more than just a semi-serious, utilitarian hot-head. Rather, as one of the fathers of the tradition of popular, Protestant instruction, he was a careful teacher, an earnest apologist for common men and women, and a man of sincere evangelism and cultural vision. His works contributed to the not-so-sensational, not-so-visible process of gradual protestantization of English religious culture. Bailey viewed Becon's plainness, occasional vulgarity, emotionalism, and practise of recycling abler theologians' ideas for the masses as the qualities that inhibited Becon's achievement of historical greatness, but are those not the very qualities that constitute Becon's genius?

61 "Evangelism" here is used to mean: the deliberate attempt to convey to others the message of God's free offering of eternal justification of repentant man and woman through Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. Evangelism has as its goal the reconciliation of human beings to God, and has as its vehicle for achieving such a goal both actions and words. Evangelism is neither an exclusively Catholic nor Protestant activity, but was a particular preoccupation of the sixteenth-century Protestants in keeping with their interest to model apostolic and early church approaches to spreading the teachings of Christ. From Michael Green's _Evangelism Through the Local Church_ (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), Archbishop William Temple is quoted: "To evangelize is so to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men should come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Saviour, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of his church" 9.
B. BECON'S WORKS IN CONTEXT:
REFORMIST LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Introduction: Medieviality in Early Modern England

At first glance, Becon's *The Sick Man's Salve* looks like a reformist, perhaps anti-medieval work, operating in an innovative genre. But Eugene Rice reminds us that: "It is... well to remember that claims for innovation in one period often rest on ignorance of the period that preceded it." Becon broke with the Catholic Church and spent his whole career trying to persuade others to do the same. This does not mean however, that he was not a "medieval" man or, indeed, a "medieval" writer. Quite the contrary. The arguments in this thesis follow Tessa Watt's dictum regarding cultural change:

The theory of social 'polarization' underestimates the ability of culture to absorb new beliefs while retaining old ones, to forge hybrid forms, to accommodate contradictions and ambiguities. ... [hybrid literary works] suggest that there were... areas of gradual and unconscious cultural integration.

In *The Sick Man's Salve* Becon presses radically different ideas through the grill of a traditional methodology; the result is a literary hybrid of continuities and discontinuities in the structure and style of both pre-Reformation and reformist religious influences. In the end, strict categories of what is "medieval" about Becon, and what is not, prove deceptive. The aim of this section is to offer a brief background to the literary, oral, and lay religious culture of Becon's time as context for evaluating *The Sick Man's Salve* as a monument to cultural transition, containing points of confluence of medieval, humanist, and reformist methods and themes.

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The Approach

The methodological aims of this thesis are similar to Paul Russell's in *Lay Theology in the Reformation* in that it seeks to understand the "genre of propagandistic expression" by exploring popular literature and noting the practical "form of piety expressed and recommended." In *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, although Tessa Watt concentrates somewhat exclusively on ballads, her categories for analyzing print as a cultural indicator of popular thought also facilitate analysis of popular religious treatises. Popular religious literature, she maintains, is pregnant with intelligence about its audience. It can serve the historian as a kind of weather vane by which to discern the impact of reformed theology on "traditional" culture. Watt distinguishes between literary outgrowths of the Reformation that are clearly "Protestant" and those she calls simply "post-Reformation." She supports the idea that out of the initial overlapping of traditional and reformist religious traditions a Protestant "belief-formation" emerged. This "belief-formation" must be understood, she argues, as a gradual, complex cohesion within a Catholic society, rather than a clean and sudden swap of one set of beliefs for another. Cheap print and popular religious literature, according to Watt, provide evidence of this growing religious cohesion, as they are "products of a dialogue between Protestant norms and traditional practises; between a centralized press and localized experience; between authors and consumers, through the profit-conscious publisher as middleman." Popular religious literature evinces cultural intersections and serves as both an agent of change and as a "force. . . for cultural continuity." Stressing reformist literature's role as an agent of radical change, John King finds that late medieval literary methods underwent what he calls

65 Watt, 22.
66 Ibid., 327.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 330.
a 'sea change' when reformist writers applied them to “a set of radically different historical, political, and religious circumstances.”

Becon’s text supports both Watt’s and King’s views: by advocating the doctrines of justification by grace through faith and sola scriptura. The Sick Man’s Salve certainly served as an agent of change. But as a moral tale told from a deathbed, it was certainly also a force for continuity in its participation in the genre and language of traditional medieval books on the Art of Dying (ars moriendi). The actual structure of his works thus mirrors the complexity of his era.

Printing and Getting Published

During the reign of Edward VI, Protestants were permitted considerable control of publication under the auspices of Richard Grafton, the King’s printer, and Edward Whitchurch. With the patents royal, Protestant factions operated essentially official presses, with a monopoly for reformist works. These years witnessed the development of both a reformist literary tradition and the growth of an audience for reformist ideas. Even so, it was not a simple matter to publish one’s work. An aspiring writer had to attract a patron for the dual purpose of funding and protection. Dedications in the prefaces of such books can deceive; although they often extol patrons for their generosity, both John King and James McConica point out that all the dedications represent is a request for support, not assurance of a secured patronage relationship. Payment, like the work, was uncertain; in fact, it was not uncommon for patrons to pay writers in preferments rather than money. Sometimes the printer himself acted as patron, taking a writer into his home for a time.

The logistics of printing in early modern England were connected to the logistics of securing patronage, and therefore subject to the same kinds of obstacles. Printers did not always print from

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69 King, 4.
70 Ibid., 6.
72 King, For a full overview of important people and events relating to literary activity during the Edwardian Reformation, see pp. 19-32.
74 King, 103.
manuscripts but relied on copies, so it is not clear whether Becon’s works went directly from his pen to the printer, or through the medium of a scribe or unofficial copier. There is little evidence of the technical details of Becon’s writing career. During the years *The Sick Man’s Savve*’s publication - 1560 to 1630s - books were becoming increasingly affordable and book prices remained fairly steady. But even so, for many English men and women wages were not generally so high that book-buying was a matter of recreational consumption. It may then be inferred that the average workman or family could not afford to buy books that were not important to them. Those books they purchased were likely to have been considered enough of a priority to warrant the cost. If so, book sales and numbers of editions of books are significant indicators of popular taste.

**Literacy and Lay Reformist Theology**

King calls the changes in lay intellectual life during the Reformation an “explosion of popular culture.” A rapid expansion of literacy accompanied the outpourings of literature; the reformers encouraged people of varying educational levels began to read aloud from (or listen to) vernacular versions of the New Testament, Lutheran tracts, and the Wyclif and Tyndale translations of the Bible. King also argues, somewhat counter-intuitively, that the fact that there is so little evidence of some of the literature testifies not to its scarcity but to the breadth of its circulation and

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76 Watt, 261. Following Keith Wrightson’s research, Watt estimates that in 1560 an average craftsman made 8 to 10 d. per day and a laboring man would make around 9 to 10 pounds a year. The basic cost of subsistence was around 11 to 14 pounds a year. Wrightson, Keith, *English Society, 1580-1680* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982).
77 King, 104.
78 Bennett, *(Books...)*, 112-113.
longevity of its use. "Octavo editions of theological tracts, political pamphlets and verse chapbooks crowded bookstalls. The extreme rarity of so many Edwardian tracts and fugitive pieces is itself a proof of [their] popularity. English readers wore out their pamphlets, proclamations, ballads, broadsides, and other ephemera."79

Historians debate the extent of literacy during the Reformation. One line of argument is that Henrician clerical opposition to vernacular religious literature in fact presupposed widespread literacy.80 Despite obvious dissimilarities between the English and continental Reformations, the implications of Gerald Strauss' forceful arguments regarding literacy and the Continental Reformation are worth considering. Strauss argues that the thrust of the Protestant (in particular, Lutheran) educational program is inexplicable without widespread literacy. He suggests that the ability to read with fair facility was evidently much more widespread in sixteenth-century German society than is ordinarily recognized. General illiteracy would have made nonsense of the Lutheran endeavor to promote domestic instruction. It could therefore be argued that the reformers' ceaseless efforts to involve the family...in Christian instruction constitutes in itself a kind of proof of extensive literacy. But there is better evidence. Mandates and visitations directives in Protestant lands plainly assume literacy as the norm, illiteracy as the exception, and not only in populous cities.81

If significant numbers of people either read (or heard) books during the Reformation, how did they obtain the books? English men and women did not have to live in a cosmopolitan city or port to find books; London book centers were linked to rural areas through what Watt calls a "network of communications," across which ran a "two-way cultural flow" between city and country and among authors, printers, distributors, and readers.82 Another common way for literature to travel - literally - was by peddler's pack: "amongst the gloves and combs, books of riddles and ballads of Robin Hood" there may have been only one little octavo which would have reached "a different sort of buyer than the sermons and treatises published by mainstream stationers for sale in ordinary bookshops."83 Evidence suggests that the printed word was crucial to the

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79 King, 104.
80 Ibid., 103.
81 Strauss, Gerald, Luther's House of Learning (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 127.
82 Watt, 324.
83 Ibid., 260.
protestantization of the middling and lower classes in England. The increased flow of religious literature among laymen points to the logo-centricism of the emergent religious culture. It emphasized "the invisible, abstract and didactic word," and de-emphasized the role of the visual, sensual and imaginative in worship. 84

C. BECON'S INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY HERITAGE

Medieval Precedents

During Becon's early career there existed no doctrinally monolithic Catholicism in the most technical sense. When this thesis discusses those cultural forms and ideas that are "Catholic," it does not suppose that the doctrinal and religious boundaries were perfectly defined. Definition of the official doctrine of Western Catholicism does not occur with precision until the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Morton Bloomfield, in his study on the Seven Deadly Sins, explained it this way:

The Western medieval world has been considered a unity centering around Catholic theology and religion; yet there is no doubt that, as scholars of the last and present centuries have shown, there never was any real unity in the full sense of the term. The structure of medievalism was not completely integral because it was built up by slow additions of widely different opinions, ideas, art forms, and concepts, and because it comprehended conflicting ideas and interpretations. The medieval economic and political organization was more diverse than is commonly supposed. In our zeal we must not oversimplify. Still the Church and all it stood for provided a system of beliefs, a set of standards, and a world view founded on faith, which gave Western civilization at least a sense of unity which it has not felt again since the sixteenth century. 85

The key word in the last sentence is "sense." There may have been a sense of Catholic unity without the unity itself.

84 Ibid., 324.
Becon's literary style was not uniquely "Protestant." The primary features of his approach have multiple medieval precedents: the mixture of evangelism and a blunt, polemical tone, his stringing together of emotional, dramatic passages, his use scriptural citations out of context, and his pattern of linking disparate themes together to make a moral teaching can each be found in conventionally medieval literature and sermons. Even his use of the vernacular was not entirely new. He stands in a long line of heated polemical communicators, or "translators," of religious principals to common people. St. Bernardino of Siena, an Italian religious cleric in the fifteenth century, was a fiery, popular preacher who delivered countless heated sermons in the vernacular that were transcribed by others and have all the flavor of an oration. Like Becon, Bernardino used pungent colloquial idioms and stories to illustrate his point and is considered "neither a great theologian nor an original thinker." Bernardino's preaching had a strong social dimension, as did Becon's, and he aimed at conventional medieval social targets: "usurers, dishonest shopkeepers and merchants, gamblers, fomenters of civic factionalism, sodomites, vain women, ignorant priests, and heretics." There were other reformers whose styles Becon's resembles. John Wyclif, for example, strung his tracts together in elaborately disorganized fashion with disconnected social and clerical criticisms and a smattering of scriptural references, some taken out of context, some not.

Another medieval forerunner of Becon's literary style was the medieval morality play. Significant characteristics of the morality play match Becon's approach to popular religious writing: Bloomfield refers to its characteristic "avoidance of philosophical and psychological analysis," "avoidance of heavy symbolism," "emphasis on action" rather than static imagery, and vividness of detail. There is, then, a rich literary and oratorical precedent for the cluttered religious

87 Ibid., 118.
88 Ibid.
89 Wyclif and Becon were critical of the similar vices in general in their respective times, but they directed their attacks quite differently: Wyclif's quarry was the institutions which blocked his reform efforts. He was also preoccupied with clerical failings. Becon concentrated more on personal, spiritual neglect on the part of laymen. Also, Wyclif's scriptural references are fewer in number than Becon's and less accurately cited. Matthews, P.D., ed. The English Works of Wyclif (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1880). 226.
compendium designed for a wide audience. Becon was heir to these medieval homiletic and literary forms.

**Christian Humanist and Patristic Precedents**

One of the crucial, but less obvious intellectual influences on Becon's work was Christian Humanism. Having spent his formative years at Cambridge during the development of humanist scholarship in England, Becon was certainly exposed to the fashionable humanist ideas then circulating in the universities, among the gentry, and at court. This essay will not attempt a serious analysis of Becon's humanist leanings. It will suffice simply to speak of Becon's writings as showing absorption of humanist ideas and methods of scholarship. His choice of dialogical structure and rhetoric, his use of classical names, and reliance on Latin and Greek Fathers are suggestive of a humanist format. Overall, however, Becon's scholarly commitment to humanism was weak. The disciplines and interests of humanist scholarship were neither his passion nor his talent.

One finds in Becon's views of education an interest in classical studies, linguistic precision, and patristic learning: he believes education to be a primary shaper of character and emphasizes language and the uniqueness of his epoch in history. Although Becon may have absorbed techniques from humanist scholarship, he was not preoccupied with it; neither his passion nor his ability lay there. He wrote for the "people," or, as he would put it, for "all Christians" rather than for an

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Lorenzo Valla took Francesco Petrarch's emphasis on rhetoric as superior to scholastic dialectic as an interpretive tool and developed the technique of philological analysis. Following Valla's application of these techniques to classical and New Testament texts, Erasmus was able to translate the New Testament from the Greek with considerable precision, 61.

92 Rice, *Foundations...*, 25. Eugene Rice explained how humanists used the Fathers as "polemical rods with which to beat the scholastics...", but Becon's readers will find no committed attack on scholasticism or medieval scholarship in Becon's writing. Scholarship and methodology simply were not urgent issues for Becon.
academic elite. He believed his audience to be less concerned with attacks on speculative theology than about getting to heaven. Ultimately, therefore, the content of Becon's works is theological, soteriological, and ecclesiological, rather than humanistic and academic.

Next to scriptural translation, the fruit of humanist scholarship that probably affected Becon's work the most was patristic study. The apostolic and the patristic eras offered early Protestant reformers what they considered a liberating "vision of antiquity...a Christian philosophy and a pristine theology...which seemed necessarily to reconcile the tensions between Christianity and the ideals of classical culture..."93 Becon was not a "patristic scholar" like Vermigli, but his copious citations of the Fathers evince a deep reverence for them. He frequently quotes Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Basil, and others, holding them up as quasi-canonical authorities.94

**Historical Perspective, Periodization, and Themes**

Becon's view of history is also essentially medieval rather than humanistic. He views history as driven by entirely providential rather than human activity. Following the Judaic and medieval Christian view of history, Becon ascribes no causal autonomy to historical events. God's providence is the prime mover of all natural and chronological movement; men and natural forces act and generate their own limited momentum, but no action exists outside of God's permissive sphere.95 Becon did share with other reformers a sense of periodization and historicism, if only in his belief that he lived in an age unlike any other and from which all great reform would come. But Becon did not articulate his views of periodized history often except occasionally to praise his own time as a a kind of culmination, nor did he discuss the place of antiquity and the Middle Ages in his scheme of world history. Rather, he remains in the medieval historical tradition of placing the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection as the supreme collective event in world history, around which all

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94 Rice, (Foundations of...), 70-72.
95 Ibid., 72. There is an even fuller explanation of the difference between humanist and reformed views on history and providence on pages 72-73.
prior and subsequent events revolve. In this sense, one could say that Becon had a “medieval,” theologically-centered view of history.\textsuperscript{96} While these categories overlapped considerably, medieval theologians generally defined man “by what he lacked, by the gulf that separated him from God,” and humanists tended to define man “in terms of the positive capacities generously granted him by God when He created him in His own image.”\textsuperscript{97} In this light, Becon has far more in common with medieval theologians than with humanist scholars. Repentance and regeneration were more central to his thought than virtue, revival of classical culture, or purity of Latin. If historians generally classify the medieval approach to religious writings as heavily theocentric, accumulative, summary, and juxtapositive, and they characterize humanist scholarship as corrective, evaluative, and preoccupied by text and language, then Becon’s style represents a coalescence of both without firm footing in either.\textsuperscript{98}  

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 68.  
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 77.  
\textsuperscript{98} Ozment, Steven, \textit{The Age of Reform, 1250-1550} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 307.
D. BECON AND THE REFORMIST LITERARY TRADITION

Sources: Propaganda, Rhetoric, and Devotional Literature

As historical sources for the study of the Reformation, rhetorical and devotional works challenge the historian in different ways. Some historians attribute the Reformation as much to rhetoric, or "propaganda," as to actual theology. But what is propaganda? Technically, it is "information methodically spread to promote or injure a cause." Although this definition fits many works of literature, the term is usually used in such a way as to indicate the manipulation or mutilation of objective facts for the purposes of persuasion. Propaganda aims at garnering support for a cause or winning mental allies, while rhetoric cuts deeper into the heart and will; it implies persuasion in the spirit. Rhetoric is defined as "the study of the effective use of language" and the "ability to use language effectively...the art of influencing the thought and conduct of an audience." The humanists fell in love with classical rhetoric for this very purpose: it could transform the heart, not just the intellect. Although there is much about Reformation propaganda and rhetoric that was insincere, much of the popular, persuasive literature needs to be taken seriously. Paul Russell wrote that popular Reformation rhetoric or "propaganda"

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99 It is helpful to avoid over-simplifying the distinctions between the goals of the reformers and the facts about Catholicism. Steven Ozment argued that it is important to avoid thinking in terms of "subjective" Protestantism, and "objective" Church authority. "Traditional Catholic piety never wanted for subjectivity and introspection, nor was there any lack of sacramental ritual and clerical authority in Protestantism...It was not primarily magic and ritual that protestants wanted removed from late medieval religion...What Protestants set out to overcome was a perceived oppressive superstition - teachings and practises that burdened the consciences and pocketbooks of the faithful", Ozment, (The Age...), 210.


101 Ibid., 1132.

demonstrates both a depth of religious feeling and a vision of church reform linked to a peculiar sense of immediacy....Historians who frequently dismissed [such literature] as simple Protestant propaganda must take another look at these...documents of lay piety and theology...[and] must come to terms with the deep, in some cases medieval piety of the...people who wrote them.103

Another source for studying Reformation mentalities that Becon provides is devotional literature. White doubts whether “official books reached the religious mind of the time so intimately or reflected it so fully as the manuals of private devotion. These by their very circumstances of their publication had to appeal to personal conviction and taste in the most personal of spiritual undertakings, solitary prayer.”104 Devotional literature offers a window into religious mentalities, a “more dependable way to the understanding of the religious consciousness of much of sixteenth century England than any other avenue of approach.”105

Reformist Aims as Expressed in Popular Literature

What were the aims - however splintered and uncertain - of the English reformers during the 1540s, 1550s and 1560s, and how did popular religious literature express them? At least in the early stages, most reformers - preachers, theologians and writers of varying degrees of sophistication - enjoyed a general unity of desires. Tessa Watt summarizes the common goals as follows: the first objective was religious and political, the “galvanizing of popular support for the Protestant nation, against the papists at home and abroad.” This involved the active promotion of martyr legends and new Protestant heroes. Well into the Elizabethan period reformist literature conveyed urgency about doctrine and a sense that “the papist enemy [was] not yet vanquished, . . . [a] mood of struggle, inspiration and martyrdom.”106 A second objective was to spread gospel (good news) of justification.

103 Russell, 213.
104 White, 3.
105 Ibid., 4.
106 Watt, 285.
of sins through acceptance of God's freely offered grace. The reformers carefully explained this
doctrine and made it vivid by using the medieval convention of the final speeches of repentant
sinners in treatises on how to die; Becon brought this convention to perfection in *The Sick Man's
Salve*. A third objective was to popularize Scripture,\textsuperscript{107} to create a biblically literate laity and help
"effect transition to a book-based religion," using Old and New Testament figures to redefine
spiritual and moral \textit{exempla}.\textsuperscript{108} A final goal was to reform society along the lines prescribed by
reformist theology. This included advice regarding the family and civic conduct. Every one of these
elements of the reformist "program" (using the term loosely) is clearly visible in *The Sick Man's Salve.*

This relatively coherent reformist agitation was manifested in Protestantism's "most youthful
stage... when the true religion was expected to solve all social problems."\textsuperscript{109} To further the reform
process, Protestant writers gave practical advice for families and households and the wrote dialogues
with a traditional question-and-answer format. The use of dialogues carried forward the long­
standing medieval tradition of writing manuals on how to live and die well, but departed from it by
advocating new ways - and reasons - to read the Bible, meditate, marry, and preach.\textsuperscript{110} These were
goals of rhetoriticians, academic, and popular writers. The rhetoriticians' role was to facilitate
theological and cultural reform by writing the kinds of works that the populace could grasp. In the
minds of reformers, the task was urgent since - as Becon was well aware - the reformers feared that
the populace would grow weary of the new religion owing to the uncertainty produced by erratic and
disjointed reform.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{107} There is some question about which Bible Becon used for writing *The Sick Man's Salve*. He appears to
have used the Vulgate at times in *The Sick Man's Salve* since he quotes the Apocrypha frequently. At the time
of writing the *Geneva Bible* and *Bishop's Bible* were not yet in print. It is likely that he used the *Great Bible*,
which was printed in 1539. Bennett, H.S., (*Books...*), 142-143.
\textsuperscript{108} Watt, 85.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{110} Bennett, 132.
\textsuperscript{111} Russell, 7.
The Integration of Oral and Written Culture in Becon’s Writing

To understand the form of *The Sick Man’s Salve* it is important to remember that Becon was a preacher and a grammar school teacher before he was a writer. His habits of communicating were formed in oral forums: the pulpit and the classroom. He wrote in English. He seems to have constructed his works very much as if he had spoken them; there are long passages that could easily have been sermons because of their readable, oratorical flow. Whether he simply had his sermons transcribed while he was speaking, or whether they originated in full written form first, is not clear; it was time-consuming for preachers to copy down sermons, exactly as they delivered them, so transcripts of them were often either from the originals due to fatigue or elaborated due to enthusiastic revision.112

It was customary for medieval preachers and academics to teach unconstrained by precise quotation from their sources.113 Rather than quoting an original translation of Scripture or the Fathers, Becon would simply paraphrase a quotation with only a general reference to its text. Becon did not copy long scriptural passages into his texts, but followed the typically scholastic pattern of citation by inserting single verses - albeit by the hundreds - into the text. He then moved in and out of repetitive cycles of quotation for the purpose of pounding the words and verses into his readers’ minds. The sixteenth century was still an age of memory: Becon’s extreme repetitiveness would have been a familiar device for facilitating memorization.

Although print was revolutionizing mass communication during the Reformation period, written and oral culture were still very much enmeshed. Robert Scribner argues that reformers broke traditional molds by delivering sermons and holding debates outside of the church building. However, marketplace preaching had long been encouraged by the medieval reforming orders. Reformist writers would have been well aware that “their works would be mediated through hearing.

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112 Bennett, 150. The historian today stands then at possibly several removes from the reformers original words. It requires some imagination to recreate from the printed page the vitality and energy with which these sermons were likely delivered.

113 Grafton, 31.
Many reformers expressly suggested that their 'readers' have works read aloud to them. It was common, then, to read a pamphlet or book aloud in a home or tavern and to discuss it at length; it makes sense that reformist popularizers would write with this activity in mind.

It may be counter-intuitive to argue that learnedness and illiteracy can go together, but there is no intrinsic connection between illiteracy and the lack of knowledge contained in books. The fact that one cannot read does not mean one cannot listen. The mechanics of reading are only one means of absorbing ideas. Illiterate men and women may have had books read to them and thus—in fact—may have become quite learned on subjects despite their illiteracy. It is therefore even more difficult to estimate how many people were exposed to Becon's thinking. When, therefore, the words "readers" and "audience" appear in this thesis, they refer to hearers as well.

The Reformist Scriptural Principle and "Gospelling" Literature

By the late sixteenth century many of the reformers, including Becon, had accepted a Zwinglian "scriptural principle" of laying down all presumed "crooked sticks" (i.e. non-scriptural traditions and accretions, "extraneous" ceremonies and doctrines, etc.), next to the "straight-edge" of scripture in order to determine their legitimacy for the reformed church. This principle of scriptural evaluation provided the reformers with a litmus test for doctrinal validity that many traditional

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114 Scribner, R.W., *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987), 54. The traditional sermon presupposed a "passive, if receptive, audience", according to Scribner, whereas the reformers' sermons broke with tradition by encouraging participation, even heckling and heated challenges from the congregation.

115 Ibid., 55. Scribner elaborates the idea of the "discussion group", citing evidence of meetings in inns, work places, at artisans' guilds. Discussions, ballads, songs, he says, have a "symbiotic relationship with printing", and when "decoded" at a local level were crucial to the internalization of radical new religious ideas. 56-57.

116 Watt, 330-331. Before *The Sick Man's Salve*, Becon's works are known to have been read aloud to gathered meetings in London during the Marian persecution. See Garrett, Christina, *The Marian Exiles, 1553-1559* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 84.
practices and doctrines failed to pass. This became the capital interpretive principle in Becon's approach to doctrine; although his system of citation was not always meticulous, he built a scriptural fence around every point he made, no matter how trivial. Therefore, to present his lessons in *The Sick Man's Salve*, Becon carefully arranged scriptural verses, stories of biblical figures, and sayings from the Fathers and a few classical thinkers to bolster his points, all of which together amounted to one vast advice book similar to medieval exemplary literature, although with a different soteriological and scriptural formulae.

John King maintains that the reformers' scriptural principle revolutionized English literature. A new genre of literature known as "gospelling" literature developed that promoted the reformist cause. According to King, it "integrates profuse biblical quotation, allusion, paraphrase, and marginal commentary with native literary forms, techniques, and conventions. Particular works may consist of moralistic plots studded with scriptural tags and examples, gospel stories, or metrical paraphrases of the Bible." Direct consultation of scripture was not customary for laymen and women in the Middle Ages, says King. "Widespread illiteracy and the sacerdotal assumptions of the late medieval church," he argues, "had commonly led to the substitution of sacred legends for Bible reading." Helen White insists in her book, *Tudor Books of Private Devotion*, that the reformists' style was to be so free with scripture that they created "mosaics of scripture" that came dangerously close to constituting a "new piece of non-canonical Scripture." The mosaic style of Latin or vernacular scriptural quotation was not unique to Becon; Wyclif and others had done the same thing. It is entirely possible that *The Sick Man's Salve* was many people's earliest exposure to

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117 Butterworth, Charles. *The English Primers, 1529 - 1545* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), 237. Perhaps in defiance of authorities, Becon quoted whole sections of vernacular scripture into his devotional works during the late Henrician period, which Charles Butterworth argues, may be why none of Becon's works were published between his 1543 recantation and 1549. However in *The Sick Man's Salve* Becon did not quote whole passages of scripture but rather disparate parts.

118 King, 15-16.

119 King, 16. There is some confusion over which biblical translation Becon used. He was ordained in 1533. The Great Bible was printed in 1539; Becon wrote *The Sick Man's Salve* at least a decade later. Although King argues that Becon rejected the Vulgate (295), it is not entirely clear in *The Sick Man's Salve* that he has done so. Becon wrote and quoted scripture in English, not Latin; but he cites the Apocrypha and uses latinate names of books of the bible in *The Sick Man's Salve* in ways that suggest possible use of the Vulgate.

120 White, Helen., *The Tudor Books of Private Devotion* ((Madison: The University of Wisconsin press, 1951), 239.)
scripture, and so was treated in the home as a near equivalent. Although the Reformation is supposed to have freed men and women to read directly from scripture, early Protestants may well have gained their biblical knowledge from books like Becon's rather than from scripture itself.

E. THE SICK MAN'S SALVE: AN OVERVIEW OF ITS LITERARY FEATURES

Form

To the medieval mind, death was not something that simply occurred to the individual; it was a passage for which spiritual preparation was required. The Sick Man's Salve is both a spiritual compendium and a manual on how to accept illness cheerfully and die well, a format for which there was a rich medieval precedent.\(^{121}\) Becon was fond of structuring his works as dialogues. The Sick Man's Salve is a dialogue between five principal characters, with one grumbling sinner and several godly counselors.\(^{122}\) There is often a predominant voice whose arguments and exhortations are buttressed by reams of disconnected scriptural and occasionally patristic or classical references. Inevitably, the authoritative voice is Becon's; his is usually the character who makes the most dramatic, triumphant points, a kind of moral "movie-star" of each scene. However, Becon's voice permeates all the voices at one time or another. It is easy to say "Becon says" when referring to remarks made by the various characters because almost all the characters reflect his own views.

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\(^{121}\) Bloomfield, 222-223. Bloomfield cited a popular anonymous work called Jacob's Well which he described as the "last great medieval English popular compendium". It was structured in sermon form, punctuated with allegory. It was neither original nor artistic, says Bloomfield, but was almost a kind of a religious encyclopedia, summing up "the popular theological knowledge of the age".

\(^{122}\) King, 213, 293-295. Becon's dramas are the source of even more stark contrast to their medieval precedents; John King's analysis of Becon's radical, Calvinist innovations in the realm of homiletic drama might be a topic for a longer paper. See also Becon as a clerical playwright, 290-291.
Unlike the requirements of more fictional or fanciful dialogues, *The Sick Man’s Salve*’s coherently moralistic aims permit Becon to place little distance between himself and his characters.

The dialogue proceeds as follows: a theologically learned layman named Philemon (Becon’s principal persona), hears of the dire illness of his friend and neighbor Epaphroditus (Becon’s secondary persona) and sends his two children (named Theodore and Rachel, after Becon’s own children) to bring three godly friends, Christopher, Eusebius, and Theophile, to the sick man’s house. The conversation among these friends displays their perfect agreement on points of reformist doctrine for the edification of the readers. Philemon and his friends go to the sick man’s home and there talk him through his sickness, last will and testament, final confession, death fears, and finally death itself. The dialogue is a drama, divided into “three traditional areas of Christian combat against the flesh, the world and the devil (as in Ephesians 6: 10-12). According to this pattern, the man about to die should meditate on the brevity and vanity of this world before facing the terror of the devil’s final assault.” Becon builds the first part of the dialogue around the sickbed without the family members, the second part with the family members present, for the drafting of the will, and the two-part farewell to loved ones. In the third part the sickbed becomes a deathbed as the dialogue builds to a dramatized spiritual climax. It ends with the sick man’s rapturous death speeches and friends’ eulogies.

*The Sick Man’s Salve* is an interesting combination of Becon’s other styles: there is a little bit of everything in it. There are prayers and a kind of informal catechetical style for which he was well known. There are moving, worshipful devotional sections, a small dose of bitter anti-catholic polemic, some sections expounding on new civic and patriotic virtues, household and relationship advice (including comments on romance), and large sections of homilies unapologetically delivered.

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123 Becon’s exact etymological reference for the name *Epaphroditus* is unclear, but *Eusebius* may refer to a church father, Eusebius of Caesarea, *Philemon* to the author of the book of the New Testament by the same name, and *Theophile* to a “lover of God.”

124 The tone of the dialogue reminds one somewhat of the tone the dialogue in Erasmus’ colloquies, such as *The Godly Feast*, where friends encourage one another and speak in either easy agreement or cheerful disagreement on weighty matters. The religious attacks in both works naturally take different forms: Erasmus used cleverness and satire to criticize aspects of popular Catholicism which were accretions and corruptions of Catholic theology. Becon is more blunt, less witty, openly Protestant, and more openly evangelistic.

125 King, 117.
Themes

There are many medieval themes on which Becon could have drawn to make his point but which he chose to omit. The personification of vices and virtues functioned as organizing principles in pre-Reformation religious works. Also common were semi-fictive hagiographies and stories of miracles, accounts of direct, physical torment of the Devil, and vivid threats of hell ("doom narratives"), discussions about the fear of death and the deathbed scenes, repentance and judgment stories. Medieval themes also included "three things God hates most" and "Four Last Things" and employed lurid visual imagery, visions and discussions between soul and body.26 Christ's life events - Virgin conception, nativity, Passion, crucifixion - somewhat more than his teachings, were often central to the medieval conceptual framework and served as devotional foci.

Categories of Sin

The Seven Deadly Sins (those leading to damnation) functioned as the supreme organizational principle of sin in the Middle Ages. The Sins formed "an element of . . . spiritual unity" in medieval literature and religious culture.127 At the close of the sixteenth century, however, Protestant reforming circles replaced the Sins with the Decalogue into catechisms and religious educational programs.128 Despite the shift in focus during the Reformation, the Sins remained, according to Watt, an "iconographical framework" demonstrating the effective continuity between

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126 Watt, 120, 110-112.
127 Ibid., 99, xiv. Also, see John Bossy, "Moral Arithmetic" in Conscience and Casuistry.
128 Bloomfield, 243. For complete history of the Sins, see Bloomfield.
medieval and post-Reformation conventions of neighborly morality. While Becon has plenty to say about sin and the nature of human fallenness, he does not discuss the Sins, as such. He completely omits the Seven Deadly Sins and reorients his the thematic center to the sinner’s unmerited salvation at the eleventh hour.

Death: Fear and Preparation

The image of the dying man, fearful of judgment, clinging in vain to his worldly possessions, is an ancient, universal theme in moralist literature. Medieval sermons emphasized the horror of dying in a state of spiritual or moral unpreparedness. Bernardino’s fifteenth-century sermons on usury, avarice and vanity describe scenes of the Devil coming for the unrepentant sinner, strangling, choking, and finally dragging him or her away. Sometimes the dying sinner is a victim, sometimes a criminal. Fear of meeting such a horrible end was instrumental in the illumination of the principle of penitence. Death dramas, like memento mori, prodded the stubborn to virtuous behavior in this life. Although their conclusions about salvation differed widely, the theme of the death provided common ground for Catholics and reformists, “an area of shared culture spanning the doctrinal rift” between them.

While the spectre of death and even the Devil’s torment is certainly present in The Sick Man’s Salve, it is not the dominant theme. The substance of the Devil’s torment is his accusation that God would never let the sick man into heaven because of his lack of works. But Becon used the threatening Devil sequence to create an impassioned dialogue between the sick man and the friends about how the Devil lies about the means of salvation. Philemon argues that if a believer is truly

129 Bloomfield, 188-189. Bloomfield notes that defiant departure from the Seven Deadly Sins takes early form in Wyclif.
130 Watt, 96. Reformist treatment of sin increased its emphasis on sins against God, taking as its focal point the first commandment, and stressing secondarily sins against one’s neighbor. Much of Protestant morality literature (and Sick Man in particular) tended to address collective as well as personal sins: the wickedness of the age, of the country, and of the community.
131 Cochrane and Kirshner, (Bernardino sermons), 135-138.
132 Watt, 113.
133 Ibid.
repentant, God grants the unmerited gift (gratis, grace) of salvation; even at the eleventh hour God receives him directly into heaven, works or no works. Becon uses the Thief on the Cross next to Christ, the reformers' key citation for this doctrine. Here again, an essentially traditional convention is turned to reformist educational purposes. In addition, Becon presents his readers with familiar threats of damnation, but then suggests new "remedies" for such fears in the form of a new doctrine of salvation. He makes the death speech a vehicle for final discourses with God, a substitute for the Catholic sacrament of last rites. This approach provides Becon a perfect opportunity for his characters to rehearse a confession of Protestant theology as he has defined for them thus far.

Becon's stated goal was to provide a manual on dying well. At the same time, however, *The Sick Man's Salve* is essentially a manual on living well. He treats all levels of life and how life should be lived in order to prepare spiritually for the next life. He de-emphasizes the role of ritual; he avoids any assumption that a person's performance of an external action (a ritual) verifies internal assent. Nowhere in *The Sick Man's Salve*, or indeed in any of Becon's writings, can one find hagiographic references to saints, personifications of vice and virtue, or any confidence in a doctrine of salvation through works. He utterly ignores the Sins, preferring to deal with sin in general. There is no excessive visual imagery, no preoccupation with Christ's humanity. While using the conventional theme of fast-approaching death and repentance dramatized through the last dying speech, Becon conspicuously omits traditional Catholic content and conclusions.

**Imagery and Devices**

**Imagery**

134 Ibid. 106.
135 *The Sick Man's Salve* exhibits thoroughly developed confessions of faith. Becon's Protestant theology is already strongly defined by the 1550s.
136 Although one could argue that certain circles of Protestants replaced ritual with their own ritual of anti-ritual.
As with themes, one sees Becon's untraditional streak less in inventions of new images and more in his omissions and transformations. He discards an arsenal of medieval imagery in *The Sick Man's Salve*. Likewise he turns traditional devices to anti-traditional purposes. Among the devices he preserved but transforms for his own purposes are the death speech, the image of the "good householder," papal caricatures, themes revolving around Jerusalem, military imagery, and sickness and death as instruments of divine instruction.\footnote{Watt, 225, 252. Although the theme of England as the elect nation under a reforming, "godly" ruler was prominent in Edwardian reformist literature, defined nationalistic Protestantism or the distinctly patriotic anti-papery is missing in *The Sick Man's Salve*. Becon's hostilities in *The Sick Man's Salve* are for the most part theological, sacramental and liturgical rather than political or national. Watt, 89.} The traditional images he conspicuously omits include bells, skeletons, dances of death, clanging of chains, and the howling of demonic laughter.\footnote{Ibid., 106. Later protestant literature and ballads would not shy away from recycling these symbols for reformist purposes.} The fact that Becon jettisoned imagery of beasts and grisly visual descriptions of Lucifer and his minions does not mean that he did not believe in the existence of such creatures but simply that he chose to steer the dialogue into theological clarifications instead. The concept of the efficacy of the host as protection against the Seven Deadly Sins and conversations between Satan and the dying soul are also conspicuously missing. Becon treats sins and vices as unpersonified abstractions, while not reducing them to metaphor, allusion, or allegory. There are no categorizations or gradations of sins, nor is there a fixation on the number seven, or any other number. There is no pilgrimage imagery, no visions, no demons with flaming eyes, and no animals with many heads.

Reformist Archetypes

The theological shifts of the Reformation necessitated a change in religious "heroes." As Watt explains, "religious emotion still attached itself to heroic archetypes," and rather than de-personalize religion altogether, reformist writers simply replaced Catholic saints with Old Testament and patristic figures and Protestant martyrs. Although the theme of martyrs became the signatures of reformation literature, since *The Sick Man's Salve* predates the reign of Mary I the martyr-theme is
absent. Becon's models typically included the wise King Solomon, the foolish King Manassas, Jonah, Abraham offering Isaac, Daniel in the lions' den, and David. One could argue that such a replacement does nothing more than exchange Catholic saints with Protestant ones. This argument, however, blunts both confessions' respective theologies of saints. To suggest that biblical heroes simply replaced saints is to imply that there was little qualitative difference between the intended function of biblical heroes and martyrs, and saints. Protestant martyrs and heroes are examples and inspirators; they are never mediators. They never stand between mortals and God; they were not to be prayed to, worshipped, or venerated above other mortals in any way. Catholic saints served as both examples and mediators and harbored treasures of intercessory power, a concept anathematic to Protestant views on the sufficiency of Christ's mediation.

**Tone**

In his writings, Becon rarely expressed himself dispassionately; he used colloquialisms, vulgarisms, alliteration, isosyllabism, and word play - anything to wake up and draw in his audience. Helen White describes him as having a "downright temper." Because Becon's rhetorical style began with oral forms of communication, his diction has a catchy, rhythmic readability consistent with sixteenth-century satirical and comical literature. In his writings generally - not just in *The Sick Man's Salve* - he liberally mocks the pope and intermittently trashes monasticism, pilgrimages, images, excessive ritualism, intercessory sainthood, Purgatory, the Mass, auricular confession, fasting, ceremonies, and vows. When elucidating differences between the newly reformed priesthood and

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139 Ibid., 126. Also see Watt, 327.
140 Ibid., 127. Also see 118, 227. Mary Magdalene, one of the traditional personifications of sin, is absent from *The Sick Man's Salve.*
141 Ibid., 94.
142 White, 175.
the "romish" priesthood, he delights in word play such as "popish Prattling of monstrous monks" and "the mumbling masses [of] lazy soul-carriers."\textsuperscript{143} He refers to Catholics as "monstrous sects, idle lubbers, bellied hypocrites, careless caterpillars, and unprofitable clods of earth."\textsuperscript{144} Alliteration abounds: "dirty dregs of divers drowsy duncers," "flying flattering friars," "doting doctors," "crooked constitutions, devillish decrees," "bragging bishops," "saucy scribes," "pattering priests," and "your gay, gallant, gorgeous, game-players' garments."\textsuperscript{145} He also indulged in isosyllabism, or the choice of words with the same number of syllables and similar phonetic patterns. He refers to the silliness of "romish" priests' behaviors: "your apish toys, your inclinations and prostrations, your complications and explications, your elevations and extensions, your incurvations and genuflexions, your inspirations and eposculations [kissings], your benedictions and humiliations, your pulsations and pausations... and all other abominations."\textsuperscript{146} He also enjoyed witty plays on names: when mocking the practice of praying for departed souls he says: "And here in your mind (for now play mum-budget and silence glum) ye pray for... the souls of Father Princhard and of Mother Puddingwright, for the souls of good-man Rinsepitcher and good wife Pintpot, for the souls of Sir John Huslegoose and Sir Simon Sweetlips." Then he cries "I answer: ye are very antichrists, that turn the roots of the tree upwards" and launches into a long exhortation on the importance of being charitable to all.\textsuperscript{147}

\textbf{Audience}

\textsuperscript{143} Becon, \textit{Jewel of Joy}, 414.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 413.
\textsuperscript{146} Becon, \textit{Displaying...}, 283.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 276.
The primary thrust in the *The Sick Man's Salve* is familial, revolving around a man and his household. However, it would be a narrow reading to conclude that Becon's message was directed solely to people who were male, and householders and owners of some property (as opposed to unmarried men and paupers). Becon's choice of prayers and topics of discussion in this and other works show that his intended audience included not only the average householder but the youngest child or servant as well. He does not speak only to men and women who are established but to young or single people; his themes are youth, courtship, dress, social life, education, and career. The book is familial and social: it aims at a wide audience, including different types of lay people's stations and occupations.148

Can we call Becon a reformer of the “middling classes”? 149 Does he target a particular social or economic "class"? It may appear so at first glance. While the protagonists of *The Sick Man's Salve* are not paupers but modestly substantial householders with servants, it does not follow that its characterization as an essentially “middle class” work is fitting. There is, instead, an unquestionably generic feeling to *The Sick Man's Salve*; the universal problems Becon addresses - pain and affliction, fear of death, temptation, love of people, money, and objects - could apply to any member of the family and both gentry and beggars.

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148 By contrast, Thomas a Kempis wrote *The Imitation of Christ* in a monastery, and his ascetic, devotional proclivities steered his instructional focus more toward the individual soul more than toward any kind of social or communal unit such as a family, a married couple, a household.

149 I use the term "class" only in the most general way, as in "classification", not in any technical, marxian sense.
PART THREE:

BECON AND IDEAS IN *THE SICK MAN’S SALVE*
...only reformed men can reform a church.

Marvin Anderson, *Peter Martyr: A Reformer in Exile*
A. THEOLOGY IN \textit{THE SICK MAN'S SALVE}

\textbf{The Character and Approachability of the Godhead:}
\textbf{The Persons of the Trinity and Salvation}

Becon analyzes God's triune character, man's nature, and aspects of their relationship to one another, and reformist doctrines of the true Church and its temporal mission.\footnote{1} The God portrayed in \textit{The Sick Man's Salve} is kind: he is a good father, neglectful of neither discipline nor tenderness.\footnote{2} He is the creator and first cause of all things; he permits and heals bodily and spiritual sicknesses according to his inscrutable judgment. His character is knowable, even intimate: "O here is that tender-hearted lover, that can no more forget us, than a mother can forget the child of her womb... for he hath written up us in his hands, so that we are always in his sight."\footnote{3} Intercession by saints is necessary neither to reach nor to appease God because since God is already near, and his Son is already the perfect intermediary. God hears prayers and deserves man's confidence both in temporal minutiae and in ultimate matters of salvation.

Becon insists that believers rest in the knowledge of the swiftness and liberality of God's mercy, offered through Christ to all mortals no matter how heinous their sin. He argues that this mercy is for all human beings since all are sinners; no woman or man can become so virtuous as not

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{1} "Man" here is not intended to be gender-exclusive, but to refer generally to mortal human beings, both men and women. I chose to use it because it is the term Becon used.
\item \footnote{2} Becon, \textit{Jewel of Joy}, 444. "...God, which is gentle, and the self-gentleness, moved with loving compassion, tender zeal, and fatherly pity toward man, forgetting the displeasure that man had done to him through his disobedience, casting all his sins behind his back, inflamed with no less love toward man concerning his salvation...".
\item \footnote{3} Becon, \textit{Jewel of Joy}, 142.
\end{itemize}
to need it. Becon uses the stories of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, Mary Magdalene, and the Thief at Calvary as practical, scriptural examples of unearned grace.

As God is good, so are the other persons of the Trinity. One of the passages which best reveals Becon’s educative intent is the complete rehearsal of the tenets of the faith. This ten-page recitation methodically explains the nature of the persons of the Trinity and confirms the sick man’s faith in them. The sick man confesses the Son in terms of all of his biblical paradoxes: he is fully man and fully God, simultaneously King and Servant, High Priest and Paschal Lamb. In the tradition of devotional language, Becon speaks of Christ as our kind “captain,” our “physician,” our “friend,” our “elder brother.”

In *The Sick Man’s Salve* Becon emphasizes the image of Christ as the Physician. The physical sickness of the sick man serves as a flexible metaphor for all spiritual rebellion or error and provides Becon with a springboard from which to jump from dramatic events to the overarching lesson for all humanity. When Philemon prays to Christ to heal the sick man, the sickness referred to is clearly spiritual as well as physical. Christ is a physician to the sick, not to the well. And all are sick. Becon continues through the dialogue to reinforce Christ’s non-remoteness. “Whoever came unto [Christ] with a faithful and penitent heart, and was refused? Whoever sought remedy at his hand, and was not holpen? Whoever opened unto him his diseases, and was not cured? Christ refuseth none, although never so grievous a sinner, if we come unto him . . . Only let us come. It is better late than never.”

The sick man proclaims his faith in the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, as the "Giver of Life"; he is a healer, a comforter, and a teacher. Becon teaches that he enters the mind of a person and witnesses internally to the truth of what God says about himself; he presents an inward testimony to the conscience that opens the eyes of the minds of receptive people to spiritual truths behind visible,

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5 Ibid., 111. Becon, speaking through Philemon: “If ye therefore feel yourself sick and grieved with the burden of sin, come unto the physician Christ, shew him your wounds, and he will undoubtedly heal them, as ye heard afore of the wounded man. Despair not, though your sins be never so great and innumerable...”

6 Ibid., 166, 168.
temporal events. The Holy Spirit, wrote Becon, "keepeth the true Christians unmoveable in one faith, and openeth their senses to understand the mysteries of God aright...Whosoever goodness we have, he is the alone author, worker, and giver of the same." While the reformers did not deviate from the basic Catholic beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit, they brought new emphases to the traditional doctrine. The difference involved not questions regarding the existence of the Holy Spirit, but of his agency. Peter Martyr Vermigli and John Calvin developed the Reformed doctrine of the Holy Spirit's activity in the human heart: the Holy Spirit acts as a living bond between the soul of the believer who has accepted Christ and God so as to render irrelevant any other mediators. The Holy Spirit becomes the glue, so to speak, that secures the believer to Christ forever. This security of salvation cannot be lost or damaged by either mortal sins or by dying without benefit of the sacraments.

Christ as Sole Intercessor and the Irrelevance of Saints

It seemed obvious to Becon that if Christ's intercession for men and women were sufficient, then it must render saints' intercession redundant. This raises an important point: to the reformers, a redundant doctrine was a bad doctrine. The principle of sola scriptura excluded all dogma that repeated or added to principles established in Scripture. To duplicate an effect that scripture assigns to Christ alone was, in the eyes of reformers, one of the direst of all theological offenses. Becon explains this idea in a passage characteristic in its mixture of the amusing with the sacred:

For he [Christ] is not gone up into heaven to be an idle gazer, nor to neglect his church; but to pray for the faithful, to make intercession for them unto God the Father, to be our

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7 Becon, The Jewel of Joy, 142.
8 This idea follows from the concluding warning in the last passage of the Bible, Revelation 22.18-19: "I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share i the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."
Mediator and Advocate, and to appease the wrath of God..., if at any time, through sin, [God's wrath] waxeth hot against us, and to win us again to his favour, and to keep us in the same unto the end. We need not seek help of other, neither yet call on the saints departed, that they may pray for us, and plead our cause before God. The man Christ Jesus alone, which gave himself a ransom for all men, is our sufficient Mediator, Advocate, and Intercessor, as the holy scripture teacheth us in divers places. Whosoever, therefore, refuseth to pray unto this man Christ Jesus...and fleeth unto other, without all doubt he is an enemy unto Christ, and to the uttermost of his power he laboureth to make Christ (as they use to say) jack out of office... .

God's Purposeful Uses of Affliction: The Cross versus the World

At the beginning of The Sick Man's Salve Becon states the aims of his work: to provide explicit moral instruction for the patient bearing of sickness, for the preparation of a theologically "acceptable" (reformist) will, and for the cheerful readiness for death. Thus the main theme is adversity in mortal life. Like his medieval predecessors, he assumes that God is the primary cause of all things - his supernatural love operates in the natural world through his design of lives and circumstances. The natural world, then, is the secondary source of causation. A man's body, says Becon, may become ill from a natural, anatomical deficiency, but the sickness itself is part of an operating, obedient nature of which God is the supreme director. Thus Becon organizes his discussion of adversity around the belief that physical or material problems require spiritual solutions; tangible struggles were to be fought with both tangible and intangible weaponry. Becon urges that God is good, and that sickness and suffering are the tools he uses either to correct those who have strayed from his fellowship or to refine and deepen relationships with those who have not strayed. Thus the friends of the sick man begin the dialogue with customary words of assurance that sickness and troubles are the "loving visitation of God" - a key phrase for Becon - and that all reminder of mortal fragility and mortality are healthful. Here pain functions as "schoolmaster."

Ibid., 140.
Mortal life is a battlefield; in Becon’s words, it is “nothing but a knighthood.” In the Christian life generally, man’s chiefest enemies are the devil, the world, and the flesh.\(^{10}\) When faced with these three enemies one is to bear one’s cross, or accept the assigned hardship as a channel through which God communicates his purposes. The cross has always served as a Christian symbol of acceptance of those difficult things that God ordains and that mortals cannot change. The cross is also the symbol for a death that is only temporary, a death which God uses to create resurrected life. Christ is naturally the model for all believers, carrying his cross to Calvary on his own back; “for by that way,” says Becon, “did our elder brother Christ enter into the kingdom of His Father.”\(^{11}\) In the dialogue, then, the sick man’s cross is mortality and sickness and its attending pain and loss.

The bearing of one’s cross is not to be confused with empty stoicism or athletic holiness. Rather, it vivifies the lesson of what Christ did for mankind and is thus a part of the process of imitating him. This plea echoes that of Thomas `a Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*: mortal men, says Kempis, must bear their crosses by keeping their senses in conscious revolt from grounding their security in perishable things that have no power to save them. In *The Sick Man’s Salve*, the theme of separation from the world - a theme abundant in ancient and medieval precedents - appears repeatedly. The sick man laments the loss of temporal possessions and associations, but as the dialogue progresses he realizes that faith and death ask the same things of mortals: renunciation.

Faith in God requires that man not only renounce “things” in his physical life (Becon never advocates ascetic self-denial simply for its own sake) but renounce these things in his heart. Becon therefore pleads for his readers to pursue what Erasmus called an asceticism of the heart, not necessarily of the possessions. In death, renunciation of loved things becomes as physical or tangible as is the renunciation of possessions demanded in this life by a monastic lifestyle. Death, for Protestants, then, achieves once and for all that to which asceticism can only aspire - the ultimate withdrawal from the ensnaring world. Since in death one must part with perishable things, one must train one’s heart to be detached from them in preparation for meeting God. Anyone

\(^{10}\) Becon, *Sick Man’s Salve* . . . 91.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 95.
committed to going to heaven must utterly reject any attachments that serve as a little, pale substitutes for God.

One of God’s central characteristics, says Becon, is that he cannot stand to see men and women drift from him. Becon emphasizes the shepherding or pastoral nature of God. Out of love for the drifting soul, God will chasten and bring him back as a father does a wayward son. Becon insists - as his predecessors had - that all suffering has the express purpose of calling the sufferer back into a protective relationship with God. Human pain operates at God’s direction for his purgative purposes by drawing the soul to himself. Becon concludes that suffering is multi-dimensional: it is both negative and positive, and it is never only a sign of fatherly wrath but always a sign of fatherly love as well. It is not just a call away from sinful actions but a call to a relationship. Adversity, he says, is “not a token of God’s... heavy displeasure, but rather a sure argument and manifest sign of his good-will, love and favour towards us.”

Thus a central message of The Sick Man’s Salve is that while suffering can be a whip, it can also be an invitation. It is the supreme goal of God’s interaction with men and women to attract them to himself; therefore anything that presses on a person so that he or she inquires after God is a positive thing. Suffering, then, is good; it only becomes a problem when the sufferer refuses to include God in the solution. Suffering must not simply be endured; according to Becon, it must also be heeded. He constantly reminds his audience that there is ultimately nowhere to hide: every creature will face God in judgment eventually; some people will come to God already familiar with his love while others will ignore him until they are forced to confront his power. God’s pastoral, wooing nature and his omnipotent sovereignty frame Becon’s interpretation of all human events.

Becon says that no one should envy the man or woman who seems mysteriously excused from suffering: he is adamant that such a cushion is actually dangerous. Beware, he says, of growing too dependent on worldly comforts and pleasures; freedom from pain and struggle can be an opiate that numbs one’s spiritual and critical faculties:

12 Ibid., 95-96.
[Y]ou, neighbor Epaphroditus, have a great occasion to thank the Lord our God...in laying on of this cross He proves you and your profession of faith. . . Where continual success of things is, where all things at all times serve and content the fleshly appetites of voluptuous worldlings, where no affliction nor trouble is, there is not God . . . Yea, it is a most certain sign of everlasting damnation, where a life is led without affliction.13

Ease dulls a person's otherwise acute sense of need for God. God puts that sense into a believer's heart to keep him or her in what Becon considered a right relationship with God. For Becon and most reformers, a right relationship is not one in which man and God find a proper balance of contribution, but rather one in which man realizes the radical imbalance between himself and God and lets Christ make up the difference. A right relationship also meant one in which man not only understands with his intellect but also receives into his heart the knowledge that God balanced this imbalance by putting Christ on the scale with sinful man to outweigh the load of mortal iniquity.

Temporarily unmindful of the corrective spiritual function of suffering, the sick man protests death at first: it is terrible, it is painful, it separates men from friends, family, and "gorgeous and pleasant houses." Each of the sick man's objections presents an opportunity for a short homily by one of the friends on the dangers of over-attachment to worldly things and under-attachment to God's promised peace.14 This dialogical, argumentative structure is common with Becon: through his characters he presents a situation, begins to address relevant issues, then presents an argument against himself in the voice of one of the characters, thus setting himself up for a full-blown rebuttal, which does not fail to come with full Beconian vigor. In this manner The Sick Man's Salve becomes a forum for day-to-day spiritual questions, answered methodically with compounding cycles of scripture and exhortation. By the end, Becon has the sick man exactly where he wants his readership

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13 Ibid., 96, 103.
14 Ibid., 150, Acts 21. Death is painful, says the sick man; the friends reply by recounting the willingness of the biblical martyrs to suffer pain if God allowed it. "If you consider the great and intolerable pains that many good and godly men have suffered on their bodies for Christ's sake, it shall the less grieve you to bear this your sickness, yea, death and the pains thereof. The great Isaiah was sawn in half; Jeremiah suffered a horrible, mysterious fate; Amos had nails driven into his temples ("and so shortly after died", Becon adds casually); John the Baptist was beheaded; James slain, Stephen stoned, Christ crucified. Becon summarizes up the point by quoting Paul: "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."


to be: able honestly to say with the sick man, “I am well content to forsake the world and all that is in the world, and to go unto the Lord my God.”

So what, then, is the sick man’s “sickness”? Sickness operates, as might be expected, as a metaphor for sin. Philemon continues to assure the sick man that a little sickness this side of heaven actually protects him from eternal sickness or damnation. Sickness and trouble, he argues, are not for destruction but for salvation, quoting David in Psalm 78: 34: “When He slew them, they sought Him, and turned them [selves] early and inquired after God.”

If sin is the sickness, the salve, of course, is Christ. He is the mediator between the fixed God and wayward man. Man comes to know Christ by relying on him as an advocate before God. Repentance and submission to Christ’s intercessory advocacy is, says Becon, the only way to restore the intended fruitful relationship with God; it is the only way that healing can begin. Becon’s lesson is not limited to individual, bodily sickness but applies to any individual or corporate adversity. In this way, the lessons of The Sick Man’s Salve apply to the sick nation as well as to the sick individual.

Merits and Grace:
Becon’s Arguments Regarding Christ’s Sufficiency and the Positive Role of Works

Because the reformers taught that works were insufficient for salvation, it became urgent that they clarify the correct role of works. Calvin would say: “faith totters if it pays attention to works since no one...will find there anything on which to rely.” As energetically as Becon insists on the utter empty-handedness with which man comes to God at the end of his life, he was equally earnest about the error of neglecting works. Works are the fruit of a grace-saved life: they testify to and proceed from it. He warns that if anyone thinks that he is “so perfectly saved by Christ only, that

15 Ibid., 155.
16 Oznent, (The Age of Reform...), 380.
thou needest not do any good works... take heed thou be not deceived with this painted visor; but rather, to the uttermost of thy power, labor to confirm thy faith with the plenteous doing of good works."

Some historians have interpreted Becon's preoccupation with works, which may have been an extension of his Zwinglian moral theology and its emphasis on conduct, as evidence of theological conservatism or plain confusion in his theology. But here there is no real confusion in Becon's theology. His position is quite clear: works do not save the soul but they may signify a saved, regenerated soul.

Becon's approach to the question of works and grace is simple. First, man has no merits and never has; second, man's meritlessness is no final threat to his salvation since perfect atonement has been made. Christ's atonement renders men's works irrelevant for salvation. Becon rails against what he considers false intermediaries as follows:

Neither need the faithful go for salvation unto massmongers, unto justiciaries, unto monkish hypocrites, nor yet unto saints. The sacrifice of Christ's body, which he himself, that everlasting Priest, offered on the altar of the cross to God the Father, is a plenteous, full, perfect, and sufficient satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, if they repent, believe and amend. We need no such daily sacrifices as the papists heretofore, for lucre's sake, have devised. As Christ Jesus is an everlasting Bishop, so abideth his sacrifice....

He continues his diatribe against reliance on merits: "The want of merits ought not to pluck you from coming unto God. For God 'saveth not us for the righteous works which we have done, but for his mercies' sake.' Becon then quotes Romans 11, 16, Ephesians 2, Galatians 2, Matthew 9, Luke 15, 10, 8, John 15, I John 3, 4, Ephesians 1, Exodus 32, Romans 9, Psalms 18 and 56 on the subject of God's complete autonomy, concluding with quotations from the Fathers. He also quotes Augustine on this point, "Thou shalt save them for nothing... yet savest thou them? Freely dost thou give, freely dost thou save", and Jerome, "the righteous are not saved by their own merits, but by the tender mercy of God", and Ambrose, "The redemption of Christ's blood should wax vile

17 Becon, Governance of Virtue, 473.
18 For more Bush, 70.
19 Becon, The Sick Man's Salve, 138-139.
20 Ibid., 169-170. A fuller definition and discussion of law and grace can be found on 162. Becon stresses the Paul's teaching that the law points to sin but cannot remove it; it is but a "school-master to lead us to Christ."
and become of no price if the justification, which cometh by grace, were due unto merits going afore.” He quotes Chrysostom: “If we shall consider our merits we are not only worthy no reward, but we are also worthy punishment,” and concludes with Augustine again: “Let all men’s merits, which perished by Adam, be still and keep silence and let the grace of God reign, which reigneth through our Lord Jesus Christ.” He repeats that although there is no doubt that the life and behavior of a believer are the central witness to the reality of his salvation, even so they earn him nothing before God. Merits and works, then, can be fruits of salvation but never criteria for it.

**Purgatory**

Becon found the doctrine of Purgatory offensive. He writes, through the sick man, that “papist” priests who teach their flock about purgatory (or, as he calls them “‘enemies of the cross of Christ,’ depravers of the holy scriptures, and corrupters of Christ,” have long bewitched the eyes of the simple, by making them believe that the souls of the faithful go not straightways after their departure unto eternal glory, but rather unto purgatory, a place of their own devising, for the maintenance of their idle bellies, there to lie miserably puling, til they be redeemed by trentals, by pilgrimages-going, by pardons, etc. Our Saviour Christ in the gospel teacheth and maketh mention of two ways: but the third is not found in the holy scripture. One is ‘a strait way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it’; the other is ‘a broad way, which leadeth unto destruction; and many there be that go by it.’

Why did Becon and his reformist colleagues oppose the doctrine of Purgatory so vehemently? Purgatory was argued to be a place for those who were “neither faithful nor unfaithful,” who may not have to go to hell but had not yet earned heaven. The idea of Purgatory was intolerable to reformers because as a location it is unscriptural, but Becon seems more preoccupied by the fact that the kind of people who are in Purgatory - souls hanging suspended between salvation and damnation - do not **categorically** exist. “Such sort of people,” he writes, "the holy scripture knoweth not.”

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21 Ibid., 170.
22 Ibid., 129.
23 Ibid., 127.
I believe that a man, even in this world, hath perfect and full remission of all his sins; or else he shall never have it. God in this world doth either forgive all the faults, and the pain due for the same, or else he forgiveth none at all. I fear nothing at all the pope's boiling furnace (I mean purgatory): . . . I require none other purgatory to purge and cleanse my sins, but the blood of Christ. . . . and that so perfect, absolute and consummate, and in all points so omnisufficient, that there can be found no imperfection in it. Christ hath borne away all my sins on his body. . . . Christ died for my sins. . . [He] is enough for me. Let the papists seek their salvation at whose hands they list.24

The Devil

Becon's audience took seriously the existence and craft of the Devil.25 As the sick man's death approaches, he begins to struggle greatly with his conscience and suffers bitter accusations (unheard by the audience) of the Devil. The friends pray fervently against wicked, accusing spirits and comfort the sick man with words from the Job. The Devil has no lines; he is not a dramatic character in the dialogue, but he becomes a vivid figure through the plagued outcries of the sick man who experiences his torments. Becon writes of the Devil's "venomous chaws" and his eternal enmity with man. "Deliver my soul . . .,” the sick man prays, “from the power of the dog.”26 The following (lengthy) passage provides the fullest picture of Becon's interpretation of the reality and also the ultimate impotence of the Devil. He seems at pains to console his readers:

The manner of Satan, which is the common adversary of all men, is, when any man is grievously sick and like to die, straightways to come upon him at the beginning very fiercely, and to shew himself terrible unto him, and to cast before his eyes such a mist, that except he taketh heed, he shall see nothing but the fierce wrath and terrible judgement of God against sinners, again, sin, desperation, death, and hell, and whatsoever maketh unto the utter

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24 Ibid., 126.
25 Ibid., 148. The friends cite even pagan poets' views on death. Even the "heathen" believed in the immortality of the soul. "The very heathen, which knew not God aright, but only dreamed of the immortality of the soul, and looked for a better life after this, they knew not what, feared not death, but wished death, and died both valiantly and joyfully: and shall we, being Christians, which know God and his holy word, and unto whom so much comfort, hope, and everlasting life is promised, refuse gladly and willingly to die?"
26 Ibid., 159.
confusion of the sick man's conscience... Fear not. It is his old property. If you had led as holy and as perfect a life as ever did man in this world, yet would he deal on this manner with you. He knoweth right well that the time of your departure is at hand, and that God will shortly call you from this sorrowful and mortal life unto a blessed and immortal life; therefore laboureth he unto the uttermost of his power to pluck you from so joyful a state, and to make you his prey. But be you not afraid. For whom of God's elect hath he let pass unassailed, untempted, or unproved? He feared not to assay the Son of God, after he had put on our nature; and think you to escape free? His nature, disposition, and desire is to destroy: marvel you therefore if he trouble you? 'He is a liar:' what truth can come out of his mouth? If he say unto you that God is angry with you, and will destroy you, know him to be a liar, and whatsoever he saith against your salvation, believe it not, but know it to be a lie. 'He is a murderer:' what life then can come from him? He is 'an accuser of the brethren:'...He is your utter enemy: how then is it possible that he may be your friend, and seek your quietness? Fear him not therefore. He is but a coward and a very slave. They be but brags, whatsoever he threateneth. He may well hiss at you; but he cannot he sting you.27

The Sick Man's Final Torment:
Medieval Struggle, Reformist Conclusion

The Devil is not actually finished with the sick man, and the underlying tug-of-war between the conventional approach to death and Becon's fully reformist approach becomes more apparent. The traditional Roman Catholic view, formalized by Tridentine decree, was that it was supreme arrogance for one to believe with certainty that one is saved. In the Fourth Session, Chapter XVI regarding Justification, the decrees state:

Canon XIII: If anyone saith that it is necessary for every one, for the obtaining the remission of sins, that he believe for certain, and without any wavering arising from his own infirmity and indisposition, that his sins are forgiven him; let him be an anathema.

Canon XIV: If anyone saith that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or, that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected; let him be an anathema.

Canon XV: If anyone saith that a man, who is born again and justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; let him be an anathema...

27 Ibid., 156. John 8, Revelation 12.
Canon XXX: If anyone saith that after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal to be discharged either in this world or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema.28

Becon addresses this traditional attitude in the death-bed sequences. At one point the sick man says,

I have heard many times at the mouth of divers men, which have a good opinion of themselves, of their own wit, doctrine, and learning, that no man in this world is certain of his salvation, neither can any man say with a safe conscience and undoubted faith, I am of the number of God’s elect, I am a vessel of mercy, I shall be saved; my name is registered in the book of life, etc.; but all men, even the most godly and faithful, must doubt of their salvation, of the remission of their sins, of the favour of God toward them, and of everlasting life.29

The Devil, said Becon, knows more about man’s fears of judgment than any mortal, which is why he labors so assiduously by the death bed to prod the repentant sinner to doubt the certainty of his or her salvation. Nothing pleases the Devil more, taught Becon, than when a repentant sinner doubts the efficacy of Christ as Savior; thus, to portray Christ as impotent is the Devil’s ultimate goal. It is not that the Devil can take the salvation away, but, being malicious, he will work to deny the dying person joy and peace until the end, when he - only if the soul is saved - must inevitably yield the besieged soul to God. But the sick man is still tormented by the Devil about his salvation and his friends advise him to resist these accusations in a new way:

Not as the superstitious papists were wont to do, with casting of holy water about your chamber, with laying holy bread in your window, with pinning a cross made of hallowed palms at your bed’s head, nor with ringing of the hallowed bell, or such other beggarly, superstitious, popish, and devilish ceremonies. . . [But] with faith, prayer, and with the word of God.30

When the struggle is viewed in this light, the motive behind the frenzy in Becon’s sick man’s death bed sequences becomes fully sensible. After the friends talk with the sick man about his safety from hell and his surety in Christ’s merits, the sick man confidently declares, “I am now well quieted

29 Becon, The Sick Man’s Salve, 174-175.
30 Ibid., 156.
in my conscience, and fear Satan nothing at all." But the fear of death still proves strong, and the sick man battles on for pages with his conscience and its spiritual accusers in familiar medieval pattern. The friends pray fervently against despair and comfort him with multiple scriptural passages regarding God's steadfastness in keeping his promise to credit the sinner with Christ's earnings. As the sick man's death nears, Philemon readies himself to launch a full-scale attack against the doctrine of uncertainty regarding salvation. He says:

The papists in teaching this doctrine doth not only trouble, disquiet, make afraid, wound, kill, and slay the consciences of the simple people. Take away the certainty of salvation from any man; and to what point serveth the merciful promise of God, and the faith which apprehendeth and layeth a loving hand on the most loving promises of God: This doctrine openeth a very path unto hell, and bringeth unto desperation. 

The friends urge the sick man to concentrate not on the paucity of his own works, but on Christ's righteousness, passion, "body-breaking" and "blood-shedding" performed so that no repentent believer needs to doubt his salvation. These are Becon's remedies, or "salves," to be administered to the dying.

As a clergyman, Becon himself had doubtless attended many death beds. He must have been alarmed by the consistency of the pattern of reformist believers' last-minute reversion to the more traditional Catholic uncertainty regarding salvation. He treats this issue as though it were one of the major impediment to popular acceptance of reformist theology. The theme of confidence of salvation is thus absolutely central to the whole of The Sick Man's Salve, far more so than his railings against the papists, attacks on the Mass, or even his words of wisdom about home life.

Although his polemical expertise was considerable and attracts modern historians' attention, it does not constitute his essence; in fact, the further one reads in the dialogue, the easier it becomes to lose Becon's polemic in his evangelism. Evangelism and exhortation are the keys to Becon. The message The Sick Man's Salve sent its readers is that any human being - no matter how many or how despicable his or her sins and no matter how late the hour - who repents his or her wrongdoing

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31 Ibid., 174.
32 Ibid., 174-175.
33 Ibid., 171.
will be received by God. For Becon, the heart of Protestantism lay in this idea: if Christ's atonement is all that the scriptures claim it is, then it is enough. Failure to accept this, in Becon's view, was failure to be actually *reformed*. Thus Becon used the dramatic struggle with fear and guilt at the sick man's death bed as a medieval struggle redirected to a reformist conclusion. The appropriateness of confidence in one's salvation is the primary argument of *The Sick Man's Saviour*; all else falls into descending degrees of importance below it.

Bailey's characterization of Becon as a mere "propagandist" who left "no notable or permanent legacy" strangely downplays the psychological centrality of sixteenth-century readers' fears about the afterlife. Such an evaluation threatens to undermine modern student's confidence in the contribution Becon may have made to contemporary readers' choices about their own destiny after death. Needless to say, the historian who is ambivalent about or rejects the concept of an afterlife might have no choice but to reduce or redefine the importance of such a book. The historian might then miss virtually all of the power in Becon's words and would have to root his contemporary and posthumous popularity elsewhere.
B. MAN'S NATURE: TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

Introduction

Becon begins *The Sick Man's Salve* with a full discussion of the transience of human life. He stresses that life is short - very short - so it matters enormously how it is spent. Mortal man must never over-value himself. In his exhortations Becon is not particularly interested in the glories of man’s accomplishments or the potential of the human spirit. Human nobility does not consist, he makes quite clear, in pride of birth, and he warns against the folly of craving the praise of powerful men. “How vain a thing the favour of great men is, the history of Adam declareth... There is nothing more uncertain than the good-will of great men...” Echoing the humanist philosophical tradition, Becon shifts the source of human nobility from birth to virtue. Nobility, he teaches, consists not in birth or rank, but in the “suppressing of vice and embracing of virtue.”

Becon also believes that spiritual reform and social prominence were connected; spiritual and moral regeneration in England must begin, he believes, with those at the narrow pinnacle of society, and failure to do so amounted to an abdication of social responsibility. In his prayers for gentlemen Becon pleads that they be “not destroyers, but fathers of the country”, reminding them that “no child of Adam hath any cause to boast himself of his birth and blood...” (Of course, he owed his safety in the 1540s to well-placed gentlemen.) This plea for social responsibility among the

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34 Ibid., 92. *Job* 14. “Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and yet in the time that he liveth he is replenished with many miseries. He cometh up an withereth away again like a flower. He flieth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one state.”

35 This is a bit confusing since he seems to have spent his whole life doing just that.


37 Ibid., 436.

38 Ibid., 421. In *The Jewel of Joy* Becon complained of gentlemen's spiritual sloth, accusing them of liking to read the bible about as much as a "true Christian" enjoys reading the pope's decretals., 420.

nobility included a demand for broad acts of charity. Becon believes strongly that not only the wealthy, all levels of society have some degree of obligation to minister to the poor. These ideas all relate to Becon's medievalist emphasis on the imitation of Christ and the importance of living a life of preparation for death. Becon was fully convinced, along with most other sixteenth-century Catholics and reformists, that without the kind of eternal perspective that leads to meditation on mortality, time on earth will be wastefully and perhaps arrogantly spent.

Life and Death

How, then, does Becon - as a reformer - think one should spend one's life? Does he as a reformist have a different view of the Christian life and death than his Catholic predecessors and counterparts? In what way might his teaching have seemed revolutionary? Death and the afterlife were, of course, ancient preoccupations. Lewis Einstein comments that ancient and medieval imaginations, as opposed to modern ones, were strongly "impressed by the mutability of all that is human." The reformers broke no new ground in merely raising issues relating to death, but strongly reoriented popular views on life after death. Twentieth-century scholars tend to describe sixteenth-century preoccupation with death and last dying agonies as grim and unsavory; Tessa Watt refers to the genre of ballads centered on the death bed as products of "morbid fascination." However, between twentieth-century scholars and sixteenth-century men and women there lies a potentially enormous conceptual gulf. Because it was more common in Becon's day, death - although certainly feared - was integrated into sixteenth-century culture. Death in the sixteenth

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40 Einstein, Lewis Tudor Ideals (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1921), 262.
century was a reckoning, a passage to an evaluation, a time of scrutiny, judgment and a hovering on
the brink of an eternal verdict. It was not just to be feared but was to be prepared for.41

Man’s fondness for life is vain, says Becon, because mortal life is perishing every minute.
Becon bemoans the contrast between many frantic efforts to acquire riches and acclaim in this life
and his sloth in preparation for the next.

We moil and turmoil ourselves in studying and devising how we may come by the gifts of
glassy fortune. We refuse no pains, no labours to become rich and wealthy in worldly goods;
yea, so blinded are our hearts. . . The holy scripture calleth us ‘strangers and pilgrims’ in this
world. . . There is not a stronger bit to bridle our carnal affects, nor a better school-master to
keep us in an order, than the remembrance of our latter end.42

Becon’s intention throughout this severe rehearsal of man’s transience and ultimate end is to set the
stage for the drama that will unfold at the sick bed. He is troubled that men and women are
surprised by the sudden adversity which faces them at death.

And when the time cometh that God visiteth us with sickness, or otherwise plagueth us for
our evil behavior. . . [then we fail to make our hearts pliant and ready to accept God’s
direction for our lives, but ] we rather murmur and grudge against God and with unwilling
hearts suffer that loving visitation of God, almost wishing that there were no God to plague
and punish us. . . And when death approacheth, and no remedy can be found against the
violence thereof, then do the ungodly and wicked livers. . . begin to despair . . .43

Becon wrote *The Sick Man’s Salve* to help his readers avoid such an end.

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41 In the preface Becon opened with laments that Christians are unmindful of their souls and their
greater inheritance. “Christ...considering what and how great carnal security and fleshly quietness reigneth in
mortal men of all ages...admonisbeth us to watch and to make provision for our latter end, lest we be found
unready when we shall be called out of the world.” Becon, *The Sick Man’s Salve*, 185. For full description of
heaven, see 184.
42 Ibid., 90., Psalm 39.
43 Ibid., 90-91.

The Believer’s Response to Adversity: Faith and Repentance
Becon encourages his readers to trust that God is real, and is who he says he is. If one does this, God will supernaturally empower him to make sense of the lessons being taught him through his circumstances. This trust or “faith” itself does not save men - only Christ can do that - but faith is the willingness to accept Christ’s offer of rescue. Faith is the proverbial hand that reaches out for the bread of forgiveness; but it is not the bread itself. Becon’s clearest definition of faith is in his *Catechism*: “faith is a certain assured, and an undoubted persuasion of the mind, conceived of the word of God through the operation of the Holy Ghost, concerning the performance and enjoying of such heavenly things as God hath promised in his holy scriptures to the faithful.” He also refers, faintly echoing mystical language, to faith as “that wedding-garment also, wherewith we be married unto Christ.” Faith, Becon quotes from Augustine, “is the beginning of salvation. Without faith all the labour of man is frustrate and void.” Becon preaches the efficacy of faith to accomplish those things that for centuries began to be believed as possible only through ceremony and the intercession of saints. To what extent Becon’s readers accepted this conceptual shift in the doctrines of faith and repentance, it is difficult to know.

When the sick man asks how faith helps one who is troubled over his sins and afraid of death, Philemon replies:

Cast the eyes of your mind with strong faith on the Seed of the woman, which hath trodden down the serpent’s head, and destroyed with his power . . . After this manner is it between Christ and us. If that fiery serpent the devil hath stricken and wounded us, let us look upon Christ with strong faith, and . . . be made whole.

Becon insists that faith is possible for anyone, anywhere, not just for the great saints and spiritual giants. For Becon, faith is an attitude, not an achievement. He believed that one need only believe that God is larger than the circumstance at hand and that his love envelopes even difficult

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44 This doctrine of the Holy Spirit was more thoroughly worked out first by Peter Martyr Vermigli and then John Calvin.
45 Becon, Thomas, *A New Catechism* Publication of the Parker Society, ed. Rev. John Ayre, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 13. Another, more concise definition of faith is this: “What thing is faith? It is a full and perfect confidence and trust in God through Christ engendered in our heart by hearing the word of God”. Quoted by Rupp, 190. (he was quoting from Becon’s *Works*, vol. 3, 602. I did not use this version of Becon’s works).
47 Becon, *The Sick Man’s Salve*, 165.
48 Ibid., 157.
circumstances, in order to make them fruitful. Faith is the response on man's part that invites God's fullest involvement in his life.\textsuperscript{49} This faith-response entails, even generates, a repentance that God, through the Holy Spirit, induces in the heart of the believer. Repentance is "an inward and true sorrow of the heart, unfeignedly concerned in the mind by earnest consideration of our sins and wickedness, which heretofore most unkindly we have committed against the Lord our God, of whom we have freely received so many . . . noble benefits . . . ; whereunto is also added a fervent and inward desire from henceforth to live godly and virtuously, and to frame our life in all points according to the holy will of God expressed in the divine scriptures."\textsuperscript{50} Repentance not only leads men to God but is also the only means by which human beings may know themselves in any depth: "the doctrine of repentance bringeth a man unto the knowledge of himself, without the which no man shall ever know God aright, nor his salvation, which he receiveth of God through Jesus Christ."\textsuperscript{51}

**Becon's Call to Evangelism: Evidence of Popular Interest?**

Becon also argued that men and women who have been supernaturally changed so as to be able to trust God have a responsibility to speak to others of God's goodness. Becon had little time for believers who preferred a "private" religion to an openly testified spiritual life. There is thus a strong evangelistic streak - or particular focus on individual conversion - in *The Sick Man's Salve* that reveals the missionary impulse of the radical reformers: "if we die in unbelief, then go we to the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 165. "By faith we are married unto Christ. By faith are our hearts purified. By faith Satan is overcome. By faith the world is vanquished. By faith we are preserved from damnation. By faith we are justified and made righteous. By faith the wrath of God is assuaged. By faith we work the will of God. By faith our prayers are heard and our requests granted. By faith we please God. By faith we be made the children of light. By faith we are born anew of God. By faith we are made the temples of the Holy Ghost. by faith we understand the mysteries of God...".

\textsuperscript{50} Becon, *Catechism*, 10.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 6.
devil, as the scripture saith: \\
‘He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him.’

Becon believed that every soul starved for “true” religion. He speaks of people’s hunger to know God. If this was a part of Becon’s rhetoric and there was, as Christopher Haigh might argue, really no great vacuum in people’s spiritual lives at the time that the reformers’ message could fill, then Becon is exaggerating. Was Becon exaggerating for rhetorical purposes? He may have wanted to create the illusion of need for a reformation he desired. Perhaps Becon honestly overestimated the level of popular support for the reformation of private religion. Or was Becon correct in perceiving a resurgent popular need for and response to the Gospel. In any case, Becon is quite confident that it was the task of those who accepted the reformed view of highly available salvation to be vocal about it. His tone is urgently evangelical and his language highly personal, anticipating the evangelical language of later centuries:

I am fully persuaded that Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour, wrought all the things that ever he did in his humanity, for me and for my salvation. To save me, to reconcile me unto God the Father, to make me inheritor of everlasting glory... Yea, he suffered, was crucified, died, went down to hell, rose again the third day from the dead, ascended unto heaven, and shall come again unto judgment for him, for my sake, for my glory and salvation.

And again, Becon speaks of new “birth” and uses the term “born anew.” When speaking of the sin of Adam, he states:

I believe that by his [Christ’s] pure conception and undefiled nativity, my conception and my birth, which, coming from Adam, was altogether unpure and defiled, is cleansed, and that no part of that sinful birth is imputed unto me; but that through faith in this most blessed Seed of the virgin I am born anew and begotten of God; so that he is my Father and I am his son...

He was convinced that scriptural words were made alive to the reader, not by the power of an erudite dialectical argument, but by the internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit. He believed that scripture needs no interpreter: scripture, therefore, is its own apologist.
C. THE CHURCH:
ECCLESIOLOGY, SACRAMENTS, REFORM AND CRITICISM

Introduction

After the sick man confesses his faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he scolds himself for almost forgetting to rehearse the benefits of being a part of the Church, that is, the invisible Body of Christ on earth. Shocked at his own negligence, he sits up in bed and declares the Church to be

the holy congregation of God, which is the company and fellowship of the saints and chosen people of God, of whom Christ the Lord is the head, ruler, and governor? Should I in my sickness forget [these] high and singular benefits . . . ? God forbid! God forbid! . . . I will therefore (although my wind beginneth to wax short, and it is painful unto me much for to speak) declare my faith concerning [the Church]56.

Thereupon, between declarations of breathlessness and failing energy, the sick man proceeds to talk on for another forty-eight pages.

Becon shifts the ecclesiological emphasis from a traditional concept of a “mother” church - one temporal, doctrinally and liturgically authoritative body - to a more Pauline view of a universal, invisible, spiritual society of believers across time and place - a trans-historical body of believers. The Roman Catholic Church traditionally taught that it is grace that saves, but that grace is conferred through the sacraments that can only be dispensed by the church. The Council of Trent

56 Ibid., 143.
summarized the connection between salvation and the church’s administration of the sacraments in the Seventh Session, Chapter V:

Canon VI: If anyone saith that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify; or that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place an obstacle thereunto: as though they were merely outward signs of grace or justice received through faith, and certain marks of the Christian profession, whereby believers are distinguished amongst men from unbelievers; let him be anathema.57

Because Protestant reformers rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation altogether, sacramental theology could not logically form the nucleus of their ecclesiology. Emphasis shifted to the people who compose the institution and away from the functions of the institution itself. Becon refers generally to the “one holy universal church or congregation of the faithful,” which, though scattered throughout all ages and places, is “gathered and knit together in one faith, as members of one body, whereof Jesus Christ is the head.”58 His full definition is as follows:

And because no man shall doubt of what church I speak, I confess that to be the holy catholic and apostolic church which is the company and fellowship of the saints, that is to say, of the faithful, which are sanctified and made holy by the Spirit of God, and by the blood of Christ our Saviour; which have the pure word of God truly and sincerely preached, and the sacraments duly and faithfully ministered among them; which excommunicate all disobedient notable sinners, and receive into their fellowship such as unfeignedly repent and turn from their wickedness, which study in all things to please the Lord God. . . . Whosoever is in this church and congregation, he may be sure to be saved. But whosoever is not in it, he is without all doubt damned. . . For without the church of Christ there is no salvation, no forgiveness of sins, no favour of God, no quietness of conscience, no true gospel . . therefore must all they stand at variance with God that are no members of the body of the which Christ is the head, to the which also he giveth salvation.59

Becon stresses that the church was for the fellowship not only of the faithful, but also “of the wicked and unfaithful.” 60

Becon radically departs from traditional understandings by shunning all language implying any belief in the Church, as he states in his Catechism: “If I should say, I believe in the holy universal church, then I must also grant that the church is God, and by this means make four persons in the Godhead, which God forbid. My belief is not in the body, but in the head, which is

57 The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent, 55.
58 Becon, The Sick Man’s Salve, 143.
59 Ibid., 143-144.
60 Becon, Catechism, 41. Ephesians 5.
Christ Jesus our Lord and alone Saviour." 61 Contemporary conservative readers would have found missing from Becon’s exposition any implication that the dispensation of grace through the sacraments - which could only come from the visible church - is indispensable for salvation. The grace that the medieval church had taught for centuries was communicable only through the sacraments could be obtained by faith alone, according to the Protestant reformers. Therefore, in Becon’s ecclesiology, the role of the visible church changes from the agent of salvation to an agent of spiritual (and scriptural) nourishment. 62 Becon also conspicuously omits any traditional Thomist emphasis on proper internal disposition for receipt of the sacraments, and does not mention the authority of “tradition”. In this passage, as in others, Becon’s omissions may have spoken as clearly to contemporaries as his statements.

Elements of Worship:
Sacraments, Preaching and Scripture

Sacraments were not only channels for God’s power to flow into the human heart and persuade of the efficacy of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, but they also bonded the members of the church together. Becon teaches that sacraments are external signs of interior assents, serving, he says, as “sinews and bonds to link and knit together the congregations of God publicly and openly, whereby they may be known to be of one company, and of one spirit, of one faith, and of the one doctrine and profession” and as signs of “mutual benevolence” among members of the Body of Christ. 63

61 Ibid., 41.
62 This is a very complicated subject and my generalizations should not imply that Protestants developed a casual attitude toward the church or the sacraments. Quite the contrary, church feeds believers on the text of God’s word; the sacraments feed the spirit and draw believers closer to Christ. But neither church nor sacraments have an ultimately salvific role over the twin actions of repentance and faith in the heart.
63 Ibid., 200.
Baptism

For Becon, as for most Protestant reformers, only baptism and the Lord’s Supper are legitimate sacraments. The Book of Common Prayer presented baptism as an entry into the fellowship of the Body, into the “belonging” to the faith but not necessarily into the “believing” in the faith. Baptism, says Becon, is a sign or token of God’s love and a child’s entrance into the Body of believers. But Becon becomes somewhat confusing here. He argues that baptism is a sign of predestination to salvation, provided that a commitment take place that conforms to the reality of Christ’s cleansing of them. Baptism signifies salvation only if “you do believe [that Christ has cleansed you], and unto the uttermost of your power frame your life [accordingly]. For it is written,” he continues, "‘He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.’" He goes on to say, “Baptism is a continual sign of the favor of God toward us, of the free remission of sins, of our reconciliation unto God for Christ’s sake, and that we be by adoption the sons of God.” Puzzlingly, Becon discusses baptism in terms almost identical to those in which he discusses conversion. When Becon says baptism is a sign of remission of sin, it is not clear whether baptism in fact remits the sin or is the sign, or token, of a remission that has already taken place. Presumably, the reformers would have not have believed that sins are remitted in baptism but rather only through repentance and conversion. Becon does not mention that baptism cleanses a man specifically from the original or first sin, but neither is it entirely clear from this passage what conversion would add to baptism. Baptism, he teaches, is a ritual renunciation of the world, signifying surrender of the self into God’s service. It shows an acceptance of God’s mastery over one’s life. By it one is made an heir to eternal life, given the Holy Spirit and made unable to perish. It is, for Becon, not only an entry into an institution, but into an unmediated relationship.

64 It is also unclear whether Becon was speaking of the baptism of an adult who has made an explicit commitment to the faith, or an infant.
65 Becon, The Sick Man’s Salve, 173. Matthew 28, Mark 16.16. Thorough homily on baptism on this page. The full passage in Mark reads: “He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”
66 Ibid., 173. Romans 8. Italics mine.
67 Ibid., 173.
The Mass

Becon could not resist taking shots at the Catholic Mass. He was fond of referring to the Host as "your new-baken little great god," and rarely mentioned the word "transubstantiation" without following it with the expression "this prodigious monster." In *The Jewel of Joy* there is a passage that well represents his polemical expressions of irreverence for the Mass: "Christ plainly and purely ministered the sacraments to his disciples, without any ceremonies: the papists must have census, bells, candles, candlesticks, paxes, corporasses, super altaries, altar-clothes, cruets, napkins, besides their dowkings and loutings, their turnings and returnings, their gaspings and gapings, their kneelings and winkings, their mockings and mowings, their crossings and knockings, their kissings and lickings, their noodlings and nosings, their washings and wipings, their bowings and bleatings... more meet for mad-brains and drunkards than for grave and sober honest men." For the most part, however, he shows noticeable restraint. He takes pains to explain that the Lord's Supper was a table at which one inwardly feeds "upon the mysteries of the Lord's body and blood," and the receipt of the bread and wine was a "manifest argument that God hath chosen you to be his, hath written your name in the book of life, and predestinate you unto everlasting glory."

Becon's Ratramnian eucharistic views follow those adopted by Cranmer in the late 1540s (possibly 1546-49). Transubstantiation holds that the corporeal body of Christ is eaten, and that his Presence may be called real, in that it is physical; he is physically present as the bread's substance is

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68 Becon's mockery of the Mass is particularly crude in his notorious *Displaying of the Popish Masses* which, although far from representative of the general shape of Becon's thought and faith, is one work which many historians seize upon when mentioning him. In *Displaying of the Popish Masses* Becon is at his worst, but not necessarily at his most characteristic. 455-456.

69 Becon, *Catechism*, 264.


72 Ratramnus was an obscure ninth-century theologian who taught that Christ could offer spiritual feeding rather than corporeal feeding, through the Host. Martin Bucer and Thomas Cranmer absorbed his ideas and used them to develop the view of the Eucharist that neither subscribes to the Lutheran view of consubstantiation, nor the Zwinglian view of a purely memorialist view. The Ratramnian view (occasionally referred to as the Bucerian or even the Suvermerian view) is roughly similar to John Calvin's teaching.
transformed into his body. Becon and the reformers held that the body is not corporeally present, but there is nonetheless a real, as in actual, Presence. Believers feed spiritually on Christ's body - in their hearts - by eating the bread. This Ratramnian view held that communicants, "besides the corporal eating of the bread, and the outward drinking of the wine, do spiritually through faith both eat the body of Christ and drink his blood, unto the confirmation of their faith, the comfort of their conscience, and the salvation of their souls." Becon rejects the "magic of priestly consecration while preserving the mystery of Christ's presence, with the onus for his appearance resting on the faith of the communicant." He also attacks the idea that the eucharist was in any way a physical resacrificing of Christ's body. "Christ is an everlasting priest; and as his priesthood is everlasting, so likewise is his sacrifice everlasting... so that it needeth not for any... weakness... to be repeated or offered again."

It is not clear what Becon thinks, besides repentance, must precede the reception of the body and blood for them to be efficacious. Unlike Catholic predecessors (Thomas Aquinas, Brethren of the Common Life, and the Devotio Moderna), he does not prescribe elaborate preparation on the part of the individual for the receipt of the Host. But in the dialogue, Becon uses the sick man's fervent expressions of love felt upon receiving communion to explain that communion signifies intimacy with Christ.

*Preaching and Scripture*

Preaching during the Reformation became absolutely central to the reformist cause; good preaching was the persistent demand of most reformers, not just a preoccupation of extremists. So urgent and solemn was their demand for preaching that its near transformation is sometimes referred to as a “protestant sacrament.” The reformists had good reason to take preaching seriously; it was to
them, as rhetoric was to the humanists, essential for transformation not only of the intellect but of the heart and the will as well. The exposition of God's word, they believed, is the principal means by which the Holy Spirit speaks. Becon quotes Romans 10.14: "'How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher?'"76

To preach well, and thereby institutionalize reformist theology, clergymen needed systematic training. This was obviously an enormous task. Good preaching was, in Helen White's words, "a matter of more than religious idealism. It was a matter of sheerest necessity, if the changes which had been made in the religious establishment were to be maintained."77

Becon was dissatisfied with the state of preaching in the early Reformation period and was critical of preachers whose reforming zeal lagged.

For the Lord knoweth, the people perish for want of godly knowledge. The greatest part of our beneficed men (God help us!) are blind guides, and dumb dogs, not once able to bark. The people are desirous to know God; and among the great multitude of so many beneficed men, none almost either is able, or else endeavoureth himself, to bring them unto Christ.78

He pleads not only for good preaching but also for church-goers to heed sermons with the same conscientiousness with which they had pursued absolution through penance, hearing of the Mass, or pilgrimages. Ever swinging between a delicate and indelicate tone, he says: "That one faithful preacher, which is able with the sweet promises of the holy scriptures to comfort the weak and desperate conscience, is better than ten thousand mumbling massmongers, which promise with their massing mountains of gold but perform mole-hills of glass."79 Without preaching, the sacraments are not effective but are a "dumb ceremony, a glass offered to a blind man, and a tale told to one that is deaf."80 Humble receptivity to God's word, Becon insists, an even surer evidence of a salvaged soul than the reception of the sacraments.81

76 Ibid., 120.
78 Becon, The Sick Man's Salve, 119.
79 Ibid., 160.
80 Becon, Displaying the Popish Masse, 255.
81 Becon, The Sick Man's Salve, 174.
Like his attitude toward preaching, Becon's attitude toward scripture straightforwardly reflects the reformist position: the scriptures are God's Word given to human kind, and is the sole authority for church, doctrine, and society. It is inviolate and essential for the transformation of the heart and life of the "true" Christian. A mind and heart closed to God's word may well be a sign of "everlasting damnation," just as an open mind to the hearing of the Gospel is a sign of a heart fertile for a relationship with God. He quotes John 8: "'He that is of God heareth God's words.'" In his Catechism he urges the importance of having a vernacular bible always at hand. The need for vernacular scripture is one of Becon's most consistent subjects: an unintelligible tongue, he reasons, is not enough when souls are on the line. It "is not the utterance of God's word in an unknown speech that bringeth faith, but when it is so spoken that it is understand of them that hear it, and that the faith through operation of the Holy Ghost ensueth; which otherwise is cold, lieth idle, and worketh nothing in the heart of the hearer." In The Sick Man's Salve, Philemon offers to read some scripture stories to Epaphroditus but then stops short, saying, "Is there not a bible here?" Eusebius immediately replies, "Here is one," finding one lying right there in the sick man's room.

Becon's, or other popular reformers' expositions of scriptural texts were not likely to have been limited to the sophisticated, educated, owners of books, or even the literate. Nowhere does Becon suggest that the scriptures must be literally read (rather than heard) in order to impart saving knowledge: individual literacy, although encouraged, is not in itself essential for access to God's word. What is necessary is that one's mind receive the words, ponder them, and live by them. Naturally, the illiterate, the blind the ailing, the elderly, the young, the poor, the imprisoned or those who otherwise would have had no access to books were all entitled to scriptural "feeding." It was upon the strength of the message, not the level of individual intellectual training, that the Reformation movement depended. It should be remembered that one of the major targets of the

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82 Ibid., 174. John 8.
83 Becon, Catechism, 255.
84 Becon, The Sick Man's Salve, 107.
Reformation program, both on the continent and in England, was the very young. Before they were able to read, children were taught to memorize scripture through biblically-shaped catechisms. Preaching and catechisms were fundamental cornerstones of the whole program of reform, and yet neither required a literate or adult audience. To conclude that the appeal of book-born Protestantism was truly limited to the literate discounts the pervasiveness of oral traditions in the religious life of men and women in the sixteenth-century.

Burial:
Funerary Custom and Reformist Attitudes Towards Ceremony

Discussing funerals, Becon shifts from ceremony to preaching - from form to text. He encourages readers to view burial ceremonies with contempt, arguing that the real glory and solemnity of the funeral ought to lie in the sermon - "wherein the people may be admonished of their mortality" - rather than in ritual. He advocates paying the preacher handsomely; in a request significantly reminiscent of traditional requests for masses for the dead, has the sick man appoint a sum for the preaching of a certain number of sermons. This request is not a reversion to the substance of traditional Catholic leaving of trentals, but is perhaps a continuation of the form. The sick man also gives money for sermons "at other times," assigning up to twenty pounds per sermon.

Becon shows his irritation with certain traditional burial rituals through the voice of the sick man: "Heathen-like mourning," he says, "is to be banished from the burials of the Christians." Christians have more cause to rejoice in the entry of their loved ones into God's kingdom than to mourn their death. The sick man grows quite heated when asked if he wants a mourning gown. What troubles Becon is not so much the gown, as what the gown signifies. Death, he insists, is "no

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85 In Luther's House of Learning Gerald Strauss makes his famous argument that at least in Lutheran Germany, Protestant "indoctrination" programs failed miserably. I was not persuaded by his arguments.
86 Ibid., 123.
departure, but a passage. . . Who will not make haste to a better estate? “Let the heathen mourn,” agrees Eusebius, “which have no hope, for the departure of their friends.” The sick man’s widow may wear whatever she wants to the funeral, the sick man says, but the dead should be dressed to meet God, preferably in white, not in mourning. When Theophile asks what “solemnity” the sick man wants at his burial, he demands, “What mean you?” to which Theophile runs down the list of options: “Solemn singing, devout ringing, holy censing, priests pattering, candles lightening, torches brenning, communions saying, and such like.” The sick man rages in response:

No kind of superstitious custom do I allow. . . The ringing of the bells can do my soul no good. . . . Now as communions saying or singing, they serve not for the burials of them that are departed, but for the exercises of them that be alive. . . These pompous and costly burials are not to be commended; neither do they profit either body or soul, but only set forth a foolish, vain, and boasting pomp. . . Simply, not sumptuously; honestly, not honourably, let me buried; I require no more.

As the dialogue and theological lessons come to a close, Becon’s dramatic flair intensifies. Throughout the dialogue he peppers the conversation with the sick man’s feverish moans and complaints of pain. For instance, while in the middle of an instructive monologue on God’s sovereign will, the sick man interrupts with comments like, “Let me lie somewhat higher with my head. . .” As death approaches, he begins to lose his senses one by one, beginning with his sight: “As God hath taken away my sight, so do all my other senses decay.” The friends pray fervently for his salvation, listing - apparently more for the readers’ benefit than for God’s - all of the reasons why the sick man will be saved from eternal damnation. “He was baptized in thy name, and gave himself wholly to be thy servant, forsaking the devil, the world. . . His sins, we confess, are great...but thy mercies, O Lord, are much greater.” The sick man dies, articulately confessing the central tenets of
reformist theology to his very last gasp. The friends then commend him posthumously on his godly end.

Such is the basic outline of Becon's ideas regarding God and man's relationship to him; the discussion may now turn to the relational and societal implications of these ideas. From developmental reformist theology there arose a kind of model, an ideal of what a specifically "Protestant" family and lifestyle should look like. The following sections address Becon's prescriptions for the practical applications of his theology.
D. PRACTICAL AND SOCIAL MORALITY IN THE SICK MAN'S SALVE

Introduction

The consequences of reformation ideas - even in their most diluted forms - did not remain neatly contained within the boundaries of religion. By the seventeenth century, Protestantism became not only a religious expression but also a way of interpreting daily life and a force in the shaping of England's cultural identity. Becon intended *The Sick Man's Salve* to be both a practical "guide to life" and a map for the spiritual wilderness one feels when facing one's own mortality. He believed, like most Protestant reformers, that individual reform must precede institutional reform: ordinary men and women must be reformed in order to change a church or society. Similar to the Lutheran model of indoctrination, at the heart of what might be considered this "culture of Protestantism," Becon posits the *household*. Becon's vision for the practical application of reformist ideas can hardly take root in the church if it fails in the home. Becon's stress on the household were consonant with general early modern understandings of the nuclear family as central organizational unit; humanists and Lutherans generally targeted children and families for special educational attention.\(^\text{94}\) For the purposes of education, then, the characters in *The Sick Man's Salve* form types or "models" for came to be thought of as the ideal Protestant household and the society in which it functioned.

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Family and Household Relationships in *The Sick Man’s Salve*

**Marriage, Women, Wives and Husbands**

The sick man’s addresses to his wife are Becon’s obvious, if indirect, endorsements of the reformist view of marriage. He draws mainly on the Pauline amplification of Jewish teachings regarding marriage. Reformers based their arguments regarding marriage from Old Testament texts, Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, and the Pastoral and Petrine Letters. Essentially the reformers believed in the usefulness of roles for husbands and wives, within a context of mutual submission, following Ephesians 5.

The reformers’ general views on marriage came to light in discussions of their affirmative stance on clerical marriage. Marriage and homes for ministers were what the continental reformers called a *praexercitamentum charitatis,* “a warm-up exercise in love,” which was supposed to enable ministers to be more loving toward their parishioners. Marriage was not only good for clergy, but was good for most men; it was a union that by nature required a life of self-giving. Martin Luther said that marriage did not “consist only of sleeping with a woman - anybody can do that - but keeping house and bringing up children.” For the reformers, argues Ozment, marriage was more than an “outlet for sexual drives”; rather, it “created the conditions for a new awareness of human community.” Ozment summarizes the Protestant emphasis on the home as a necessary limb of the reform movement: “Spurning traditional asceticism and otherworldliness, Protestants everywhere embraced the home and family as the superior context for the service of God and man. Experiences within the home provided analogies for understanding the deepest mysteries of God.”

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95 *The Sick Man’s Salve* is not actually the fullest corpus of Becon’s thoughts on marriage. He wrote a whole treatise on marriage called *The Book of Matrimony* (which is not in print), based on Miles Coverdale’s translation of Heinrich Bullinger’s *The Christen State of Matrimony*.
96 These include I and II Timothy and Titus, I and II Peter.
97 Protestant views on clerical marriage are often conflated with their general views on marriage since Protestant reformers sought to dilute the lines between priest and layman.
98 Ozment, *Age of Reform,* 392.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
domestic model in *The Sick Man's Salve* reflects this general connection, common in the sixteenth century, between home relationships and spiritual completeness.

Reformers emphasized "mutual sympathy" as a crucial component of marital happiness and security. One historian comments that Becon "idealizes" marriage by viewing it as a blessed state of mutual companionship. Calling Becon's views "idealized" is only one way of portraying them; one could just as easily call his views "positive" or "hopeful"; he speaks like a man who found happiness with his wife. Such views are significant, if for no other reason, because of the width and force of their communication in popular literature and sermons. What if his views were in fact idealized? What matters then is that his idealized vision of marriage became popularized through his works and may have shaped new Protestant conceptions of marriage. Idealized notions themselves, even if actually incongruent with reality, must be reckoned with. They often inform reality, and so become reality. The argument for the importance of Becon's views on marriage would therefore lie not so much in the degrees of their realism as in their power to shape a standard.

The Protestant reformers deliberately rejected the monastic ideal, devalued the celibate life, and strove to dignify married state (and therefore sex) in a more pronounced way than had medieval theologians. As feminist studies on the "patriarchalism" of the Protestant Reformation have tried to show, the theoretical ennobling of the married state does not suggest that the reformers brought women out of the misogynist Middle Ages into the light of reformist egalitarianism. On the contrary, it has been argued that the Protestant movement actually worsened the plight of wives by enshrining the Pauline marital prescription. That view, however, presupposes a set of assumptions about gender and Paulinism that lie beyond this essay. Although historians including

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102 Ibid., 207.
103 Clerical marriage was legalized in 1549, and Bailey surmised that Becon was married soon thereafter, at least before his imprisonment in 1553. His oldest surviving child - Theodore - was born in 1555. If Becon wrote *Sick Man* in the Edwardian period, then he was writing soon after he was married. Becon's marriage underwent the strains of his children's death, his own persecution, serious job insecurity, threatened life, exile and extended separation.
104 Bailey, 111.
Bailey have portrayed Becon as a simplistic chauvinist, he must be judged on the terms of his own age.

Becon’s views on women are hard to define, since advancing a coherent theory about women as a sociological group was not usually on the sixteenth-century clergyman’s agenda. However, he has definite, complex feelings about women. He wrote at a time when the sexes were viewed as more complementary than competitive. As was common, he generally addressed women in terms of their familial capacity or vocation (i.e. as wives, daughters, widows, elderly teachers of young girls, etc.). For all his reported, sixteenth-century crustiness regarding women, Becon is noted for his strong, and almost unique views on the education of girls. At least one historian of English educational systems finds his opinions to be among the more forward-looking of the Edwardian reformers. Becon argues energetically for a full system of schooling for girls:

If it be thought convenient... that schools should be erected and set up for the right education and bringing up of the youth of the male kind, why should it not be thought convenient that schools be built for the godly institution and virtuous bringing up of the youth of the female kind? Is not the woman the creature of God as well as the man, and as dear unto God as the man? Is it not the woman a necessary member of the commonweal? Have we not all our beginning of a woman? Do not the children for the most part prove even such as the mothers from which they come? Can the mothers bring up their children virtuously, when they themselves be void of all virtue?106

These words seem difficult to reconcile with a hard core chauvinism. Following the reformist attempt to replace female saints, Becon cites Roman women and women from the Old Testament as role models for girls. His teachings in The Sick Man’s Salve conform to the principles in his Catechism, which offers his fullest views on those qualities he believed women should have: they should strive not merely to serve but to enjoy their husbands and children; they should not be enticed by clothing - in which no real source of evaluation of womanhood consists - or with weak flattery or gifts, nor should they be moved to dishonesty or disloyalty.107 The “virtuous woman”

107 Clothing references are plentiful and amusing in Becon’s writings. One sample comes from The Jewel of Joy, 438. “Neither with fine clothes, nor with satin, damask, velvet, nor with cloth of gold, did God apparel Adam, neither did he trim and set forth our grandmother Eve with sumptuous apparel of cloth of silver...gold, neither did he set upon her head a French hood with an edge of gold, besides pearls and precious stones, and such other trim-trams, I cannot tell what....”. Clothing was for Becon, as for his medieval predecessors, as symbol of the interior. Becon, ever simple,
(following tradition, always juxtaposed with "the whore") is not idle but looks after her household, reproves vice in her servants, avoids meddling and gossiping, does not tolerate "accompanying herself with light persons."  

Becon's admonishments to husbands are also quite forceful in his *Catechism*, where he insists that a husband's role is primarily to be responsible and responsive in his private relations with his wife. She is both a practical and a spiritual partner. He must "govern, rule, defend, preserve, and maintain [his wife] in all godliness and honesty, and to tender her and her wealth, even as the head studieth, deviseth, and compasseth all means possible how to conserve and keep all members of the body in safety, health and wealth."  

Becon calls for sensitivity towards wives, urging men to avoid criticizing and picking at their wives. He concludes his marital advice to husbands in his *Catechism* with a long paragraph against marital abuse, urging that the man whom God has appointed to a woman must use his power only for the "conservation and health . . . [and] the quietness and safeguard, of his wife."  

In *The Sick Man's Salve*, when drafting his will the sick man calls in his wife, praises her, and makes her the executress of his estate. He goes on to wax eloquent about their happy union:

First, as touching my wife, with whom I coupled myself in the fear of God, and refusing all other women I linked myself unto her, living with her in the blessed state of honourable wedlock. . . forasmuch as God hath blessed me with worldly substance, and she is mine own flesh, and whosoever provideth not for his hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel; I bequeath and give unto her . . . this house.

The sick man then strongly emphasizes a wife's role in educating the household. Finally, he advises her to care lovingly for his servants and to concern herself with their spiritual well-being.

110 Ibid., 338. Husbands, he says, should turn a blind eye to any faults and "dissemble" them, "never laying them to her charge, and for his love sake toward her recounteth her faultless, fair and beautiful . . . Be even a Christ unto her."  
111 Ibid., 339.  
112 Ibid., 117.  
113 Ibid., 131. The sick man admonishes his wife to "look diligently to the virtuous education and bringing up of my children: graft in their hearts so much fruit of God's Spirit as is possible, and weed out of their minds all kinds of vice and wickedness, that their breasts may be made the temples of the Holy Ghost."
Despite the niceties of Becon's portrayal of women and marriage, Bailey thought Becon a male chauvinist. He finds Becon's exhortations formulaic; they are "formal and thoroughly conventional, entirely androcentric and based on a one-sided interpretation of the Pauline doctrine of subordination. Woman is the inferior, and should in all things submit to her husband and be guided and ruled by him." Bailey not only does not understand Paul's teaching on women, but he is also inconsistent in the ensuing discussion. Immediately after this slamming introduction, Bailey points out that Becon is actually very even-handed in his analysis of both women and men; he is vicious in his attack on husbands who misuse their strength, condemning the "'currish and doggish behavior of some loosebands," rather than husbands who forget that 'their wives be no dishclouts, nor handbasket-sloys, nor no drudges, nor yet slavish people, but fellow-heirs with them of everlasting life, and so dear to God as the men; forasmuch as they also be made like unto the image of God, redeemed...and sanctified.' Becon similarly attacked insensate husbands in the Catechism through the voices of a father and his young son (who is suspiciously wise and theologically mature for a five-year old):

**Father:** Some husbands also be so churlish, and so wedded to their own fancy, that, altho' their wives be both sober, wise, and prudent, and also able to give good counsel; yet will they by no means hear them, nor follow their counsel or advice, but rather do that which their brain-sick heads have determined, altho' foolish and worthy to be laughed at.

**Son:** These husbands err and go out of the way. For women also many times can give better counsel than men, and are able to determine what is good and what is otherwise, no less than their husbands.

Bailey's charge of Becon's chauvinism melts in light of the evidence of Becon's reasonableness. He says, "Against the traditional view of woman...[Becon] asserts that: 'the blessed trinity is the creator and maker no less of the woman, than of the man: whereby it is given us to understand, that the woman is before God of no less price and dignity, then man is, so that they

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114 Bailey, 111.
115 I presume this to be a pun.
116 Ibid., 112. He is quoting from Becon, Catechism, 339.
117 Becon, Catechism, 339.
which so contempituously and so despitfully either write or speak of the feminine kind, do so great dishonour God.’”

Becon seems to love the whole idea of marriage; one has to strain to tease genuine misogyny in his writings. In the Book of Matrimony he paints a picture of marriage in which day-to-day home life, work and marriage are blissfully conflated:

The wife’s love is with no falsity corrupted . . . Finally with death only . . . withdrawn . . . Do ye judge any pleasure to be compared with this so great a conjunction: If ye tarry at home, there is at hand, [that] which shall drive away the tediousness of solitary being. If from home, ye have one that shall kiss you, when ye depart: long for you, when ye be absent, receive you joyfully, when ye return. A sweet companion of youth, a kind solace of age.

There is no suggestion that Becon thinks a woman’s love is a spiritual sedative, that celibacy is the more honorable state, nor that union with a woman is a second-best option or a necessary evil for men too weak for the celibate life. Bailey suggests that Becon’s enthusiasm for the married state may have been even more vigorous than that of the other reformers; and seriously reduces Becon’s sincerity to suggest that he values marriage only as a forum for masculine dominance. For Becon women are neither a drag on men’s holiness nor simply alluring manifestations of all that is base in the flesh, but partners, friends, companions, lovers, and sharers of joys. Bailey rightly points out that Becon viewed marriage as not merely a handy convenience, but a noble vocation, not a result of chance happenings but brought about by the supernatural action of the Holy Spirit, “by whom love is engrafted in their hearts.”

Marriage, Becon concludes, “is destiny.”

Marriage was important to Protestant reformers because it offers a relational structure in which one learns to serve others in imitation of Christ. It was a hallmark of Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century to explore and praise the benefits of marriage, and not only its caricatured, self-

118 Bailey, 112. Becon, Book of Matrimony.
119 “Misogyny” is defined in the Random House Dictionary as ”hatred of women.”
121 Bailey, 113. Bailey mentions the general reformist position on the purposes of marriage: “For the three bona matrimoni of the Augustinian-Thomist theory of marriage (fides, proles, sacramentum) the English reformers substituted the three ‘causes for which matrimony was ordained’” - [in order of priority] mutual society, help and comfort, procreation, and a remedy against sin.
123 Becon, Book of Matrimony, Bailey, 113.
serving aspects (e.g., sexual gratification, patriarchal domination). They had all been priests who probably thought they would never marry, and when they did, it brought to their movement a burst of interest in relationships and the sexes. It is not the aim here to discuss in depth the points at which Becon's view of women and wifehood diverged from preceding views, and what conclusions can and cannot be made about women and the Reformation. What can be said is that Becon implicitly argued that a woman neither drains the spiritual strength from a man nor is a biological necessity for reproduction that otherwise a mere barnacle clinging to the great hull of manhood. A woman's love is instead viewed as the crown of a man's life and the completion of his own personhood.

**Children**

Becon's attitude toward children displays none of the supposed remoteness and lack of affection that historians have suggested may have characterized parent-child relationships at a time of high infant mortality. Although some of Becon's children died, his relationships with those that survived was strikingly affectionate. "Now sir," he wrote in *The Book of Matrimony*, "how highly will ye esteem this thing, when your fair wife shall make you a father to a fair child: when some little young babe shall play in your hall, which shall resemble you and your wife: which with a mild lisping, or amiable stammering shall call you Dad..."124

Becon was troubled by absentee fatherhood; fathers, he believed, have enormous responsibilities in their children's developmental lives.125 He warns men not simply to beget children with their bodies and then fail to adopt them in their hearts; to fail to do so was to be a father more "of the flesh than of the soul."126 Fathers must learn to treat children as spiritually and intellectually viable creatures, whose habits are likely to develop in proportion to parental guidance. Children

124 Ibid., Bailey, 114-115.
125 Becon was a man of pet peeves, one of which had to do with irresponsible parenting. He became particularly incensed over fathers who neglected, or refused, to be present at children's baptisms. Becon, *Catechism*, 228.
should see their parents saying prayers and having a thankful attitude even for little things; they should learn to read early if possible, and parents who can read should read aloud at the dinner table.\textsuperscript{127} Finally, Becon teaches that the best way to encourage children to have good marriages was to cultivate and maintain a good relationship with one's own wife.

The sections in \textit{The Sick Man's Salve} regarding children attempt to provide them guidelines for prudent living. When the sick man drafts his will and calls his children in to bid them farewell, he speaks to each in an affectionately instructional tone and addresses issues that would have been concerns of most contemporary youths and their parents. The knowledge of unmerited salvation and reverence for God should serve young people as a kind of glue that maintains the cohesion between life and faith.

\textit{Sons}

The sick man admonishes his unmarried son to see that he cherish his own future children someday as gifts, not as entitlements. He also urges his son and his daughters to remember that God is their true father and that they should to acquaint themselves with him intimately and early in life. Becon's rhetorical language would have read aloud well: "Be not only favourers, but followers also of the word; not only lovers but livers of the gospel; not only professors, but also practisers of God's holy law..."\textsuperscript{128} He emphasizes the dangers of "riotous company", "light" living, and self-indulgence ("Avoid banqueting and delicious fare...").\textsuperscript{129} He advises his son to keep faithfully the sabbath day, to hear sermons, to be merciful to the poor, and delve into and meditate on scripture. He warns against using God's name trivially, indulging in "superfluous eating and drinking" and in

\textsuperscript{127} Becon, \textit{Catechism}, 348-351.
\textsuperscript{128} Becon, \textit{The Sick Man's Salve}, 132.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 132-133. "Be sober-minded, and 'eschew the lusts of youth'...Spend in measure...Beware of superfluous expenses. Avoid banqueting and delicious fare...Extraordinary banquetings look that thou flee, remembering that that which is gotten through long time is consumed in a very little space."
intemperate anger. "'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with goodness' ", he quotes from
Romans 12.\textsuperscript{130}

Becon was not reticent in his disapproval of sexual immorality, whether occurring before or
during marriage.\textsuperscript{131} He cautions against a cavalier choice of a partner:

In the time of thy youth take heed thou defilest not thyself with whoredom; but bring an
honest and chaste body unto the blessed state of honourable wedlock. And when the
ripeness of thy age doth require thee to marry, take heed whom thou choosest to be thy yoke-
fellow. Follow not the corrupt manners of the wicked worldlings, which in choosing their
wives have their principle respect unto the worldliness of the stock, unto the wealthiness of
the friends, unto riches, beauty, and such other worldly vanities.\textsuperscript{132}

The sick man has transparent religious requirements for the son's wife as well. "Let her be no
papist, nor anabaptist, nor epicure, but one of the household of faith."\textsuperscript{133}

The sick man concerns himself with his son's business affairs as well as his marriage. The son
ought to love his neighbors, and "dwell quietly among them," lending to those in need if he can.
Regarding business and the treatment of men under his mercy, he instructs:

Oppress not thy tenants. Raise not thy rents. Take no incomes nor fines. Be content with
old and accustomed payments. Bring up new customs. Maintain the lawful liberties of
the town wherein thou dwellest. Be no unprofitable member of the commonwealth.
Defame no man; but speak well of all men. Hurt no man; but to the uttermost of thy power
be beneficial to all men. Let never pride have rule in thy mind, nor in thy word; for in pride
began all destruction. Whosoever worketh anything for thee, immediately give him his hire;
and look that thy hired servant's wages remain not by thee overnight. Look that thou do
never unto another man the thing that thou wouldest not another man should do unto thee.
Eat thy bread with the hungry and poor, and cover the naked with thy clothes. Ask ever
counsel at the wise.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 132. Romans 12.
\textsuperscript{131} There is no evidence that Becon ever even tried to deny the reality and legitimacy of sexual impulses,
but rather, as Gerald Strauss explained it, worked to postpone the meeting of those impulses until they could be
met in the most fulfilling way (permanent union) with the most solidifying effect (creating a bond between a
man and his wife).
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., Proverbs 19, 5. Becon was well-known for his address on the sin of adultery that Archbishop Cranmer
asked him to contribute as a sermon to the Book of Homilies. He continued the address to sons by warning them against
breaking faith with their wives. "Therefore, when thou art once joined with her in the holy order of matrimony, seek
after no strange flesh, beware of whoredom, entangle thyself with no other woman's love; but 'be glad with the wife of
thy youth'."
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 133.
Daughters

To his daughters the sick man leaves two hundred pounds each, “to be paid in the day of their marriage,” and the house in the event of their brother’s death. The sick man’s address to his daughters is interesting because of its detail. He opens with the fundamentals regarding their relationship to their mother: “What shall I say unto you, my little daughters? I pray God bless you, and make you joyful mothers of many children. Serve God. Obey your mother... Give ear to her wholesome admonitions, and follow them. Do nothing without her counsel and advisement.”

A mother, no matter how educated, is to be an instructor in her home by training her children in steady belief through minute doctrinal training and by the breadth and consistency of her own example. In the Catechism Becon exhorts his women readers that although it was not granted for them to preach in church, they are “not only not forbidden, but also most straitly commanded” to preach and teach in their homes.

He then addresses their choosing of a husband. To begin with, a woman’s chastity is not a vain trophy of virtue of which to be proud but a necessity for the protection of her personal dignity. A woman’s honor and self-respect are at stake in her romantic involvements. Also, the granting of a woman’s hand in marriage was viewed as a corporate event, involving more than just the lovers involved, but whole families. However, Becon also cautions that young women must not be so sheltered that they have no wariness of masculine deceits and urges them not to be moved by superficial attentions from men. “Take heed ye be not corrupted with the gifts of naughty packs, nor deceived with the flattering tongues of wicked and unthrifty persons. For many in these our days seek not the woman, but the woman’s substance.”

A father has a solemn duty, Becon teaches, to try to find husbands for his daughters who may not only provide for them materially but

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135 Ibid. Note: There is no mention of the Virgin Mary anywhere in his address on wives or daughters.
136 He cited I Timothy 2, I Corinthians 14, and Genesis 3.
137 Becon, Catechism, 376.
138 Becon, The Sick Man’s Salve, 134.
cherish them as well. In one of his more charming moods he says, “I had rather marry my daughter to a man without money than to money without a man.”

The sick man closes his address to his daughters - just as he does to his son - by warning against the frivolities of youth and discreet living. “Be no gadders abroad, nor hausers of taverns; but keep your houses continually, except some earnest and lawful business provoke you to go forth. Be no babblers nor vain talkers; but for the most part use silence. . .” Becon cites the scriptural admonitions on vanity that stand in the general tradition of Christian morality, including the short-sightedness of relying on plumage and external decoration instead of cultivating inward beauty. He advocates instead the fostering of growth and sanctification of the “inner man, which is in the heart.”

Becon’s Civic Conscience

Domestic Servants, the Poor and the Community

The sick man’s exhortation to his servants is almost as detailed and earnest as those to his children. He leaves them six pounds and thirteen shillings each and praises them for their faithful service to his family. He asks that they continue in faithful service to his widow. He advises them to shun all immoral and fruitless behavior, including thievery, “stubbornness, churlishness, cursed speakings, telling of tales, . . . waste, idleness, negligence, and sluggishness.” He continues:

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139 Becon, Catechism, 356.
140 Ibid., 369.
141 Becon, The Sick Man’s Salve, 134.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid. “Therefore, I pray you, look well unto the things which appertain to her. See that nothing go to waste. Provide that through your diligence, her things may rather increase than decrease.”
“Eschew all evil and riotous company. Fly drunkenness and whoredom. Abstain from vain oaths and foolish pastimes. So behave yourselves in all your life and conversation, 'that the name of God an his doctrine be not evil spoken of.' He concludes his exhortation to his servants with an encouragement never to be satisfied with spiritual sloth, but to improve their minds and souls continually in the capacity that God has granted them and in their specific vocations. A strong vocational thrust marks Becon's protestantizing civic manuals: "Live therefore according to your vocation in the fear of God," he says.

Becon stresses that compassion must not stop at the gates of his own household but must extend into his community. He does not use the word "community," but this seems the best current word for the idea he promotes. Helen White points out that the Protestant reformers drew heavily on traditional forms of social criticism, of which there was a rich store from medieval literature. The reformers believed that lack of knowledge of the Gospel was the root of all societal disorders and corruptions. To demonstrate his commitment to the principle of social betterment through preaching, the sick man leaves a legacy to support preachers and encourage the preaching of strongly biblical sermons. The sick man also provides for his house and entire estate to go to "the use of the poor" should all of his children die. "I will that they [the poor] be mine heirs," he says. He then forgives all his debtors completely, while lecturing on the wisdom of living free of debt.

The Protestant reformers, like many medieval theologians, placed a high premium on knowledge and learning as a function of piety. Children, servants, any one high or low ought to learn all they can. Becon held up an example of philanthropy by having the sick man leave money to the "poor scholars of the universities of Cambridge and Oxford," claiming that civic health and reform hangs on their maintenance:

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144 Ibid., 135. *I Timothy* 4.
145 Ibid. In his *Catechism* Becon taught that masters and householders have an obligation to train servants in godliness by including them in all morning prayer, etc. Becon, *Catechism* 359.
146 White, 1-2.
. . . if they be not maintained, all learning and virtue will decay, and a very barbarity shall brast in among us, and at the last bring this our realm into destruction. And verily the love of many now-a-days toward good letters is very cold; insomuch that we see daily many good wits compelled, for lack of exhibition, to forsake the university, and to become serving-men, which kind of life is most abominable, and unworthy a good nature . . . Surely I think him no good Christian, nor friend unto his country, which if he be able, refuseth to help forward the studies of good wits.149

The sick man then leaves the universities an amount equal to that left to his daughters!

Becon defends the honor of the state of poverty: if poverty is honest, he claims, it is wholly acceptable to God. Again he pushes a strong message of lay vocational dignity. He is adamant that the labor of a simple man pleases God. “No less than the state of a king or of an emperor. . . There is no condition of life more pleasant in the sight of God, than that which is passed over in labour and honest exercises.”150 The sick man delivers a hearty diatribe against the abdication of responsibility of those who neglect the poor or take money from the poor. These villains include conservative Catholic clerics, or “purgatory-rakels” who “scrape for me with their masses and diriges.”151 He leaves four hundred pounds, not to “idle-lubbers . . . but upon the halt, the lame, the blind, the sick, and such other as be comfortless.” The sick man also includes prisoners, “poor maids”, and “young men which have not wherewith to set up their occupation” and finally, all of his “needy neighbors” in his final donations.152 In a final display of civic consciousness, the sick man leaves forty pounds for the repair of highways, which he calls “foul and jeopardous,” so that “the people may safely and without danger travel by the way.”153 In this way, Becon used the traditional device of the death-bed speech to urge multi-leveled individual and civic reform. Such a mammoth work of parental advice before death did what Tessa Watt found death-bed ballads to have done: they “reinforced the centrality of the household as a unit for moral and religious education” during the sixteenth century and set the tone for it in the seventeenth.154

149 Ibid., 119.
150 Becon, Catechism, 398.
151 Becon, The Sick Man’s Salve, 119.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
154 Watt, 101.
Social Hierarchy and Stations

English reformers advocated respect of authority for at least two reasons. First, it was unscriptural to rebel against authority under almost all circumstances. Second, they desperately needed their monarchs. Thus, "by nature of their position the reformers were tied to the support of the existing power. Only when, as in the reign of Mary, [they felt that it had] deserted them, would they even morally desert it." In *The Flower of Godly Prayers* Becon upholds the traditional Tudor view of a hierarchical "chain of being," which equated rebellion with heresy. "The powers that be are of thee [God]," said Becon, "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance . . ." He carefully stresses the value of each individual's function in society not only as a utilitarian, economic creature but as a spiritual and intellectual one. His prayers and primers, largely based on late medieval ones, provided "definite formulas of prayer for every occasion and need . . .[with] that sense of the stir of particular groups and classes in their day-to-day business . . ."

In his advice to men of varying professions in his *Catechism*, he implies that the "common people" all need the same thing, be they students, parishioners, or subjects; the same primary spiritual and moral responsibilities underlie all secondary occupational responsibilities. Like his use of dialogue in *The Sick Man's Salve*, Becon uses prayers and catechisms to further a reformist social vision. This vision was informed by the idea of a "priesthood of all believers," a new kind of

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155 The Protestants relied for their political doctrines on authority on *Romans* 13.1 Although it does not argue against Becon's essential political conservatism, and erastianism, it is noticeable that in *The Sick Man's Salve* there are no clear political, hierarchical references - he emphasizes neither duty to king, nor obedience bishop.
156 Watt., 134.
158 White, Helen. (*Tudor Books* . . .), 161, 168. I hesitate to say anything about this, lacking hard evidence, it seems that most of Becon's works, prayers and otherwise, if they had to be socio-economically classified, would be considered middle class in "orientation".
159 Becon, *Catechism*, 376.
equality between the laity and Protestant clergy, and by the concept of a society composed of diverse stations, each - at least theoretically - valuable in its own right.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{160} White, Helen, \textit{(Tudor Books...)},167. In the \textit{New Catechism}, when Becon attacked the injustices of society, he turned his fire "democratically" on all levels of men, criticizing the wrongdoings of parishioners, lawyers, judges, merchants, chapmen, husbandmen, gentlemen, debtors, "Finders of things," "Gamesters," "Dicers," "Carders," "Prodigal parents" (!) and beggars. 108
PART FOUR:

CONCLUSION
It is in this realm [practical religious literature], therefore, that the religious reformer, whether he is instituting a new system or renewing an existing order, meets his most exacting challenge. For now he is not trying to persuade the average human being to consent to a change of ideas, difficult as that is, but to do something even more repugnant to human inertia, namely to change himself.

Helen White, *Tudor Books of Private Devotion*
IV. CONCLUSION

The English reformers did not sweep onto the stage of their religious culture and overturn every aspect of traditional piety as if disconnected from it. They invented neither the love of scriptural texts, nor deeply personal, emotional relationships with God. They were not the first to express dissatisfaction with the state of the church, nor were they the first successful religious polemicists. They did not revolutionize family life in any basic sense: good marriages and strong ties between parents and children existed for centuries before the arrival of Protestantism.

The author of *The Sick Man's Salve* was not a theological revolutionary. However, by skillfully pushing radically reformist theological themes through the filter of an un-radical literary format, Becon's participated in and facilitated a type of cultural revolution. He was able to make the Protestant message acceptable and accessible by using language in ways that spoke to his audience. He wanted to provide models of ways to think, believe, and behave. While he certainly craved institutional and ecclesiological reformation, what he wanted most was conversions - reformations of persons. The success of *The Sick Man's Salve* suggests that a substantial number of people found his message timely and meaningful.

Becon's talents lay not in the generation of religious ideas but in their interpretation, translation, and transmission. This thesis argues that he made an important cultural, as well as theological, contribution to the English Reformation. Becon matters because he was a shaper of public opinion, and in a way, even a sculptor of men and women. He contributed, through the medium of pulpit and print, to the molding and merging of identities, or perceptions of identities. The doctrinal outline in *The Sick Man's Salve* may have provided a kind of mental compass for
developing a non-academic, livable Protestantism in a time of religious confusion, uncertainty, and apathy.

Recent research on the English Reformation has focused on points of continuity rather than discrepancy between medieval and reformist attitudes, and to a great extent the present thesis supports this view. However, Patrick Collinson argues that while there may be general areas of continuity between medieval and reformist views on many topics, it is still true that the formulation of an *ideal* of "the Protestant family" was a unique contribution to English popular religious culture.¹ There is evidence in reformist literature, and certainly in Becon's works, of a conscious effort to produce a new kind of person, or at least a new vision for men and women who had espoused the reformed faith. More than merely an academic or Platonic idea, the concept of "the good Protestant" was a model deliberately put forth whose "features became elevated to a high point of explicit consciousness."²

What, then, was the "good Protestant" like? At the close of *The Sick Man's Salve*, in the sick man's closing speeches and in the friends' eulogy, Becon summarizes his own opinion characteristics of the good Protestant (in this case, male). First, he understands and accepts the fundamentals of the reformed faith:

_Epaphroditus_: Without wavering or doubting, I faithfully believe, and am assuredly persuaded, that God the Father is a merciful Father unto me, that he hath forgiven me all my sins, received me into his favour, and made me heir of everlasting glory. And all this hath he done unto me, not for my merits and deserts, (which are utterly none,) but for Christ's sake, in whom I believe, whom also I confess to be my alone Saviour and Redeemer.

_Philemon_: Neighbour Epaphroditus, you thus believing cannot perish . . .³

After the sick man dies, the friends speak well of him, listing his virtues. This is not simply for effect but paints a conspicuous portrait of the desired qualities of the new man, the good Protestant. Note the features of his virtue:

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² Watt, 225.
Our brother hath made a godly end. He hath given up a good spirit into the hands of the living God... His life before men was unrebukeable and blameless. He lived justly and uprightly with his neighbours. He was friendly to all godly men, and enemy to no man. He was both a sincere favourer and a diligent follower of God's most holy word. He abhorred all sects, papists, anabaptists, libertines, etc.; notwithstanding, always praying for their amendment, that they, knowing their errors, might with us confess one God, and one truth in the unity of the Spirit. He was a dear friend to such as were studious of good letters, to widows, to fatherless children, to poor young maids' marriages, to young men that had not wherewith to set up their occupations, to the prisoners, to those poor people which were not able to get their living, to poor householders, to the repairing of high-ways, and such-like. What a will he made, ye know. His end also ye know.

It has been argued that a whole genre of literature emerged from the reform movement in which the "goodly householder" or the good Protestant parent constituted not only the market for the product but the product itself. There is nothing glamorous or romantic about The Sick Man's Salve; the sick man is not a saint nor a ruler; he is just an ordinary parent. As a source for contemporary views of sixteenth-century family life, The Sick Man's Salve is an invaluable source precisely because it is a masterpiece of the mundane. The keys to both its contemporary appeal and its historical value lie in its fusion of tradition and innovation. Becon may be credited with having helped create this cultural form.

It is possible to argue that Becon's emphasis on the commonplace in The Sick Man's Salve was a contrivance, or an artificial means of couching what were actually radical views in so ordinary and familiar a setting so as to de-emphasize their potentially revolutionary nature. It is not clear that such a contrivance was Becon's aim. Regardless of the degree of deliberateness of his approach, the fact remains that while his readers may still have participated in the traditional, familiar cultural forms encouraged in The Sick Man's Salve, if they took the theology in it seriously, they would be going against almost every major religious tenet their ancestors had been taught. While this thesis has argued that there is much about Becon's writing and outlook that remains thoroughly medieval, in the final analysis he must be considered a man who, in his heart, broke violently with the past.

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4 Ibid., 190.
5 Watt, 225.
6 Ibid., 101.
If historians continue to treat Thomas Becon as merely a hot-headed propagandist whose contribution was most valuable when most partisan, they will have to reject evidence of the sincerity of his reformism, the practicality of his evangelical approach, and the consistency of his message both during and after periods of conflict. His ability to translate the complex theological debates of his day into lessons for ordinary men and women rendered him enormously influential during the precarious birth of Protestantism in England. By anchoring theology in day-to-day life, he provided his readers with a vision for keeping Protestant Christianity from being a religion practised only from the neck up.
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