

The Age of Reform as an Age of Consolation

RONALD K. RITTEGERS

This article seeks to provide a new way of interpreting the Age of Reform and its legacy on the occasion of the Protestant Reformation's 500th anniversary. Over the past several decades, many scholars have interpreted the Age of Reform through the lens of a "Discipline Paradigm." They have stressed the centrality of social and moral discipline in the Age of Reform and its legacy for the modern world. This paradigm has inspired much important and original scholarship, and yet it has also failed to take account of significant aspects of the Age of Reform. This article seeks to revise and challenge the "Discipline Paradigm" by focusing on one of the most important and widespread practices of the period: verbal consolation. There was an unprecedented flowering of such consolation in the Age of Reform and yet scholars have largely ignored it in their treatments of the period. This article seeks to demonstrate how viewing the Age of Reform as an Age of Consolation can provide important new insight into the character and legacy of the Age of Reform, and, indeed, into human existence in the past.

I. INTRODUCTION

ON March 11, 1591, Augsburg lawyer Lucas Geizkofler (1550–1620) and his wife, Katharina, saw their infant son, Ludwig, die, just one year after they had married.¹ A few weeks later, Geizkofler, a

This presidential address was delivered to the American Society of Church History on January 7, 2017. I wish to dedicate this paper to the memory of Roy Austensen, former Provost and Professor of History at Valparaiso University. I also wish to thank the following people for their helpful comments on earlier drafts: Berndt Hamm, Alec Ryrie, John O'Malley, Ward Holder, Vincent Evener, and Bruce Hindmarsh, along with my Valpo colleagues: Mark Schwehn, Dorothy Bass, Tal Howard, Agnes Howard, Peter Kanelos, Mel Piehl, Luis Ramos, Robert Elder, Gretchen Buggeln, and Jeremy Telman. This article grows out of a paper I gave at a 2015 conference held at the University of Vienna. The paper, "Suffering and Consolation in the Age of Reform: Reflections on the Origins of Modernity," appears in Hans Schelkshorn and Herman Westerink, eds., *Reformation(en) und Moderne. Philosophisch-theologische Erkundungen* (Vienna: Vienna University Press bei V & R unipress, 2017), 117–134.

¹On Geizkofler, see Hyacinth Holland, "Geizkofler, Lukas," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig, 1878), 8:529, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd118690299.html#adbcontent>. See also Alois Schweizer, "Lucas Geizkofler (1550–1620): Bildungsweg, Berufstätigkeit und soziale Umwelt eines Augsburger Juristen und Späthumanisten" (PhD diss., Tübingen University, 1976); and Florian Schaffnerath, "Der Humanist Lucas Geizkofler zwischen Innsbruck und Augsburg: Seine

Ronald K. Rittgers holds the Erich Markel Chair in German Reformation Studies at Valparaiso University.

Lutheran who worked for the influential Catholic Fugger family, was called to Prague on business, where he remained based until the summer of 1592. Well aware of his wife's ongoing grief, which he clearly shared, Geizkofler sought to console her via letters. On Palm Sunday of 1592 he wrote to Katharina:²

To this point I have consoled myself by considering that the Founder of holy matrimony does not visit Christian married folk with the beloved cross out of wrath, rather much more out of a fatherly inclination to test their patience and to bless them, and that all of His works are meant for our best, which they achieve. I hope that you, my beloved spouse, will also consider these things and console yourself with them in a Christian manner. We should and indeed readily wish to confess that we are great sinners and have certainly merited every manner of cross and suffering. But along with this we must remind ourselves in what way the same crosses and sufferings are sent to us Christians, namely, so that in this world we do not allow ourselves to be taken in and tempted by the temporal and worldly treasure, but are moved to strive after the eternal and heavenly treasure.

Geizkofler continued:

In the time that I have been absent from you and allowed myself to be too concerned with worldly business, such things, my beloved wife, have caused me to go into myself, and especially in this Lent to seek after an enduring consolation in our miserable life. In view of our sinful lives, we may seek and find this consolation through no other means and through no one else than our Savior Jesus Christ and His bitter suffering and death, which according to ancient Christian usage is held up for our consideration especially in Lent and Holy Week. Therefore I have sought as much as possible to set aside my worldly dealings and to allow this consolation to impress itself more deeply on my heart.³

When Geizkofler wrote this letter of consolation he was engaging in a practice that had become widespread in the Age of Reform. He and his contemporaries were

Trauerrede auf Matthias Schenck," in *Humanismus und Renaissance in Augsburg: Kulturgeschichte einer Stadt zwischen Spätmittelalter und Dreißigjährigem Krieg*, ed. Gernot Michael Müller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 157–186.

²Geizkofler and his wife did see each other during this time. She gave birth to their second child, another son, on May 28, 1592, and was thus pregnant when Geizkofler sent her this letter. He had received word that she was having a difficult pregnancy, along with other unspecified trying news, which was the immediate precursor to his decision to write this letter. Still, he indicates in the letter that the loss of their first son remained paramount in his mind, and the consolation he offers was intended in the first place to speak to this situation. Adam Wolf, ed., *Lucas Geizkofler und seine Selbstbiographie, 1550–1620* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, k. k. Hof- und Universitätsbuchhändler, 1873), 152.

³Ibid., 151–152. For a brief discussion of this letter in the context of Geizkofler's piety, see Schweizer, *Lucas Geizkofler*, 171.

living in a period that witnessed an unprecedented flowering of verbal consolation. Never before in the history of the West had human beings produced more works of consolation; never before had so many human beings sought so earnestly to console themselves and others through words, whether written, spoken, read, heard, or sung. This flowering was a defining feature of the Age of Reform—it was one of the important intended consequences of the medieval and early modern reform effort. Unfortunately, scholars have not taken adequate account of it, especially in their attempts to assess the overall character of the Age of Reform and its legacy for the modern period. The synthetic treatments of the period have largely ignored the practice of consolation. This article seeks to remedy this situation. It seeks to demonstrate how viewing the Age of Reform as an Age of Consolation can provide important new insight into the character and legacy of the Age of Reform, especially into the character and legacy of the Protestant Reformation, whose 500th anniversary we are marking this year.

II. DEFINITIONS AND THESIS

I am using the term “Age of Reform” to refer to the period from the Investiture Controversy to the conclusion of the Thirty Years War on the Continent and the end of the Civil War in England, thus, circa 1050 to circa 1650. This entire period was marked by an unprecedented and ever-increasing effort to make Europe more identifiably Christian through various kinds of reforms.⁴ Already in 1980, my *Doktorvater*, Steven Ozment, entitled his religious history of late medieval and Reformation Europe *The Age of Reform*; it remains one of the finest treatments of the period to appear in the last several decades.⁵ I understand the Protestant Reformation to be a pivotal movement within the Age of Reform that was significantly shaped by the reforms that preceded it, but which also introduced qualitatively new and radical elements of change into the mission to further Christianize Europe.⁶ The explosive effects of the Protestant revolution lasted until at least the mid-seventeenth century, in their initial phase; they are still very much with us today.⁷

⁴See Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016). On the Reformation as Christianization, see Scott Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

⁵Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980). I extend the chronological boundaries of the Age of Reform further than Ozment.

⁶My thinking here has been influenced especially by the work of Berndt Hamm. See Robert J. Bast, ed. *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety: Essays by Berndt Hamm* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 254–272.

⁷See Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 1–24.

My definition of “verbal consolation” is similarly expansive.⁸ The term refers to a host of writings and practices intended to soothe feelings of pain and loss and to provide hope through various verbal remedies. In the Age of Reform there were many different kinds of consolation writings, or writings that included consolation: letters, poems, hymns, published sermons, diaries, autobiographies, works of devotion, pastoral manuals, church orders, biblical commentaries, and formal theological treatises. Similarly, the practice of verbal consolation took place in numerous contexts, including the confessional, during Communion, at the deathbed, during childbirth, via sermons, in the lecture hall, in the monastery, in times of private reflection, and in informal gatherings of friends and family members. There were also different kinds of consolers: clerical and lay, male and female, well educated and rustic. These consolers sought to reframe the experience of pain and loss through verbal remedies in a way that made this experience both plausible and enduring. The more sophisticated of these verbal remedies were informed by a complicated mixture of Christian theology and pagan philosophy, as had always been the case in the West.⁹ In the Age of Reform, this mixture only grew more complicated as competing Christian confessions began to emerge with competing Christian consolations. In my previous scholarship, I have examined these competing consolations in detail;¹⁰ here I am interested in the phenomenon of consolation itself and its overall cultural impact on the Age of Reform and beyond.

By referring to the Age of Reform as an Age of Consolation I am not seeking to claim that all people in all places and from all ranks of society were equally engaged in the kind of verbal solace I am exploring in this article. I am not claiming that Lucas Geizkofler was a spiritual Everyman. Some, perhaps many, sought solace through other means, including magic and various folk remedies.¹¹ Much of the evidence for the practice of verbal consolation, especially among laypeople, comes from towns and cities, from members of the merchant and professional classes, such as Lucas Geizkofler, who made up a relatively small portion of the overall population. Still, while Geizkofler

⁸On the need for such an expansive definition, see, H. Balthussen, ed., *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and Its Afterlife* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013), xiv. In the same volume, see also J. H. D. Scourfield, “Towards a Genre of Consolation,” 1–36.

⁹See Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 37–62.

¹⁰See Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience, and Authority in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*; and related articles and book chapters.

¹¹See R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe 1550–1750* (London: Routledge, 1989), 151–159. The classic treatment of lay resistance to clerical ministrations in the Reformation period remains Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

was not a spiritual Everyman, he does represent an important and growing group of people in the Age of Reform who, owing to their education, religious commitment, and positions of influence, did a great deal to promote the cause of reform. The evidence of such people's engagement in verbal consolation may be found especially in various extant ego-documents,¹² which became increasingly plentiful from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. When this evidence is coupled with the unprecedented number of works of consolation that appeared in the same period, along with the myriad references to lay consolation among different socio-economic groups in various clerical sources (see below), one soon has sufficient warrant for viewing consolation as a distinctive mark of the Age of Reform.

Of course, every age of human history is an age of consolation, for in every age human beings must contend with the pain caused by misfortune and death. When Geizkofler sought to console his wife via letter, he was also engaging in an ancient practice. The effort to comfort oneself or others through words is as old as literate humanity, predating even Homer.¹³ The practice grows out of the human desire to mitigate pain and to manage strong emotions, but also out of the human need for meaning, especially amidst the chaos unleashed by suffering that can suggest there is none.¹⁴ Consolation has a rich history in the West, numbering among its masters in the ancient and late antique periods Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Cicero, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, and Boethius. Although not as widespread in the Middle Ages as in the ancient period,¹⁵ the practice continued.¹⁶ Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* was well known at court in the Carolingian period, owing especially to the efforts of Alcuin of York. It was reproduced, glossed, and translated

¹²"Ego-documents" refers to various kinds of autobiographical sources. For further information, see n94 below.

¹³On the long history of consolation in the West, see Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 37–62. The following paragraph draws on this chapter.

¹⁴On consolation as a form of "emotional management," see Leila Ruth Watkins, "Forms of Consolation in Early Modern English Poetry" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014), 3. On the human need for meaning and the way that suffering threatens this meaning, see Peter Berger, "The Problem of Theodicy," in *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Double Day, 1967), 53–81.

¹⁵See George W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 12–14.

¹⁶See Peter von Moos, *Consolatio: Studien zur mittellateinischen Trostliteratur über den Tod und zum Problem der christlichen Trauer*, 4 vols. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1971–1972); and Chad. D. Schrock, *Consolation in Medieval Narrative: Augustinian Authority and Open Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). See also, Eike Kohler, "Trost," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie Studienausgabe* (hereafter cited as *TRE*), ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 34:143–153; and G. Bernt, L. Gnädinger, W. Schmidtke, and R. Gleißner, "Trostbücher," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, (Munich: Artemis, 1997), 8:1048–1051. On this literature from the eleventh to the early sixteenth century, see Albert Auer, *Johannes von Dambach und die Trostbücher von 11. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Verlag der Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1928).

throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁷ We also have letters of consolation from Alcuin.¹⁸

Thus, verbal consolation clearly persisted from the ancient period to the Age of Reform. However, there are good reasons for concluding that it was far less common in, say, the year 1000, than in 1500 or 1600.¹⁹ The vast majority of the population in 1000 was illiterate, far more so than in Geizkofler's day, and preaching in the vernacular was rare. Religious life centered on ritual and ceremony, and most people must have looked to these for solace in the midst of adversity.²⁰ Words were part of medieval ceremony, but they were not the main focus; ritualized action was. The extant works of consolation in this period stem from elites, whether lay or clerical, and these works are not especially plentiful. The literary evidence for verbal consolation during the Carolingian Renaissance, a highpoint of literary production in the Middle Ages, amounts to eleven letters, three poems, and six treatises, less than the total number of extant editions of *one* work of consolation by Martin Luther (see below).²¹ Even if one allows for the likely possibility that some medieval consolation literature has been lost or remains undiscovered,²² it is still safe to conclude that there was something unique about the flowering of such literature and its concomitant practices in the Age of Reform. The ubiquity of verbal consolation in this period was without precedent.

This flowering began, slowly, through various consolatory efforts in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. One thinks of the letters of Peter the Venerable in which he sought to provide solace to Heloise upon the death of Abelard. These efforts also include sermons by Bernard of Clairvaux and spiritual treatises by Aelred of Rievaulx.²³ The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) encouraged the growth of an alternative kind of verbal consolation aimed

¹⁷See P. G. Walsh, trans. and ed., *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), xlv–i; and Noel Harold Kaylor Jr., *The Medieval Consolation of Philosophy: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1992).

¹⁸According to von Moos, *consolatio* appears most frequently in letters in the Middle Ages. See *Consolatio*, 1:38. On Alcuin's letters of consolation, see pp. 105–111.

¹⁹On the paucity of works of consolation in tenth and early eleventh centuries, see *ibid.*, *Consolatio*, 187.

²⁰See Joseph Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (London: Longman, 1992), 118, 128.

²¹See von Moos, *Consolatio*, 1:184.

²²*Ibid.*, 448.

²³Von Moos demonstrates that works of consolation only began to become plentiful in the High Middle Ages. See *ibid.*, p. 199. On Peter the Venerable's letters of consolation, see *ibid.*, 224–278; and Betty Radice, trans., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (London: Penguin, 1974), 277–284. On Bernard's works of consolation, along with those of Aelred, see von Moos, *Consolatio*, 278–339 and 340–397, respectively. On the slow growth of literacy in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Languages and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983). See also Paul Saenger, "Literacy, Western Europe," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986), 7:597–602.

especially at the laity, sacramental confession, which sought to alleviate a different kind of distress: a guilty conscience. It had a profound effect on the shape of late medieval piety.²⁴ Important works of consolation by Renaissance humanists such as Petrarch, Erasmus, and Thomas More also come to mind,²⁵ as do works by late medieval mystics, theologians, and reformers such as Meister Eckhart, Johannes von Dambach, Thomas à Kempis, and the *doctor consolatorius* par excellence of the period, Jean Gerson.²⁶ The latter's works were crucial to the growth of the *ars moriendi*, which also encouraged verbal consolation.²⁷ (Such consolation was administered by priests in the context of extreme unction and by laypeople outside of last rites.)²⁸ Additionally, we know that monastics engaged in the practice of verbal consolation with one another and with the laypeople to whom they ministered. Late medieval laypeople also consoled one another via letter.²⁹ As we will see, verbal consolation increased dramatically in the

²⁴See Rittgers, *Reformation of the Keys*, 25, 38.

²⁵See Conrad H. Rawski, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of De remediis utriusque Fortune, with a Commentary*, 5 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Erasmus, *Letter of Comfort in Adversity (Epistola consolatoria in adversis)*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. John W. O'Malley, vol. 60, *Spiritualia and Pastoralia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 185–201; and Thomas More, *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, ed. Terri Ann Geus (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2016).

²⁶Meister Eckhart, *Daz buoch der götlichen tröstunge*, in *Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke; Die deutschen Werke*, ed. and trans. Josef Quint, vol. 5, *Traktate* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1963), 3–61; Eckhart, *The Book of Consolation*, in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, ed. and trans. Edmund Colledge, O. S.A. and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist, 1981), 209–239; Auer, *Johannes von Dambach und die Trostbücher*; Johannes de Tambaco, *Consolatio theologiae* (Strasbourg: Drucker des Henricus Ariminensis, [not after 1479]), Herzog August Bibliothek (hereafter cited as HAB), Wolfenbüttel, Germany, H: E 162.2° Helmst.; and Clyde Lee Miller, trans., *Jean Gerson: The Consolation of Theology, De Consolatione Theologiae* (New York: Abaris, 1998). On Gerson as *doctor consolatorius*, see Mark Stephen Burrows, *Jean Gerson and De Consolatione Theologiae (1418): The Consolation of a Biblical and Reforming Theology for a Disordered Age* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 41. See below for a brief discussion of the importance of *The Imitation of Christ*, traditionally ascribed to à Kempis, in the Catholic consolation tradition.

²⁷See Rainer Rudolf, "Ars moriendi," in *TRE*, 4:145.

²⁸On unction, see Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 21–24. On the lay *ars moriendi*, see Claudia Resch, *Trost im Angesicht des Todes: Frühe reformatorische Anleitungen zur Seelsorge an Kranken und Sterbenden* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2006), 42–47.

²⁹For an example of consolation among monastics, see the letter correspondence between Henry Suso and Elisabeth Stagel in "Heinrich Seuse, Dominikaner, an Elisabeth Stagel, Klosterfrau in Tötz," in *Deutsche Privatbriefe des Mittelalters*, vol. 2, *Geistliche-Bürger*, ed. Georg Steinhausen (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1907), sec. 1, ch. 4, pp. 3–5. An English translation can be found in Frank Tobin, trans., *Henry Suso: The Exemplar, with two German sermons* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 340–341. For an example of a nun who wrote letters of consolation to her family members in the late fifteenth century, see Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 81–82. Monks and friars also exercised a ministry of consolation with laypeople through hearing their confessions. One may find late medieval lay letters of consolation in the archives of Nuremberg (for example: Wolf Behaim, "Zehn Briefe des Wolf Behaim, jüngerer Bruder des Martin Behaim, aus Lyon und Genf an seinen Vetter Michel Behaim (Peham) in

early modern period owing to the influence of the Protestant and Catholic reformations, a fact that is crucial to the argument of this article. In the Age of Reform there was a growing preoccupation with verbal solace that reached its high point right around Geizkofler's lifetime.

Consolation via sacraments and ceremony obviously continued in the Age of Reform, providing an important context for the verbal consolation I am examining, although this context varied greatly from one expression of Christianity to another after Protestantism was on the scene. Geizkofler makes specific reference to the rhythm of the liturgical year in his letter to his wife, and as a Lutheran he no doubt had the rituals of private confession and the Lord's Supper in mind. Not all Protestants shared this liturgical and sacramental context. But many, especially in urban areas, did share a piety that relied on words for solace and instruction, something one can also find among early modern Catholics.³⁰ It should also be noted that images, in many cases with accompanying texts, were important in conveying solace to the afflicted in the Age of Reform, but they fall beyond my purview in this article.³¹

To refer to the Age of Reform as an Age of Consolation is to run counter to at least one dominant scholarly interpretation of the character and legacy of the late medieval and early modern Christianization campaign. While there have been many ways of understanding this character and legacy in the last several decades, one of the most important has focused on the theme of discipline and its significance for the eventual emergence of modernity and the modern state. One immediately thinks of the "Confessionalization Thesis" developed by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling in conversation with the earlier work of Gerhard Oestreich. This thesis has been hegemonic in Reformation studies until very recently.³² It holds that

Nürnberg," 19 May, 1496, Rep E 11/ II FA Behaim, Nr. 583, no. 10, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg; Barbara Holzschuchin, "Briefe von verschiedenen an Michael Behaim," 21 January 1505, Rep. II/67, Behaim Archiv, Nr. 12, Germanisches Nationalmuseum Archiv).

³⁰On literacy among Catholic burghers, see Matthew Lundin, *Paper Memory: A Sixteenth-Century Townsman Writes His World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012). On the importance of preaching in late medieval and early modern Catholicism, see John M. Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

³¹On the use of images to console in the later Middle Ages, see Berndt Hamm, "Die Dynamik von Bamherzigkeit, Gnade und Schutz in der vorreformatorischen Religiosität," *Lutherjahrbuch* 81 (2014): 97–134. See also the forthcoming book by Mitchell Merback, *Perfection's Therapy: An Essay on Albrecht Dürer's Melencolia I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone, forthcoming). (I am grateful to Merback for sharing the unpublished manuscript with me.) Yu Na Han, a doctoral student at Johns Hopkins University, is currently working on a dissertation entitled "Consolation of the Image: Pastoral Care and Visual Culture in Reformation Germany, 1520–1570."

³²See Thomas A. Brady, "Confessionalization: The Career of a Concept," in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555–1700: Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan*, ed. John M. Headley, Hans J. Hillerbrand, and Anthony J. Papalas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 2–3.

the Christian confessions that emerged in the wake of the Protestant Reformation helped to promote the social discipline that was essential to the formation of the early modern state. The clergy and various temporal elites—the “moral police”—utilized mechanisms such as church visitations, catechesis, and consistories to attempt to plant the defining beliefs and practices of their competing confessions in the hearts and minds of their contemporaries. This process, in which a new kind of intellectual, social, and moral discipline was so central, gradually encompassed all of society, first leading to its sacralization, and then, eventually, to its secularization.³³

Philip Gorski has written similarly about how the Protestant Reformation unleashed a “disciplinary revolution” that contributed to the rise of the state, especially in Calvinist lands. According to him, Calvinism invented “a panoply of disciplining techniques and strategies” in which the “technology of observation” played a defining role. (The Genevan consistory is one example of this technology.) The disciplinary regimen and regime were gradually absorbed into the structures of the early modern state, granting to it unparalleled power over its subjects.³⁴

Foucault figures prominently in Gorski’s analysis,³⁵ owing to his work on various kinds of “panoptic” gazes and disciplinary efforts in the Age of Reform. Foucault also interpreted institutions such as sacramental confession as expressions of “pastoral power” that robbed laypeople of their native freedom and subjected them to the clergy, who supplied laypeople with their very sense of identity and through which the clergy dominated them.³⁶ Although not a Foucauldian, David Sabean has likewise maintained that state officials in the early modern period saw in devotional literature—specifically, literature on preparation for participation in the Eucharist—a

³³On the work of Oestreich, Reinhard, and Schilling in the development of the Confessionalization Thesis, see Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation*, 1–9. For more recent treatments of the thesis, see Brady, “Confessionalization,” 1–20; and Ute Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” in *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. David M. Whitford (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2008), 136–157. On the “moral police” in confessional culture, see Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation*, 122–142.

³⁴See Philip S. Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xv–xvi. See also, Gorski, *The Protestant Ethic Revisited* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

³⁵Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, x.

³⁶Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995); Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 37–68; Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999); and Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). On Foucault, see Christopher Falzon, Timothy O’Leary, Jana Sawicki, eds., *A Companion to Foucault* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); and Gary Gutting, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

means of encouraging a sense of interiority in their subjects that would render them more susceptible to state discipline.³⁷ Approaching the early modern Christianization campaign from a different angle, Theodore Dwight Bozeman has depicted Puritanism as a “Disciplinary Religion” that so encumbered the original Protestant Gospel with demands for moral progress that it failed to console and instead contributed to an Antinomian backlash.³⁸

Less interested in the growth of the modern state than in modernity itself, especially its secularity, in the 1980s Jean Delumeau sought to explain the de-Christianization of Europe as an understandable response to the allegedly warped Christianization of the late medieval and early modern period. Delumeau argued that Catholic leaders utilized the disciplinary mechanism of sacramental confession to instill a hyper-Augustinian Christianity in the masses, who were taught to fear God, themselves, and life in this world. Protestants only made things worse through their emphasis on human bondage to sin.³⁹ Also in the 1980s, Gerald Strauss argued that Protestant pedagogy and catechesis, which he believed were designed to produce obedience to governing authorities above all else, largely failed in their disciplinary goals, for the common folk preferred their own traditional and quasi-pagan religion to the austere Lutheran creed.⁴⁰

More recently, Susan Karant-Nunn has examined the reformation of ritual and emotion, respectively, among early modern Christians. She has situated the former study within the literature on confessionalization and social discipline, and argued that Protestant attempts to reform religious rituals should be interpreted as a sincere but ultimately flawed (and failed) effort to discipline the masses. This effort left the masses with a sense of impotence before an increasingly remote God and an increasingly powerful state.⁴¹ In her work on emotion, Karant-Nunn draws appreciatively on Delumeau’s thesis⁴² and interprets Protestant efforts to teach early modern Europeans new “emotional scripts” as contributing to the suppression of emotion, especially among Calvinists.⁴³

³⁷David Warren Sabean, “Production of the Self during the Age of Confessionalism,” *Central European History* 29, no. 1 (1996): 1–18.

³⁸Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

³⁹Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th Centuries*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990). Originally published as *Le Pêché et la Peur: La Culpabilisation en Occident, XIIIe–XVIIIe Siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1983).

⁴⁰Strauss, *Luther’s House of Learning*.

⁴¹Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London: Routledge, 1997), 5.

⁴²Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

⁴³It should be noted that Karant-Nunn has stressed the importance of consolation among early modern Lutherans. See *The Reformation of Feeling*, 96, 97, 178, 201, 226, 251.

While these scholars have approached the Age of Reform from different vantage points and have sought to contribute to different bodies of scholarship, they may all be seen as advocates of what one might term the “Discipline Paradigm” or the “Discipline Thesis.” This perspective views the Age of Reform primarily through the lens of discipline because it is convinced that the Age of Reform was fundamentally about discipline. Scott Dixon has recently expressed this perspective well: “The Reformation, after all, was in essence a campaign to impose a form of Christian order on the world.” Discipline was the most important tool in this campaign, and thus, according to Dixon, historians have been understandably “preoccupied” with it.⁴⁴

The “Discipline Thesis” is compelling; there is a lot of truth to it, and it has been propounded by some of the most creative and talented scholars of the last couple of decades. The thesis has greatly expanded our understanding of the Age of Reform and its legacy in the West, and it has exposed the narrowness and naïveté of many past interpretations. It has also attended to the nameless masses that had been ignored in much previous scholarship. The late medieval and early modern Christianization campaigns clearly sought to promote and enforce greater order and conformity. The result of these efforts was the creation of numerous means by which human beings were disciplined inwardly and outwardly, by their rulers and by themselves, to become dutiful members of various Christian churches and obedient citizens in the emerging early modern states. After all, obedience is central to Christianity, and many contemporaries, both lay and clerical, saw it as a good thing, even as many also resisted it, at least in the form advocated by their leaders.⁴⁵

The story I wish to tell about consolation can be fitted within the “Discipline Paradigm.” Geizkofler was exercising a form of discipline with himself and his wife that was the result of training and instruction from the clergy. He conformed quite well to the confessionalizing designs of his leaders. He can even be viewed as a member of the “moral police” that sought to promote and impose these designs. But Geizkofler also challenges the “Discipline Thesis.”

All large interpretive paradigms and theses are fallible; all have blind spots.⁴⁶ The major failing of the “Discipline Paradigm” is that it can be quite one-sided. As I have suggested, those who support it typically have eyes for discipline and control in the reforming activities of the period and not for much else.⁴⁷ They can also have a narrow and largely negative view of Age-of-Reform discipline,

⁴⁴See C. Scott Dixon, *Contesting the Reformation* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 172.

⁴⁵See Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 372; Eire, *Reformations*, 616; and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2004), 591.

⁴⁶See Brady, “Confessionalization,” 1.

⁴⁷For an important exception, see n43 above.

viewing it primarily as a species of coercion or even punishment.⁴⁸ Relatedly, the discipline perspective tends to have a reductionistic view of religion—religion functions especially as an instrument of social control.⁴⁹ Recent concerns about the way the Confessionalization Thesis has viewed religion may be extended to the “Discipline Thesis” as a whole. Thomas A. Brady Jr. has observed, “Ironically, the inability to comprehend religion, the chief marker of confessionalization, as a set of coherent practices has proved the Achilles heel of the confessionalization thesis, particularly in its original vision.”⁵⁰ John O’Malley has similarly remarked on the inability of the Confessionalization Thesis to take seriously “religion in and of itself—religion not as a political or social force but as a yearning for the transcendent or an experience of it.” He has also asked, with respect to figures such as François de Sales and Teresa of Avila and their religious experiences, “These individuals and phenomena can be studied from many perspectives, but is it not incumbent upon us to study them for what they head-on purported to be about, the sacred?”⁵¹ Finally, proponents of the “Discipline Thesis” have at times had a reductionistic view of human beings as creatures that exercise power, succumb to power, or resist power. Foucault is but one source among many for the “Discipline Thesis,” but his influence on it is unmistakable.

Advocates of the “Discipline Thesis” have understandably situated the Age of Reform in a larger narrative about the growth of modernity, especially the growth of the modern state and the attitudes and behaviors that became necessary to form and support it. Again, despite its blind spots, this has been a worthy project. However, there are other ways of understanding the Age of Reform and its contribution to modernity. There are other narratives within which one may place the Age of Reform, such as the narrative about consolation that I have begun to sketch above. By drawing our attention to this narrative, I hope to show another side of Age-of-Reform discipline and, indeed, another side of human existence in the past. My goal is to help us achieve a more balanced and complete understanding of the period as a whole.⁵² I also hope to show how Age-of-Reform consolatory practices contributed directly to an important development in human

⁴⁸See MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 591–592.

⁴⁹See Heuman, “Confessionalization,” 145; Eire, *Reformations*, 616; and Dixon, *Contesting the Reformation*, 171.

⁵⁰Brady, “Confessionalization,” 12.

⁵¹John O’Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 139.

⁵²My thinking here has been influenced especially by the nuanced treatment of discipline and consolation found in the work of Thomas Tentler and Berndt Hamm. See Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), xiii, xvi, 349; and Bast, *Essays by Berndt Hamm*, esp. 45–46.

self-understanding that has significantly shaped modern existence in the West. I will return to an examination of this development later in the article. Permit me now to move from these reflections on discipline and to turn to a brief examination of the evidence for the ubiquity of consolation in the Age of Reform, and thus to support my foregoing assertions about its cultural importance.

III. THE UBIQUITY OF CONSOLATION IN THE AGE OF REFORM

It is not difficult to establish this ubiquity, especially after the advent of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, although, we have seen, there is plenty of manuscript evidence, as well, beginning already in the High Middle Ages.⁵³ It is a well-known fact that works of devotion were the most popular form of printed material in the late medieval and early modern periods,⁵⁴ and many of these works can be classified as works of consolation. Martin Luther provides a good case in point. His pastoral writings made him into an early modern publishing sensation, not his controversial works.⁵⁵ Luther's famous *Ninety-Five Theses* is extant in just a handful of editions, while *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* (1519), a vernacular work of consolation, is extant in twenty-four editions; his other pastoral writings are similarly well attested.⁵⁶

Luther was by far the most popular author of his day,⁵⁷ but other clerical authors produced individual works of consolation that outsold his. The Augsburg Lutheran reformer Urbanus Rhegius authored a pamphlet entitled *Soul-Medicine for the Healthy and the Sick in these Dangerous Times* (1529) that went through 121 editions in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and was translated from the original High German into Low German, Danish, French, Icelandic, Latin, Dutch, Polish, Swedish, and

⁵³See n23 above.

⁵⁴Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 199; and Gunter Franz, ed., *Huberinus—Rhegius—Holbein: Bibliographische und druckgeschichtliche Untersuchung der verbreitetsten Trost- und Erbauungsschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1973), 215. On the success of printed works of devotion in England, see Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5, 22.

⁵⁵Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 163–164. On Luther's success as an author, see Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

⁵⁶For publication statistics, see Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 271. See also, Rittgers, "Pastoral Writings," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, ed. Derek Nelson and Paul Hinlicky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming [2017]).

⁵⁷See Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 115, 210, 213.

Czech.⁵⁸ It also influenced works of devotion in English.⁵⁹ (Geizkofler, who lived in Augsburg, almost certainly knew this work.) Other important Lutheran works of consolation—or works of devotion that contained significant treatments of consolation—include Caspar Huberinus’s *How One Should Console a Dying Person* (1529; thirty-eight editions), Johannes Spangenberg’s *A New Booklet of Consolation* (1542; sixteen editions), Michael Bock’s *Little Garden of Spices for Sick Souls* (1562; twenty editions), and Johannes Habermann’s *Prayer Booklet* (1597; fifty-nine editions).⁶⁰

Turning to Reformed Protestantism on the continent, some scholars have argued that consolation and its attendant affectivity were lacking in this version of Christianity. They have maintained that the teaching of correct doctrine, even at the deathbed, was the Reformed pastor’s primary concern.⁶¹ But other scholars have found quite a strong emphasis on affective piety and solace in the relevant devotional literature, pointing to works of consolation by Huldrych Zwingli and, especially, Heinrich Bullinger, among others.⁶² Zwingli’s famous *Plague Song* (1519) is extant in nine editions, Bullinger’s *Instruction of the Sick* (1544) in six editions.⁶³ While Reformed Protestants on the continent did not produce as many works of consolation as Lutherans, we should avoid concluding that consolation was somehow foreign to the religion of Zwingli and Calvin and their followers. We need more research on this front. There was nothing in Reformed Protestantism itself that militated against the ministry of consolation. English Protestantism makes this point very clearly.⁶⁴ Thomas Becon’s *Sick Mans Salve* (1553) is extant in some thirty editions,⁶⁵ John Norden’s *A Pensive Mans Practice* (1623) in forty-four

⁵⁸Franz, *Huberinus—Rhegius—Holbein*, 213–224, 266.

⁵⁹See Jonathan Reimer, “The Life and Writings of Thomas Becon, 1512–1567” (PhD diss., Pembroke College, Cambridge University, 2016), 145–147.

⁶⁰For publication statistics, see Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 269–274.

⁶¹See Amy Nelson Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation: Ministers and Their Message in Basel, 1529–1629* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 238, 272; and Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Feeling*, 101–131.

⁶²See Bruce Gordon, “Bullinger’s Vernacular Writings: Spirituality and the Christian Life,” in *Architect of the Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–1575*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 117–134.

⁶³For publication statistics, see Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 270, 274. On Bullinger’s *Bericht der Kranken*, see Andreas Mühlhling, “Welchen Tod sterben wir?—Heinrich Bullingers ‘Bericht der Kranken’ (1535),” *Zwingliana* 29 (2002): 55–68.

⁶⁴I am grateful to Jonathan Reimer for his help in identifying key works of consolation among early modern English Protestants.

⁶⁵For publication statistics, see Christopher Marsh, “‘Departing Well and Christianly’: Will-making and Popular Religion in Early Modern England,” in *Religion and the English People, 1500–1640: New Voices and Perspectives*, ed. Eric Josef Carlson (Kirksville, Mo.: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1998), 204; and Mary Hampson Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation: Protestant Best Sellers, Private Devotion, and the Revolution of English Piety* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 319. Patterson also provides a

editions,⁶⁶ William Cowper's *A Conduit of Comfort* (1606) in twelve editions,⁶⁷ and Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Pietie* (1613), which contains numerous consoling sayings, in over fifty editions.⁶⁸ These works were among the most popular of the day.

We have fewer extant works of consolation from the Radical Reformation, but Anabaptists and Spiritualists still contributed to this literature. Caspar von Schwenckfeld authored a number of letters and works of consolation, two of which appeared together in the late 1530s: *Consolation for One Who Stands Under the Cross* and *A Useful Book of Consolation for All Sick, Afflicted, and Imprisoned People*. This two-part work is extant in eight editions.⁶⁹ Menno Simons also authored letters of consolation, although they were not published in his lifetime.⁷⁰

Catholics produced numerous important works of consolation in the Age of Reform. One thinks of the tremendous growth of manuals for confession that appeared in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council, each of which contained sections on consolation. The same was true for the treatments of unction in pastoral manuals.⁷¹ One should also mention Jean Gerson's *Work in Three Parts* (manuscript circa 1404, incunabulum 1467), which is extant in twenty-seven incunabular editions. Gerson wrote the work for simple priests to assist them in the care of souls.⁷² Part three of the work contains his famous "On the Art of Dying," which played such a pivotal role in the late medieval *ars moriendi* movement.⁷³ (Parts one and two deal with the

biographical sketch of Becon and an analysis of *Sick Mans Salve*, see 81–100, 101–154. On Becon's importance and success as a devotional writer, see Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 5. See also Jonathan Reimer, "The Life and Writings of Thomas Becon," and Reimer, "Thomas Becon's Henrician Writings: Composition and County Patronage, 1541–1543," *Reformation* 21, no. 1 (2016): 8–24.

⁶⁶Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 22n29. For an overview of Norden and *A Pensive Mans Practice*, see Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 157–236.

⁶⁷For publication statistics, see the relevant search on The English Short Title Catalogue, http://estc.bl.uk/F/?func=file&file_name=login-bl-estc.

⁶⁸According to Ryrie, Bayly's *Practice* was the most successful devotional handbook in early modern Britain. See *Being Protestant*, 22n30.

⁶⁹For publication statistics, see Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 273.

⁷⁰See "Comforting Letter to a Widow, c. 1549" and "Letter of Consolation to Sick Saint, c. 1557," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496–1561*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1984), 1028–1029, 1050–1052.

⁷¹See discussions of unction and confession, respectively, in Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 21–25, 27–32.

⁷²Jean Gerson, *Opus [or Opusculum] Tripartitum De Præceptis Decalogi, De Confessione & de Arte moriendi*, in *Johannes Gerson: Opera Omnia*, ed. Louis Ellies Du Pin (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1987), vol. 1, part 3, col. 427.

⁷³See n74 below.

Ten Commandments and Confession, respectively.)⁷⁴ Catholics produced other notable works of consolation,⁷⁵ but arguably the most important treatments of the subject appeared in immensely popular works of devotion such as *Of the Imitation and Christ* (manuscript 1420s; incunabulum 1471), Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* (1541), and Frances de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609).⁷⁶ Each of these works is extant in myriad editions and in multiple languages. (*Of the Imitation and Christ* is extant in circa 800 manuscript editions and circa 740 print editions.)⁷⁷ Turning from manuscript or printed material to Catholic practice, John O'Malley has argued that the ministry of consolation was central to Jesuit self-understanding, especially in administering the Sacrament of Penance to laypeople, which lay at the heart of their care of souls.⁷⁸ In point of fact, clergy from each of the Christian confessions claimed that consolation was central to their ministry, asserting that the ability to provide solace to troubled souls was the greatest gift a pastor or priest could have.⁷⁹

There is also abundant evidence of a vibrant ministry of consolation among laypeople in the Age of Reform, especially as we approach the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, although there is evidence of this ministry in the later Middle Ages, as well (see above). Many clerical works of consolation were written to and for laypeople, in part because the authors knew that there were not enough pastors to go around and therefore laypeople had to

⁷⁴Gerson's *De arte moriendi* first appeared in French and then in Latin. *La science de bien mourir* may be found in *Jean Gerson: Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Mgr. Glorieux (Paris: Desclée & Cie, 1966), 404–407. On the popularity of this work, see Christoph Burger, "Gerson, Johannes," in *TRE*, 12:534. The Incunabula Short Title Catalogue contains twelve Latin editions, ten French editions, three German editions, and one Dutch and Low German edition each. See the relevant search on http://data.ceerl.org/istc/_search.

⁷⁵For example, see Robert Bellarmine's *The Art of Dying Well* (1619), which is extant in fifty-eight editions and was translated from Latin into multiple European vernaculars. John Patrick Donnelly, SJ and Roland J. Teske, SJ, trans. and eds., *Robert Bellarmine: Spiritual Writings* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 23–24. See also Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Tratado de la tribulacion* (1589), which is extant in multiple Latin, Spanish, German, and French editions.

⁷⁶For treatments of consolation in *Of the Imitation and Christ*, see 1:12; 2:8–9,12; 3:1–2, 16, 19, 25, 29, 34, 47; 4:2–4. In *Introduction to the Devout Life*, see 3:3; 4:5, 11, 14. In *The Spiritual Exercises*, see especially "The Contemplation to Attain Divine Love" in the Fourth Week and "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits." On the theme of consolation in the latter section of *The Spiritual Exercises*, see John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 41–43. On the importance of the theme in *Of the Imitation of Christ*, see *ibid.*, 83, 265.

⁷⁷Maximilian von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425–1650: From Late Medieval Classic to Early Modern Bestseller* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 1, 255–307.

⁷⁸O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 19, 82, 141.

⁷⁹For examples, see *ibid.*, 83; Thomas Becon, *Sick Mans Salve* (London: John Daye, 1572), 364, Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home> (hereafter cited as EEBO); and Hieronymus Weller, *Der ander Theyl des Buchs* (Nuremberg, 1565), fols. Aiii r-v, <http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/resolve/display/bsb10984870.html>.

become their own consolers. This was true of Urbanus Rhegius's *Soul Medicine*, Heinrich Bullinger's *Instruction of the Sick*, and Thomas Becon's *Sick Mans Salve*.⁸⁰ The latter work is especially interesting. It tells the story of how a layman sought and received solace in his illness from his friends via holy "conferences" in his home. Becon, a pastor, has laypeople provide all of this solace.⁸¹ Only after the sick man dies do his friends seek out a pastor to preach a funeral sermon.⁸² Becon also includes prayers that laypeople could use as they attended to the sick and dying, something one also finds in Lewis Bayly's popular *Practice of Pietie*.⁸³ Lutheran church ordinances called for pastors to train laypeople to minister to the sick and the dying,⁸⁴ and Dutch Protestants even created a special lay office to carry out the ministry of consolation—the *ziekentrooster*.⁸⁵ Other sources reveal Lutheran midwives comforting pregnant women,⁸⁶ Reformed Protestant deacons visiting and consoling the sick,⁸⁷ Lutheran laypeople singing hymns to console the sick and dying,⁸⁸ Anabaptist laity consoling their co-religionists in the face of exile and

⁸⁰See Rhegius, *Seelenärztney*, in Gunter, *Huberinus—Rhegius—Holbein*, 243; Heinrich Bullinger, *Bericht der krancken* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1544), Aiii r, HAB, H: S412.8° Helmst. (5); and Ian Green, "Varieties of Domestic Devotion in Early Modern English Protestantism," in *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Alec Ryrie and Jessica Martin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 28–29.

⁸¹On the importance of such conferences in early modern English piety, see Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 392. For an example of a devotional work organized around a stylized conference between a pastor and a layperson, see John Norden's *A Pensive Mans Practice* (London, 1623), EEBO.

⁸²Becon, *Sick Mans Salve*, 526.

⁸³Green, "Varieties of Domestic Devotion," 28–29.

⁸⁴See *Kirchenordnung des Noppus* (Regensburg, 1543), in *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Emil Sehling, 19 vols. (Leipzig: O. R. Riesland; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1902–1913, 1955–), 13:410a; *Kaspar Löners Kirchenordnung* (Nördlingen, 1544) in Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen*, 12:315b; and *Herzogtum Pfalz-Neuburg Generalartikel von 1576* in Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen*, 13:196a.

⁸⁵Johan de Niet, "Comforting the Sick: Confessional Cure of Souls and Pietist Comfort in the Dutch Republic," in *Confessionalism and Pietism: Religious Reform in Early Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Mainz: Von Zabern, 2006), 197–212; and de Niet, *Ziekentroosters op de pastorale markt 1550–1880* (Rotterdam: Erasmus, 2006).

⁸⁶Christopher Boyd Brown, "Sixteenth-Century Midwives and the Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation." *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 4, no. 2 (February 2004): <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/783>. See also Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 189.

⁸⁷See the section entitled "Von heimsouchung der krancken" in "Die Basler reformationsordnung, 1529, April 1," *Aktensammlung zur Geschichte der Basler Reformation in den Jahren 1519 bis Anfang 1534*, ed. Emil Dürr and Paul Roth, vol. 3, *1528 bis Juni 1529* (Basel: Verlag der Historischen und Antiquarischen Gesellschaft, 1937), 395.

⁸⁸Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

persecution,⁸⁹ and Catholic laypeople practicing the *ars moriendi* with fellow members of confraternities.⁹⁰

We know from post-mortem inventories that lay urban dwellers owned works of consolation.⁹¹ If a layperson could read, his literary diet was comprised almost exclusively of such works, and it is likely that he—or she—was reading the works to others. But laypeople were not simply consumers of such works; they also produced their own. One of the earliest Protestant works of consolation was written by a layperson, Nuremberg's city council secretary, Lazarus Spengler, who, because of his public support for Luther, had been threatened with excommunication along with the Wittenberg reformer. The work was entitled *A Consoling Christian Instruction and Medicine in All Adversities* (1521).⁹² Protestant women also wrote such works. Strasbourg's Katharina Schutz Zell, an eclectic evangelical who drew on Lutheran, Zwinglian, Spiritualist, and Catholic sources to develop her own theology, wrote a pamphlet entitled *To the Suffering Christ-believing Women of the Community of Kentzingen* (1524) in which she seeks to console her evangelical sisters whose husbands had been banished from the city.⁹³ Many lay ego-documents, like Lucas Geizkofler's letter to his grieving wife, are also replete with consolation,⁹⁴ as are lay letters written during outbreaks of plague.⁹⁵ We also have diaries and autobiographies from across the confessional spectrum, many of which

⁸⁹On consolation during exile, see Hans Leaman, "The Consolation of Exile: Confessional Identity and Migration in the German Reformation" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2014). On consolation in the midst of persecution, see Hans Hillerbrand, ed., *The Reformation: A Narrative Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1972), 234.

⁹⁰Nicholas Terpstra, "Death and Dying in Renaissance Confraternities," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), 179–200. There is also evidence of Catholics consoling one another in times of persecution. See 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.

⁹¹Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 234 (with reference to Rhegius's *Soul-Medicine*).

⁹²The work is extant in two editions. For a discussion of this work, see Ronald K. Rittgers, "Productive Misunderstanding in the Early Reformation Revisited: The Case of Lazarus Spengler's *A Consoling and Christian Instruction and Medicine in All Adversities* (1521)," *Reformation and Renaissance Review: Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 19–42.

⁹³Elsie Anne McKee, ed., *Katharina Schütz Zell*, vol. 2, *The Writings, A Critical Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 3.

⁹⁴For an introduction to ego-documents in the early modern period, see the sources listed in Ronald K. Rittgers, "Grief and Consolation in Early Modern Lutheran Devotion: The Case of Johannes Christoph Oelhafen's *Pious Meditations on the Most Sorrowful Bereavement* (1619)," *Church History* 81, no. 3 (September 2012), 605–606n19.

⁹⁵See Ronald K. Rittgers, "Protestants and Plague: The Case of the 1562/3 Pest in Nürnberg," in *Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque*, ed. Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2007), 132–155.

contain expressions of self-consolation.⁹⁶ Some can even be humorous. When the sixteenth-century Catholic diarist Hermann von Weinsberg suffered a hernia, he consoled himself by interpreting it as a penance that would reduce his time in purgatory.⁹⁷ (I am sure the hernia was not funny to him.)

An important feature of consolation literature should also be noted, namely, the great amount of borrowing of sources between the Christian confessions, especially among Protestants. As Alec Ryrie has put it, Protestants were “devotionally omnivorous.”⁹⁸ Catholics were less so. From the later Middle Ages forward, there was a growing expectation among devout laypeople that the ability to console themselves and their loved ones was simply part of what it meant to be a good Christian.⁹⁹ Devout laypeople, especially devout Protestant laypeople, were quite willing to cross confessional boundaries in order to carry out this ministry of self and neighbor consolation.¹⁰⁰

Given the ubiquity of consolation in the Age of Reform, it is rather curious that scholars have largely ignored it in their overall treatments of the period and its legacy. To my knowledge, no one has asked larger questions about the cultural significance of consolation in the Age of Reform and beyond. We do not have anything approaching a synthetic treatment of consolation itself

⁹⁶See Patrick Coleman, Jayne Lewis, and Jill Kowalik, eds., *Representations of the Self from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); James Helgeson, *The Lying Mirror: The First Person Stance and Sixteenth-Century Writing* (Geneva: Droz, 2012); Michael Mascuch, *Origins of The Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591–1791* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997); Nicolas D. Paige, *Being Interior: Autobiography and the Contradictions of Modernity in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); and Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and English Culture in the 18th Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004). It should be noted that Lucas Geizkofler also produced an autobiography. See n2 and n137.

⁹⁷Matthew David Lundin, “The Mental World of a Middling Burgher: The Family Archive of Cologne Lawyer Hermann Weinsberg (1518–1597)” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2006), 74n114. Lundin has published this dissertation as *Paper Memory* (see n30 above).

⁹⁸Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 287. See also von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi*; Peter Damrau, *The Reception of English Puritan Literature in Germany* (London: Maney, 2006); Edgar C. McKenzie, “British Devotional Literature and the Rise of German Pietism” (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 1984); and Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine, and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading “The Anatomy of Melancholy”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 60–67.

⁹⁹See Hans Balthussen, “Nicholas of Modrus’s *De consolatione* (1465–1466): A New Approach to Grief Management,” in *Ordering Emotions in Europe, 1100–1800*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 106; Johann Anselm Steiger, “Die Gesichts- und Theologie-Vergessenheit der heutigen Seelsorgelehre: Anlaß für einen Rückblick in den Schatz reformatorischer und orthodoxer Seelsorgeliteratur,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 39, no. 1 (January/March 1993): 64–87; and Anna Linton, *Poetry and Parental Bereavement in Early Modern Lutheran Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁰There was a parallel development in physical self-care. See Paul A. Russell, “Syphilis, God’s Scourge or Nature’s Vengeance? The German Printed Response to a Public Problem in the Early Sixteenth Century,” *Archive for Reformation History* 80 (1989): 286–287.

in the Age of Reform.¹⁰¹ We have studies of consolation in the works of specific reformers, especially Luther,¹⁰² and specific confessions,¹⁰³ but not for the Age of Reform as a whole. Perhaps scholars are not fully aware of this ubiquity, or perhaps they view consolation as a “soft” topic, much as they used to see healing and emotion, both of which are now important subfields in their own right. Or maybe scholars consider the study of consolation to be narrow or even naive, for it can certainly seem Pollyannaish to make so much of solace in an age of such cruelty, hatred, and oppression. But the evidence for the ubiquity of consolation remains, demanding attention and interpretation.

IV. REASONS FOR THE GROWTH OF VERBAL CONSOLATION IN THE AGE OF REFORM

How may we account for the flowering of verbal consolation in the Age of Reform? The presence of myriad forms of suffering, such as plague, famine, and war, along with the generally trying circumstances of everyday life in pre-modern Europe, is certainly part of the answer. In the Age of Reform, one out of every four or five infants died in their first year of life and only half reached the age of ten.¹⁰⁴ Geizkofler’s experience of loss was quite common. Contemporary medicine did little to help those who survived as they faced the constant threat of disease. Clearly, there were many reasons to be anxious in the Age of Reform, especially when misfortune was interpreted as a sign of either divine wrath or demonic activity. The fact that so many people turned to consolation *via words* may be attributed to the so-called “rise of laity” in the later Middle Ages, and the concomitant and well-attested growth of lay literacy and lay devotion—words were taking on an increasingly important role in lay piety.¹⁰⁵ It seems that consolation via

¹⁰¹For an early attempt at providing such a treatment, see Auer, *Johannes von Dambach und die Trostbücher*.

¹⁰²See Neil R. Leroux, *Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); and Ute Mennecke-Haustein, *Luthers Trostbriefe* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1989).

¹⁰³See Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, which deals largely with Lutheran sources, although in conversation with Catholic, Reformed Protestant, and Radical ones.

¹⁰⁴Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 10.

¹⁰⁵MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 16–26, 70–76; Richard Kieckhefer, “Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion,” in *History of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Jill Raitt, vol. 2, *High Middle Ages and Reformation* (New York: Continuum, 1987), 75–108; and Bernd Moeller, “Piety in Germany around 1500,” in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Steven E. Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971), 50–75. On the growth of lay literacy in the later Middle Ages and early modern period, see Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 318–319; and Karin Maag, “Education and Literacy,” in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London: Routledge, 2000), 542–543.

book, sermon, letter, or song created a thirst for more of the same. That is, it seems that the growth of verbal consolation, especially in the form of printed materials, was, at least in part, a response to real demand.

The Latin Church encouraged the growth of verbal consolation in a number of ways. As mentioned above, in order to combat heresy and to promote piety, the church made annual sacramental confession obligatory for all Christians at the Fourth Lateran Council. Canon 21 of this landmark gathering calls for the confessor to be “discerning and prudent, so that like a skilled doctor he may pour wine and oil over the wounds of the injured one.” The priest is to make a careful inquiry into the penitent’s sins and their circumstances, “so that he may prudently discern what sort of advice he ought to give and what remedy to apply, using various means to heal the sick person.”¹⁰⁶ While actual practice lagged far behind this ideal,¹⁰⁷ these stipulations did create a new set of expectations for the faithful priest, and being able to offer solace and instruction through words was central to them.¹⁰⁸

Some of the most important theologians and preachers of the later Middle Ages also stressed the importance of consolation in their works and sermons, among them Jean Gerson, Johannes Paltz, and Johannes von Staupitz, Luther’s spiritual mentor. Berndt Hamm has shown that these figures advocated a form of pastoral care that stressed the nearness of divine grace and the presence of the suffering Christ in the lives of believers.¹⁰⁹ As is well known, this emphasis on the suffering humanity of Christ was a hallmark of late medieval devotion, and it too encouraged the growth of consolation. Rachel Fulton and others have demonstrated that the origins of Passion piety may be traced back to the prayers of St. Anselm at the beginning of the Age of Reform, among other sources.¹¹⁰ Europeans did not

¹⁰⁶Norman P. Tanner, SJ, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, *Nicaea to Lateran V* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 245.1–23.

¹⁰⁷See Lawrence Duggan, “Fear and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 75 (1984): 153–175; W. David Myers, “Poor Sinning Folk”: *Confession and Conscience in Counter-Reformation Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 27–60; and Rittgers, *Reformation of the Keys*, 25–28.

¹⁰⁸See Leonard E. Boyle, “The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology,” in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 30–43.

¹⁰⁹See Bast, *Essays by Berndt Hamm*, 1–43; and Berndt Hamm, “Die ‘nahe Gnade’—innovative Züge der spätmittelalterlichen Theologie und Frömmigkeit,” in *Berndt Hamm: Religiosität im späten Mittelalter. Spannungspole, Neuaufbrüche, Normierungen*, ed. Reinhold Friedrich and Wolfgang Simon (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 544–560.

¹¹⁰See Fulton’s extensive treatment of Anselm’s prayers in *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 142–192. On the importance of Anselm in the development of Passion piety, see also Richard Viladesau, *The Beauty of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts—From the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 76.

have to wait for Martin Luther to discover a God of mercy, compassion, and grace; they heard sermons and read devotional literature about this God before Luther appeared on the scene, even as they also heard plenty about the divine Judge. Late medieval Christianity was a religion rich in consolation.

The Protestant and Catholic Reformations greatly accelerated the growth of verbal consolation, although as I have just emphasized, in the case of Protestants, this growth should not be viewed as a new development, as if Protestants invented solace and late medieval Christianity only fostered guilt and anxiety.¹¹¹ Still, this is how many early Protestants saw things. Theologically speaking, the Protestant Reformation began as a quest for a new kind of consolation. After Luther discovered (or invented) this evangelical solace, he saw proclaiming the gospel of unconditional grace through faith to his contemporaries as his top priority. Many found his message appealing, especially as they suffered in soul or body. In 1520, having found great solace in Luther's writings for his own *Anfechtungen*, Albrecht Dürer praised the Wittenberg reformer as "a Christian man who helped me out of great distress."¹¹² As was true of many evangelical lay priests, Dürer then sought to spread Luther's consolation to others. Luther did a great deal to accelerate the growth of verbal consolation through his preaching and writing. As we have seen, he was the most popular author of his day and his works of devotion and consolation easily outsold his controversial works. Here the printing press was absolutely central; it was essential to the flowering of verbal consolation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Catholics and other Protestants responded with their own competing consolation campaigns. The leaders of the Christian confessions believed that if they could persuade the laity to cope with misfortune according to Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed Protestant, or Anabaptist prescriptions, respectively, they would have gone a long way toward securing the laity's allegiance to their version of Christianity, thus ensuring the salvation of lay souls. In this way, competing versions of consolation contributed significantly to the process of confessionalization.¹¹³ There was a lot of

¹¹¹See Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism in Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), 22–32; and Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 216–222. For an assessment of Ozment's thesis, see Ronald K. Rittgers, "Anxious Penitents and the Appeal of the Reformation: Ozment and the Historiography of Confession," in *Piety and Family in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of Steven Ozment*, ed. Benjamin Kaplan and Marc Forster (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 50–69.

¹¹²See William Martin Conway, trans. and ed., *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 155–156.

¹¹³See Ronald K. Rittgers, "Christianization Through Consolation: Urbanus Rhegius's *Soul-Medicine for the Healthy and the Sick in These Dangerous Times* (1529)," in *Reformation as*

common ground between the competing consolation campaigns, for each confession stressed that God was sovereign over suffering, that the Christian had to face suffering with faith and patience, and that God accomplished much good in the Christian's life through suffering, conforming her to the image of Christ. Every confession also taught that Christ was present in the Christian's suffering. But there was also a lot of disagreement, especially regarding what constituted *true* suffering and *true* consolation. Radicals accused other Christians of being unwilling to suffer persecution for the sake of the Gospel, while magisterial Protestants accused Catholics and Radicals of engaging in self-made suffering.¹¹⁴ Catholics turned to saints and sacramentals for consolation, while Protestants rejected the same. Catholics said suffering was a means of penance; Protestants insisted it was not.¹¹⁵ Lutherans and Catholics looked to clerical absolution for solace; other Protestants said it was a fraud. And so on. All the while, each Christian confession continued to churn out numerous works of consolation and to encourage various consolatory practices that promised true solace vis-à-vis other confessions. One overall effect of these competing consolation campaigns was to raise lay expectations of consolation, for never before had so much solace been promised to the laity, and never before had so much been at stake in persuading the laity to suffer "correctly."¹¹⁶

There is another cause of the flowering of verbal consolation that relates especially to Protestants. Many Protestants had a sacramental view of scripture, that is, they saw it not simply as divine revelation, but also as a means of divine grace.¹¹⁷ For most Protestants, grace was tied to the Word and therefore to human words that sought to convey the Word—verbal consolation was essential to Protestant consolation.¹¹⁸ One sees this very

Christianization: Essays on Scott Hendrix's Christianization Thesis, ed. Anna Marie Johnson and John Maxfield (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 321–345.

¹¹⁴See Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 156. See also Vincent Evener, "'Enemies of the Cross': Suffering, Salvation, and Truth in Sixteenth-Century Religious Controversy" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014).

¹¹⁵See Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 106.

¹¹⁶David Lederer, *Madness, Religion, and the State in Early Modern Europe: A Bavarian Beacon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16.

¹¹⁷See Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils*, 27; and Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993), 82–86. I am grateful to Ward Holder, Bruce Gordon, and Sujin Pak for helpful e-conversations on the Word as sacrament in Reformed Protestantism. On preaching as a Protestant sacrament, see Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 221.

¹¹⁸On ancient precedents for the early Protestant "therapeutic" view of words, see Pedro Lain Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, ed. and trans. L. J. Rather and John M. Sharp (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970). On Catholicism as a religion of the Word, see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*.

clearly in Becon's *Sick Mans Salve*.¹¹⁹ During the conference with the sick man that Becon narrates, the book of Job comes up for discussion. One of the lay consolers takes Job's friends to task for initially sitting with the afflicted saint for a week in silence (Job 2:13). The lay consoler exclaims, "by the space of vii. dayes, [they] spake not one comfortable worde unto hym."¹²⁰ By way of contrast, the lay consolers in this work set to consoling their sick friend with "comfortable words" as soon as they enter his house. In a sense, Protestant consolers, with their sacramental view of the Word, took on the role of the priestly confessor in Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council. Armed with the sacramental Word, they sought to become doctors of souls, both their own and their neighbors'.

V. ASSESSING THE EFFICACY OF VERBAL CONSOLATION IN THE AGE OF REFORM

Did any of this verbal consolation work? Did it help? Some have suggested that it did not, certainly not very often, and this is why there was so much consolation literature, especially among Protestants. Protestants deprived their contemporaries of the ritual means of consolation that provided at least some solace, along with the promises of miraculous healing contained in traditional Christianity, leaving them more anxious than ever.¹²¹ On this interpretation, Protestants created the anxiety that they then tried feverishly but unsuccessfully to relieve. According to Delumeau, Catholics did the same through a similarly obsessive emphasis on guilt.¹²² It is of course true that the competing Christian confessions helped to create the fear and discomfort that their competing consolations sought to ease. Am I sufficiently sorrowful for my sins? Have I performed enough penance to appease the wrathful divine Judge? Do I have sufficient faith to receive free grace? Am I among the elect? Am I truly willing to die for my faith? The clergy placed these and other anxiety-producing questions in the minds of their contemporaries, believing they were divinely authorized to do so.

But here one should mention an extremely important "missed opportunity" for the production of such anxiety that should temper our interpretation of efforts to

¹¹⁹One also sees it in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. See Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine, and Religion in Early Modern England*, 27–29.

¹²⁰Becon, *Sick Mans Salve*, 33.

¹²¹Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 147; Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 438.

¹²²See Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*.

discipline the laity in the Age of Reform. In keeping with medieval precedent,¹²³ theologians and pastors regularly chose *not* to interpret suffering as a divine punishment for sin, or not only as such punishment. They still attributed the fact of suffering to original sin, and there are plenty of examples of this view in the sources, even as there are plenty of examples of specific forms of affliction being tied to specific sins, especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹²⁴ Some rather brutal “consolation” could be the result of this latter connection.¹²⁵ But what is really striking is how frequently the sin explanation is listed along with other explanations of misfortune or avoided altogether. There are in fact numerous examples of clerical authors insisting that suffering is not a punishment for sin, at least not for the faithful. Protestants, especially, reasoned that Christ had already born all such punishment on their behalf, and therefore suffering could only be for their edification.¹²⁶ In many ways, the whole point of the Christian consolation literature was to persuade its hearers and readers that their affliction was not a punishment meted out by an angry deity; rather, it was their heavenly Father’s means of preparing His children for heaven—this is how the consolers sought to reframe the experience of pain and loss to render it bearable and even meaningful.¹²⁷ This is how Lucas Geizkofler interpreted the death of his son. In his letter to his wife, he seeks to persuade her that their loss is not a punishment for sin, even though he concedes that he and his wife deserve such punishment. David Lederer and Jeremy Schmidt have found the same emphasis on consoling approaches to misfortune in their important work on early modern madness and melancholy, respectively.¹²⁸ Most scholars have overlooked this emphasis in the sources, perhaps because they are difficult to encompass within the “Discipline Paradigm.”

It is difficult to know if verbal consolation worked, or if some versions of it worked better than others, because we cannot peer directly into the souls of people in the past.¹²⁹ Those who think they can declare with confidence that one form of consolation worked better than another, or that consolation did not work at all, typically reveal more about their own religious or

¹²³See von Moos, *Consolatio*, 3:269, no. 1268.

¹²⁴See Philip M. Soergel, *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination: The Evangelical Wonder Book in Reformation Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation*, 112.

¹²⁵For an example, see Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 214.

¹²⁶See Lederer, *Madness, Religion, and the State in Early Modern Europe*, 9–10; Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Madness in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 11; and Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 8, 105–106, 147–148, 212–217.

¹²⁷For an example, see McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell*, 2:5.

¹²⁸See n126 above.

¹²⁹See Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul*, 71.

philosophical commitments than they do about human experience in the Age of Reform. Consolation refers not only to a collection of written works and to a set of practices, but also to an emotional state, the state of being consoled, and this feeling is difficult for the historian to access.¹³⁰ Even ego-documents such as Geizkofler's letter need to be treated with caution, as they are mediated sources that do not provide direct access to the souls of the people who created them.¹³¹ Still, I do not believe that we are completely cut off from human emotional experience in the past,¹³² and I also think there are reasons for concluding that the various verbal consolations provided comfort to Christians, at least some of the time.

This seems to have been the case with Geizkofler. He says it consoled him to consider that his misfortune was not an expression of divine wrath—that it was actually meant for good. We must appreciate what a powerful insight this was for many people in the Age of Reform, perhaps especially because there were so many reasons for them to conclude the opposite during this time. Regardless of how one might evaluate this insight today, it seems to have worked for Geizkofler, and he thought it would help his wife. Along with his letter, and in place of a “sweet unleavened Easter cake,” Geizkofler sent a theological treatise on the merit of Christ to his wife that he had prepared himself. He again decouples misfortune from divine wrath, showing how important this view was for him. Geizkofler also mentions an additional source of solace. He says that he has drawn great consolation from the belief that Christ the Bridegroom has joined Himself in an indivisible union with every Christian soul, come what may.¹³³ Geizkofler commends this insight to his wife, observing that in their love for each other they are able to experience something of the “fervent love” Christ has for souls, even in the midst of their loss.¹³⁴ (Especially because Geizkofler was a Lutheran, one cannot help

¹³⁰For a general treatment of religion and emotion, see John Corrigan, Eric Crump, and John Kloos, *Emotion and Religion: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2000); and John Corrigan, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹³¹See Rittgers, “Grief and Consolation in Early Modern Lutheran Devotion,” 629n137.

¹³²I am an advocate of “chastened realism,” a term coined by Mark Noll. For a discussion of this epistemological stance, see Noll's four-part series on the “History Wars” in *Books and Culture* (especially vol. 5, no. 6, November/December 1999), along with his two related book chapters: “The Potential of Missiology for the Crises of History,” in *History and the Christian Historian*, ed. Ronald A. Wells (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 106–123; and “Traditional Christianity and the Possibility of Historical Knowledge,” in *Religious Advocacy and American History*, ed. Bruce Kucklick and D. G. Hart (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 28–53.

¹³³See Wolf, *Lucas Geizkofler und seine Selbstbiographie*, 152–153; and Lucas Geizkofler, *Ein hoch tröstliche vnd nutzliche Erinnerung von dem volkhommen hochwürdigsten [sic] verdienst vnsers lieben Heren vnnnd einigen Selligmacher Jesu Christ*, pp. 43v–44r, 144r–v, HAB, HS 62.13 Aug. 8°.

¹³⁴See Wolf, *Lucas Geizkofler und seine Selbstbiographie*, 152–153.

but hear in these lines echoes of Luther's "wonderful exchange" from *The Freedom of the Christian*.¹³⁵ It is plausible that such a perspective could provide comfort to Age-of-Reform Christians in the midst of distress. As Alec Ryrie has argued in his magisterial *Being Protestant*, even anxious Puritans seem to have derived some measure of solace from the works of consolation that were available to them.¹³⁶ My sense is that this was true of Christians from all confessions.

VI. CONSOLATION AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE AGE OF REFORM

How should we assess the overall cultural impact of this flowering of consolation on the Age of Reform? How did it shape the human beings who practiced and experienced it? Beyond providing them with some comfort, did it influence them in any other significant ways? The cultural effects of consolation are difficult to measure—there are no court records or church visitation reports to document it, which is perhaps one reason why historians have paid less attention to it. One must proceed more inferentially and study sources that can be difficult to access, such as ego-documents, many of which are still hidden away in archives.¹³⁷

There are clues in Geizkofler's letter to his wife about one possible way verbal consolation shaped those who engaged in it: the practice encouraged the growth of a certain kind of inwardness.¹³⁸ Here it is helpful to interact with the work of Charles Taylor and his efforts to understand the "making of modern identity."¹³⁹ My suggestion is that the practice of consolation had an important influence on the self-understanding of those who experienced it, that it promoted the kind of inwardness that Taylor has examined in *Sources of the Self*. I think that at least some aspects of modern identity may be traced back, in part, to the flowering of consolation in the Age of Reform. Allow me to sketch out the broad contours of what I have in mind with this claim.

¹³⁵Luther refers to "der froelich wechBel" in the German version of *The Freedom of the Christian*. See D. Martin Luthers Werke, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Schriften* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897), 7:25.34.

¹³⁶Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 475.

¹³⁷Fortunately, Geizkofler's autobiography is published in Wolf, *Lucas Geizkofler und seine Selbstbiographie*. It is available on Google Books (<https://books.google.com>) and can be downloaded on Google Play (<https://play.google.com>). For an example of an ego-document that required considerably more effort to access, see Rittgers, "Grief and Consolation in Early Modern Lutheran Devotion."

¹³⁸For a discussion of how meditation on religious images could similarly encourage "attention to the self," see Merback, "Therapies of the Image in the Age of Dürer," in *Perfection's Therapy*.

¹³⁹See Charles Taylor, "Inwardness," Part 2 in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

First, I wish to make it clear that I am not seeking to contribute to a teleological narrative about the manifest destiny and moral superiority of a modern introspective and autonomous (male) self. That narrative is deeply problematic and grew out of the social and political needs of its day,¹⁴⁰ even as the current narrative of the non-existent self or of constantly shifting selves serves similar needs in our own day.¹⁴¹ We should be wary of accepting either narrative uncritically. While the enormous literature on the history of the self contains crucial disagreements about the definition of the self,¹⁴² including whether there is such a thing as “the self” (as opposed to a mere sense of self),¹⁴³ there is widespread agreement that something important happened in the evolution of human self-understanding in the Age of Reform, at least for a portion of the population, and that a new kind of inwardness, or at least a new value placed on inwardness,¹⁴⁴ was central to this evolution. I am seeking to draw attention to one understudied and important facilitator of this inwardness.

According to Taylor, people in the modern West have a sense of themselves as beings that have selves in the same way they have heads, hands, and feet.¹⁴⁵ Inwardness, the sense of having inner depths or a private inward space, and of being aware of having this sense, is a key feature of modern self-understanding for Taylor. He traces the growth of this inwardness from its origins in Augustinian “radical reflexivity,”¹⁴⁶ through its intensification and spread in the

¹⁴⁰See Roy Porter, ed., *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1–7. See also Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20.

¹⁴¹See Coleman, Lewis, and Kowalik, *Representations of the Self*; and Jerrold E. Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. 4–5.

¹⁴²See Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1–2.

¹⁴³For criticism of the concept of “the self,” see Anthony Kenny, “Body, Soul, and Intellect in Aquinas,” in *From Soul to Self*, ed. M. James Crabbe (London: Routledge, 1999), 39–40. On the distinction between having a self versus having a sense of having a self, in the same volume, see Galen Strawson “The Sense of Self,” especially pp. 127 and 131. See also Lynn Hunt, “The Self and its History,” *American Historical Review* 119, no. 5 (December 2014): 1576–1586. For a robust defense of the existence of a non-Cartesian self, see Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

¹⁴⁴See Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 15.

¹⁴⁵It should be noted that Taylor does not think the modern sense of self is the only, or even the best, way of “being a self”; in fact, he is quite critical of it. See *Sources of the Self*, 175.

¹⁴⁶Taylor writes, “a turn to the self as a self. This is what I mean by radical reflexivity.” See *Sources of the Self*, 176. On Augustine and the development of interiority, see Philipp Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

late medieval and early modern periods,¹⁴⁷ and finally to its secularization in the modern period, when, according to him, human beings became enclosed in their own reflexivity, trapped in a never-ending quest for meaning and authenticity.¹⁴⁸ While Taylor mentions the role of Jesuit and Puritan self-examination in the growth of inwardness,¹⁴⁹ he makes relatively little of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations in this part of his analysis. He has more to say about the Age of Reform as a whole in *A Secular Age*, asserting that German mysticism and *Devotio moderna*, along with private confession and the *ars moriendi*, also contributed to the growth of inwardness.¹⁵⁰ But in neither work does he refer to the larger flowering of verbal consolation that we have explored above. I assume that he was unaware of it. The Age of Reform remains for Taylor an age of anxiety that was characterized by a lamentable effort to Christianize the masses inwardly and outwardly through largely coercive means.¹⁵¹ Taylor has sympathies with the “Discipline Thesis.”¹⁵²

While brilliant in so many ways, there are problems with Taylor’s analysis of inwardness, especially from a historian’s perspective. He has been accused of constructing the kind of teleological narrative I eschew above and of failing to appreciate the myriad ways that human beings have formed senses of identity in the past.¹⁵³ This is an important criticism,¹⁵⁴ although I think that Taylor is still on to something important with respect to at least *one* dominant version of self-understanding in the West. Taylor also seems to imply that inwardness is a uniquely Western phenomenon, especially a uniquely modern Western phenomenon, a perspective that is highly debatable—inwardness may be found outside of the modern West, even as it has a distinctive form and story in the West.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, Taylor’s sources are problematic, something he readily concedes: they do not provide access to the most important driver of change in human self-understanding over time. According to him, that driver is practices, or ideas embedded in practices, including religious practices.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁷Taylor speaks of a flowering of Augustinian spirituality, and therefore of Augustinian inwardness, across the confessions in 16th and 17th centuries. *Sources of the Self*, 141

¹⁴⁸Taylor observes that, for Augustine, reflexivity is a good thing, but it becomes evil “when this reflexivity is enclosed on itself”: *Sources of the Self*, 139. On the modern quest for authenticity, see Charles Taylor, “The Age of Authenticity,” in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁴⁹Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 184.

¹⁵⁰Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 68–71.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 88, 541.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 68, 82, 158.

¹⁵³See David Sabeen and Malina Stefanovska, eds. *Space and Self in Early Modern European Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3.

¹⁵⁴But see n145 above.

¹⁵⁵See Paster, Rowe, and Floyd-Wilson, *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, 15; and Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 20.

¹⁵⁶Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 204–206.

As is true of most large synthetic works that seek to understand the origins of modernity, Taylor focuses almost exclusively on ideas, largely limiting his analysis to the writings of Descartes, Montaigne, and Locke in his examination of the Age of Reform in *Sources of the Self*. The references to confession and the *ars moriendi* in *A Secular Age* are brief and undeveloped.¹⁵⁷ I believe that consolation did more to encourage the growth of inwardness in the Age of Reform than did the writings that Taylor engages, and I think Taylor would agree. After all, many more people practiced verbal consolation than read Descartes.

Consolation was a social practice and embedded within it were key ideas about human identity that shaped people as they engaged in it.¹⁵⁸ The kind of consolation we have seen in Geizkofler and others both presupposes and encourages the inwardness that Taylor says was so important to the eventual emergence of modern identity in the West. When the clergy consoled the laity, or when they urged the laity to become their own consolers, they were encouraging them to develop a lay version of the radical reflexivity one sees in Augustine's *Confessions*. The practice of verbal consolation assumes that a human being is a creature with inner depths that can be full of pain and distress, and which therefore must be carefully and individually plumbed if the person is to find the appropriate solace in the midst of suffering. To become a doctor of one's own soul or of one's neighbor's soul is to become a person who believes she and others have such depths. But this practice did not simply assume the existence of these depths; it helped to form, expand, and maintain these depths, even as it sought to convey solace to them. Words—written, spoken, read, heard, and sung—were central to this process of persuading human beings to understand themselves as creatures with inner depths. These depths were frequently referred to as the conscience or the heart.

Consolation clearly promoted a sense of inwardness in those who practiced it, and not just among anxious monks like Luther. Lucas Geizkofler says in his letter to his wife that his grief and extended absence from her, along with his theological reflections on the same, have caused him “to go into myself” (*in mich selbs zu gehen*). He also says that he has allowed the consolation he has discovered “to impress itself more deeply on my heart” (*den angedeuteten trost mir etwas tiefer in mein herz einbilden wollen*).¹⁵⁹ His pain and search for solace caused him to retreat within himself, something he also commends to his wife. Like Augustine, Geizkofler turned inward to be drawn upward to God, although he lacked Augustine's neo-platonic account of this upward

¹⁵⁷Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 66, 68.

¹⁵⁸Other scholars have heeded Taylor's statement about the importance of social practices in the formation of identity. See Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*.

¹⁵⁹Wolf, *Lucas Geizkofler und seine Selbstbiographie*, 151–152.

drawing.¹⁶⁰ Geizkofler emphasized instead the reality of the union between Christ and each Christian soul, a perspective that also assumed and encouraged inwardness. As a humanist, Geizkofler had likely learned to retreat into himself through other practices, such as private reading and writing, both of which were essential to the consolation that he practiced with himself and his wife.¹⁶¹ (As a humanist, Geizkofler was also likely aware of the antiquity of consolation.) Consolation was but one of several interrelated practices that promoted inwardness in the Age of Reform; it is, however, the least studied among them.

While verbal consolation was not a mass practice, it was much more common than the writing of diaries and autobiographies. Such practices also clearly encouraged the growth of inwardness, and we have several fine treatments of how they did so.¹⁶² But these sources do not become plentiful until the seventeenth century.¹⁶³ Verbal consolation was also much older than the making of diaries and autobiographies, predating the heyday of these other practices by centuries. Although common to all Christian confessions, verbal consolation had a unique importance among Protestants because it represents what Susan Karant-Nunn has called a “pararitual,” that is, a kind of unofficial ritual that survived the censorship of Protestant authorities and that was able to shape Protestant emotional life in important ways.¹⁶⁴

It should be stressed that as Geizkofler sought comfort in his distress, he looked to others for solace, in the first place, God, and more specifically, to the Passion narratives in the sacred Gospels. He also looked to other human beings, including, he tells us, a Jesuit priest in Prague who shared works of the early and medieval Church Fathers with him—these were the sources for his reflections on the “wonderful exchange.” Geizkofler was not an isolated monad; he had a relational sense of self.¹⁶⁵ He also did not shun

¹⁶⁰According to Taylor, Augustine turned inward to be drawn upward by and to God. See *Sources of the Self*, 134.

¹⁶¹See *A History of Private Life*, ed. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, vol. 3, *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 111.

¹⁶²See Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*; Coleman, Lewis, and Kowalik, *Representations of the Self*; Helgeson, *The Lying Mirror*; Mascuch, *Origins of The Individualist Self*; Paige, *Being Interior*; and David George Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self in Early-Modern Scotland* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

¹⁶³Mascuch, *Origins of The Individualist Self*, 75; Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 21–22.

¹⁶⁴Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 193.

¹⁶⁵On the importance of a relational or open sense of self among early modern Christians, see Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, vii–viii; and Robert Dimit, “Divine Grace, the Humoral Body, and the ‘Inner Self’ in Seventeenth-Century France and England,” in Sabean and Stefanovska, *Space and Self in Early Modern European Cultures*, 153–164. As with other members of the growing early modern bourgeoisie, it is possible that Geizkofler’s inward self

suffering.¹⁶⁶ Geizkofler was a long way from Taylor's modern "buffered self" that believes it can and must make its own meaning in a closed and meaningless universe, an exercise that, according to Taylor, frequently involves the avoidance of suffering. Geizkofler still had a "porous self."¹⁶⁷ And yet he and those like him represent one important step in the contingent historical development of one significant feature of modern identity; as they practiced verbal consolation, people like Geizkofler unwittingly helped to prepare the ground for this identity.¹⁶⁸

Geizkofler's practice of consolation can also help us to broaden our understanding of Age-of-Reform discipline. Consolation has its own expansive story that stretches from the ancient world to the modern day. Placing the Age of Reform within this story as one of its most important chapters can reveal dimensions of this Age that the "Discipline Paradigm" either ignores or interprets one-sidedly. The dimensions I have especially in mind include the kind of resourcefulness, compassion, and empathy that people like Lucas Geizkofler displayed as they practiced verbal consolation, along with the version of porous inwardness that they cultivated in the process. This inwardness could function as a convenient tool for church- or state-sponsored coercion, but I hope I have shown that it had other purposes as well. I also have in mind such dimensions as the solace that Geizkofler and his contemporaries seem to have experienced and the yearning for the divine, and thus for meaning, that lay at the heart of their desire for comfort. Finally, I have in mind the way consolation could also provide refuge from the harsher aspects of Age-of-Reform discipline. These aspects of human experience are also an important part of the Age of Reform. To miss them, and the way they challenge and revise the "Discipline Thesis," is to miss something essential about the Age of Reform and its legacy.¹⁶⁹

was confined to one aspect of his life, the devotional part, while he adopted other senses of self in his public or professional life. On this topic, see Debra Shuger, "Life-Writing in Seventeenth-Century England," in Coleman, Lewis, and Kowalik, *Representations of the Self*, 63–78.

¹⁶⁶Taylor notes that one mark of modern identity is the high value it places on the avoidance of suffering. See *Sources of the Self*, 12.

¹⁶⁷Taylor makes the distinction between a premodern "porous self" (that is, a self that is open to supernatural intervention) and the modern "buffered self" (that is, a self that is bounded, disenchanted, and detached) in *A Secular Age*, 37–38. According to Taylor, the buffered self did not emerge until the eighteenth century.

¹⁶⁸I am borrowing the idea of the intensification of Christian devotion preparing the ground for modernity from Taylor. See *A Secular Age*, 145.

¹⁶⁹It is equally dangerous to view the Age of Reform solely through the lens of its devotional literature and all of the consolation that it assumes and promises. See Eire, *Reformations*, 719.

VII. CONSOLATION AND THE LEGACIES OF THE AGE OF REFORM

If there is anything to Taylor's treatment of modern identity, especially regarding the importance of inwardness to it, and if I am on to anything with these reflections about the connection between the practice of verbal consolation and the growth of inwardness in the Age of Reform, then it would follow that we should pay close attention to what happens to this practice if we want to understand the gradual transition from a porous self to a buffered self in the West. In other words, if we want to gain insight into the secularization of self-understanding in the West as a legacy of the Age of Reform, we should attend closely to the historical development of consolatory practices.

As scholars such as Jan Goldstein have shown, early modern Christian consolation itself became secularized over time, at least among a certain portion of the European population, gradually evolving in some contexts into Freudian psychotherapy, an obvious *terminus ad quem* for the story I am telling.¹⁷⁰ An important part of this story is the gradual decline of belief in things such as heaven, hell, purgatory, the devil, saints, angels, divine judgment, divine grace, miracles, and so on, which were assumed in traditional Christian consolation. The competing versions of consolation in the Age of Reform no doubt contributed to this decline by throwing into doubt so many traditional beliefs and practices and by causing so much conflict about them.

I believe that an unfortunate characteristic of much of this consolation literature also contributed to this decline: Age of Reform consolation frequently made little room for the full-throated biblical lament, and even protest, that one finds in certain of the Psalms (see especially 44, 88, 89). Many Christians were expected to suffer without being able to shake their angry fists at heaven once in a while, which, owing to the psychological burden this created, in time may well have encouraged opposition to Christianity itself.¹⁷¹ As Taylor has argued, traditional Christianity gradually gave way among a certain portion of the population to "Providential Deism," whose ideas were embedded within more secular practices of consolation.¹⁷²

This is not the place to explore the secularization of Age-of-Reform consolation in detail. I will simply observe that the Christian consolation

¹⁷⁰Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5, 382. See also Lederer, *Madness, Religion, and the State in Early Modern Europe*.

¹⁷¹See Rittgers, *Reformation of Suffering*, 262–263.

¹⁷²For Taylor's discussion of Providential Deism, see "Providential Deism" in *A Secular Age*. For a discussion of how the decline in belief in traditional Christian theodicy contributed to the decline of Christianity in the West, see Berger, "The Problem of Theodicy," in *Sacred Canopy*.

tradition always carried within it the seeds of its own secularization, for it always retained within it numerous pagan remedies alongside and integrated with Christian ones. As Christian explanations of misfortune gradually became less plausible for a portion of the population, the Christian and the pagan elements of the Christian consolatory tradition slowly began to unravel. One sees this unraveling in the influential neo-Stoic work of Justus Lipsius, *On Constancy*.¹⁷³ While Lipsius insists in a prefatory letter that “it is only in conjunction with the holy scriptures that this way of [stoic] wisdom can lead to tranquility and peace,” his work of Christian Stoicism makes no mention of Christ and contains no quotations from the New Testament.¹⁷⁴ In response to the turmoil of religious wars, Lipsius offers his contemporaries a largely Ciceronian solace.¹⁷⁵ Boethius had done the same centuries earlier, but medieval Christians had read *The Consolation of Philosophy* through a Christian lens, providing Christian glosses and commentaries on the text, and adjusting the text itself, in both Latin and vernacular editions, to correspond to Christian convictions.¹⁷⁶ By way of contrast, not long after *On Constancy* appeared, some Christian intellectuals—most notably, Blaise Pascal—wondered aloud whether the reconciliation between Christianity and Stoicism that Lipsius and others attempted was salutary, in part because they feared that in the current climate their contemporaries would embrace a thoroughgoing Stoicism at the expense of their Christian faith.¹⁷⁷

More striking, and more in keeping with my argument about the importance of practices, is the way Joseph Addison wrote about loss in the extraordinarily popular publication *The Spectator*. According to Habermas, this publication played an important role in the growing bourgeois self-consciousness of those who read and discussed it, especially in English coffee houses.¹⁷⁸ C. S. Lewis argued persuasively that Addison was an advocate of

¹⁷³Justus Lipsius, *On Constancy: De Constantia translated by Sir John Stradling (1595)*, ed., John Sellars (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix, 2006). On the popularity of *On Constancy* in the early modern period, see p. 5. Lipsius also figures prominently in Taylor’s account of the rise and eventual secularization of western society. See *A Secular Age*, 117, 155.

¹⁷⁴Lipsius, *On Constancy*, 2.

¹⁷⁵Lipsius does seek to refute Stoic determinism, which is incompatible with Christianity, in *On Constancy*, bk. 1, ch. 20.

¹⁷⁶See Walsh, *Boethius*, xlv–l. See also Kaylor, *The Medieval Consolation of Philosophy*, 12. Petrarch also offered his contemporaries a largely Ciceronian solace, but there was more Christian content to this consolation than one finds in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. See Rawski, *Petrarch’s Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, vol. 1, bk. 1, p. 37; and vol. 3, bk. 2, pp. 39, 76, 279.

¹⁷⁷See Sellars, introduction to *On Constancy*, 12.

¹⁷⁸Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 42–43.

eighteenth-century “Rational Piety,”¹⁷⁹ and when he sought to console his readers, he, like Lipsius, turned primarily to pagan philosophers, in Addison’s case, Plutarch and Seneca. In an entry from 1711, he readily acknowledges how essential “the Arts of Consolation” are for seeking contentment in this life in the midst of affliction, and while he concedes that Christian devotion can be helpful, the remedies he suggests are purely pagan—he sees the two as separate. Addison writes to a young woman named Leonora whose fiancé had recently died of an unnamed and sudden disease. Addison interprets her loss as an example of the “little strokes of Fortune” that invariably befall one in this life. Referring to her in the third person, he advises:

Let the Disconsolate *Leonora* consider, that at the very time in which she languishes for the Loss of her deceased Lover, there are Persons in several Parts of the World just perishing in a Shipwreck; others crying out for Mercy in the Terrors of a Death-bed Repentance; others lying under the Tortures of an Infamous Execution, or the like dreadful Calamities; and she will find her Sorrows vanish at the Appearance of those which are so much greater and more astonishing.

Addison continues:

I would further propose to the Consideration of my afflicted disciple [*Leonora*], that possibly what she now looks upon as the greatest Misfortune, is not really such in it self. For my own part, I question not but our Souls in a separate State will look back on their Lives in quite another View, than what they had of them in the Body; and that what they now consider as Misfortunes and Dissappointments, will very often appear to have been Escapes and Blessings.¹⁸⁰

The practice of reading, discussing, and experiencing this kind of consolation, which was pretty brutal in its own way, helped to shape human self-understanding in the early eighteenth century along “enlightened” lines, a process that would continue in the coming decades and centuries.

The great irony of the history we have examined is that the deeply religious practice of verbal consolation, which had little interest in the development of a sense of self, helped to promote an understanding of the self that would have been utterly foreign to the men and women in the Age of Reform who so earnestly engaged in it. An intended consequence of the Age of the Reform had completely unintended consequences in the long run, which is a familiar

¹⁷⁹C. S. Lewis, “Addison,” in *Eighteenth Century English Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. James Clifford, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 147, 155.

¹⁸⁰G. Gregory Smith, ed., *The Spectator by Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Others*, vol. 1 (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1915), Number 163, 6 September 1711, pp. 293, 296.

story.¹⁸¹ But none of this was necessary. There is no necessary causal relationship between the consolatory practices of the Age of Reform and the eventual emergence of Taylor's buffered self. As Thomas Nipperdy once observed, the Reformers were grandparents of modernity, not parents. I would say, great-grandparents, at best, for anything could have happened.¹⁸² The Age of Reform created new possibilities for human existence that, under certain contingent circumstances, could evolve in what we would call a modernizing direction.¹⁸³ I have explored one of these new possibilities. I have proposed an alternative way of relating the Age of Reform to modernity, or at least to one aspect of modernity, namely, the kind of self-understanding that it has encouraged among many.¹⁸⁴ But the Age of Reform also stands as a critique and challenge to modernity, for it confronts us with a way of being human that is at once familiar and foreign, and it thus shows us what we were and what we have lost, for good and for ill. It also causes us to wonder about what we might have become.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹See Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*.

¹⁸²Thomas Nipperdy, "The Reformation and the Modern World," in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. E. I. Kouri and Tom Scott (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987), 539.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 540.

¹⁸⁴For discussion of the secularization thesis, especially whether it continues to possess explanatory power (which I think it does in modified form), see Steven Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999).

¹⁸⁵Nipperdy, "The Reformation and the Modern World," 552. Hindmarsh also allows his sources to challenge modern notions of identity. See *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, vii and 346.

Copyright of Church History is the property of Cambridge University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.