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# “Never Better”: Affliction, Consolation and the Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern England

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**Abstract:** This essay examines the central role of consolation in early modern Protestant culture. It first maps a number of the important tropes in early modern Protestant consolation literature, focusing on England. It then analyses the language of consolation in early modern printed and manuscript sources on the legal proceedings against the Puritan pamphleteers Bastwick, Burton and Prynne, showing how consolation was both widely shared and politically contentious, undermining the very idea of a unified Protestant cause which it served to foster. Finally, I examine the notebooks of the London wood-turner Nehemiah Wallington as a case study of the ways in which self-writers, in recording and reflecting on affliction, drew on consolation discourses. While consolation is a central strand in Wallington’s reflections on affliction, it is also elusive and provisional, especially where everyday, personal suffering is concerned. In Wallington, consolation seems available especially if the religious suffering it alleviates has a political dimension, and can be construed as a way of suffering for the true faith.

**Keywords:** suffering, consolation, protestantism, early modernity, self-writing

## 1 Introduction

In February 1524 Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote a letter of consolation to the fledgling evangelical congregation in the German town of Miltenberg, whose pastor Johann Drach (Johannes Draconites, 1494–1566) had been excommunicated in 1523, with some of his followers executed and the Evangelical movement in Miltenberg suppressed.<sup>1</sup> Luther’s *christlicher Trostbrief* appeared in

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<sup>1</sup> Following Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe’s House Divided 1490–1700* (London: Penguin books Ltd, 2003), I use the term “evangelical” to refer to “sympathizers with reform in the first half of the sixteenth century” (xx).

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seven editions, printed in five German cities.<sup>2</sup> The letter to the Miltenberg congregation is one of a body of consolation letters written by Luther during the 1520s, and addressed to specific early evangelical communities facing persecution, such as those in Halle and Worms, or to persecuted Protestants more generally, such as the 1522 *Letter of Consolation to All Who Suffer Persecution*.<sup>3</sup> In these letters, Luther not only comforts his coreligionists but also addresses the question of what constitutes effective and theologically sound consolation in the first place. Indeed, for Luther, the true Christian community is *defined* to a significant extent by the ways in which it understands and practices consolation – by the manner in which it bears and attaches meaning to suffering and adversity.

Luther's consolation letters are part of a broader preoccupation with consolation that was characteristic of early modern Protestant culture from its very inception.<sup>4</sup> This interest in consolation among Protestants was occasioned in

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<sup>2</sup> Neil R. Leroux, *Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007), 108. For Luther and consolation, see also Hans B. Leaman, “‘Count Every Step in my Flight’: Rhegius's and Luther's Consolations for Evangelical Exiles, 1531–3,” in *Exile and Religious Identity, 1500–1800*, ed. Jesse Spohnholz and Gary K. Waite (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 9–24; Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Ronald Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> In Martin Luther, “Devotional Writings II,” in *Luther's Works*, vol. 43, ed. Gustav K. Wiencke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 57–71; translation of Martin Luther, *Eyn Missive allen den, so von wegen des Wortts Gottes Verfolgung lyden tröstlych* (Strasbourg, 1522).

<sup>4</sup> There is, of course, a long Christian and classical tradition of consolation literature, with the consolation letter as one subgenre. Important examples from classical antiquity are Plutarch's *On Exile*; Cicero's *Consolatio and Tusculan Disputations*; and Seneca's *Consolatione ad Marciam*, *De Consolatione ad Polybium*, *Epistolae ad Lucilium* and *De Consolatione ad Helviam*. Chad D. Schrock, *Consolation in Medieval Narrative: Augustinian Authority and Open Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) reads Augustine's *Confessions* and *City of God* as consolatory, in that they offer narratives of consolation after the sack of Rome in 410 had rendered problematic the idea of history as a gradual and inevitable spread of Christianity. For Augustine and consolation, see also Mary Melchior Beyenka, *Consolation in Saint Augustine* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950). The most famous medieval work of consolation is Boethius' sixth-century *Consolation of Philosophy*, which, in spite of its pervasive influence on medieval Christianity, drew predominantly on classical rather than Christian models, especially the Stoicism of Seneca and Cicero, and the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus (see Pierre Courcelle, *La 'Consolation de Philosophie' dans la tradition littéraire: Antécédents et postérité de Boèce* [Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1967] and Howard Rollin Patch, *The Tradition of Boethius* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1935]). For consolation in Italian humanism, see George McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). My concern in this essay is not with the classical and earlier Christian lineage of early modern

part by the fact that the persecution which they faced gave new urgency to the experience of suffering. As various scholars have shown, persecution and martyrdom became central to early modern notions of Protestant identity, with the immense importance in England of the *Book of Martyrs* (1563) by John Foxe (1516/17–1587) as only one example among many.<sup>5</sup> Protestants saw themselves as sufferers for a righteous cause, a community held together to an important extent by the shared experience of suffering and persecution. This centrality of martyrdom brought with it a need for consolation in the face of persecution, as is suggested, for example, by the pervasiveness of the language of consolation in the *Book of Martyrs*. Two examples from many in Foxe are the narratives of the Marian martyrs John Philpot (1515/16–1555) and Lawrence Saunders (d. 1555). In a letter to Lord John Careless, Philpot claims to feel “the consolation of heaven” and expresses a hope that Careless too will experience God’s “inward consolation”, while Saunders is described as being “expert” in “consolations” and “able to comforte other which were in any affliction, by the consolation wherewith the Lord did comfort him”.<sup>6</sup> As Luther’s letters to early evangelical congregations also make clear, discourses of consolation provided a crucial framework for articulating a sense of community-in-suffering. The need to claim consolation for the Protestant cause was intensified by the existence of a body, often highly politicized, of early modern Catholic consolation writing. Prominent English examples include Thomas More’s *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* (1534, reprinted in 1553 and 1573); *An epistle of comfort to the reverend priestes* (1587) and *The triumphs over death* (1595) by Robert Southwell (1561?–1595); the *Spiritual Consolation* (1578) by the bishop and martyr John Fisher (c.1469–1535); and Robert Persons’ *The First Booke of the Christian*

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Protestant consolation discourses, but with these discourses as a coherent framework for attaching meaning to suffering in their own right.

5 Among a large number of relevant titles, see John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563–1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1999); Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). A useful recent study of Foxe is John N. King, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

6 John Foxe, *Actes and monuments* (London, 1583), 1833, 1494. Foxe appended a series of letters by Philpot, many consolatory in nature, to the narrative of Philpot’s examination and martyrdom.

*Exercise, Appertayning to Resolution* (1582), hugely popular in the 1584 Protestant adaptation by Edmund Bunny.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the strong link between consolation and martyrdom, the dominance of consolation in early modern Protestant culture extended beyond the experience of persecution and martyrdom. As Ronald Rittgers has shown, the Protestant Reformation was to an important extent a “reformation of suffering”: members of the Protestant clergy were strongly interested in suffering more broadly, and undertook a massive effort to instruct their flock in the meanings of, and to shape their responses to, suffering.<sup>8</sup> They did so in a diverse genre best labeled “religious consolation literature”, which includes printed sermons and meditations on suffering, as well as works of spiritual guidance and biblical commentaries. What these various works of religious consolation literature have in common is that their primary goal is to offer ways of coping with or bearing affliction. The aim of consolatory discussions of physical illness, for example, is not the cessation of particular ailments but rather to provide a narrative that will make illness easier to bear, meaningful and spiritually efficacious. The category of suffering in early modern consolation discourse was a fluid and flexible one. It ranged from religious persecution to serious physical illness and from grief to religious doubt, and even economic adversity – experiences which early moderns referred to by means of the capacious term *affliction*. They did not distinguish clearly between these various forms of suffering, and construed all of them as occasions for consolation.

My first aim in this essays is to map some of the important tropes in early modern Protestant understandings of consolation. My main focus is on the important but hitherto underexamined role of consolation literature within the culture of early modern English Protestantism.<sup>9</sup> Yet I will read English

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<sup>7</sup> A discussion of early modern Catholic consolation is beyond the scope of this article, but see Mark Greengrass, “Two Sixteenth-Century Religious Minorities and their Scribal Networks,” *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1700*, eds. Heinz Schilling & István György Tóth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 317–338; and, for consolation in Jesuit spirituality, John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), esp. 19–21, 41–45, 82–84, 264–266, 370–373. For Persons, see Kevin Laam, “‘For God’s inheritance onely’: Consolation and Recusant Identity in Robert Persons’s *Christian Directorie*,” in *The Reformation Unsettled: British Literature and the Question of Religious Identity, 1560–1660*, eds. Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen & Richard Todd (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 205–225.

<sup>8</sup> Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> The Folger Shakespeare Library collection alone contains at least 150 early modern printed works of Protestant consolation in English, of which I can discuss only a handful in this essay. Existing studies focus on more circumscribed issues, such as the relation between poetry and consolation, consolation of convicts, and the consolation of Catholic martyr priests. See Lorna Clymer, “The Funeral Elegy in Early Modern Britain: A Brief History,” in *The Oxford Handbook*

consolation discourses partly in dialogue with some of the central tropes in Luther’s consolation letters; this will help to clarify that English consolation discourses were part of a tradition that was characteristic of international Protestantism and spanned the entire early modern era. When Luther wrote his consolatory letters, Protestant discourses of martyrdom had not yet crystallized, and the question of how best to console a persecuted religious community was an open one. As Neil Leroux points out, “in the third decade of the [sixteenth] century, Luther’s early pamphlets had no precise generic pattern to follow”, and by examining Luther’s consolation letters we can map a number of the parameters that would dominate Protestant consolation discourses throughout the early modern era, and that were also central to early modern English Protestantism.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as Alec Ryrie has argued, it was precisely in its theology of the cross – its insistence on suffering as a hallmark of Protestant identity, with consolation as its logical corollary – that Lutheran theology had a shaping influence on English Protestant culture, even after the Church of England became predominantly Calvinist in theological outlook. As Ryrie notes, John Foxe “appears to have been the first English writer to label Luther as a theologian of consolation”, while ‘Foxe’s theology of consolation was indebted to Luther’s theology of the cross’.<sup>11</sup>

My discussion of early modern English Protestant consolation is based principally on a reading of works by the clerical authors Richard Allestree (1621/2–1681), Edmund Calamy (1600–1666), Edward Dering (c.1540–1576), John Downname (1571–1652) and Elnathan Parr (1577–1622). Richard Allestree’s devotional works were highly popular, and frequently reprinted, during the second half of the seventeenth century; his spiritual manual *The whole duty of man* (1657) was a bestseller. Edmund Calamy’s collection of sermons *The Godly mans ark* (1657) was similarly popular, having been reprinted seven times by

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*of the Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 170–186; Sarah Covington, “Consolation on Golgotha: Comforters and Sustainers of Dying Priests in England, 1580–1625,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60, no. 2 (April 2009): 270–293. Nicholas Terpstra (ed.), *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy* (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2008). Ronald Rittgers, in the study most immediately relevant for this essay, examines Protestant pastoral theology in early modern Germany; its thematic focus is on the modern Protestant rejection of the idea that suffering is salvific (Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*).

**10** Leroux, *Martin Luther as Comforter*, xxxii.

**11** Alec Ryrie, “The Afterlife of Lutheran England,” in *Sister Reformations / Schwesterreformationen: The Reformation in Germany and in England / Die Reformation in Deutschland und in England*, ed. Dorothea Wendebourg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 231. For the role of suffering in early modern English Protestant culture, see also Alex Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 239–243 and 422–428.

1683.<sup>12</sup> Edward Dering's sermons and devotional works were reprinted numerous times during the late sixteenth century and the first three decades of the seventeenth century. The letters of consolation included in his posthumously published *Maister Derings workes* (1590) were also published separately in 1614 and 1590, under the title *Certaine godly and verie comfortable letters, full of christian consolation*.<sup>13</sup> John Downname's sermons, biblical concordances and treatises were reprinted frequently throughout the seventeenth century. His *Consolations for the afflicted* (1613) formed the third part of his famous treatise *Christian Warfare*, published in four parts between 1604 and 1618. Elnathan Parr's *Abba father* (1618), finally, was 'a popular guide to private prayer', reprinted in 1636, and included in his *Workes* (1632, reprinted in 1633 and 1651).<sup>14</sup> Taken together, as I hope to show, these authors shed useful light on the characteristic preoccupations of early modern English Protestant consolatory writing. The works discussed in this article cover a large timespan, as well as a range of devotional genres, from prayer manuals to consolation letters and treatises devoted specifically to the topic of consolation. Nevertheless, my analysis is, of course, far from exhaustive, and intended first and foremost as a first step towards a fuller, book-length account of early modern English consolation discourses.

As will become clear from my discussion of consolation discourses in the next section, the meaning of consolation in early modernity was often inflected by the intensely political act of comforting coreligionists facing persecution. Even consolation in times of illness potentially partook of this political dimension, and even what we might now see as the most personal anguish could be understood as a manifestation of the collective suffering which any community of true Christians necessarily undergoes. Yet, as a subsequent reading of printed and manuscript sources on the 1637 legal proceedings against the Puritan pamphleteers John Bastwick (1595?–1654), Henry Burton (1578–1648) and William Prynne (1600–1669) will show, this political dimension of consolation

<sup>12</sup> Sharon Achinstein, "Calamy, Edmund (1600–1666)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/4355.

<sup>13</sup> The first, half-clandestine edition of *Maister Derings workes* was prepared in the Middelburg print shop of Richard Schilders, who produced many books deemed unprintable in England, but it was later published in what Patrick Collinson describes as "more respectable and enlarged London editions of 1597 and 1614" Patrick Collinson, "Dering, Edward (c. 1540–1576)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7530. See also Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 28.

<sup>14</sup> Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, 24. For biographical information on Parr, see Stephen Wright, "Parr, Elnathan (1577–1622)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/21394.



could be appropriated by various Protestant factions, and had the potential to undermine the very idea of a unified Protestant cause which consolation served to foster. Consolation was therefore both a widely shared and a deeply contentious discourse. In addition to this political instability, consolation could also threaten to break down – rendered problematic or even ineffective – as a result of the very suffering which it was designed to ease. As a reading of the notebooks of the London wood turner and nonconformist Protestant Nehemiah Wallington (1598–1658) will show, consolation could be a frustratingly open-ended, potentially endless enterprise. While consolation is a central strand in Wallington’s reflections on affliction, it is also frequently elusive and provisional, especially where everyday, personal suffering – such as personal illness or the illness and death of loved ones – is concerned. Indeed, in Wallington, consolation seems successful and potent especially in the politically charged context of religious persecution.

## 2 Mapping Early Modern Protestant Consolation Discourses

In his letters of consolation, Luther presents consolation as fundamental to Christianity: to be a Christian is to be consoled. Indeed, he sees the God of Christianity first and foremost as a God of consolation – a God who comforts His people in their suffering. This becomes clear, for example, when he opens his letter to the Miltenberg congregation by quoting 2 Cor 1:3–4:

Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.<sup>15</sup>

The second verse quoted here imagines the Christian community as held together by a flow of consolation that emanates from God. The ability of Christians to console their coreligionists finds its source in the superlative consolatory powers of God himself – an idea also encountered in the description in Foxe of Lawrence Saunders as able to console others because he himself was consoled by God. Indeed, for Luther, consolation ultimately comes directly, and only, from God, rather than from other human beings, and is therefore to be

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<sup>15</sup> Unless noted otherwise, biblical quotations are taken from the Authorized King James Version.



drawn from His word: “dear Paul extracts the genuine and noble comfort of God from Holy Scripture and how he strengthens and cheers the Corinthians with the gospel”.<sup>16</sup> In the mid-seventeenth century, Edmund Calamy reiterated this idea in *The Godly mans ark*. Calamy extols the scriptures as “the *Magazine* and *Storehouse* of all comfort and consolation”, and claims that “There is no condition (but one) that a man can be in, but he may find soul-supporting comfort for it out of the Word” – the one condition for which even the word of God offers no consolation being persistence in sin.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the scriptures are the origin of *all* consolation. Other books, Calamy asserts, derive whatever consolatory power they possess from the Bible: “The Word of God is not only the *Magazine* of all true comfort, but the *Fountain* from whence it is derived. All the comfort that you receive by reading of good Books, is fetched out of this Book. All the refreshings that the *Ambassadors of Christ* administer to you, are borrowed from this *Fountain*”.<sup>18</sup>

This emphasis on consolatory Bible-reading could go hand in hand with a rejection of what Protestants writers saw as ineffective Catholic forms of consolation.<sup>19</sup> This is implicit, of course, in Luther’s claim that consolation comes not from men, but the point is made explicitly in a “comfortable Letter ... to a Christian Gentlewoman, in *heavines of spirite*” written by Edward Dering and included in his posthumously published collected works, along with other “godly and comfortable Letters, full of Christian consolation”.<sup>20</sup> Like Luther, Dering counsels the distraught Christian gentlewoman to seek comfort in the Scriptures: “seale it in your heart with a good perswasion that it is the word of God, and of life, and hee hath graven in it an expresse image of eternall trueth”.<sup>21</sup> Dering also contrasts the consolatory efficacy of intensive Bible-

<sup>16</sup> Luther, “A Christian Letter of Consolation to the People of Miltenberg Instructing Them on the Basis of Psalm 120 How to Avenge Themselves on Their Enemies,” in *Devotional Writings II*, Luther, 104; translation of Martin Luther, *Ein, wie sie sich an ihren Feinden rächen sollen, as dem 119. Psalm* (Wittenberg, 1524).

<sup>17</sup> Edmund Calamy, *The Godly mans ark, or, City of refuge, in the day of his distresse discovered in divers sermons, the first of which was preached at the funerall of Mistresse Elizabeth Moore: the other four were afterwards preached, and are all of them now made publick, for the supportation and consolation of the saints of God in the hour of tribulation: hereunto are annexed Mrs. [sic] Moores evidences for heaven, composed and collected by her in the time of her health, for her comfort in the time of sickness* (London, 1678), 85.

<sup>18</sup> Calamy, *Godly mans ark*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> As Rittgers point out, the evangelical preoccupation with consolation stemmed in part from a belief that “the traditional ‘popish’ approach to suffering was not sufficiently Christian and that it thus led souls astray” (Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 5).

<sup>20</sup> Dering, *Maister Derings workes* (Middelburg, 1590), sig. A1[3]<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Dering, *Maister Derings workes*, sig. A8[3]<sup>r</sup>.

reading with what he contemptuously refers to as “the traditions of men”, by which he means a range of specifically Catholic beliefs and traditions: “The Popes Supremacie, Latin service, prayer for the dead, Masses, Diriges, Pardons, Pilgrimages, Sensinge ... all which have neither trueth, nor shadowe of trueth”.<sup>22</sup> This list includes Catholic rituals that were at least partly consolatory in nature, such as prayers for the dead and the Office of the Dead.<sup>23</sup> For Dering, such forms of consolation are ineffective because, given their ceremonial nature, they lack the authentic inwardness of solitary Bible-reading, in which the truth of the Scriptures is “sealed” within one’s heart. In a similar anti-Catholic comment, Elnathan Parr dismisses the doctrine of Purgatory as “yeeld[ing] but a cold comfort”.<sup>24</sup> It may seem to offer consolation in that, in Stephen Greenblatt’s words, it enables people to see the dead as “not completely dead”, but belief in it will in fact lead the living “to hell in a string” (119).<sup>25</sup>

This polemical aspect of consolation underscores the exclusivist dimension that consolation often had in early modern Protestantism. In his letter to the Miltenberg evangelicals, Luther sets up an opposition between, on the one hand, the comfort which they themselves find in knowing that they suffer for a righteous cause, and the disconsolate state of their persecutors on the other:

Be happy and thank God that you are found worthy to know and to hear his word and to suffer for it; be pleased to know that your cause is God’s word and that your comfort derives from God. Have pity for your enemies because they have no clear conscience in their cause and take their miserable and gloomy and devilish comfort only from their malice, impatience, vengeance, and wantonness.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Dering, *Maister Derings workes*, sig. B1[3]<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> The *OED* defines a *dirge* as follows: “In the Latin rite: The first word of the antiphon at Matins in the Office of the Dead, used as a name for that service; sometimes extended to include the Evensong” (*OED*, s.v. “dirge”, 1). For the Office of the Dead and consolation, see McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, 14, 114. In late medieval and early modern Catholicism, Mary was also seen as an important purveyor of consolation; see Virginia Reinburg, “Hearing Lay People’s Prayer,” in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800): Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis*, eds. Barbara B. Diefendorf and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 19–41 (28). Luther’s insistence that consolation can come only from God is also a rejection of this aspect of the Mary cult; see also Bridget Heal, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany: Protestant and Catholic Piety, 1500–1648* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 54–55.

<sup>24</sup> Elnathan Parr, *Abba Father: or, a Plaine and Short Direction Concerning Priuate Prayer* (London, 1618), 118.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Luther, *Devotional Writings II*, 106.

The “pity” which Luther’s Miltenberg readers are enjoined to feel here stems from a pronounced sense of moral and religious superiority – a conviction that God punishes the wicked by withholding consolation from them. Indeed, for Luther, consolation consists partly in the knowledge that it is reserved for the true Christian, and consolation is therefore a way of asserting religious group identity through opposition: true Christians are consoled by God, while others are not. This, for Luther, is also why persecuted Protestants should not seek revenge. Revenge, Luther notes sarcastically, is the kind of false, unchristian consolation sought precisely by their persecutors: “For this is worldly vengeance and comfort which does not befit us. It does, however, befit our enemies; for you see how they vented their anger on you, how they avenged themselves and gloated over this. They indeed comforted themselves beautifully”.<sup>27</sup>

In the “Christian Letter of Consolation to the People of Miltenberg”, Luther also comforts his coreligionists by congratulating them on the fact that they are “found worthy ... to suffer” for the word of God. This conception of suffering as the litmus test of true Christianity is one of the central tropes in early modern consolation discourses – reiterated, in various forms, in numerous works of the period. The idea of being found worthy to suffer for Christ has its scriptural roots in Acts 5:41, in which the apostles, having been brought before the Sanhedrin, depart “from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name”. In his *Consolations for the afflicted* (1613), John Downname cites the joy which the apostles take in their suffering as an example for all Christians.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in suffering *for* Christ, we in fact suffer *with* Him, becoming, in the words of 1 Peter 4:13, “partakers of Christ’s sufferings”, a phrase quoted approvingly by Downname.<sup>29</sup> Such suffering simultaneously *for* and *with* Christ does not refer exclusively to persecution but extends to all forms of affliction, including what we might now refer to as mental suffering and physical illness. In fact, for Downname, it is from our own human capacity for spiritual anguish, as well as from our physical frailty, that we may glean the power of God, and this is one important reason for rejoicing in it:

Neither did he [St Paul] onely thus rejoyce in his suffering persecution for Christ and the profession of the Gospell, but in those spirituall afflictions which hee indured, in the sight

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<sup>27</sup> Luther, *Devotional Writings II*, 104.

<sup>28</sup> John Downname, *Consolations for the Afflicted: or, The Third Part of The Christian Warfare wherein is Shewed, how the Christian may be Armed and Strengthened against the Tentations of the World on the Left Hand, Arising from Trouble and Affliction; and Inabled to Beare all Crosses and Miseries with Patience, Comfort and Thanksgiving* (London, 1613), 117.

<sup>29</sup> Downname, *Consolations for the Afflicted*, 117.

and sense of his infirmities, when hee knew that in them Gods power and grace was advanced and magnified.<sup>30</sup>

The notion that affliction is a way of partaking of the suffering of Christ brought with it a pervasive interest among consolation writers in the precise conceptual relation between human and divine suffering. On one dominant reading of that relationship, suffering is hard-wired into Christian identity because of the example of Christ's Passion. Both the inevitability of human suffering and its correspondence with divine pain, moreover, hold consolatory power. In *A Letter of Consolation to the Christians at Halle* (1527) Luther insists that Christians cannot escape suffering because Christ himself suffered:

It is unimaginable that Christ our head should wear a crown of thorns and die on the cross but that we should be saved without any suffering and with nothing but joy and delight. But if we are to suffer, then let it be suffering which God inflicts upon us and not that which we choose to bring upon ourselves, for he knows best what will serve and help us.<sup>31</sup>

This view was eagerly adopted by later writers such Richard Allestree, who, in *The art of Contentment* (1675), asserts that affliction is the lot of all Christians – a Christian rite of passage, modelled on Christ's own suffering. It would be “very absurd”, he writes, “for us to expect easier conditions, when these are the same to which our Leader has submitted, the *Captain of our Salvation was perfected by sufferings*, Heb. 2.10 ... it were insolent madness for us to look to be carried thither upon our beds of Ivory, or from the noise of our Harps and Viols be immediately rapt into the Choire of Angels”.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of this close correspondence between Christ's Passion and the suffering of humans, and in spite of the idea that the latter necessarily echoes the former, Allestree is also at pains to underline the gap between the two, urging his readers to view their own suffering in the light of Christ's immeasurably larger pain: “let us often draw this uneven parrallel, confront our petty uneasinesses with his unspeakable torments; and sure tis impossible but our admiration and gratitude must supplant our impatiencies”.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, in *The*

<sup>30</sup> Downname, *Consolations for the Afflicted*, 117.

<sup>31</sup> Luther, *A Letter of Consolation to the Christians at Halle*. In *Devotional Writings II*, Luther, 165. Translation of Luther, *Tröstung an die Christen zu Halle über Herr Georgen ihres Predigers Tod* (Wittenberg, 1527).

<sup>32</sup> Richard Allestree, *The art of Contentment*. By the Author of *The Whole Duty of Man*, &c. (Oxford, 1675), 145. For biographical information on Allestree, see John Spurr, “Allestree, Richard (1621/2–1681),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/395.

<sup>33</sup> Allestree, *Art of Contentment*, 174.

*art of patience* (1684) Allestree encourages his readers to compare their own suffering to that of martyrs, whose superhuman suffering exists on a par with that of Christ himself. The conclusion Allestree's readers will inevitably draw is that their own pains are comparatively trivial:

Consider the *Prophets*, *Apostles*, and *Martyrs*, the Great Favorites of Heav'n; some on *Gridirons*, others in *Boyling Caldrons*; some on *Spits*, others under the *Sawes*; some in the *Flames*, others crashed with the *Teeth of Wild Beasts*; some on the *Racks*, others in *Fiery Furnaces*; most of them in such Torments, as in comparison whereof, thy Pains are but a Sport.<sup>34</sup>

For Allestree, the extreme physical torments undergone both by Christian martyrs and by Christ himself form the gold standard of all suffering. Especially the pains inflicted on Christ's body are surpassing in their brutality, as the following extended description makes clear:

Do's any man groan under sharp and acute pains: let him consider what his redeemer endur'd, how in his infancy at his circumcision he offer'd the first fruits, as an earnest of that bloody vintage when *he trod the winepress alone* Isaiah 63.3. Let him attend him thro all the stages of his direful passion, and behold his arms pinion'd with rough cords, his head smote with a reed, and torn his crown of thorns, his back ploughed with those *long furrows* (Psal. 120.3) the scourges had made; his macerated feeble body oppress with the weight of his cross, and at least rackt and extended on it; his hands and feet, those nervous and consequently most sensible parts transfixt with nailes, his whole body fastned to that accursed tree, and exposed naked to the air in a cold season; his throat parched with thirst, and yet more afflicted with that vinegar and gall wherewith they pretended to relieve him ...<sup>35</sup>

Paradoxically, if such passages serve to belittle the pain that might befall humans, they also keep conceptually central the links between human and divine suffering. That is to say, it is through its relation to Christ's pain that human suffering acquires consolatory meaning. While the former is immeasurably deeper, human agony does draw us into the orbit of Christ's Passion, and provides a way of seeing ourselves as imitators – albeit poor ones – of Christ.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as Allestree's description of the extreme physical agony endured by martyrs suggests, the pain suffered as a result of religious persecution can bring one into what Natalia Khomenko vividly describes as “dizzying proximity to the

<sup>34</sup> Richard Allestree, *The Art of Patience under all Afflictions an Appendix to The Art of Contentment* (London, 1684), 21.

<sup>35</sup> Allestree, *Art of Contentment*, 171–172.

<sup>36</sup> For early modern views on the question of whether humans can imitate Christ's suffering, see also Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012).

sufferings of Christ”.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, while the pain endured by martyrs is exceptional, it also serves as a reminder of the Christ-like heights towards which humans can aspire in their suffering.

The correlation, in consolation discourses, between human affliction and divine suffering in fact works in two directions. For Allestree, not only do human beings become more Christ-like in their affliction, but God himself, knowing when their needs are most acute, is apt to seek them out precisely in their suffering and comfort them. This holds true for physical illness, for example, which renders us especially vulnerable and needy, and therefore offers an especially effective way of experiencing the power of divine consolation. Indeed, it is in part because both suffering and consolation are such defining aspects of the Christian God that we know Him most intensely during illness, with health construed by Allestree as a positive spiritual obstacle:

THOU art retir'd to thy Sick-Bed: Be of good Comfort; *God* was never so near thee, never so tenderly indulgent to thee, as now. *The Whole*, saith our Saviour, *needs not a Physician, but they that are Sick*, Matth. 9.12. The Physician, as being made for the time of Necessity, cometh not but where there is need; and where that is, he will not fail to come: Our Wants is motive enough to Him, who himself *took our Infirmities, and bare our Sicknesses*, Matth. 8.17. Our Health estranges him from us: but whil'st thou art his *Patient*, He cannot be kept from thee. *The Lord*, saith the Psalmist, *will strengthen thee upon the Bed of Languishing, thou wilt make all his Bed in his Sickness*, Psal. 41.3. The Heavenly Comforter doth not only visit, but attend thee: If thou find thy Pallet uneasie, he will turn, and soften it for thy Repose.<sup>38</sup>

If, as we have seen, consolation writers felt that suffering is the mark of the true Christian, and as an occasion for experiencing the power of divine consolation, they also saw suffering as deeply connected to sin. It was commonplace for Catholics and Protestants alike to assert a causal relation between various forms of adversity on the one hand and human sinfulness on the other. Indeed, as Alexandra Walsham notes, “reformers strengthened the tendency to detect the hand of the Almighty behind floods, fires, storms, and other strange accidents and catastrophic events and to interpret these visitations as divine judgements for sin and impiety”.<sup>39</sup> Hannah Newton has recently argued, in a

<sup>37</sup> Natalia Khomenko, “The Authorization of Torture: John Bale Writing Anne Askew,” in *Death, Torture and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300–1650*, eds. John R. Decker & Mitzi Kirkland-Ives (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 117–137 (124).

<sup>38</sup> Allestree, *Art of Patience*, 27. The *OED* explains that a *pallet*, in this context, is a “straw bed or mattress; an inferior bed or sleeping place” (*OED*, s.v. “pallet”, 1a).

<sup>39</sup> Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed”, *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 2 (2008): 497–528 (508).

groundbreaking study of sick children in early modern England, that such views were also applied to physical illness. Rightly insisting on the importance of the “spiritual aspects of sickness” in early modernity, she argues that early moderns believed that “God had ordained sickness as a punishment for sin”.<sup>40</sup>

Yet if especially communal disaster seems to have been eminently legible in such terms, the correlation between sin and *individual* affliction was a subject of debate, and many writers on this topic in fact resisted punitive readings of affliction. In *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage* (1542), Luther reassures his readers that “they should be confident that God is not angry with them ... Rather is this a test to develop patience”.<sup>41</sup> He insists, moreover, that God hears the silent anguish of bereaved mothers: “God must listen, as he did to Moses, Exodus 14[:15], ‘Why do you cry to me?’, even though Moses couldn’t whisper, so great was his anxiety and trembling in the terrible troubles that beset him”.<sup>42</sup> The question of the relation between sin and affliction was addressed especially prominently in early modern reflections on the Book of Job. As Susan Schreiner explains, John Calvin (1509–1564), in his sermons on the Book of Job, “sees Job’s lot not as a punishment but as a test”.<sup>43</sup> For Calvin, Job is not more deserving of punishment than others; the opening verse of the Book of Job in fact describes him as “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1). Moreover, Calvin explains that if God were in fact to judge his creatures according to the rigour of his higher, divine justice, no one would escape censure, and “even the unfallen angels could be

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<sup>40</sup> Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580–1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6; the same point is made on 17.

<sup>41</sup> Luther, *Devotional Writings II*, 247; translation of Luther, *Ein trost den Weibern, welchen es ungerade gegangen ist mit Kindergebären* (Wittenberg, 1542).

<sup>42</sup> Luther, *Devotional Writings II*, 248.

<sup>43</sup> Susan E. Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Calvin’s Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 115. For the early modern Protestant notion of affliction as a test, see also Adrian Chastain Weimer, “Affliction and the Stony Heart in Early New England,” in *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World*, eds. Alec Ryrie & Tom Schwanda (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 122–143. The Calvinist doctrine of predestination arguably produced an intensified need for religious consolation, although recent scholarship argues that the importance of spiritual despair in early modern Calvinist, and especially Puritan, culture has been overstated (see for example Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda’s ‘Introduction’ to *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World*, 1–12). One example of a work of consolation that aims to assuage doubts about election is the *Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) by the physician and Calvinist divine Timothy Bright (1549/50–1615), advertised on its title page as offering ‘spirituall consolation’ to its readers. Predestination theology may also have helped to strengthen the idea that consolation is reserved for a minority of true Christians.



condemned”.<sup>44</sup> To posit a causal relation between suffering and sin, therefore, would be to underestimate the sinfulness of *all* human beings, as well as the inscrutability of God’s judgment. Instead, Schreiner explains, Job is tested by God according to an inscrutable, transcendent, “secret intention”.<sup>45</sup> The precise relation between sin and affliction is not open to human understanding, and is certainly not to be construed in straightforwardly retributive terms.

This reading of Job was echoed by later English Protestant writers. John Downname’s *Consolations for the afflicted* explicitly rejects the idea that “afflictions are the just punishment of our sinnes, and the signes of Gods wrath”, arguing that this is in fact what Satan “is ready to tell us”.<sup>46</sup> This Satanic view of affliction as punishment is also espoused by the friends of Job, whom Downname, quoting Job’s own words in 16:2, dismisses as “*miserable comforters*”.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Downname reads the book of Job as being in part *about* the nature of consolation. The story of Job, he points out, teaches us that consolation should be compassionate, acknowledge the reality of suffering, and be aimed at easing pain, not aggravating it by telling sufferers they have themselves to blame:

For this made Jobs afflictions greevous and intolerable, when unto them were added the unjust criminations and hard censures of his friends, from whom he expected comfort, whereas their mercy and compassion towards him would have made his heavy burthen light, like a load carried upon many shoulders. And this made him to complaine that they were *miserable comforters* ... . And as his afflictions were increased by the displeasing society of some of his friends, who in steed of comforting tormented him, so by others of them, whilst they did abandon and forsake him, because of his afflictions.<sup>48</sup>

Since Downname rejects the notion that suffering is a punishment from God, he seeks to define the spiritual meaning of affliction in other terms. He finds these in the idea that affliction serves as an intensifier of faith, an antidote against the dangers of spiritual complacency. Afflictions, Downname maintains, “serve as instruments and meanes to reclaime men from sinne, and to increase in them saving and sanctifying graces”.<sup>49</sup> This understanding of affliction as an

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<sup>44</sup> Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> Downname, *Consolations for the afflicted*, 22. In a similar reading, the Argument to the Book of Job in the Geneva Bible explains that “Job held that God did not always punish men according to their sinnes, but that he had secrete judgments, whereof man knew not the cause” (*The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1599 Edition with Undated Sternhold & Hopkins Psalms*. Introd. Michael H. Brown. [Ozark, MO: L.L. Brown Pub, 1995], fol. 179<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>47</sup> Downname, *Consolations for the afflicted*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Downname, *Consolations for the afflicted*, 26

<sup>49</sup> Downname, *Consolations for the afflicted*, 19.

intensifier of one's spiritual life also led consolation writers to understand affliction, and especially physical illness, as a deeply inward experience. The consolatory writings of Richard Allestree are a case in point. Physical illness, Allestree writes in *The art of patience under all afflictions*, affects us in an inward realm that constitutes the very essence of our being: "Worldly Crosses are at a distance from us; but Sickness is in our Bosoms: those touch Ours outwardly, these inwardly our Selves: Here the whole Man suffers."<sup>50</sup> It is also in this inward realm that Allestree locates the spiritual efficacy of illness. He exhorts his readers to "fetch Comforts to alleviate the Sorrows" of their suffering bodies by listening for "the Voice of th[eir] Disease", that is to say, by attending to its spiritual significance.<sup>51</sup> Illness should not simply be endured but be made spiritually productive. The proper response to illness, therefore, is intense self-examination, with the aim of determining the nature of one's individual sins:

This Duty [of showing patience in affliction] is not completed, by only a Quietness and Thankfulness under *Afflictions*; but there must be *Fruitfulness* also, or all the rest will be of no Advantage to us; which is the bringing forth that, which the *Afflictions* were sent to work in us; viz. the Amendment of our Lives: so that, in Time of *Affliction*, it is a necessary Duty to call our selves to Account, to examine our Hearts and Lives, and make a severe Scrutiny, what Sins lie upon us ...<sup>52</sup>

This inward response to illness is frequently described by Allestree in spatial metaphors, with the human heart as a container to be searched for the sins and the guilt stored in it. "Would we but ransack our hearts", he writes in *The art of Contentment*, "and see all the abominations that lie there ... let us interrogate our souls".<sup>53</sup> The reader of Allestree's best-selling spiritual manual *The whole duty of man* is exhorted in similar terms: "*Examine thine own heart, search diligently what guilt lie there*".<sup>54</sup> Intriguingly, both the sins themselves and the guilt over them are stored in the heart without the patient's knowledge. For Allestree, such spiritual stupor is a state into which humans lapse habitually, and the purpose of physical illness is to activate our dormant awareness of sin. Indeed, God inflicts illness on us because he has privileged access to the truth about our spiritual state, and therefore knows when we are in need of a warning: "He that made thee, has a far greater Inspection into thee, than thine own Eyes can have; He sees thy Vigour is turning wanton; and that if thy Body be not sick, thy Soul

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<sup>50</sup> Allestree, *Art of patience*, 15.

<sup>51</sup> Allestree, *Art of patience*, 16.

<sup>52</sup> Allestree, *Art of patience*, 3–4.

<sup>53</sup> Allestree, *The Art of Contentment*, 182.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man Laid Down in a Plain and Familiar Way for the Use of all, but Especially the Meanest Reader* (London, 1678), 44.

will”.<sup>55</sup> For Allestree, then, physical illness is not so much a punishment for, but rather a *sign* of, sin: an opportunity to gauge the stage of one’s own soul, and an occasion for human beings to cultivate something of the intimate knowledge of their own soul which God possesses.

### 3 Appropriating Consolation: Bastwick, Burton, and Prynne

The consolation discourses outlined in the previous section were widely shared across a range of Protestant denominations, and showed remarkable continuity throughout the early modern period.<sup>56</sup> Yet during this era there was also a political tension built into the very idea of consolation: for Protestants, to be consoled – by God as well as by coreligionists – is a mark of the true Christian, and the consolation of true Christians necessarily implies the disconsolation of others. Consolation was therefore in part a polemical tool, a way of asserting the truth of Protestantism; the proximity between consolation and the language of martyrdom is one pertinent example of this. This also meant that consolation could in principle be appropriated by any Protestant denomination, as a way of laying exclusive claim to religious truth, at the expense of other versions of Protestantism. It is true that consolation writers frequently employed a generalized religious vocabulary, suggesting in this way that consolation is a universally Protestant, and even universally Christian concept. For example, there is nothing inherently polemical – or even denominationally specific – about Richard Allestree’s notion of self-scrutiny as the preferred response to illness, or in the idea that we find God in our afflictions. Yet, depending on context, the very term consolation itself could acquire a powerful political dimension that undermined the idea of a shared Protestant identity which it served to foster in Luther’s consolation letters, or in Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*.

A striking early modern English example of this is the way in which the language of consolation crops up in printed and manuscript sources on the 1637

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<sup>55</sup> Allestree, *Whole Duty of Man*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> This continuity can usefully be seen as an aspect of the broader long-term unity which, as Alec Ryrie has recently argued, characterized early modern British Protestant culture (see Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, 4–5, 469–475). For an account which stresses transformations in early modern Protestant understandings of suffering, especially in terms of an emerging ‘anti-providentialism’, see Ann Thompson, *The Art of Suffering and the Impact of Seventeenth-century Anti-Providential Thought* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

Star Chamber proceedings against the Puritan pamphleteers John Bastwick, Henry Burton and William Prynne. John Bastwick's 1638 printed account of the trial and the execution of the sentence presents consolation as central especially to Burton's demeanour. Facing his impending mutilation (and subsequent life imprisonment) in the palace yard at Westminster on 30th June 1637, Burton is calm and even joyful, claiming to have found divine consolation for the suffering he is about to undergo. When a member of the crowd inquires after his well-being, he responds by saying that he was "never better" and is "full of Comfort".<sup>57</sup> When bystanders offer him a "cup of wine", furthermore, "He thanked them, telling them, he had the wine of consolation within him, & the joyes of Christ in possession, which the world could not take away from him, neither could it give them unto him".<sup>58</sup> The arresting phrase "wine of consolation" had a long history in devotional discourse, beginning at least as early as the anonymous *The rote or myrour of consolacyon and conforte* (1496), whose central theme is the idea, taken from Acts 14:22, that 'we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God'. This treatise describes the 'strokes of trybulacyon' as a prerequisite for eventually receiving the 'wyne of consolacyon' from Christ.<sup>59</sup> In early modern consolation discourses, the 'wine of consolation' is associated variously with the comfort which fellow-Protestants give each other, with the solace offered by Christ himself to distressed Christians, and even with the joys of the afterlife. In *Consolations for the afflicted*, John Downname explains that when his readers 'are like fruitfull grapes pressed with the waight of tribulation', their coreligionists 'drinke from [them] the pleasant wine of consolation' (377), while the Puritan preacher William Whately looks forward to 'feast[ing] with [Christ], with the new wine of consolation in his Kingdome'.<sup>60</sup> Burton's use of the phrase, therefore, underlines the extent to which he claims religious consolation, in these various meanings, as a nonconformist prerogative. Indeed, in the later seventeenth-century, the phrase arguably acquired a more clearly nonconformist ring, for example in *The silent soul*

<sup>57</sup> John Bastwick, *A Breife Relation of Certaine Speciall, and most Materiall Passages, and Speeches in the Starre-Chamber Occasioned and Delivered June the 14th. 1637. at the Censure of those Three Worthy Gentlemen, Dr Bastwicke, Mr Burton, and Mr Prynne* (Amsterdam, 1638), 26.

<sup>58</sup> Bastwick, *Breife relation*, 27.

<sup>59</sup> *The Rote or Myrour of Consolacyon and Conforte* (Westminster, 1499), sig. F3v. The closest scriptural analogue of the phrase occurs in Jeremiah 16:7: 'neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother'.

<sup>60</sup> William Whately, *Gods Husbandry: The First Part. Tending to Shew the Difference Betwixt the Hypocrite and the True-hearted Christian* (London, 1622), 71.

(1659) by the Independent minister Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), who writes that “when a Christian is brim-full of troubles, then the wine of consolation is at hand”.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, the Puritan writer and ejected minister Thomas Watson (d. 1686) employs the phrase three times in *The beatitudes: or A discourse upon part of Christs famous Sermon on the Mount* (1660), once in relation to religious persecution: “In case of Martyrdom God hath made promises of consolation ... In time of persecution God broacheth the wine of consolation”.<sup>62</sup>

In a manuscript account of the Bastwick, Burton and Prynne case in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Burton, about to be mutilated in front of a large crowd, also displays his own state of consolation with great dramatic flair:

Againe he beganne to expresse to those present the heavenly consolations (saying) I have in possession it is my unspeakable comfort this uphoulds mee noe man can take this away from mee & as hee looked hee noded his head & shooke his hands & wept with tears of exceeding great joy his very lookes did demonstrate him to bee as if hee were ravished with the glorious sweetness of heaven in an abundant measure swee[t] passages hee had out of the apostles saying in them for our light and momentaree afflictions are not worthy to bee compared to the glory th<sup>at</sup> shal bee revealed &c.<sup>63</sup>

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**61** Thomas Brooke, *The Silent Soul, with Sovereign Antidotes against the Most Miserable Exigents* (London, 1659), 247. *The silent soul* is also known as *The mute Christian under the Smarting Rod with Sovereign Antidotes against the most Miserable Exigents*, which is the title under which it is listed in the English Short Title Catalogue.

**62** Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes: or A Discourse upon Part of Christs famous Sermon on the Mount* (London, 1660), 389.

**63** Folger MS V.a.248, fol. 41<sup>v</sup>. A marginal note accompanying this passage refers to 2. Corin. 4.14 but the passage in fact alludes to 2. Corin. 4.17: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory”. Folger MS V.a.248 is a collection of writings by seventeenth-century Puritan authors. In addition to the account of the Star Chamber examination of Bastwick, Burton and Prynne, it contains, among other writings, a deathbed dialogue between ‘Mr Dod and Mr Throgmorton’ (fol 2r) and an account of the life of Francesco Spiera (1502–1548). The story of Spiera, who converted to Lutheranism but recanted his beliefs before the Inquisition, was well known among Puritans, and was read as a cautionary tale of religious despair and pastoral failure (see Michael MacDonald, “The Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira: Narrative, Identity, and Emotion in Early Modern England,” *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 1 [January 1992]: 32–61). The deathbed dialogue is centrally concerned with consolation, and with the difficulty of finding ‘joy or comfort’ (fol. 5r) in the face of death. The Folger catalogue dates the manuscript to ca. 1638–ca. 1650. The paper has a pillar-and-grapes watermark common during the seventeenth century; comparison with the watermarks gathered in Edward Heawood, *Watermarks, Mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Hilversum: The Paper Publications Society, 1950) and W. A. Churchill, *Watermarks in Paper in Holland, England, France, etc. in the XVII and XVIII Centuries and their Interconnection* (Amsterdam: M. Hertzberger, 1935) suggests that it was most likely produced during the mid-1630s.

In the same source, when a bystander is concerned that the pillory might be too heavy for Bastwick's neck, Bastwick responds by saying that "all places [are] alike to mee & I am as comfortable & more comfortable now then ever I was in any place therefore all standinge alike to mee".<sup>64</sup> Bastwick's use of *comfortable* here seems to capture both the sense of "being free from physical unease" and that of "enjoying spiritual consolation".<sup>65</sup>

In addition to being consoled himself, Burton also comforts his wife, and other members of the crowd. In Bastwick's account, he admonishes his wife for her dejection, insisting that he "would not have thee to dishonour the day, by shedding one teare, or fetching one sigh for behold therefore thy comfort my triumphant Chariot" (Bastwick does not reveal how Burton's wife herself felt about this).<sup>66</sup> When Burton sees "a young man at the foote of the Pillary, and perceiving him to look pale on him", he addresses him as follows: "Sonne, Sonne, what is the matter you looke so pale? I have as much comfort as my Heart can hold, and if I had need of more, I should have it".<sup>67</sup> In his autobiography, Burton himself emphasizes the intense joy he felt as he underwent his sentence, reiterating the idea that suffering for Christ is an occasion for self-congratulation, a confirmation of one's Christian identity:

I found those of Peter verified on me in the Pillary, *If ye be reproached for the Name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you, which on their part is blasphemed, but on yours, glorified.* For my rejoycing and glorying was so great all the while, without intermission, in the Pillary, that I can no more expresse it, then *Paul* could his ravishments in the third heaven[.]<sup>68</sup>

As we have seen, central to early modern Protestant consolation discourses is the idea that consolation comes directly from God, and that the Christian God is fundamentally a God of consolation. What ability human beings have to console each other ultimately derives from God and Christ. Yet in his public performance as a dispenser of consolation, Burton seems to upstage Christ, appropriating for himself the role of Christ-like consoler. Indeed, when in the passage quoted above, Burton speaks words of consolation to the "young man at the foote of the Pillary", there is a faint but unmistakeable echo of Christ's words to Mary in John 19:25: "When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple

<sup>64</sup> Folger V.a.248, fol. 40<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> For these shades of meaning of *comfortable*, see *OED*, s.v. "comfortable", 9 & 10a.

<sup>66</sup> Bastwick, *Breife Relation*, 24.

<sup>67</sup> Bastwick, *Breife Relation*, 26.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Burton, *A Narration of the Life of Mr Henry Burton. Wherein is Set Forth the Various and Remarkable Passages Thereof, his Sufferings, Supports, Comforts, and Deliverances* (London, 1643), 13

standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!”. As John R. Knott has shown, of the Puritan triumvirate publicly mutilated on 30th June 1637, it was especially Henry Burton who “boldly represent[ed] his suffering as an *imitatio Christi*”, drawing numerous parallels between his own plight and the Passion of Christ.<sup>69</sup> To be sure, he presents his own agony as insignificant compared to that of Christ, declaring that “All our sufferings be but fleabittings to that hee endured ... Was not the Crosse more shamefull, yea and more painfull than a Pillary?”.<sup>70</sup> Yet, as in other texts we have considered, this rhetoric of modesty also serves to underscore the correlation between the two. Those witnessing the earlopping, and those reading the printed and manuscript accounts, are continuously invited to see the pillory in which Bastwick, Burton and Prynne are put as an echo of Christ’s cross; recognizing that the echo may in some ways be faint is in fact part of this interpretative game. The similarities between Christ and both Burton and Bastwick are also underscored in the ritual gestures recorded by Bastwick and by Edward Rossingham in a newsletter dated July 1637. In the passage from Bastwick quoted in the previous paragraph, the “cup of wine” offered to Burton echoes the “sponge full of vinegar” offered to Christ in Mark 15:36, while the Rossingham newsletter reports that “light common people strewed herbs and flowers before” Bastwick, unmistakably echoing the account of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem, on the eve of his Passion, in Matthew and Mark: “a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way” (Matthew 21:8).<sup>71</sup>

In claiming to be consoled by Christ in their suffering, as well as presenting themselves as Christ-like consolers in their own right, Burton, Bastwick and Prynne were asserting the superiority of their version of Protestantism, implicitly casting the Laudean establishment in the role of the unconsolated persecutors found in Luther’s letters of consolation. Undergoing their suffering in a spirit of defiant joyfulness, they appropriated consolation as the prerogative of a dissenting minority within the Protestant church. In doing so, they drew on the widely understood importance of consolation as an ingredient of Protestant identity, and sensed that wresting consolation from the control of conformist Protestantism – for example by claiming to have imbibed the “wine of consolation” – was a powerful political gesture. Being in a state of consolation could only add to the sense that they were martyrs persecuted for advocating the true

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<sup>69</sup> Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, 141.

<sup>70</sup> Bastwick, *Breife Relation*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> “News-letter of C. Rossingham, July 6 1637”. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the reign of Charles I, April–Nov 1637*. Vol. CCCLXIII, 42.



faith. Bastwick, Burton and Prynne were later rehabilitated by the Commons, with Burton and Prynne welcomed into London as heroes in November 1644 (Bastwick was to follow two weeks later). By this time the politico-religious conflicts of which their trial and sentence formed one important manifestation had culminated in a civil war.<sup>72</sup> For early modern English Protestants, the question of who is consoled, and by whom, was a potentially political one, and formed a way of addressing the fundamental question of what constitutes true Protestantism.

## 4 Consolation Deferred: the Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington

We have seen that, in addition to their political dimension, early modern Protestant consolation discourses attempted to shape the ways in which individuals responded to and dealt with the affliction and adversity they encountered in their personal lives. In this section, I address the question of how consolation literature was put to use by these individuals. To this end, I turn to the genre of self-writing, and specifically to one case study: the notebooks of the London wood turner Nehemiah Wallington. Various scholars have shown that it was during the early modern era, and especially in the seventeenth century, that people began to document and reflect on their own experiences, on a scale previously unthinkable, in various forms of self-writing.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the emergence of self-writing as an important textual genre coincided in part with the rise of the early modern religious consolation discourses examined in this essay. Both affliction and consolation loom large in Wallington, and his notebooks form an ideal case study, therefore, for examining how early modern Protestants, in documenting and reflecting on the experience of affliction in self-writing, both drew on and departed from the consolation discourses available to them. In

<sup>72</sup> See for example, Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168–169.

<sup>73</sup> For studies of the emerging genre of self-writing in early modernity, see James S. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Ronald Bedford, Lloyd Davis & Philippa Kelly, eds., *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Julie A. Eckerle, *Romancing the Self in Early Modern Englishwomen's Life Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); David George Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self in Early-Modern Scotland* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Bruno Tribout & Ruth Whelan, eds., *Narrating the Self in Early Modern Europe / L'écriture de soi dans l'Europe moderne* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).

addition, Wallington’s notebooks help us to understand when and how discourses of consolation threatened to break down: what experiences rendered consolation problematic or even ineffective. Indeed, as we will see, for Wallington, consolation was an open-ended, self-generating and potentially endless enterprise. Throughout his notebooks, he reiterates many of the central tropes of consolation, yet frequently fails to arrive at a point where consolation has attained its goal. Especially Wallington’s domestic, day-to-day afflictions – the illnesses and deaths of his children, his own sicknesses – are resistant to consolation, while consolation seems more readily available when he suffers for his nonconformist faith.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout his notebooks, Wallington is strongly preoccupied with the question of how to respond appropriately to affliction. It is clear that he is steeped in the tropes of early modern consolation discourse, frequently reiterating the various conceptions of suffering we have encountered. When he falls ill for several weeks in April 1624, afflicted with a “burning Feaver” and a painful toothache, he is confident that “it pleased my loving Father to afflict mee againe”, and that the pain from which he suffers is a form of “Fatherli correction” that will help him overcome his sinfulness.<sup>75</sup> In the last of his surviving seven notebooks, now in the Folger Shakespeare Library, he reflects explicitly on the spiritual meaning of physical illness, and on the idea that

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<sup>74</sup> In spite of the richness of Wallington’s notebooks, and although Wallington is a well known figure among early modernists, little sustained work has been done on them. Paul Seaver’s *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985) still stands as the standard work on Wallington, yet its thematic interests differ from those pursued in this essay. My examination of affliction and consolation in Wallington is intended as a first foray into a topic that awaits further, more detailed and more systematic study. My analysis is based on Booy’s edition of selections of the notebooks (*The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618–1654: A Selection* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007]) and on Folger MS V.a.436, the last of Wallington’s extant notebooks. Booy’s edition also contains a highly informative introduction; for other recent work on Wallington, see Suzanne Trill, “Re-Writing Revolution: Life-Writing in the Civil Wars,” in *A History of English Autobiography*, ed. Adam Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 216), 70–86 (70–75); and Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Farnham: Routledge, 2012), esp. chapter 4. More directly related to the theme of consolation is Lucy Busfield, “Doubt, Anxiety and Protestant Epistolary Counselling: The Letter-Book of Nehemiah Wallington,” in *Doubting Christianity: The Church and Doubt, Studies in Church History*, eds. Frances Andrews, Charlotte Methuen, Andrew Spicer 52 (2016): 298–314. In quotations from Wallington, I follow the editorial procedures laid out by Booy (pp. xiii–xix), retaining Wallington’s original spelling but modernizing u/v, i/j and long s; replacing ‘&’, ‘y<sup>b</sup>’, ‘y<sup>e</sup>’ respectively with ‘and’, ‘that’ and ‘the’; and expanding ‘Mr’ to ‘Master’. Insertions made by Wallington are shown by means of angled brackets.

<sup>75</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 56.

illness is a pointer to sin, and therefore an exhortation to self-scrutiny. Taking as his cue Micah 6:9, in which the prophet Micah proclaims to the people of Israel that “The LORD’s voice crieth unto the city” and exhorts them to “hear ... the rod, and who hath appointed it”, he ruminates on the right response to illness as follows: “So for sicknesse that Rod hath a voyce saying did I spend health in Gods sarvis, did I prise itt was I thankfull for itt did I petty and pray for others therefore God may justly deprive mee of itt”.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, it is through our physical illness that God alerts us to our need for spiritual betterment: “As Gods Rod hath a voyce of justice, so Gods rods of affliction hath a voyce of marcy & comfort inviting us to come to him And thus God by the voyce of his Rod of Affliction calls us to Repentance”.<sup>77</sup> Like the Protestant consolation writers of his time, Wallington sees illness not in the first instance as a punishment for specific sins, but as an incentive to become aware and repent of sinfulness more generally.<sup>78</sup> Wallington also reads his own physical ailments as part of the suffering which all Christians must undergo. Commenting on his 1624 illness, he notes that “it is the lot and portion of Gods children to have many troubles and afflictions heare in this world”.<sup>79</sup> For Wallington, even a toothache can be a way of partaking of this communal Christian suffering.

Wallington finds consolation in intensive Bible-reading, at times providing several pages of scriptural quotations to illustrate God’s comfort in times of affliction. Indeed, in the last of his surviving notebooks he points to the scriptures as the sole source of spiritual consolation: “Certainly when the day of affliction coms then there is nothing can comfort thee but the word”.<sup>80</sup> In this notebook, he also explicitly identifies his practice of copying passages from scripture as a way of consoling himself, as well as enabling himself to comfort others:

In the yeere 1622 and 1623 I was still bent to know more what the Law of God was and to that ende I did brance out every Commandement gethering places of holy Scriptor of the old and new Testatement the Chapter and Verse that speaks against all kind of sinne and quote them in a book by themselves to be in a readines that I may the better know the will of God and so to lead my life thereafter As also that I may be the more readier to convince others of their evill ways. And so in like maner I did write there the promises that I mite be the better able to comfort my selfe and others with the same comfort I received of God[.]<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Folger V.a.436, 195.

<sup>77</sup> Folger V.a.436, 196.

<sup>78</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 166.

<sup>79</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Folger V.a.436, 270.

<sup>81</sup> Folger V.a.436, 30.

Wallington readily applies the consolatory power of the scriptures to events in his life. When, in June 1631, a business transaction with an untrustworthy pedlar initially causes him to lose money but later brings unexpected financial benefits, he records the “great comfort” which this brings. This comfort does not in the first instance derive from the material gains he has unexpectedly reaped, but in the spiritual lessons to be gleaned from this sudden turn in his fortunes: “First I found the word of God true by my own experience in Hebrewes 12:11 That no affliction for the present is Joyous but greivous but afterward it bringeth forth the pleasant fruits of righteousness of them that are exercised thereby”.<sup>82</sup> A manicule in the margin emphasizes the significance which Wallington accorded to this comment, and to the Biblical verse which it both quotes and adapts.<sup>83</sup> The passage also forms an apt illustration of the capaciousness, in early modernity, of the term *affliction*. For Wallington, affliction refers to a wide gamut of experiences, ranging from physical illness to financial adversity. Indeed, in July 1629 he writes of the “sorrow and affliction” he experiences when a journeyman, who he had assumed was a “verey honest simple man”, steals money from him.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to thinking of copying Bible passages as a form of self-consolation, Wallington also ascribes consolatory efficacy to the act of writing his notebooks more generally. One of them is in fact entitled “Profitable and comfortabl letters”, and James Daybell has recently argued that Wallington “turned to the volume as a source of comfort and solace at the end of his life, and was determined to bequeath his small notebook, itself a form of scribal publication, with a framework to guide subsequent readers to its content.”<sup>85</sup> In his last surviving notebook, Wallington reviews his previous writing, reflecting on his motivations in producing such large quantities of text, and listing the various topics he has dealt with. Consolation figures prominently among the

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<sup>82</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 72.

<sup>83</sup> Hebrews 12:11, both in the Geneva Bible and in the Authorized Version, in fact speaks of “chastening” rather than affliction: “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby”. Paratextual marks such as the manicule pointing at this passage suggest that Wallington intended his notebooks to be read, by himself and others; as Paul Seaver notes, his writings were “explicitly intended for posterity” (Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 2).

<sup>84</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 65.

<sup>85</sup> Now in the British Library, Sloane Manuscript 922; James Daybell, “Early Modern Letter-Books, Miscellanies, and the Reading and Reception of Scribally Copied Letters,” in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, eds. Joshua Eckhardt & Daniel Starza Smith (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 66.

topics listed for a notebook, now lost, which Wallington refers to as “the law of God”.<sup>86</sup> This notebook contained sections entitled “Comfort that all things worke for thee best to those that are Gods children”, “Why the Lord afflicts his Children”, and “Directions to Christians how to behave themselves in tims of fere and Danger”. Wallington also comments on another lost notebook, his 24th, written in 1644 during “tims of distress”, and entitled “the pilgrimes jorney”. He notes that it contained sections on “The Sickness of my brothers Child” and “the use of the death of my Brothers Childe”, as well as various reflections on consolation: “comforts and marcys”, “comfort against discontent” and “comfort in prayer”.<sup>87</sup> In this last notebook, Wallington also refers to the writing of “the groth of a Christian”, now in the British Library, as a source of consolation: “In the yeere 1641 I did write another book (the bignese of quarto) of the benifet or fruit that I have by the Lords Supper which booke I call the groth of a Christian wherein I did then find much profit and comfort in writing of it”.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, he lists self-consolation as one of his aims in writing a notebook, also now lost, entitled “The Travilors Meditation”: “Every man hath his sorrow. I have my part[:] troubls within and sorrows without and that which one bars another sinks under[.] Therefore I did use this as a prop to stay me up from sinking and to sweeten my sorrows and drive away heart qualms with good Meditations”.<sup>89</sup>

If many of the afflictions which Wallington records and reflects on are intensely personal, they can also take on a clearly political dimension. In February 1638, he was ordered to appear before the Star Chamber, together with his brother and “divers other godly men”, in a bill that also indicted Burton, Prynne and Bastwick for seditious activities; Wallington in fact incorporated a lengthy account of their ordeal into his notebooks.<sup>90</sup> Quoting 1 Peter 4:13, he records the “Joy” and the sense of consolation he feels at suffering for a righteous cause: “Rejoyce inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ sufferings and indeed I was more comfortable <all the while> under this troubl then I have bene under a far lesse”.<sup>91</sup> As we have seen, the idea that human suffering was a way of partaking in the suffering of Christ was a commonplace in Protestant consolation discourses, and during the 1630s it was eagerly embraced by

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<sup>86</sup> Folger V.a.436, 9.

<sup>87</sup> Folger V.a.436, 110.

<sup>88</sup> Folger V.a.436, 90.

<sup>89</sup> Folger V.a.436, 30.

<sup>90</sup> Booy, 79. For Wallington’s association with Burton, Bastwick and Prynne, see also Seaver, *Wallington’s World* 150–51.

<sup>91</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 81.

nonconformists facing persecution by the Laudian establishment. Indeed, the manuscript account of the Bastwick, Burton and Prynne trial discussed earlier in this essay quotes a slightly adapted version of Acts 5:41 immediately after the sentence, pronounced by Lord Cottington at the conclusion of the trial: “the gentlemen depart rejoysing that they are counted worthy to suffer for Christ sake”.<sup>92</sup> Wallington, too, almost instinctively drew on this trope when he recorded his response to his Star Chamber interrogation:

It m[ade] me to search in Gods word how he had dealt with others of his child[ren] and what promises he had made to those that trust in him. It mad[e] me to rejoice that I was partakers of saints suffering it made me to pray more often and more fervently: Indeed it did seat all the graces of Gods spirit a worke in mee, as my kno[wledge] and experience of Gods love, my faith and repentance: a se[arch?] and exsamenation of my heart how it could stand for Gods ca[ll] and a sorrow and a griveing for the times where in we live, with a striving for uprightness and sinserity of heart[.]<sup>93</sup>

For Wallington, the difficulties which he experienced as a result of his nonconformist Protestantism acquire meaning because they are part of a broader, communal narrative of persecution. Indeed, as the above quotation suggests, Wallington’s most inward spiritual life is given a boost by his political tribulations: he finds God’s spirit at work in him, and the spiritual self-examination which he values so much is intensified by the experience.

While Wallington habitually understood his afflictions in the deeply spiritual terms recommended by consolation writers, his notebooks also reveal the difficulties he experienced in reading affliction appropriately. For example, he at times finds it hard to respond in the requisite manner to illness. When he falls ill in April 1642, his anxieties over his personal health get the better of him: “I was so violent taken that I thought I had bine strock with the plague. then I sent for my wife, and I was impatient under Gods hand. I spoke it with shame for it grived me that I ware so impatient”.<sup>94</sup> Yet it is especially in Wallington’s response to the suffering of others – first and foremost his family members – that his beliefs can be strained almost to breaking point. When his “sweete childe” Elizabeth falls gravely ill in February 1625, he does not construe her illness as a test or as a pointer to sin, but only prays to God to cure her, and is deeply relieved when “God did heare our prayrs and restored her to health againe”.<sup>95</sup> When the two-year-old Elizabeth dies in October of that year, Wallington is devastated: “I was much disstrackted in my mind, and could not

<sup>92</sup> Folger V.a.248, 30.

<sup>93</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 83.

<sup>94</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 163.

<sup>95</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 56.

be comforted Allthoe my freends speake so comfortably unto mee”.<sup>96</sup> When Wallington’s wife tries to convince him that he “offend[s] God” in his intense grief, and holds up Abraham, prepared to sacrifice his only son Isaac, as a role model, he responds with a stark question: “then said I unto my wife, doe you not grive for this childe?”<sup>97</sup> As Paul Seaver notes, “in these moments of high stress Nehemiah always found it difficult to summon the theologically appropriate feelings”.<sup>98</sup> Wallington’s raw grief cannot be assuaged by the tropes of consolation culturally available to him – although he simultaneously feels guilty over his own disconsolateness. Indeed, if, as consolation writers were at pains to make clear, God is a God of consolation, and if, as Edmund Calamy maintained, the scriptures offer consolation for all afflictions except persistence in sin, then a failure to be consoled is tantamount to rejecting a defining aspect of the Christian God, as well as a sin in itself.

Moments such as these show Wallington reflecting anxiously and explicitly on the fact that he is not always able to find decisive spiritual meaning in his suffering. At other moments, he narrates the suffering of others in ways that reveal in a more implicit manner the difficulties which they experienced in bearing their afflictions. An instructive example is Wallington’s account of the death of his mother (Elisabeth Wallington, née Elisabeth Hall, 1562/3–1603), in what he refers to as ‘A Faithfull Memoriall of my < owne > Mother that is Deceased’.<sup>99</sup> Wallington documents the doubts and near-despair which she experienced when she was close to death and in excruciating pain, and her inability, despite her best efforts, to find the causes of her illness in her own sins:

Her payne was so grate, that shee woulde often reason with the Lord and say: Lord what have I done, what is my sinne, what is the cawse that thou dealest thus with mee, and what glorye canst thou gett by shewing thy strength against suche a weake wretch as I. O God wilt thou not heare mee, though I crye and intreate thee: God will withdraw his anger and the moste mighty helpe doo stoop under him[.] O thou renewest thy plagues against mee, and thou encreasest thy wrath against mee[;] changes and armies of sorrowes are against mee: Shee woulde many times repeate the XXXVIII psalme and the XXXIX psa[*lm*] and shee recited this verse out of the LXIX psalme, O God of Hostes defende and staye all those that truste in thee. Lett no man dowbt or shrinke away for ought that chaunceth mee: Shee would often say Oh what is the paines of Hell appoynted for the wicked seeing God afflicteth thoses that are his so sharply in this life[?]<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 59

<sup>97</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 59.

<sup>98</sup> Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 88.

<sup>99</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 86.

<sup>100</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 87.



This passage is dominated by anxious spiritual questions that remain unanswered. Wallington's mother can only ask insistently why God is afflicting her, what her sins could possibly be, and why He seems deaf to her cries. The self-scrutiny which consolation writers urge their readers to cultivate fails to yield any answers. Moreover, the psalms she repeatedly recites are psalms of lamentation, and while she may have found a degree of solace in turning to the language of scripture to name her own agony, they also underline her inability to obtain effective consolation at the hour of her death. Psalm 69, quoted by Wallington in the metrical version of the *Whole Book of Psalmes* by Thomas Sternhold (d. 1549) and John Hopkins (1520/21–1570), explicitly records David's disconsolation: “I seeke for helpe anon/But find no friends to ease my smart,/to comfort me not one”.<sup>101</sup> It seems that Elisabeth finds some comfort in the idea that the wicked will suffer even worse afflictions than she, yet this, too, is registered only as a possibility. There is a similar lack of consolatory closure in Wallington's account of the utterly unexpected death, in May 1654, of his “Naighbor Master Bartlet”.<sup>102</sup> Like Wallington's mother in her dying moments, Bartlet seems consumed by doubt and a Faustus-like despair, insistently – and bootlessly – asking God to grant him respite before death:

[A]s I here these were the last words that Master Bartlet spake when he was in his death bed Lord spaire me six hours O let me live six houres longer, but Lord if thou wilt not spaire me six hours, O spaire me and let me live three houers longer, And when breth was departing he sayd O spaire me half an houre longer and with these words he departed they were the last words he spake.<sup>103</sup>

While passages such as these suggest at what moments consolation discourses failed to have their intended effect, the efficacy of consolation is also thrown into doubt by Wallington's repeated and explicit reflections on the uses of affliction and on what responses to affliction he should cultivate. Far from being an internalized part of Wallington's habitus, these responses have to be evoked deliberately, consciously held up by him as an ideal to aspire to. Wallington feels an urge to remind himself of the spiritual uses of suffering time and again, frequently drawing up lists such as the following, which in part

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**101** Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins, *The Whole Book of Psalmes, Collected into English Meeter by Thomas Sternhold, Iohn Hopkins, and others Conferred with the Hebrew with apt notes to Sing them Withall* (Cambridge, 1628), 38. *The Whole Book of Psalmes* was first published in 1562 but was reprinted hundreds of times throughout the early modern era and beyond (see John N. King, “Religious Writing,” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500–1600*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 126).

**102** Folger V.a.436, 213.

**103** Folger V.a.436, 214.

sets out the trajectory for an appropriate response to affliction that culminates in acceptance of God's will:

Now to give an account <And> what fruit I had in and by affliction

First it made me call to mind hard lessons what I have larned of them as first

1. By Faith I did se things invisable as the Love of an angry God in time of affliction And so
2. Hope in him tho he defers me and so God defers mee that I may give him the honour in beleiving
3. I deney my selfe in the taking up of Christ Crosse daily
4. In Examining my selfe what is it that I have so offend God that he so afflicts mee and so
5. To mortify those sinns which is most predominate and the cause of affliction so also
6. Gods glory as in patient bareing so in delivering to ascribe all praise and glory to him
7. To be content with all Gods dispensations for Gods strokes are stroks of love And grace givs me an eye to see Gods love in afflicting of mee ...<sup>104</sup>

If, as we have seen, Wallington insists that affliction “hath a voyce” (a view also espoused by Richard Allestree), this voice has to be *made* to speak again and again. In this sense, Wallington's notebooks are best understood not so much as an application of the consolation discourses available to him, but as an extension and continuation of them. The notebooks reproduce the tropes of consolation – the idea, for example that affliction is a pointer to sin, and an occasion for spiritual self-betterment – in the form of overt, explicit and repeated self-instruction and metareflection on the meanings of affliction. Indeed, the intensely repetitive character of Wallington's notebooks, to which David Booy has rightly pointed, is an integral and meaningful aspect of their form, enacting the sustained and ultimately unresolved spiritual struggles which they simultaneously record and make possible.<sup>105</sup> Consolation, in Wallington, is self-perpetuating and leads to a potentially infinite regress, in that he, and others around him, struggle indefinitely to summon the perspectives on suffering which consolation literature exhorts them to adopt. One reason why Wallington's notebooks are so revealing, therefore, is that they show how difficult it could be to summon the appropriate attitudes towards affliction, even for those who believed so fervently in their appropriateness.

A final example that reveals both the insistence and the inconclusiveness of Wallington's attempts to bring consolation to bear on his own suffering can be found in Wallington's last notebook, in an entry for 7th December 1654.

<sup>104</sup> Folger V.a.436, 336–337.

<sup>105</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, ix.

Wallington's daughter Sarah, his only surviving child, had been gravely ill since early November; on 6 December he writes about his fears that her “sicknes will be to her death”.<sup>106</sup> The next day he ruminates on his worries over Sarah by reading his own situation in the light of the Book of Job:

my heart was heavy and sadd with discontent of my daughter sicknes that I thought how the Lord still brings one sorrow upon another one care and trouble coms before another is off as it was with Job though not so grate as it was with Job

Then I Examened my selfe what I was the better and where is the sanctified use I make of them but alas I could find littel or none Then I thought of Jobs words that saith shall we receve good at the hand of God and not receive evill Job ii.10<sup>107</sup>

The passage puts on display Wallington's self-consolation in times of suffering as a deliberative and deliberate process. The self-examination so characteristic of the notebooks initially leads him to conclude that he is unable to locate “sanctified use” – that is to say, spiritual usefulness or efficacy<sup>108</sup> – in the sorrow he feels over his daughter's illness. He then turns to the Book of Job as a framework for interpreting his suffering, urging himself to accept it. This enables him to think “upon Gods marcy” and reflect that, given his sinfulness, his suffering is in fact light compared to what he deserves.<sup>109</sup> He goes on to rebuke himself for what he sees as his failure to repent properly of his sins, finding another scriptural echo of his own spiritual state in Amos 4:

And surely it may be sayd to me as it is sayd to them in Amos the iiiii 6 7 8 I have sent you cares and frowns of the world yet have you not turned to me saith the Lord I have smitten you with troubls and shortness of breath in your wife yet have you not turned to me saith the Lord

I have smitten you with troubls and losses to your sonne and weaknes and sicknes to your daughter, yet have you not turned to me saith the Lord

Gods marcy in return of prayrs in giving some ease to my daughter of her pains and gripings<sup>110</sup>

Wallington freely adapts the verses from Amos to which he alludes to his own afflictions, effectively quoting only the recurrent phrase “yet have ye not

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**106** Folger V.a.436, 475.

**107** Folger V.a.436, 476.

**108** See *OED*, s.v. “sanctify”, 8: “‘To make a means of holiness’ (Johnson); to render productive of or conducive to holiness or spiritual blessing.”

**109** Folger V.a.436, 477.

**110** Folger V.a.436, 478.

returned unto me, saith the LORD”.<sup>111</sup> It is at this moment – marked by one of Wallington’s signature manicules – that he comes to construe his daughter’s illness as God’s way of alerting him to a persisting spiritual lassitude. Yet this is in turn partially undercut by his gratitude when Sarah’s pain is subsequently eased. Wallington’s response to Sarah’s illness, as recorded in this last notebook, shows him attempting to make consolatory sense of his anguish in a series of interpretive moves whose effectiveness seems provisional, and which require perpetual reenactment. Indeed, Wallington’s notebook entry for 8 December shows him scrutinizing himself once again, still seeking to arrive at an appropriate and definitive response, both to Sarah’s illness and to his own sense of sin, yet seemingly able to find this only in death:

upon further serch I find that the elnes and weekenes of my Daughter with other outward sorrows pressing my heart, with the boylling of my corruptions as impatience and discontent they were as gall and wormwood as bitter as death that caused me to say O Lord how long holy <and true> will it bee ere thou wilt come and set me at liberty from this body of sine.<sup>112</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The tentative and provisional character of consolation in Nehemiah Wallington’s notebooks can be usefully contrasted with the confident display of consolation in the accounts of the pillorying and earlopping of Bastwick, Burton and Prynne analysed in section 3 of this essay. For these nonconformist, Protestants consolation is not a state to aspire to or hope for, as it is in Wallington, but something they claim, with great confidence and certainty, to have found already. They present their state of consolation as definitive, moreover, and beyond the power of humans to take away from them. Indeed, Burton professes to have imbibed the “wine of consolation”, and to “have in possession” the “heavenly consolations”, even before his ordeal in the pillory properly begins.<sup>113</sup> To a significant extent, this defiant consolatory confidence stems from the political and public, even performative, character of their suffering. Consolation, it seems, is unproblematically available only if one can claim the role of true Christian persecuted for his faith, and if one can do so, moreover, in

<sup>111</sup> The phrase occurs 5 times in Amos 4, at verses 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11.

<sup>112</sup> Folger V.a.436, 479.

<sup>113</sup> Bastwick, *Breife relation*, 27; Folger MS V.a.248, fol. 41<sup>v</sup>.

a public context, with an audience who acknowledge and confirm one's status as (pseudo-)martyr.

It is enlightening, in this context, to juxtapose Wallington's difficulty in accepting the death of his two-year-old daughter Elizabeth with Henry Burton's less troubled response to the death of his only daughter Anne, some months after he had been transferred to Castle Cornet on Guernsey on 1st November 1637, as narrated in his autobiography, *A Narration of the Life of Mr Henry Burton*:

In this interim, I heard of the good pleasure of God, in taking away my deare and only daughter. It was a little before supper that Mr *Lieutenant* began darkly to intimate the same unto me, untill I prayed him to deale plainly with me, which he then did: whereupon craving pardon, I immediately retired to my lodging, and there on my knees gave the Lord solemne thanks, that it had pleased him to translate my daughter, now his alone, into his Kingdom of glory, after he had fitted her to be a Virgin Spouse for her husband Jesus Christ.<sup>114</sup>

Unlike Wallington, Burton feels instant gratitude to God for "translating" his daughter, confident that she has gone to heaven. This moment should be seen as part of the public self-fashioning which Burton undertakes in his autobiography. The title page of the *Narration of the Life of Mr Henry Burton* presents him as a role model for fellow-Christians persecuted for their faith, promising accounts of "his Sufferings, Supports, Comforts, and Deliverances", now published "for the Benefit of all those that either doe or may suffer for the Cause of Christ". Burton's ready, even eager acceptance of his daughter's passing is part and parcel of the persona he sets out to construct: that of the persecuted Christian who embraces all forms of suffering, including personal loss, with alacrity, and finds comfort in the knowledge that affliction is what makes one a Christian, and that the ultimate agent of all forms of suffering is God.

Wallington, by contrast, usually lacks such a public forum on which to stage his own suffering. While he, too, believes that affliction is the lot of Christians, the domestic tragedy of his daughter's death, and, later, of the possible death of his sole remaining child, resists being subsumed into such larger, communal narratives, while the consolation produced by his persistent spiritual self-scrutiny, recommended in contemporary Protestant consolation literature, remains fleeting. It is revealing that Wallington is most serenely confident about consolation when he finds himself under scrutiny by the Star Chamber, together with Bastwick, Burton and Prynne: "I was more comfortable

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<sup>114</sup> Burton, *Narration*, 23.

<all the while> under this troubl then I have bene under a far lesse”.<sup>115</sup> For Wallington, too, consolation comes most naturally and easily if the religious suffering it alleviates has an unmistakably political dimension, and can be construed as a way of suffering for the true faith.

This contrast between these public and private, politicized and non-politicized forms of consolation can in part be understood as a function of the different media within which Bastwick, Burton, Prynne and Wallington operated, and of the diverging generic and rhetorical conventions associated with them. Burton’s highly public autobiography, and his highly public performance as a martyr in the palace yard, both made possible and required a set of thematic preoccupations and narrative tropes that were less suitable to the more introspective form of the spiritual notebook. As Monique Scheer notes in an article on emotion history, “[w]riting for oneself, as in a diary, while sitting alone has interiorizing effects, whereas speaking out loud while in view of a dialogic partner has exteriorizing ones.”<sup>116</sup> At the same time, it is precisely in its interiorizing effects that self-writing – in this case the notebooks of Wallington – reveals how consolation could come under pressure. It is in the spiritual self-examination recommended in consolation literature that divisions between public and private spirituality, and between politicized and non-politicized forms of suffering, were perhaps experienced most acutely by early moderns – and become legible to historians. For all the attempts by Protestant consolation writers to shape the ways in which their readers responded to a wide gamut of forms of affliction, and in spite of their sustained efforts to codify the spiritual uses of adversity, consolation could be frustratingly unsuccessful, elusive and open-ended, and effective especially in easing the collective, politico-religious suffering addressed by Luther in his letters to the fledgling evangelical communities of early sixteenth-century Germany. Yet, paradoxically, in seventeenth-century England, such political consolation could also erode the very concept of a unified Protestantism which it had served to promote in earlier stages of the Reformation.

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<sup>115</sup> Booy, *Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*, 81.

<sup>116</sup> Monique Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,” *History and Theory* 51 (May 2012): 212.