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## Revisiting Robert Barnes on the Eucharist

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Only slightly less significant than the doctrine of justification, yet often even more contentious than that fundamental article, the doctrine of the Eucharist was central to the controversies of the sixteenth-century reformations. As such, eucharistic theology has come to be considered one of the identifying marks of Europe's diverse reformations as well as its various reformers. This was certainly the case in England, where Peter Marshall rightly notes that, by the end of the reign of Henry VIII, eucharistic theology "had become, on all sides, the single most important marker of religious difference."<sup>1</sup> This fact was also noted more than a generation ago by Basil Hall, whose survey of "the early rise and gradual decline of Lutheranism in England" put forth the suggestion that sacramental doctrine was "the chief hindrance to the advance of Lutheranism in England."<sup>2</sup> Though perhaps there is some truth to Hall's claim within the parameters of England's "long reformation,"<sup>3</sup> more recent scholarship has demonstrated that those individuals most influential in inaugurating and establishing the reformation under Henry VIII—Vicegerent in Spirituals Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer—held in the 1530s what might confidently be labeled "Lutheran" views of the Sacrament.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore somewhat ironic that the eucharistic theology of the less prominent reformer Robert Barnes

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Marshall, "Identifying Religion in Henry VIII's England," in *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England*, ed. Peter Marshall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Basil Hall, "The Early Rise and Gradual Decline of Lutheranism in England" in *Reform and Reformation: England and the Continent, c. 1500-1750*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 109.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Alec Ryrie, "The Strange Death of Lutheran England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53 (2002): 64-92.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Peter N. Brooks, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of the Eucharist*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 3-37; Rory McEntegert, "England and the League of Schmalkalden, 1531-1547: Faction, Foreign Policy and the English Reformation" (PhD diss., London School of Economics, 1992), 293-297, 348; and Ryrie, "Strange Death," 69-73.

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(1495–1540), the man so often championed as a rare sixteenth-century “English Lutheran,”<sup>5</sup> remains less clearly understood.

### I. The Current Debate on Barnes

To be sure, even if there were no evidence to illuminate Barnes’ eucharistic theology, there would remain good reason to associate him with broadly Lutheran views. As an Augustinian friar in Cambridge, Barnes was a known associate of more than one distributor of illicit “Lutheran” literature. He was himself arrested in February 1526 for an offensive sermon preached late in the previous year, a sermon later determined to be, at least in part, cribbed from one of Luther’s printed homilies.<sup>6</sup> When he escaped captivity in 1528 he fled immediately to the continent, and by the summer of 1530 was lodging with the Wittenberg pastor Johann Bugenhagen. For the next several years Barnes was frequently in and out of Wittenberg, even matriculating at the university in 1533. It was also in Wittenberg that Barnes wrote and published two extant Latin works—one including a preface by Bugenhagen, the other a preface by Luther himself.

Such mutual indications of approval between Barnes and the Wittenbergers partially explain the now frequent descriptions of Barnes as “Luther’s English connection” or, with allusions to the eventual manner of his death, a “Lutheran martyr.”<sup>7</sup> But beyond the biographical details there are clear doctrinal affinities as well, and arguments for Barnes’ status as a Lutheran frequently—and relatively safely—revolve especially around his doctrine of justification. With regard to his eucharistic theology, however, twentieth-century scholars frequently described him in mutually exclusive terms: as a Zwinglian,<sup>8</sup> as “the orthodox Lutheran,”<sup>9</sup> and even as one whose theology reveals “an unblushing avowal of belief in

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<sup>5</sup> Hence, for example, the recent inclusion of his name among the “saints” commemorated in the *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), xiii.

<sup>6</sup> John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe* [hereafter *A&M*], 8 vols., ed. J. Pratt (London: Religious Tract Society, 1877), 5:415.

<sup>7</sup> See, most obviously, James Edward McGoldrick, *Luther’s English Connection: The Reformation Thought of Robert Barnes and William Tyndale* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1979), and Neelak S. Tjernagel, *Lutheran Martyr* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> James Gairdner, *Lollardy and the Reformation in England*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1908–1913), 1:530 n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 65. Porter introduces particular confusion by calling Barnes “the orthodox Lutheran,” while on the same page stating that the sacramentarians John Frith and John Lambert “were of the school of Robert Barnes.”

transubstantiation."<sup>10</sup> Such confusion among modern commentators is partially understandable, as it is evident that even Barnes' sixteenth-century contemporaries were less than consistent in describing his theology. Thomas More, for instance, early on charged him with being "of zwinglius secte agaynste the sacrament of the auter, bylevynge that it is nothyng but bare brede."<sup>11</sup> The young Henrician martyr Richard Mekins claimed to believe on the basis of Barnes' teaching that the bread remained present in the Sacrament even with Christ's body. The martyrologist John Foxe, on whose *Acts and Monuments* depends much of the information pertaining to Barnes' life, perhaps indicates that Barnes never ceased to confess transubstantiation.<sup>12</sup>

In the context of this confusion, and especially in response to William Clebsch's assertion that such inconsistent interpretations were largely the result of an inconsistency on the part of Barnes himself,<sup>13</sup> Carl Trueman attempted in a 1995 essay to demonstrate that Robert Barnes remained throughout his career a proponent of a distinctly Lutheran doctrine of the Sacrament.<sup>14</sup> While that essay succeeded in casting serious doubt on the methodology by which Clebsch concluded Barnes had eventually abandoned a confession of Christ's corporal presence, it in fact offered surprisingly little evidence to establish that the converse was true. Nor did it address the possibility to which Foxe seems to have alluded, and which Norman Fisher explicitly asserted: that Barnes maintained a belief in the corporal presence of Christ because he never ceased to confess the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation.

In light of the above, it seems not wholly unreasonable to suggest that the question of Robert Barnes' doctrine of the Eucharist has not been decisively answered. The present essay is therefore intended to address this question anew, reviewing the evidence regularly adduced in earlier examinations of Barnes' thought, but also drawing on evidence previously ignored. An investigation not only of Barnes' own words, but also of important yet often overlooked circumstantial evidence, will, it is

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<sup>10</sup> N. H. Fisher, "The Contribution of Robert Barnes to the English Reformation" (master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 1950), 327.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas More, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* [hereafter CWM], ed. Clarence H. Miller, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963-), 8/1:302.

<sup>12</sup> On Foxe and Mekins, see nn. 63, 65, and 66 below.

<sup>13</sup> William A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 68-69.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Trueman "'The Saxons be sore on the affirmative': Robert Barnes on the Lord's Supper," in *The Bible, the Reformation and the Church*, ed. W. P. Stephens (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 290-307.

suggested, satisfactorily demonstrate that Barnes is indeed best viewed as a consistent proponent of a Lutheran theology of the Sacrament. By way of introducing such an argument, some historical and theological context may prove helpful.

## II. The Influence of Luther

Not only inaugurating the eucharistic controversies of sixteenth-century England, but, arguably, the controversies of the English Reformation as a whole, was the 1520 publication of Martin Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.<sup>15</sup> Almost immediately after its publication on the continent, this treatise was being read across the channel in London's Steelyard and in the University of Cambridge. It was also, perhaps more surprisingly, being read in the King's court. More surprising still, it was Henry VIII whose name was attached to the first English refutation of Luther's treatise, aptly titled *An Assertion of the Seven Sacraments*.<sup>16</sup> While both Luther's and Henry's tomes addressed each of the medieval sacraments in turn, by far the greatest number of pages in both works was given over to the Sacrament of the Altar. It was under this *locus* that Luther had outlined his condemnation of the Roman theology which, he claimed, held the Mass in a threefold captivity.

Most significant for the investigation below is Luther's approach to what he described as the second captivity in which the Mass was held: that pertaining to the doctrine of transubstantiation. While fully aware of Rome's insistence on this doctrine, Luther judged error on this point "less grievous [than communion in one kind] as far as the conscience is concerned."<sup>17</sup> Though he will complain that transubstantiation was only dogmatized after "the pseudo philosophy of Aristotle began to make its inroads into the church," and though he will profess a preference for Pierre D'Ailly's theory that the bread and wine can remain even with the presence of Christ's body and blood, he clearly states that he "will permit every man to hold either of these opinions, as he chooses."<sup>18</sup> Unconcerned

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition* [hereafter LW], 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 36:11-126, and Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Schriften* [hereafter WA], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-1993), 6:497-573.

<sup>16</sup> *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* (Rome, 1521; facsimile: Ridgewood, NJ, 1966). This 1521 Roman edition reprints the *editio princeps* (London, 1521), prefacing it with a papal letter to Henry.

<sup>17</sup> LW 36:28 (WA 6:508, 1-2).

<sup>18</sup> LW 36:31, 30 (WA 6:509, 29-30; 508, 27).

with defining the mode of presence or the manner in which it occurs, Luther's confession is summed up with a rhetorical question: "Why do we not put aside such curiosity and cling simply to the words of Christ, willing to remain in ignorance of what takes place here and content that the real body of Christ is present by virtue of the words?"<sup>19</sup>

King Henry, who had read the *Babylonian Captivity* early in 1521, was not slow to respond to Luther's attack. His *Assertio*, an orderly presentation and rejection of Luther's own assertions, defended the received doctrine of transubstantiation as the only orthodox interpretation of Christ's sacramental presence; it was to be believed, he insisted, "because the church has believed this from the beginning."<sup>20</sup> By simply but forcefully reiterating received dogma the King presented himself as both a capable and faithful defender of Roman theology.<sup>21</sup> In return he was rewarded by the papacy with an honorary title that explicitly declared as much: "Defender of the Faith."

Henry's defense of the Mass against Luther in the sixteenth century differed very little from the English defense mounted against the Lollards in the previous century. Heirs and proponents of the posthumously condemned Oxford theologian John Wyclif, the Lollards were deemed heretical especially for denying the bodily presence of Christ in the Sacrament. The Twelve Conclusions of 1395, a concise statement of the Lollard position, rejected any corporal presence of Christ as a "pretended miracle," which leads men into idolatry "because they think that the Body of Christ which is never away from heaven could by power of the priest's word be enclosed essentially in a little bread."<sup>22</sup> It was this denial of the bodily presence, further promoted in popular works such as *Wyclif's Wicket*, that was to become "one of the most generally and strongly held convictions of the English Lollards."<sup>23</sup> The focus of the *Wicket* is succinctly noted in the tract's subtitle: "A verye brefe diffinition of these wordes. Hoc

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<sup>19</sup> LW 36:33 (WA 6:510, 32-34).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., *Assertio*, sig. e3r-v.

<sup>21</sup> For the debate about whether Henry himself in fact authored the *Assertio*, and for commentary on the work's international importance, see Richard Rex, "The English Campaign Against Luther in the 1520s," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser. 39 (1989), 85-106.

<sup>22</sup> *Documents Illustrative of English Church History*, ed. H. Gee and W. J. Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1896), 127.

<sup>23</sup> David Loades, "Martin Luther and the Early Stages of the English Reformation," in *Politics, Censorship and the English Reformation*, ed. David Loades (London: Pinter, 1991), 155.

*est corpus meum.*"<sup>24</sup> The anonymous author rejects any belief that "that thyng that is not God to daye shalbe God to morowe,"<sup>25</sup> and therefore concludes that the words of consecration cannot be understood literally; instead, "the breade is the fygure or mynde of Christes bodye in earth."<sup>26</sup>

While English Lollardy survived past the fifteenth century, the eucharistic views characteristic of the movement fell increasingly under the label of Sacramentarianism in the sixteenth century. Developed on the continent by Swiss theologians such as Ulrich Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius, this theology was also offered to an English speaking audience in the works of William Tyndale, George Joye, and others. A representative presentation of English Sacramentarian thought is found in the anonymous 1533 publication, *The Supper of the Lord*, variously attributed to both Tyndale and Joye.<sup>27</sup> As had the Lollards, the author of *The Supper* concludes that any reference to Christ's corporal presence, whether in Scripture or in the Mass, can only be understood "in an allegorical sense."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, when turning to the words of institution, he argues that "*est* is taken for *significat*."<sup>29</sup> In stark contrast to a bodily presence, *The Supper* maintains a "bodily absence."<sup>30</sup> The assertions, whether Roman or German, "that so great a body should be contained in so little a place, and that one body should be at once in so many places" are simply dismissed as absurdities.<sup>31</sup>

By December of 1525, when Robert Barnes first revealed publicly his reformist leanings in a Cambridge sermon, and even more so by the summer of 1530 when he published the initial outline of his own theology, each of the eucharistic theologies outlined above was well known in England. The long held and often violently defended position of England's church and King would certainly have been an alluring option for any Englishman who sought royal favor or ecclesiastical promotion—or perhaps even for any who sought to meet an end other than martyrdom. Alternatively, the Sacramentarian theology of the Swiss proved for many

<sup>24</sup> *Wycklyffes Wycket* (Nuremberg, 1546; reprinted: Oxford, 1828), sig. A3r.

<sup>25</sup> *Wycklyffes Wycket*, sig. B1r.

<sup>26</sup> *Wycklyffes Wycket*, sig. B5v.

<sup>27</sup> For the authorship debate, see W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, "Who Wrote 'The Supper of the Lord'?" *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (1960): 77-91, and J. F. Mozley, "The Supper of the Lord, 1533," *Moreana* 3/9 (1966): 11-16.

<sup>28</sup> *The Supper of the Lord*, in Tyndale's *Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue, etc.*, ed. H. Walter (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1850), 228.

<sup>29</sup> *The Supper*, 248-249.

<sup>30</sup> *The Supper*, 253.

<sup>31</sup> *The Supper*, 261.

to be an equally attractive option on account of its close resemblance to native Lollard opinions.<sup>32</sup> Is there, then, any good evidence to support the assertion that Barnes eschewed both of these options and instead consistently held to a Lutheran "middle way" with regard to the Eucharist?

### III. The Eucharist in the Writings of Barnes

In the early 1530s, when the English Reformation debates were well under way, Robert Barnes wrote to the conservative polemicist and lay-theologian Thomas More, promising that he would soon publish a treatise setting forth his own theology of the Eucharist.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, this was a promise that went unfulfilled. The Sacrament is not, however, a subject which goes unmentioned in Barnes' extant works. The first of these, his *Sententiae ex Doctoribus Collectae*, was published in 1530 by the Wittenberg printer Joseph Klug.<sup>34</sup> Under the pseudonym Antonius Anglus, Barnes collected and compiled patristic opinions on a variety of *loci*, with brief marginal annotations reflecting his own thoughts. In the following year, while the Wittenberg pastor Johann Bugenhagen saw two German editions of the *Sententiae* through the press, *A Supplicatyon Made by Robert Barnes* was published in Antwerp for an English reading audience.<sup>35</sup> A significantly revised edition of this *Supplicatyon* was published three years later by the London printer John Bydell.<sup>36</sup> It has largely been on account of the revisions made in 1534 that Barnes' eucharistic theology has become a matter of some contention. Questions are raised not only on the basis of

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<sup>32</sup> On this point, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, "Can the English Think for Themselves? The Roots of English Protestantism," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 30, no. 1 (2001): 17-20.

<sup>33</sup> CWM 7:255-256.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Barnes [pseud., Antonius Anglus], *Sententiae ex doctoribus collectae* (Wittenberg, 1530).

<sup>35</sup> *A Supplicatyon Made by Robert Barnes* (n.p., n.d. [Antwerp, 1531]). Though the first edition of the *Supplicatyon* lacks any indication of where, when, or by whom it was printed, the date is certainly before November 1531, by which time Thomas Cromwell had received copies in England. See *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* [hereafter *LP*], ed. J. S. Brewer and J. Gairdner (London: Public Record Office, 1936), 5:533. Regarding location, I follow the majority opinion in favoring the Antwerp printer Simon Cock. See W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, "The Sixteenth-Century Editions of *A Supplication unto King Henry the Eighth* by Robert Barnes, D.D.," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 3 (London, 1963), 134 and n. 5; J. F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (London: Macmillan, 1937), 201 n.; and Charles S. Anderson, "The Person and Position of Dr. Robert Barnes, 1495-1540" (ThD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1962), 146-147.

<sup>36</sup> *A Supplication unto the Most Gracyous Prynce H. the VIII* (London, 1534).



dissimilarities between the two editions of his English work, however, but also due to differences between this work and his earlier *Sententiae*. In that 1530 work, Barnes had arranged his patristic citations under nineteen *loci*, three of which pertain to the Eucharist. He addressed reception in both kinds, Christ's presence in the Sacrament, and the historical origins of the Roman Mass.<sup>37</sup> The 1531 edition of the *Supplicatyon* includes only the first of these articles. The *Supplicacion* of 1534 omits even this. As previously noted, some have argued that these changes reflect a modification of Barnes' own views.<sup>38</sup> Others contend that such alterations are more a matter of Barnes' cautious politics than an indication of fundamental changes in his theology.<sup>39</sup> A fresh examination of the evidence is therefore in order.

In Barnes' fullest treatment of the Eucharist, found in his *Sententiae*, there can be little doubt that he holds to a belief in Christ's true, corporal presence in the Sacrament.<sup>40</sup> This is made clear not only in the patristic citations he chose to include, but also in the brief commentary that accompanies them. Even while denouncing the Roman theology of the Mass, he does not hesitate to refer to the Sacrament of Christ's body, noting that "the words by which the body is made were given by the Lord himself."<sup>41</sup> Justifying such language are the catechetical questions and answers of Athanasius in the fourth century:

What in fact is the bread? It is the body of Christ. What is given to those who partake? Without a doubt, the body of Christ.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This last point is also addressed throughout Barnes' final publication, the *Vitae Romanorum Pontificum* (Wittenberg, 1536), where it becomes something of a leitmotif in his history of the papacy.

<sup>38</sup> See especially Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants*, 68-69, and Hall, "Lutheranism in England," 110.

<sup>39</sup> See Trueman, "Robert Barnes on the Lord's Supper," 296, 300-301. See also Rainer Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 121.

<sup>40</sup> The choice of the adjectival "true" is simply governed by Barnes' own use of the term in the title of article seventeen in his *Sententiae*: "In Sacramento altaris est verum corpus Christi." It should not, *a priori*, be construed as something other than what may be called a "real" presence. In an otherwise outstanding work, Peter Brooks misleadingly implies a clear sixteenth-century distinction between a real (corporal) presence and a true (spiritual) presence. See Brooks, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of the Eucharist*, 38-71; for a corrective analysis, see Dairmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 181-183, 392.

<sup>41</sup> Barnes, *Sententiae*, sig. K5r.

<sup>42</sup> Barnes, *Sententiae*, sig. K4r.

Against opinions that the bread merely represents the Lord's body, or that this is simply a "spiritual" body, the graphic language of the Byzantine father Theophylactus is brought forward:

He certainly did not say, this is a figure, but this is my body. Although it seems to us bread, it is in fact transformed by an ineffable operation. Because we are weak and loathe to eat raw flesh, especially human flesh, it therefore appears to be bread; but it is flesh.<sup>43</sup>

By way of explanation, Christology is introduced with Augustine's opinion that just as "of the virgin the body of Christ was made true flesh by the Holy Spirit, so also by the same is the body of Christ mystically consecrated from the substance of bread and wine."<sup>44</sup> Not only does Barnes thus compare Christ's incarnate body with that of the consecration; he goes on to equate them. He calls upon the testimony of Augustine and Ambrose in support of the contention that the body on the altar is that born of the virgin, which suffered, died, rose, and ascended.<sup>45</sup>

While Barnes' quotations and commentary point unequivocally to a belief in a corporal presence, they nowhere give any indication of his thoughts regarding the status of the bread after consecration. A belief in transubstantiation, therefore, cannot be excluded on the basis of the text alone. Circumstances related to the production of the *Sententiae*, however, mitigate against associating it too closely with any position other than the Lutheran. Bugenhagen notes in his glowing preface to the *Sententiae* that Barnes was at work on the book while living under his roof.<sup>46</sup> That it was written in Wittenberg, published there, and promoted by the town pastor strongly suggests that the Lutherans understood it to be in harmony with their own position. Especially in 1530, only a few months after the presentation of the Augsburg Confession and only one year after the Marburg Colloquy, the Wittenbergers would not have been reading sacramental theology uncritically.

Although Barnes did not take up Christ's sacramental presence under a separate heading in his *Supplicatyon* of the next year, his references to the Eucharist in other articles reveal no hints of a changed opinion. He constantly speaks of the "blessyd boddy" and "holy bloude" of Christ;<sup>47</sup> when mentioning the cup, he variously refers to Christ's "blessyd blood,"

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<sup>43</sup> Barnes, *Sententiae*, sig. I7r.

<sup>44</sup> Barnes, *Sententiae*, sig. I6r.

<sup>45</sup> Barnes, *Sententiae*, sig. I8r.

<sup>46</sup> Barnes, *Sententiae*, sig. A2v.

<sup>47</sup> Barnes, *Supplicatyon* (1530), fol. 128v.

"glorious bloud," and "swet bloude."<sup>48</sup> He is willing to grant the logic of the scholastic argument that Christ's body contains within it his blood; yet he insists that Christ's mandate "is not to reseve the bloude in the boddy wonly / but to reseve the bloude (after his institucion) by it selfe out of the cuppe."<sup>49</sup> In some respects, it seems that Barnes actually makes his position of 1530 more explicit. Whereas he had previously quoted Athanasius' opinion that all who partake of the bread receive Christ's body, he now even more specifically allows for a *manducatio impiorum*. Criticizing Rome's explanation that withholding the cup prevents Christ's blood from being spilled, he argues that there are far greater dangers in offering Christ's body to unbelievers.<sup>50</sup> Such a position not only distances Barnes from those who hold a symbolic view of the elements; it also distinguishes him from those who argue that Christ is present spiritually and only on account of the communicant's faith.

As noted above, the 1534 *Supplicacion* contains no article on eucharistic doctrine or practice. The suggestion that this omission indicates a revision of Barnes' theology has also been noted. Against this argument from silence, however, stands evidence found in the correspondence of his contemporaries. Letters related to the arrest and trial of John Frith shed light on Barnes' thought between 1531 and 1534. Thomas More, who had previously charged Barnes with sharing the Sacramentarian heresy of Frith, tentatively admits that he may have been mistaken. His comments on a letter received from Barnes in 1532 deserve to be quoted at length.

And also frere Barns, albe it that as ye wote well he is in many other thinges a brother of thys yonge mannes secte / yet in thys heresy he sore abhorreth hys heresy / or ellys he lyeth hym selfe. For at hys laste beyng here, he wrote a letter to me of hys own hand / wherin he wryteth that I lay that heresy wrongfully to his charge / and therin he taketh wytnesse of god and his consyence / and sheweth hym self so sore greved therwyth, that any man shold so repute hym by my wrytyng, that he sayth he wyll in my reproche make a boke agaynst me, wherin he wyll professe and proteste hys fayth concernyng thys blessed sacrament. By whych boke it shall he saith appere, that I have sayd untrewly of hym, and that he abhorreth thys abomynable heresy.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Barnes, *Supplicatyon* (1530), fol. 130r.

<sup>49</sup> Barnes, *Supplicatyon* (1530), fol. 127v.

<sup>50</sup> Barnes, *Supplicatyon* (1530), fol. 132r; and see 1 Corinthians 11:27-30, which Barnes apparently has in mind.

<sup>51</sup> CWM 7:255-256.

The divergence between Barnes and Frith on this point was also apparent to William Tyndale, who clearly understood how such differences could be exploited by polemicists such as More. He wrote to Frith:

Of the presence of Christ's body in the Sacrament meddle as little as you can, that there appear no division among us. Barnes will be hot against you. The Saxons be sore on the affirmative.<sup>52</sup>

Tyndale's note of a doctrinal difference between Frith and Barnes is unquestionably enlightening. Equally illuminating is his explicit association of the latter with the theology of the Saxons. In the light of Barnes' matriculation at the University of Wittenberg in 1533, he is undoubtedly correct in alluding to Barnes' Lutheranism.

In addition to these comments on Barnes' thought in the years leading up to the 1534 *Supplicacion*, there are also important clues to be found in the events following its publication. In the following year Barnes was engaged as an English ambassador to the Germans, with the purpose of discussing a political and theological alliance between the two states. Of the documents emerging from the discussions of the next few years, Barnes was involved in the drafting of three which clearly align him with a Lutheran position. The first of these, the Christmas Articles of 1535, does not deal specifically with individual doctrines. The articles do, however, simply ask for King Henry's acceptance and promotion of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. Barnes' signature is included among those subscribing this request.<sup>53</sup> While the Christmas Articles did not address specific doctrinal *loci*, these were soon taken up in the Wittenberg Articles of 1536. Although the debates leading up to their drafting resulted in no consensus on the subjects of *utraquism* or private Masses, Barnes and his English companions did confess with the Germans that:

We firmly believe and teach that in the sacrament of the Lord's body and blood, Christ's body and blood are truly, substantially and really present under the species of bread and wine, and that under the same species they are truly and bodily presented and distributed to all those who receive the sacrament.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> LP 6:403.

<sup>53</sup> See *Corpus Reformatorum, Philippi Melanthonis Opera*, ed. C. G. Bretschneider (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1836), 2:1032-1036.

<sup>54</sup> *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. G. Bray (Cambridge: James Clark and Co., 1994), 137.

The same would be confessed again in the Thirteen Articles of 1538.<sup>55</sup> Especially significant is that in this last round of discussions, which took place in England and included several traditionalist English bishops, Barnes was assigned by the King to argue on the German side of the debate. This implicit acknowledgement that Barnes' theology did not accord with Rome's is especially revealing in the light of another royal decision of the same year, one which again makes plain that his theology did not differ from Rome's to the point of Sacramentarianism.

In October 1538 Thomas Cranmer was appointed head of a commission for the suppression of English Sacramentarianism. Also appointed to the commission was Robert Barnes, who, before the next month had passed, would set in motion events leading to the condemnation and subsequent death of John Lambert.<sup>56</sup> Lambert, who had previously spent time with Tyndale and Frith in Antwerp, returned to England as a proponent of their eucharistic theology. His views became the center of public controversy in 1538 when he challenged the sacramental preaching of John Taylor, rector of St. Peter's Cornhill. When Taylor turned to Barnes for support, he was encouraged to bring the matter before Cranmer. With Barnes' awareness of the King's intent and Cranmer's theology, it cannot be doubted that he was in disagreement with Lambert, who denied "the very body of God to be in the said Sacrament in corporal substance, but only to be there spiritually."<sup>57</sup> Much more likely, Barnes was of the same mind as Cranmer, to whom he referred the case. Some hint of Cranmer's position on the Sacrament at this time is evident in a letter of August 1538. He wrote to Thomas Cromwell, commenting on the trial of Adam Damply, whose confession of the Eucharist had also been questioned. He reports that Damply did not deny the bodily presence of Christ; he did, however, deny transubstantiation. Cranmer confesses that "therein I think he taught but the truth."<sup>58</sup> A generation later John Foxe drew what seems the logical conclusion in his

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<sup>55</sup> *Documents of the English Reformation*, 192: "Concerning the Eucharist, we continue to believe and teach that in the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, the body and blood of Christ are truly, substantially, and really present under the forms of bread and wine. And that under these forms they are truly and really offered and administered to those who received the sacrament, whether they be good or evil."

<sup>56</sup> For the commission, see *LP* 13/2:498. For the Lambert affair, *A&M* 5:227–250. For Barnes' role in the examination of English Sacramentarians even as early as 1535, see *LP* 8:771.

<sup>57</sup> *LP* 13/2:851.

<sup>58</sup> *LP* 13/2:97. On the weight of this phrase, see MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 182.

summary of the Damplic affair; he referred to Cranmer as "then yet but a Lutheran" in sacramental theology.<sup>59</sup>

Ten years after his first published confession of the Eucharist, Barnes would reaffirm his belief in Christ's bodily presence one last time. Having failed to negotiate a binding settlement with the Germans, Barnes seemed to have outlived his usefulness to the King. A prolonged and public dispute with the conservative bishop Stephen Gardiner over the doctrine of justification was enough to seal his fate. Arrested and condemned by Act of Attainder, he met his death at the stake on 30 July 1540. There he made his last profession of faith. A witness recorded his confession of the Sacrament:

After this there was one that asked him, what he said of the sacrament of the altar. Then said he to Mr. Pope, which was there present: "Mr. Pope, ye know, and Mr. Riche, if ye be alive, that there was one accused before my lord chancellor for denying of the sacrament; and for fault of a better, I was assigned to the examination of him in the gallery. And after long reasoning and disputation I declared and said, that the sacrament being rightly used and according to scripture doth, after the word spoken by the priest, change the substance of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Were not these my words?" said he. "Yea," said Mr. Pope. "Then bear me witness," said he, "that I err not in the sacrament."<sup>60</sup>

That Barnes here mentions the substance of bread and wine being *changed into* the body and blood of Christ has been read by some as a clear confession of transubstantiation. This is indeed what the words seem to suggest, and it would not be impossible for an early English evangelical to maintain such a belief; this opinion, for example, is often ascribed to Barnes' own Cambridge mentor Thomas Bilney.<sup>61</sup> There are also indications that those who read and reprinted this confession were uncomfortable with the overtones in the language. Luther's fond remembrance of Barnes was prefaced to a German translation of the martyr's last confession that considerably modified its content. In Luther's translation Barnes was only allowed to confess that "the true body of Christ, which was conceived and born of the virgin Mary, exists [in the

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<sup>59</sup> A&M 5:501.

<sup>60</sup> *Remains of Myles Coverdale*, ed. G. Pearson (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846), 417.

<sup>61</sup> See A&M 4:649 for Foxe's attribution of this belief to Bilney. In this attribution, he is followed by A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 79, and Harold S. Darby, "Thomas Bilney," *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 167 (1942): 74. For an alternative interpretation of the evidence, however, cf. Corey D. Maas, "Thomas Bilney: 'simple good soul'?" *The Tyndale Society Journal* 27 (July 2004): 15-16.

Sacrament] in a miraculous manner."<sup>62</sup> John Foxe, in his account of Barnes' trial and execution, also records his last words. Unlike Luther, however, he does not modify Barnes' confession of the Sacrament; he simply omits it altogether.

It is not unreasonable to think Foxe suppressed this portion of Barnes' testimony in order to avoid the embarrassing language of transubstantiation.<sup>63</sup> Though that interpretation is not unreasonable, an equally likely explanation might be forwarded on the basis of the context in which Barnes' words are found. It is noteworthy that his involvement with commissions for the suppression of Sacramentarianism is nowhere mentioned in the martyrologist's life of Barnes. Yet Barnes himself alludes to this in his confession of the Sacrament. This may have been reason enough for Foxe to omit it, especially as it occurs at the point of Barnes' own death. Foxe's keen sense of divine providence may have persuaded him to avoid the obvious irony of the judge having become the judged. Reference to his role as an examiner may even explain Barnes' own choice of words. Interestingly, he makes no mention of the Sacrament until asked by a bystander. Then, rather than simply offering his confession, he requests confirmation of words spoken in the course of a previous examination. Having been commissioned by the crown, and being well aware of the King's own views on the matter in question, it would not be surprising if Barnes had at that time phrased his opinion so as not to offend royal ears. Indicative of his desire to avoid conflict in the matter is his contemporary Richard Hilles' indication that Barnes had spoken against the 1539 Act of Six Articles – which forbade upon pain of death any denial of transubstantiation – though he did so only in private.<sup>64</sup>

Hilles, who himself disagreed with Barnes on the Sacrament, also provides enlightening commentary on another episode relative to Barnes' eucharistic theology. In 1541, shortly after a second commission for enforcing the Act of Six Articles went into effect, the young Richard Mekins was brought to trial. Hilles describes Mekins' heresy as consisting of "Lutheran opinions," saying that he did not reject Christ's corporal presence, but merely denied that the accident of the bread remained

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<sup>62</sup> *Bekanntnus dess Glaubens die Doctor Robertus Barus* (Wittenberg, 1540), sig. A3r.

<sup>63</sup> That Foxe believed Barnes to confess transubstantiation may be evident in his comment on the trial of Richard Mekins. Commenting on Mekins' testimony that he learned his doctrine of a non-transubstantiationary corporal presence from Barnes, Foxe says Barnes held no such view. He does not, however, describe what he understood Barnes' view to be. *A&M* 5:442 n. 3.

<sup>64</sup> *LP* 16:578.

without its substance.<sup>65</sup> Mekins claimed to have learned these "Lutheran opinions" from Robert Barnes.<sup>66</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

Upon a review of the evidence, it is not surprising that there should be some confusion regarding Barnes' theology of the Sacrament. Even the anonymous sixteenth-century polemicist whose broadside rejoiced at Barnes' downfall could only say, "But what he thought (the Sacrament was) I wyll not judge."<sup>67</sup> Some conclusions, however, can be made. Between 1530 and 1540, Barnes consistently maintained a belief in the true, corporal presence of Christ in the Sacrament. He was decidedly anti-Sacramentarian, but, as Henry and his conservative English bishops seemed to understand, he was never wholly in agreement with Rome. There is perhaps some merit to the description of his theology "not as Lutheran, but as anti-papal, although there is not sufficient evidence to enable us to determine exactly how he conceived of the mode of the eucharistic presence."<sup>68</sup> Contrasting Rome's insistence on transubstantiation with Luther's constant refusal to define a mode or method of presence, however, it might be proposed that Barnes' very ambiguity argues for an interpretation that places him within Luther's theological sphere. This last point should not be pressed too far; but, when weighed together with the extant literary and circumstantial evidence, the reading of Robert Barnes as one who consistently held "Lutheran opinions" remains by far the most satisfying among the available alternatives.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> LP 16:1204.

<sup>66</sup> A&M 5:442.

<sup>67</sup> *This Lytle Treatyse Declareth the Study of Barnes* (London, 1540).

<sup>68</sup> C. W. Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 96. McGoldrick, *Luther's English Connection*, 165, agrees that "it is difficult to tell the exact sense in which he believed Christ was present." Dugmore's refusal to call Barnes a Lutheran, however, is based primarily on Barnes' claim that he will cite only mutually accepted sources so as not to be dismissed out of hand as a Lutheran. Dugmore's reading quite misses the point. This phrase refers not to Barnes' theological conclusions, but to his methodological presuppositions. It is a plea for an objective reading. As such, it should probably be understood as an implicit admission by Barnes that he was indeed a Lutheran. See Dugmore, *Mass and the English Reformers*, 95, and cf. *Sententiae*, sig. K6v.

<sup>69</sup> It also makes unnecessary any explanation of why Barnes should be out of step with his closest associates both on the continent and in England: the Wittenberg theologians and the circle of Cranmer and Cromwell.