

COVERDALE'S ALTER EGO

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The name of Miles Coverdale is so closely associated with Bible translation that it is easy to overlook the other aspect of his life, that of the reformer. He played a not insignificant part in spreading the ideas of the Continental Reformers in England, and during his lifetime from 1488 to 1569 experienced eight decades of crucial importance in religious history. In his first forty years he became an Austin friar in Cambridge and witnessed the coming of Erasmian and Lutheran teaching from its early stages. Between 1528 and 1559 he spent long periods abroad in such cities as Antwerp, Strasbourg, and Geneva; and his old age was passed, in anxiety and with a troubled conscience, in the first decade of Elizabeth's reign. His theological development furnishes a paradigm of the progress of the English Reformation between 1530 and 1552. First he embraced Lutheran doctrines, then moved in the direction of the Swiss reformers. Finally he parted company with the *via media*, and adopted a position which might be termed proto-Puritan, similar to that of other Marian exiles like Humphrey and Sampson, who could not come to terms with the Elizabethan prayer book and Archbishop Parker's efforts to establish uniformity.

Coverdale's apprenticeship to his work both as a translator and as a reformer began in the 1520s, when he first came under the influence of Robert Barnes, then prior of the Austin house in Cambridge. There followed a further apprenticeship to Tyndale between 1528 and 1534, when, like Barnes, Coverdale had left the priory and travelled abroad. Although older biographies discount the suggestion, more recent writers believe that Coverdale had considerable involvement in Tyndale's revision and completion of his version of the Bible.¹ In 1534 he was himself commissioned by

¹ Cooper, *Athenae Cantab.*, pp. 268-274; G. Pearson, introduction to the Parker Society edition of the works of Coverdale in 2 vols. — I *Writings and Translations* (Cambridge, 1844), II *Remains* (1846); H. Guppy, "Miles Coverdale and the English Bible", *Bulletin*, xix (1935), 300-28; J.F. Mozley, *Coverdale and his Bibles* (London, 1953); F.F. Bruce, *The English Bible: a History of Translations*

an Antwerp merchant to translate the whole of the Bible into English, and the following year the first edition was produced. Shortly afterwards Coverdale returned to England, and produced a *Concordance of the New Testament*, a *New Testament Diglot* in Latin and English, and two new editions of the Bible in English, published in Southwark in 1537. In 1538 he was asked by Thomas Cromwell to revise Matthew's Bible for official use in the English church. This version was the work of John Rogers, another of Tyndale's associates; and Coverdale made it the basis of his new edition, whilst modifying the wording in places. Paris was to have been the place of publication, and Coverdale was there, supervising the work, until the French authorities threatened the printer, and the task was completed in London. These years from 1535 to 1539 were a period of relative security and optimism for the Protestant sympathisers in England, and they enjoyed the support of Cromwell if not of the entire ecclesiastical establishment. The Great Bible, Coverdale's version, was set up in every parish church in England.

In the prefaces to the early editions of the Bible Coverdale makes clear his aims and limitations as a translator. The dedication to Henry VIII in 1535 prudently refers to the necessity of obedience to a Christian prince rather than to the Bishop of Rome, and suggests that when the Pope conferred on Henry the title Defender of the Faith he was acting on prophetic inspiration, "not knowing what he did". There is also a certain amount of polemic against Rome, in a style similar to that of Coverdale's contemporaries like Latimer, Turner and Joye. The preface exhorts the reader to show gratitude to God by caring for the poor, and expresses the hope that all rulers, judges, preachers and parents will profit by reading the Bible in their own tongue. Those who cannot understand a text are advised to refer it to others "better learned", and every text should be interpreted in its context. Coverdale explains his dependence on the Latin and 'Dutch' (German) versions, and it is generally understood that his translation was based on these rather than directly upon the original languages. In the prologue to the 1538 version he refers to the avoidance of renderings that have given offence in Tyndale's translation, and says that where he departs from the literal sense

(London, 1970); L. Lupton, *History of the Geneva Bible*, Vol. XI, *Endurance* (London, 1979), and Vol. XII, *Heaven* (1980).

of the Vulgate this is only because he uses "the honest and just liberty of a grammarian, as needful is for thy better understanding".

During the late 1530s Coverdale was already at work on other translations, including short works by Luther and Osiander, and a Latin paraphrase of the Psalms by Johannes Campensis. There is another work attributed to Coverdale by the authors of *Athenae Cantabrigienses* entitled *Of Ye Olde God and the New*, a translation of a Latin version of an original German tract. The Latin was by Hermann Tulich (Dulichius), from the German of Joachim von Watt (Vadianus), a Zwinglian reformer of St. Gall. This title is not included in the list of Coverdale's works given by Bale, and probably the confusion arose when other bibliographers misinterpreted the list of books burnt at Paul's Cross in 1546 as given by Foxe. The most likely conclusion to be drawn from Foxe is that the translator was William Turner.² What Coverdale certainly did translate, a few years later, was a work of similar intention, Bullinger's *The Old faith*. This is a summary of scripture, intended as a guide to those who wish to avoid doctrines and practices not authorised therein, and, as Coverdale states in the preface, to show that the reformers were not "new-fangled gospellers" but had respect for "the antiquity and ancient age of our holy Christian faith".

The most important work of Coverdale, apart from his Biblical translation, is the book known as the *Ghostly Psalms and Spiritual Songs*, of 1539. This may fairly be described as the first English hymn book, and the only one until the publication of the collection by Sternhold and Hopkins. It was closely associated with Luther's *Wittenberg Hymnal*, and Bale listed it as *Cantus Usuales Wittenbergensium*. A detailed study of the work appeared in the late nineteenth century in Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*, and another was made by Althoff in 1935.³ Their research shows

² *Of ye Olde God and the New* (STC 25127 attrib. to William Turner); Mozley, op. cit. pp. 345ff.; Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, Religious Tract Soc. ed., v. 567. On the importance of the work see W.A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants* (Yale and London, 1964), p. 169f. Another work ascribed to Coverdale and appearing in the Parker Society edition is *The Carrying of Christ's Cross*, but this is identical with that of the same title by John Bradford, and is now thought to be his. It appears in the Parker Society edition of Bradford also.

³ J. Julian (ed.), *Dictionary of Hymnology* (London, 2nd ed., 1907), i. 442; E. Althoff, *Myles Coverdales Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songes und das deutsche Kirkenlied* (Bochum, 1935).

that nine out of a total of twenty-four of the hymns are English versions of Luther's, and eight of the canticles and psalms. Others use traditional German sources, themselves usually derived from Latin, and often collected and printed before Luther began his own compilation. The aim of Coverdale's work was two-fold. In the first place he wished, in his own words, to supply "godly songs" to be sung by "minstrels... our young men that have the gift of singing. ... and our women spinning at the wheels", instead of "hey nonny nonny, hey trolly lolly, and such like phantasies". Secondly, his purpose was to prepare for the day when England would, he hoped, be using a reformed service-book on the pattern of the Lutheran churches he knew on the Continent, and which he was to record a few years later in Copenhagen. He translated this into English under the title *The Order of the Church in Denmark and in many places of Germany, for the Last Supper, Baptism and Holy Wedlock*. stating in the preface,

And this have I done to the intent, that when ye have spied and do see that this order is agreeable unto God's word, not varying from the most wholesome doctrine thereof, ye may wish in your hearts to have God's truth prosper likewise among you in the realm of England, ...⁴

During the Lutheran Communion services the congregations sang hymns "in their mother tongue", and especially so before the sermon, when it was customary to sing a vernacular version of *Veni Creator Spiritus*. The first three hymns in Coverdale's book are English versions of this.

Other Latin hymns had been used and sometimes transformed by Luther; for example, *Media Vita*, a well-known prayer for deliverance from punishment after death reflecting despair of the salvation of sinners.

Media vita in morte sumus.
 Quem quaerimus adiutorem nisi te, domine?
 Qui pro peccatis nostris iuste irasceris.
 Sancte deus, sancte fortis, sancte et misericors salvator,
 Amarae morti ne tradas nos.

Luther's version transformed the hymn by adding a line which named Jesus as the deliverer from sin and death, and two stanzas affirming faith in justifying grace. His first stanza reads

⁴ *Writings and Translations*, p. 469.

Mytten wir ym leben synd
 mit dem todt umbfangen:
 Wen suchen wir der hulffe thu,
 das wir gnad erlangen?

Das byst du, Herr, alleyne.
 uns rewet unser missethat,
 die dich, herr, erzurnet hat.
 Heyliger herre Got,
 Heyliger starcker Got,
 Heyliger barmhertziger heyland,
 du ewyger Got,
 las uns nicht versyncken
 yn des pittern todes nott.

Coverdale follows Luther's three stanzas, and emphasises the additional line 'Even thou, Lord Jesu, alone'.

In the myddest of our lyvyng
 Death compaseth us round about:
 Who shulde us now sucour bryng
 By whose grace we may come out?
 Even thou, Lorde Jesu, alone:
 It doth oure hertes sore greve truly,
 That we have offended the.
 O Lord God most holy,
 O Lord God most myghtie,
 O holy and mercyfull Savioure,
 Thou most worthy God eternall,
 Suffre us not at our last houre
 For any death from the to fall.⁵

Although it is dangerous to argue on the basis of omission, one cannot refrain from noting that Coverdale did not translate either of Luther's two hymns on the eucharist. One of these is based on a version made by John Hus of a traditional hymn which implies a doctrine of the real presence of Christ, in terms which would not have been acceptable to Karlstadt or Zwingli. Others have commented on the absence of English versions of Luther's sacramental writings in general,⁶ and it seems significant that Coverdale did not translate anything of Luther's which had

⁵ Althoff, *op. cit.*, p. 47; *Remains*, p. 554 f.

⁶ E.g., Basil Hall, "Lutheranism in England (1520-1600)" in *Reform and Reformation: England and the Continent (Studies in Church History, Subsidia 2)*. Oxford, 1979), pp. 103-131.

bearing on the eucharist. There are two possible explanations, one being that Coverdale was being diplomatic in avoiding offence to Henry VIII. But a more likely explanation is that he was already moving closer to Swiss reformed theology and away from Lutheranism, as was the case with some of his friends. An additional reason in support of this view is that Coverdale made a significant omission in translating one of Luther's two hymns on the ten commandments. After devoting a stanza to each of the ten, Luther adds two stanzas of his own, reflecting his concern to teach that faith, not obedience to the law, brought justification. Luther's final stanza reads

Das helff uns der herr Jhesu Christ,
der unser midler worden yst.
Es ist mit unserm thun verlorn,
verdienen doch eytel zorn.⁷

It is obvious that in omitting these lines Coverdale was by no means a blind follower of his source, even if that was Luther himself, and that he exercised his own discretion in selecting what he transmitted to his fellow-countrymen. In another hymn occurs an even more interesting example.

So are good workes the very frute
Of hym that beleventh stedfastly,
A good tre with good frutes breaketh out,
As the gospell doth testifie.
For lyke as fayth hangeth whole on God,
So shulde oure werkes do other men good:
For fayth without them can not be.⁸

The first four lines state that works are the fruit of faith, but the last is open to the interpretation that works are the necessary antecedent to faith. The original of this hymn is not Luther's but a compilation by Paul Speratus published in 1524. Perhaps one should not read too much into these examples, but they may justifiably be regarded as straws in the wind. There is reason to connect his change of viewpoint about faith and works with Robert Barnes and William Tyndale, as Clebsch describes them.⁹

The literary merits of Coverdale's renderings have been fre-

⁷ Althoff, op. cit., p. 17.

⁸ *Remains*, p. 553; Althoff, pp. 39 ff.

⁹ Clebsch, op. cit., pp. 67 and 168 ff.

quently pointed out, and all that is needed is a brief comparison between a verse of his hymn *On the Birth of Christ* and a nineteenth century version by George Macdonald. Both are translations of Luther's *Gelobet seystu Jhesu Christ*. Coverdale begins

Now blessed be thou, Christ Jesu,
Thou art man borne, this is true;
The angels made a merry noise,
Yet have we more cause to rejoice.

Macdonald has:

All praise to thee, O Jesus Christ,
That a man on earth thou liest!
Born of a maiden, it is true,
In this exults the heavenly crew.

Like Luther, Coverdale makes each stanza of his hymns self-contained, because this helps people to memorise and to understand. He does not try to reproduce Luther's metre or rhyme-schemes; and, compared with Macdonald, exercises more independence with happier results. Coverdale's hymn book was one of the most effective means of bringing home the ideas of the reformers to the ordinary Englishman—more widespread in influence than his sermons, none of which has survived, and possibly, in its own day, more influential even than the Great Bible. Hymns can more easily be passed on to others, especially to children, than Biblical passages; and Coverdale took pains to refer to his scriptural authority by citing chapter numbers in the margin whenever possible. Copies of the English Bible were not available to be read privately by everyone; indeed their use was severely restricted from 1543 onwards. But it is difficult to suppress oral tradition, as Coverdale was well aware when he expressed the hope that he was supplying "godly songs" for "our young men ... and our women spinning at the wheels".

The *Act of Six Articles*, the rise of Norfolk and Gardiner, and the overthrow of Cromwell, constituted a marked change in the fortunes of the English reforming party. An *Act for the Advancement of True Religion* was passed in 1543, whereby the use of Tyndale's Bible was forbidden, and no annotated versions were to be retained for public use. No unlicensed person was to read or expound the Bible in public. In 1546 a royal proclamation forbade

the possession of Bibles or any other books by Tyndale or Coverdale, and there followed the burning of books by them and other writers such as Frith and Turner. The king had complained to Parliament in December 1545 that "the most precious jewel, the Word of God, is disputed, rhymed, sung and jangled in every alehouse and tavern", and the Act of 1543 stated that Bible-reading had become widespread among such under-privileged classes as "women, artificers, apprentices, journeymen, serving-men under the degree of yeomen, husbandmen and labourers". The legislation did not go without protest. In 1543, safely abroad, William Turner accused the bishops of responsibility for efforts to suppress Bible reading, suggesting that they had opposed the king's wish to introduce a copy into every church, because they were afraid to be measured by its standards, and that they would prevent its re-introduction even when Prince Edward had succeeded.¹⁰

Coverdale, like Turner, was abroad from 1540 onwards, and for him that year marked a watershed, since he lost both his patron, Cromwell, and his spiritual father, Barnes, who was burnt as a heretic, though without trial, soon after the overthrow of Cromwell. The condemnation of Barnes caused reverberations for several years and was the subject of severe criticism from his supporters. Barnes had first incurred suspicion of heresy as early as Christmas Day 1525, when he preached a sermon in Cambridge criticising Wolsey's love of costly ceremonial — a sermon, moreover, imbued with Reformation ideas such as the need to restore the primitive purity of New Testament times both in worship and morals. Barnes had been abroad and had returned to Cambridge to enter wholeheartedly into the movement towards reform associated with the disciples of Erasmus and the White Horse group. As a result of his sermon he was charged with heresy, examined by Wolsey, and forced to bear a faggot at Paul's Cross as a sign of repentance. This was the cause of his departure from England and the Augustinian order; and others, including Coverdale, followed. During Cromwell's period of ascendancy, Barnes enjoyed a remission and found favour with the king. He was employed on diplomatic missions abroad between 1534 and 1539, negotiating with Lutheran princes, and in efforts to achieve

¹⁰ *The Huntynge of the Romishe Fox* (Basle, 1543), STC 24353, sig. D viii and E i.

doctrinal agreement with them. Early in 1539 he was on the point of completing negotiations for an alliance between England, Denmark and Saxony when he was forced to return home. Foreign policy had undergone a change, and Cromwell was about to fall. Gardiner had already expressed objections to the employment on foreign missions of a man who had once been charged with heresy, and it is difficult to avoid the impression that personal jealousy had a share in the efforts made by Gardiner to bring about Barnes' downfall in 1540. Ironically it was Cranmer who initiated the events which culminated in Barnes' second experience of being accused of heresy. He invited Barnes, Jerome and Garret, all Protestant sympathisers, to preach Lenten sermons at Paul's Cross. Gardiner contrived to open the series himself on the first Sunday in Lent, and delivered an attack on Barnes. A counter-attack was inevitable, and the matter was reported to the king. Gardiner recounts how he persuaded Barnes to preach a recantation, which he did in the first half of his sermon, but then concluded by re-stating his former opinions. The case against Barnes built up as the weeks went by, and the downfall of Cromwell removed any hope of effective defence. In the end all three Lenten preachers, together with three Catholic friars, were condemned without trial and burnt at Smithfield.¹¹

Popular revulsion at this event is reflected in the outburst of writings attacking Gardiner and, through him, the king. John Bale, Wiliam Turner, Henry Brinklow and George Joye, as well as Coverdale, all expressed fierce indignation in treatises published abroad, and one may conjecture that on a popular level broadsheets were published at home and circulated in secret. The protagonist who came closest to rousing Gardiner's conscience must have been Joye, because it is in his reply to Joye that Gardiner goes to considerable length to justify and explain his treatment of Barnes. Joye had first written an attack on Gardiner, and we have Gardiner's reply, *A Declaration of such true articles as George Joye hath gone about to confute as false*. This brought forth Joye's *Refutation of the Bishop of Winchester's derke declaration*.¹² The theme of the controversy is the doctrine of justifica-

¹¹ There are accounts of Barnes' career in E.G. Rupp, *The Making of the English Protestant Tradition* (Cambridge, 1947); Guppy, op. cit.; Clebsch, op. cit.; and J. A. Muller, *Stephen Gardiner and the Tudor Reaction* (London 1926).

¹² Gardiner's *Declaration* (1546) STC 11589, and Joye's *Refutation* (1546) STC 14827, are in the John Rylands University Library.

tion by faith, but the occasion is undoubtedly the burning of Barnes. Gardiner prefaced his *Declaration* by an account of the way in which he summoned Barnes to his house and argued with him on the subject of justification. He denies that this was the reason for Barnes' condemnation, but Joye maintains that they never reached agreement and that Gardiner handed over Barnes to the secular powers knowing that he would be burnt. He compares Barnes to Elijah, warning Ahab at the risk of his life.

Does he claim (think ye) any part of his justification for burning Dr. Barnes and his fellows for preaching against these wickedly armed articles? Tell us Winchester, didst thou burn them so cruelly of love and not of hatred or envy?¹³

In his correspondence Gardiner recorded misgivings about the publicity being given to Protestant doctrines by illegal pamphlets, and to his own bad image:

How many books and scrolls have been cast abroad in London within this year and the offender never found out! ... When those that now be young shall, with the frailty of youth, win a contempt of religion and conceive another opinion of God than is indeed true, what is like to ensue thereof? ... I have finished mine answer to George Joye. ... and although I go not about to prove myself a saint, for I have made no such outward visage of hypocrisy, yet it shall appear I am not utterly a devil. And if I be a devil, I am not of the kind of devils that he noteth me of, and such other as have pleasure to have me so spoken of. And yet that is not the purpose of my answer, but specially to declare certain things that need declaration not unfruitfully. And that book I write to the world.¹⁴

Coverdale did not aim a broadside at Gardiner, but wrote his defence of Barnes in answer to a treatise by one John Standish, described as a lecturer at Whittington College, a man of decidedly Papist views who later, in Mary's reign, was to publish a discourse designed to prove that it was inexpedient to make scripture available for all to read. If he is the same John Standish who still held a prebend in 1570, he must have been ready to adapt his ideas to changing circumstances.¹⁵ Joye made a sarcastic reference to him as one who, in his treatise against Barnes, "laid out Scripture

¹³ Joye, quoted in *Declaration*, f. cxlv.

¹⁴ Letter to Paget dated 5 November 1545, in *Letters of Stephen Gardiner*, ed. J. A. Muller (Cambridge, 1933), pp. 160, 161, 163.

¹⁵ P. Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal* (Berkeley and London, 1979), p. 117.

written and unwritten, Englished and unenglished as thick as hail, and understood not one word that he said".¹⁶

The title of Coverdale's work is *A Confutation of the Treatise of John Standish*, and it was published in Strasbourg whither the writer had fled. It incorporates Barnes' *Protestations*. He refers to Standish's treatise against Barnes as having appeared in October 1540, among many other "books and ballads in England, one envying against another, one reviling and reproving another, one rejoicing at another's fall and adversity". All are published under the king's privilege and thereby damage England's reputation abroad. Coverdale goes on to accuse Standish of fighting a dead man—"Is he not a worthy soldier, that all the battle-time thrusteth his hand in his bosom; and when men are dead, then draweth out his sword, and fighteth with them that are slain already?"¹⁷ To give further publicity to the infamous act which caused the death of Barnes and his fellows was foolish, and showed, said Coverdale, that "ye may well have wit, but sure ye lack policy".

Standish accused Barnes of falling into error in two categories, although his arguments as reproduced and answered by Coverdale are not arranged in any such logical order. But it is possible to summarise them as, first, those which imply that Barnes was critical of traditional Catholic patterns of faith and practice, and, second, those which suggest that he was actually 'heretical' in the manner of Anabaptists. On both counts Standish accused Barnes of encouraging insurrection, lawlessness and treason, and at the outset Coverdale wrote a spirited refutation of this accusation, saying that Barnes taught no erroneous doctrine and abhorred all sects and their false opinions. On such matters as prayer to the saints, Barnes stood by scriptural teaching, saying

Throughout all Scripture we are not commanded to pray to any saints: therefore I cannot nor will not preach to you, that saints ought to be prayed unto. For then should I preach you a doctrine of mine own head.¹⁸

Coverdale adds that, according to Standish, scripture did not teach us to pray to the saints because they were not in heaven

¹⁶ Joye, quoted in *Declaration*, f. lxxxviii.

¹⁷ *A Confutation of the Treatise of John Standish made agaynst the protestation of R. Barnes in the yeare 1540*. Address to the Reader. *Remains* p. 325.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 418.

before Christ's ascension. He adduces the authority of Augustine to show that the church has no power to set up any doctrine unless it is based on scripture, and states that Christ alone is the means of salvation. Barnes has said that whether the saints pray for us or not is a matter known only to God, but he promises to pray for his executioners if such intercession is indeed possible. In the context of the argument about the saints Coverdale notes conflicting doctrines of the church. Standish defines it as "In this region of England... the king's majesty with his learned council". But surely the true church is "The universal congregation and multitude of them that believe in Christ".¹⁹

On the subject of church government, Coverdale defended Barnes against the charge of inciting men to disobedience.

Such bishops as labour in the word of God and in the doctrine thereof, are to be counted worthy of double honour: therefore in hearkening unto such, he did well; and if he despised such, he despised Christ. But if he followed St. John's bidding, and did not receive such false apostles as bring not the doctrine of Christ, then can ye not justly blame him.²⁰

Of eucharistic doctrine little is said, in spite of the Lutheran views of Barnes. It seems to have been sufficient for Barnes to state that he was on one occasion entrusted with the examination of one accused of denying any change in substance of the bread and wine. Coverdale himself accuses Standish of departing from scriptural authority in the matter. Much more attention is given to the question of justification by faith. This doctrine had been at the centre of Barnes' earlier writings, and was the touchstone of Protestant 'orthodoxy' in general. Most of Joye's debate with Gardiner turned on the question of whether the doctrine had scriptural foundation and how it should be interpreted. Clebsch maintains that Barnes changed his views on justification by faith between 1531, when he published his *Supplication* and adopted a Lutheran position, and 1534, when he expressed the opinion that though men were justified by faith alone, they must be justified before the world by their good works. Similar doctrine is contained in the 'Ghostly Psalms' as has been noted. As recorded by Coverdale, Barnes' opinion in 1540 certainly must be interpreted in terms of the second version.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 422-425.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 417.

Ye say also, D. Barnes did preach, that "works do not profit". If ye mean works invented by men's own brains, not grounded on God's word, then verily might he well say, that such works do not profit to salvation: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. But if ye mean such good works as are comprehended in the commandments of God, and within the precinct of his word, then truly ye fail so to report of him; for though salvation be God's work only, yet D. Barnes in his book doth not only condemn the fleshly and damnable reason of them, which say, "If faith only justifieth, what need we do any good work, etc.?" but also he affirmeth plainly, that we must needs do them, and that they which will not do them, because they be justified alone by faith, are not the children of God.²¹

The "works which do not profit" are penance and superstitious practices which have no basis in scripture or patristic teaching such as belief in purgatory, masses for the dead and pilgrimages. There is no truth in the allegation that the doctrine of justification by faith leads to the abolition of repentance and sorrow for sins. But Barnes taught his followers not to imitate the Pharisees in showing the world that they were fasting and praying. The essential point of Barnes' doctrine rests on the faith that Christ has rendered satisfaction for man's sin.

Dr. Barnes' last will and testament, whereupon he taketh his death, is this; that there is no other satisfaction unto the Father, but the death and passion of Christ only. Therefore, though it had been ten thousand times revoked before, yea, and declared never so oft at Paul's cross ... yet shall no man's revoking, no, nor your blasting and blowing, your stamping and staring, your stormy tempests nor winds, be able to overthrow this truth and testimony of the Holy Ghost throughout the Scriptures, that the death of Jesus Christ only doth satisfy and content the Father of heaven, and maketh the atonement for our sins. Neither do ye aught but bark against the moon, so long as ye labour to diminish the glory of Christ, as though he obtained not grace for all the sin of the world.²²

The second category of charges against Barnes was concerned with alleged antinomianism, Pelagianism and other opinions commonly held to be propagated by the Anabaptists. In the *Declaration* Gardiner wrote that Barnes had been accused of holding Anabaptist views as a result of his Cambridge sermon of 1525. The grounds for complaint were that he had maintained that

²¹ Ibid., p. 341.

²² Ibid., p. 357 f.

lawsuits between Christians ought not to take place — the reference being to the imprisonment of a member of his congregation for refusing to surrender a kettle bequeathed to the church by a deceased relative. Gardiner was writing twenty years later when Anabaptist teaching had penetrated England, and was over-anxious to denigrate Barnes. To suggest that anyone preached Anabaptist doctrine in Cambridge as early as 1525 is to ante-date the possibility by at least five and probably eight years. What Barnes did was to adduce and apply the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount in the manner of Lutheran preaching. Gardiner's attempt to label Barnes as an Anabaptist is an anachronism.

John Standish made similar attempts with little effect. He declared that Barnes did not agree with infant baptism, but brought forward no evidence to substantiate his statement. Another charge related to the heresy of Melchior Hoffman and his followers concerning the 'celestial flesh' of Christ. Barnes thoroughly understood the implications of this doctrine, which amount to a denial of the incarnation, and vigorously rejected it:

Although I have been slandered to preach, that our lady was but a saffron bag, which I utterly protest before God, that I never meant it, nor preached it; but all my study and diligence hath been, utterly to confound and confute all men of that doctrine, as are the Anabaptists, which deny that our Saviour Christ did take any flesh of the blessed virgin Mary; which sects I detest and abhor.²³

To Standish's claim that Barnes did not pay honour to Mary, Coverdale replied that those who heard him preach reported that he had never spoken irreverently of her, and Barnes himself protested that

She was a virgin immaculate and undefiled, and ... the most purest virgin that ever God created, and a vessel elect of God, of whom Jesus Christ should be born.²⁴

Barnes had been a member of a commission appointed in 1538 to suppress the heresies of the Anabaptists, and could justifiably claim that "all my study and diligence hath been ... to confute ... that doctrine".

Another charge against Barnes related to the implications of the doctrine of justification by faith as well as to the views of certain

²³ Ibid., p. 347 f.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 414.

Anabaptist and radical groups. The charge may be termed antinomianism or Pelagianism; and in each case the suggestion is that he shared the views of the Free-willers, who denied the doctrines of predestination and original sin. The Free-willers were by no means lawless, though confusion between their views and those of the Münsterites might exist in the popular mind. However, they were sufficiently numerous and vociferous in England to be taken very seriously, and a considerable propaganda campaign was conducted in the effort to suppress them. William Turner was playing his part when he composed a treatise called *A Preservative or Triacle against the poyson of Pelagius* in 1551. The 'heresy' attacked by Turner is not that of the original Pelagius, but a set of doctrines denying the validity of infant baptism, election and predestination. Turner's treatise was occasioned by a work written by one Robert Cooche, a disciple of Henry Hart, whom Coverdale described as "the chieftest maintainer of man's free will and enemy to God's free grace".²⁵ On page after page Coverdale defends Barnes against allegations of preaching free-will, lawlessness and insurrection, emphasising that he preached the necessity of good works after justification, exhorted his hearers not to live after the flesh, and to obey the civil powers.

He believeth in the holy Trinity, he extolleth the merits of Christ, he praiseth our lady, he abhorreth the Anabaptists' heresy, he prayeth for the king's highness, he exhorteth men to good works, he beseecheth God to forgive him his trespass.²⁶

Coverdale turns the tables on Standish by accusing him of Pelagianism, because he says that "God commandeth us nothing impossible for us to do".

Coverdale concluded his *Defence* by an account of Barnes' last speech and calm acceptance of death, and a final debate with Standish. In the closing section he admonished the reader:

Arm thyself, therefore, with the comfortable ensamples of the scripture: and, as touching those jolly Nimrods that persecute God's word, hunting it out of every corner, whetting their swords and bending their bows against it, be thou sure, that the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, shall do with them as he ever was wont to do with tyrants in times past.²⁷

²⁵ Coverdale's marginal note on a letter of John Bradford, see Bradford's *Works* (Parker Soc., Cambridge, 1848-53), ii. 170 and 174.

²⁶ *Confutation*, loc. cit., p. 400; cf. p. 388.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 446-7.

The total impression made by Coverdale's *Defence of Barnes* is one of moderation, dignity of style even in fierce debate, and a thorough understanding of the theological issues. Judged by the standards of the time, Coverdale's tone is restrained, even though he is defending the reputation of his most trusted friend and spiritual guide. He does not descend to personal attack or use the plain speech of some religious controversialists. The thread of the argument is sometimes tangled, and there is repetition of themes, but this is a characteristic of other examples such as the Gardiner-Joye or Gardiner-Turner debates. In Coverdale's case much of the blame for the circuitous nature of the argument may rest upon Standish, whose treatise is taken as the basis of the reply. The theological position which Coverdale is defending is opposed to Rome and to the radical wing of the reformers. It is partly Lutheran and partly Zwinglian or "proto-Reformed", in the sense that while Luther's teaching on justification by faith and obedience to the civil powers is accepted, there is the anti-ceremonialism and insistence on the importance of good works as issuing from the justified that is characteristic of Swiss theology. By one of the ironies of sixteenth century history, Coverdale was appointed in 1563 to the lectureship at Whittington College once held by Standish.²⁸

Coverdale's dealings with Anabaptist and radical groups did not end with his *Defence of Barnes*. In letters written in February 1545 he referred to being "troubled by the ravings of the Anabaptists" at Bergzabern and names Schwenckfeld as the chief source of their doctrine. During Edward's reign he was appointed, along with Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, Sir John Cheke and others, to a commission "to preserve the purity of religion now threatened by doctrines of Anabaptists and Libertines". A Flemish surgeon accused of heresy, George van Parris, was handed over to this commission in April 1551, and, as he spoke no English, Coverdale acted as interpreter. Parris was a member of the Strangers' Church led by John à Lasco, and the charge on which he was condemned and put to death was that of denying the divinity of Christ. Anti-trinitarian views were spreading, and shortly after the trial a bill was introduced into the House of Lords by Ridley, Hooper, Thirlby and Coverdale to protect the king's subjects from heresies propagated by foreigners resident in England.

²⁸ Lupton, *Heaven* (ed. cit.), p. 175.

In the reign of Mary, John Bradford conducted a campaign against the Free-willers who were in the same prison as he, and wrote *A Defence of Election*. Henry Hart's name is not among the list of those examined by the commission in 1551, but his name was mentioned in the depositions of others²⁹ and he would thus be well-known to Coverdale who was one of the commissioners. Hart's disciple Robert Cooche persisted in his former opinions in spite of Turner's efforts to subdue him in *A Preservative*. Parkhurst wrote in Elizabeth's reign:

Robert Cooche is a very accomplished man, and well skilled in music. When I was a preacher at the court of Queen Catherine, he was steward of the Wine Cellar ... He very frequently troubled Coverdale and myself by controversies ... so that we were quite weary of him. He was verbose to an extreme. When Jewel and other learned men came ... to visit me, this man instantly began to enter on these subjects with them, nor could he make an end of his loquacity. Now he is even in the Queen's Court.³⁰

Thus it seems that Coverdale was involved in controversy with radical views until his old age, for, although the letter of Parkhurst refers to the period between 1543 and 1547, Cooche was still active at the time when the letter was actually written in 1574.

Coverdale's activities as a reformer are reflected in the letters he wrote during his period abroad in the years 1540 to 1548. He was befriended by Bucer in Strasbourg and his secretary, Conrad Hubert, who helped him to obtain a schoolmaster's post at Bergzabern. The letters to Hubert and others mention names like Erasmus, Bullinger, and Bucer, "Our dearly-beloved preceptor in Christ". In 1545 he wrote to Hubert that he was anxious to translate Bucer's reply to Gardiner's treatise on clerical celibacy, and though he was not able to do so he obviously regarded the task as urgent, and wished to play a full part in the struggle of the reforming party against Gardiner. Two other interesting letters are addressed to Calvin and to Fagius. Both were written in 1548; the former, to Calvin, while Coverdale was on his way back to England, reported that he had received the new *Order of Holy Communion*, and translated it into both German and Latin. He sent it as a token of esteem to Calvin, with greetings of affection to his wife, "who deserved so well from me and mine, when we went up to Strasbourg". The second was written in the following

²⁹ C.J. Clement, *The English Radicals and their Theology, 1535-1565* (Cambridge, unpubd. Ph.D. thesis, 1980), p. 176.

³⁰ Quoted in C. Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* (Cambridge, 1912), ii. 7 f.

October after Coverdale's return and was sent from Windsor Castle on 21 October 1548. It is a reasonable assumption that he was attending the consultation of bishops and divines prior to the publication of the *First Book of Common Prayer*. Paul Fagius, whom Coverdale describes as "eminent among the best scholars of Germany", was urged, with the authority of Archbishop Cranmer, to flee from the persecutions of Charles V and come to England, where his son was already being educated. The invitation was accepted, and one more well-known authority arrived to add to the growing influence of English scholarship.

To the period between 1540 and 1548 there belong also translations of the proceedings at the Council of Regensburg recorded in Latin by Bucer and Melancthon. There were translations of three works by the Swiss divine Werdmüller, of Erasmus' *Enchiridion*, and the account of the *Order of the Church in Denmark for the Lord's Supper, Baptism and Holy Wedlock*, to which reference has already been made. This was based on Coverdale's visit to his wife's sister and her husband in Copenhagen. These relatives the Machesons (or McAlpynes as the name is given sometimes) were to play a vital part in making it possible for Coverdale to escape from England in Mary's reign. John Macheson was Professor of Divinity at Copenhagen University and persuaded the king of Denmark to intercede with Queen Mary on Coverdale's behalf. In the 1540s Coverdale visited them and thus became acquainted with Danish Lutheran practices at first hand. He published the *Order of the Church in Denmark*, and older authorities state that he prefaced it by a translation of Calvin's *Treatise on the Sacrament*. This indeed is included in the Parker Society edition of Coverdale's works. Mozley, however, believes that the style of the translation is not Coverdale's but more like that of another translator of Calvin, Thomas Broke. The title-pages of the *Treatise* do not bear Coverdale's name, and their inclusion in the Parker Society volume suggests that some doubt existed in the mind of the editor. In a volume of miscellaneous sixteenth-century tracts in the John Rylands University Library, there are three works together at the beginning; the first is clearly ascribed to Thomas Broke, the second is a translation of Calvin's *Treatise* with no name given, and the third is the *Order of the Church in Denmark*, clearly ascribed to Coverdale.³¹ He did not

³¹ *Writings and Translations*, pp. 422, 468, and 529; Mozley, op. cit., p. 330; John Rylands' catalogue R7262.

translate Luther's sacramental writings, and it appears that he did not translate Calvin's either.

The translations of works by Otto Werdmüller were probably made in the late 1540s, although not all were published until about 1550. There are three in all: *A Treatise on Death, The Hope of the Faithful*, and *A Spiritual and Most Precious Pearl*. The last was published in 1550 under the patronage of Protector Somerset, and, according to the preface, presented by him to King Edward VI. Werdmüller was a divine of Zürich and his works of personal devotion are imbued with the spirit of the Swiss reformers. The unquiet soul is advised to place all his trust in God alone, as did the heroes and martyrs of Biblical times. No help is to be expected from man. Though the believer is justified by faith, repentance and amendment of life are necessary, and adversity must be borne "with a right christian patience". Of similar character is Zwingli's *Brevis commemoratio mortis Christi*, which Coverdale translated as *Fruitful Lessons upon the Passion, Buriall, Resurrection, Ascension and the sending of the Holy Ghost*. The treatment takes the form of excerpts from the New Testament, followed by "the doctrine and meditation". In key passages such as those relating to the Lord's Supper, there is evidence of the Zwinglian emphasis on an act of remembrance for the benefits of Christ's Passion as the believer receives by faith his flesh and blood.³²

A work of a different type was a translation entitled *The Defence of a certain Poor Christian Man: who else should have been condemned by the Pope's law*. The original was supposedly a defence by a Christian prince, possibly Philip of Hesse or Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, of someone imprisoned and sentenced to death for heresy.³³ The list of the prisoner's alleged heresies is of interest:

This heretic, saith our adversary, doth affirm,

First. That the Bishop of Rome is not the head of the church, nor the true vicar of Christ.

Secondly. That the mass is no sacrifice, nor ought to be used for other.

Thirdly. That the Supper of the Lord ought to be ministered in forms both of bread and wine, and that unto also the lay people.

³² *Writings and Translations*, pp. 195-421; esp. pp. 211 f., 384, 419. The first printing was at Nurnberg in 1545.

³³ Lupton, *Heaven* (ed. cit.), p. 44.

Fourthly. That there is no purgatory, and that suffrages for the dead are in vain, and superstitious.

Fifthly. That it is not necessary to call upon saints.

Sixthly. That auricular confession was neither commanded nor instituted of Christ and his disciples.

Seventhly. That on the days prohibited and forbidden by the church of Rome, it is no sin to eat flesh.

Eighthly and finally. He saith plainly, that priests may marry.³⁴

Again there is insistence on the necessity of good works, and even a paragraph referring to the Epistle of James. The writer goes on to explain the difference between works of charity, which issue from the justified, and works such as pilgrimages, prayer to saints, veneration of relics and monastic vows.

The conclusion of the treatise, which may well be of Coverdale's own writing, invites the reader to consider how God "mollifieth and moveth the heart of this virtuous prince", and it may be assumed that he hoped that the future King Edward VI would emulate the godly prince in whose name the work was composed. The doctrinal position adopted is less moderate than that of Barnes but similar to that of William Turner. Each article of the eight on the list is discussed separately, and the result is to provide text-book answers ready to hand for anyone accused of these 'heresies'. Coverdale translated the treatise in order to give weapons to his fellow-countrymen when they faced a ruler who did not live up to the standards of the 'godly prince'.

When Coverdale returned to England in 1548 he was soon drawn into the circle of the leading reformers, and was associated with the preparation and publication of the new *Book of Common Prayer*. He enjoyed the patronage of Katherine Parr, and with her support took part in the translation of the *Paraphrases* of Erasmus. On many occasions he preached at Paul's Cross, earning the admiration of Latimer and Peter Martyr, and went as preacher to the West Country with the army sent to quell the rebellion against the new Prayer Book. In August 1551 Vesey, Bishop of Exeter, was deposed and replaced by Coverdale. At this stage he apparently had no objection to wearing surplice and cope for his consecration. As bishop he undertook a diocesan visitation, as would be expected of a conscientious reformer, and in this period also published some of his translations and the new edition of his

³⁴ *Remains* p. 463.

1538 Bible. Less than two years after his consecration, however, Edward was succeeded by Mary, and Coverdale was summoned to appear before the Privy Council, put under house-arrest, and replaced by Vesey. Eventually, through the intervention of his brother-in-law and the Danish king, he was allowed to go to Denmark, and from there to join a group of exiles in Wesel. After some time the group was forced to leave Wesel and settled in Aarau in Switzerland, but Coverdale seems to have gone to Geneva, where he spent nine or ten months in 1558-9. Possibly he was invited to assist with the preparation of the Geneva Bible; and if so, this would explain why he was in no hurry to leave for England when Elizabeth succeeded Mary in November 1558. He did not return until the following August. Certainly he was closely associated with John Knox in Geneva, and was godfather to Knox's child. Their friendship helps to account for the shift in Coverdale's views towards a less conciliatory position which made him refuse to compromise with Elizabeth's *via media*.

When Coverdale eventually returned, he took part in the consecration of Matthew Parker, wearing a plain black gown. He had no living apart from a minor appointment as a preacher, and probably refused to accept a bishopric. Many former exiles such as Grindal, Coxe, Jewel and Parkhurst, had scruples about accepting office in the church, and did so only after consultation with their friends in Strasbourg and Geneva. Coverdale belonged to an older generation than they—he was over thirty years older than Grindal—and at the age of seventy-two may have felt unwilling to undertake the burden of high ecclesiastical office. Grindal as Bishop of London tried in vain to persuade his revered friend to accept appointments, and wrote to Cecil concerning the bishopric of Llandaff c. 1563:

If any competency of living might be made of it, I would wish it to father Coverdale, now lately recovered of the plague. Surely it is not well that he, qui ante omnes fuit in Christo, should be now at his age without stay of living. I cannot herein excuse us bishops. Somewhat I have to say for myself: for I have offered him divers things, which he thought not meet for him.³⁵

Eventually Coverdale did accept the living of St. Magnus Martyr, London Bridge, in January 1564. He was so poverty-stricken that

³⁵ Letter of Grindal, quoted in Coverdale, *Remains*, p. 529.

he had to beg leave not to pay the first-fruits to the Crown, as was customary. It was appropriate that in the following April Coverdale should be deputed by the vice-chancellor of Cambridge to confer on Grindal the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

His last literary work was the compilation and publication of the *Letters of the Martyrs* in 1564. He must have collected the originals during his last period of exile, possibly in collaboration with Foxe, who was preparing his *Acts and Monuments*. To their preservation we owe much knowledge of the activities of Cranmer, Ridley, Hooper, Taylor, Saunders, Philpot, Bradford, Careless, Marsh and others who perished in the Marian persecution. In many instances Coverdale has added marginal notes of explanation, identifying people and places occurring in the text, and indicating his close acquaintance with the circumstances of the writers. Most of the letters have since been incorporated in separate editions of the writers' works.³⁶

Scarcely two years after he accepted the living of St. Magnus, Coverdale found himself unable to comply with the requirements of Archbishop Parker's *Advertisements*, which enforced strict adherence to the standards of the *Book of Common Prayer* in the use of ceremonies and in clerical dress. These were issued in March 1566, and all London clergy were summoned to Lambeth to signify their willingness to subscribe to the rubrics. Coverdale wrote a diplomatic letter to Parker's Chaplain on the subject, showing that in old age he had not lost the discretion and tact which characterised his work on the Great Bible:

Whereas I am summoned to appear with others tomorrow afore my Lord's grace at Lambeth, I beseech your worthiness to be means for me unto his grace, that at this present I may be dispensed with; not only for that I am unwieldy, and could neither well travel by land, nor altogether safely by boat, but also for other considerations which this bearer, my dear friend, shall signify to you by mouth.³⁷

In July 1566, a few months after this episode, Coverdale, Humphrey and Sampson wrote to their friends Farel, Beza, Viret and others in Geneva to seek advice about the wearing of clerical

³⁶ *Certain most Godly fruitful and comfortable letters of such true saints and holy martyrs of God as in the late bloody persecution have within this realm gave their lives for the Defence of Christ's holy gospel.* (London, 1564). STC 5886. Another edition was published, ed. by E. Bickersteth (London, 1837).

³⁷ Letter XXXIX (*Remains*, p. 532).

apparel, the use of wafer bread, kneeling reception at communion, and other ceremonies which seemed contrary to scripture. They reported that failure to comply could result in deprivation.³⁸ As their correspondents seemed unable to understand the gravity of the situation, and advised compliance with the law until further reformation could be brought about, Humphrey and Sampson persisted in writing a series of similar letters, and were incensed when they learnt that the recipients had consulted Grindal and informed him of their attitude. Bullinger wrote to Coverdale to explain that he had not intended the letter to Grindal for publication. Coverdale did not sign any more letters, however, and perhaps considered that there was nothing to be gained by continuing to press for intervention from the church in Geneva. He had resigned his living in the summer of 1566 but continued to preach; and it is recorded that he did so on at least eleven occasions in London. There is an account of his last sermon, preached shortly before his death in January 1569, delivered at St. Magnus, when he reluctantly yielded to persuasion because there was no other preacher available.

Coverdale's stand on the question of Parker's *Advertisements* increased his popularity in early Puritan circles, and it is probable that he delivered many a sermon in secret during the last two or three years of his life. His name was mentioned by a group of Londoners who were arrested for holding an illegal service in the Plumbers' Hall in 1567. They complained about lack of preaching in the parish church, and said that ceremonies and "idolatrous gear" were given more importance than the Word of God. Father Coverdale was the only preacher they had heard recently, and he was "so fearful, that he durst not be known to us where he preached".³⁹ Coverdale was not molested by Grindal and his commissioners, who did, however, commit a number of the group to prison. Clearly there could be no compromise with the Elizabethan establishment for men like Coverdale and Turner, of the older generation. To the younger men like Grindal, who told the Plumbers' Hall men that he preferred not to wear vestments himself, but obeyed the law, fell the unhappy lot of enforcing the *Advertisements* in London, where resistance was greatest. Coverdale's feelings toward his younger friends may be imagined.

³⁸ *Zürich Letters*, Series II (Parker Soc., Cambridge, 1845), pp. 121-4, 136-7.

³⁹ Grindal, *Remains* (Parker Soc., Cambridge, 1843), p. 203.

When Coverdale died he was buried in St. Bartholomew-by-Exchange, but this church was demolished in the nineteenth century, and his remains were transferred to St. Magnus. He would fail to recognise his own church in the present building, erected after the Great Fire by Wren, in what Eliot called "inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold".⁴⁰ Undoubtedly Coverdale would disown its present style of churchmanship; but his memorial tablet is to be seen on the east wall, close to the altar.

In assessing Coverdale's significance as a reformer, one must consider first of all the many activities whereby he furthered the cause to which he became more and more deeply committed as years went by. His sermons have not survived, but he must have been as powerful a preacher as Latimer, if one can judge by the vivid style of occasional passages of polemic in his extant writings.⁴¹ The defence of Barnes was a bold contribution to the campaign conducted by the Henrician exiles against Gardiner, and must have impressed the rising generation of churchmen like Grindal, and other future bishops of the Elizabethan church. One can only estimate the power of Coverdale's example in this direction. Abroad, he was able to make contact with leading reformers, some of whom became his friends — particularly Bucer and his secretary, Hubert. He translated many of their writings, and thus played a part of great importance in the dissemination of reformed teaching wherever he went, but especially in England. The development of his own views from Lutheranism to 'proto-Puritanism' has been traced already. While he was not an original thinker, he was capable of exercising independent judgment in deciding what works to translate and how to preface the text.

He did not engage very deeply in controversial matters except for the *Confutation of the Treatise of John Standish*. By nature he seems to have been a pacific and diplomatic person who preferred to act unobtrusively in order to gain his point. For example, in the address to the reader of the *Defence of a certain poor Christian* and of the *Order of the Church in Denmark* he quietly urged the need for reformation according to the Word of God, but did not hint that this should be brought about by violent means. When he

⁴⁰ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

⁴¹ E.g., two passages quoted from the *Confutation of the Treatise of John Standish*, referred to in notes 22 and 27.

translated the *Enchiridion* of Erasmus he omitted the controversial passages, and concentrated, as in the translations of Werdmüller, on the personal piety associated with Erasmianism. Most significantly he sought to propagate reformed doctrines through the hymn book and the oral tradition of ordinary men and women. What he believed in and worked for, a gradual reformation according to the Word of God, permeated his whole way of life; his opinions were sincerely held, and if modified, only because of the conviction that change was imperative, not from any other motive. Personal gain and security were of little consequence to Coverdale. His literary labours and his manifold activities brought little reward and even endangered his livelihood, as did his continued preaching in early Puritan circles; and in an age when many compromised their principles he stands out as first and foremost a man of integrity who kept to his purpose steadfastly in all circumstances, like a pilot who guides the crew of a storm-tossed vessel through the currents and between the rocks.