‘Ways of Lying’: Anne Askew and the Examinations

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I have redde the processe, whych is reported of them that knowe not the truth, to be my recantacyon. But as sure as the lorde lyveth. I never ment thynge lesse, than to recant. Notwithstandyng, thyss I confesse, that in my first troubles, I was examyned of the Byshopp of London aboute the sacrament. Yet had they no graunte of my mouth but thyss. That I beleved therin, as the worde of God ded bynde me to beleve. More had they never of me.

Anne Askew to John Lascelles, Summer 1546

In mid-summer 1546, a twenty-five-year-old woman wrote these words from her London prison in a letter attempting to reassure a friend of hers of her constancy in the face of martyrdom. Soon both she and her correspondent would be dead, burnt in spectacular fashion together with two other men as heretics. Anne Askew, the author of the letter, has since become one of the more famous of the Tudor Protestant martyrs, immortalised through the publication of what are purported to be autobiographical descriptions of her imprisonment, trials and condemnation, as well as various parts of her correspondence. John Lascelles, her correspondent, is by contrast a minor figure in English Protestant history, chiefly known for his privileged martyr status as Askew’s fire-fellow.

It is likely, however, that in life Lascelles was the dominant partner in his relationship with Askew. Very young, and an unprotected woman estranged from her marital household, Askew, in the mid-1540s, was a new and minor member of a thriving evangelical network in London, one which included Lascelles. This network revolved around the person and personality of the famous preacher and favourite of the king, Dr Edward Crome, rector of St Mary Aldermary Parish Church, and also included such notable Protestants as Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Shaxton. Lascelles was a courtier, ally of Thomas Cranmer and servant of the king’s Privy Chamber, and as such enjoyed a status that Askew could not have shared, even as the daughter of prominent Lincolnshire gentry (one possibly in disgrace because of her separation from her husband and ongoing attempt to secure a divorce). It has been suggested that Lascelles was Askew’s teacher, and it is likely that their relationship, which seems to have been close, if not specifically one of tutor and pupil, was not one of equals. Nevertheless, it is Askew, not Lascelles, who remains a prominent subject of modern scholarship, and it is not the purpose of this essay to buck the trend, restoring Lascelles to what might be his rightful place in the calendar of Tudor Protestant saints. Rather, this essay aims to restore Askew to her...
rightful place, as one of a community of persecuted Henrician heretics, whose example she followed in dealing with persecution, whose opinion she clearly valued and for whom she penned the account of her sufferings, published as *The First Examinacyon* and *The Lattre Examinacyon of Anne Askew*.4

Askew has been valued in modern scholarship for her singularity, her deviation from what we expect either of Tudor women or, more specifically, Tudor women martyrs. Her written work – or what has come to us as her writing – is prized as that rare commodity, a sixteenth-century, female voice, one published and therefore public. Askew is seen, therefore, as a *woman* who wrote down her own experiences, thus transmitting to the world her confrontations with male figures of authority, her subjective experience as a woman doing so and her necessarily feminine spirituality. The *Examinations* are read as revealing (or rather, failing to reveal) a personal, largely indefinable faith, bullied into serving the needs of magisterial (and male) Protestantism by the editing and commentary of Askew’s first editor, John Bale. In the process of appropriating the *Examinations* for his own purpose – and there is no evidence that anyone but he ever saw Askew’s original manuscripts – Bale, according to such interpretation, robs Askew of her expressed and female interiority, making of her a ‘univocal representation of reformist [and male] polemic’.5 Askew’s much-noted evasive strategy under interrogation is contrasted with Bale’s elucidation of her scriptural references – his assignment of ‘meaning’ to them: while *her* strategy reveals an unaffiliated interiority, an unfettered relationship with scripture and an awareness of women’s debarment from male doctrinal discourse, *his* distorts her representation (or lack thereof) of her faith, in the process denying her right (and thus arguably a woman’s right) to own it.

Critics of the *Examinations* often base their arguments on Askew’s tendency – or the tendency portrayed of Askew as she appears in them – to deflect direct questions in a series of interviews intended to encourage her to confess her heterodox beliefs, in particular her sacramentarianism:6 her rejection of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the sacrament of the altar. Crome and his associates, during the year that Askew died, were under scrutiny due in part to Crome’s public denunciations of the sacrifice of the Mass, denunciations which hinted at, but did not make explicit, his own sacramentarianism. Denial of the real presence was punishable by burning under the Act of Six Articles (1539), but by the mid-1540s English Lutheranism – which, while rejecting transubstantiation, retained belief in Christ’s corporal presence in the sacramental elements (alongside the still present bread and wine) – had begun giving way to its more radical rejection. With former Lutherans like Shaxton, Crome and other prominent churchmen abandoning the ship of Lutheran compromise, the Mass had, by 1546, become the ‘battleground’ on which reformers and conservatives confronted each other.7

In order to prosecute defendants, however, it was necessary to achieve indictment of them by a ‘quest’ or Grand Jury. Askew managed to avoid indictment when interviewed before a quest in March 1545, in a climate in which previous hostility towards heretics brought to trial had been replaced by a tendency towards sympathy for them, given the severity of the penalties demanded under the Six Articles.8 Either because of this, or, as according to the *Examinations*, because of her ability to confound her jurors, Askew avoided indictment, a fact which Paula McQuade has used as a premise for locating in the *Examinations* what she calls Askew’s ‘real brilliance’, her consistent foregrounding of her illegal imprisonment without formal indictment. McQuade argues convincingly

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that Askew’s continued use of evasion under examination constituted an attempt to avoid self-incrimination, making a compelling case for her being familiar enough with English law to attempt to use the system to her benefit.9

Nevertheless, and with a nod to McQuade, critics (focusing mainly on the *First Examinacyon*) continue to read Askew’s ‘silence’ as indicating a distinctly female and thus indefinable faith; her unwillingness to express herself as an inability to do so; her rejection of self-incrimination as a tactic ‘other’ than male. A woman imprisoned in a text, and singular among persecuted Henrician evangelicals, Askew exists alone, with little context apart from what we know of early-modern ideas about women. The *Examinations*, however, in themselves resist such interpretation. While Askew is described in them being accused under torture of membership in a community of evangelical women, she identifies herself instead as part of a network of men through her choice of correspondents, by requesting the counsel of Latimer in the *Lattre Examinacyon* and by identifying, in the *First*, men like Crome and David Whitehead as friends whose integrity she trusts. Indeed, while it is standard – and perhaps accurate – to historicise her persecution as part of a plot to incriminate as evangelical Queen Catherine Parr and some of her female courtiers, Askew was arrested with and died with sacramenterian men connected with Crome. When viewed through the lens of Askew’s known context, the *Examinations* becomes less a discrete record of female self-expression than an artefact of late-Henrician religious persecution, and its negotiation.

Leaving aside for the moment her clear and forceful utterances in the *Lattre Examinacyon*, by refusing to explicitly utter her faith in the *First*, Askew was participating in a strategy frequently and famously drawn upon by men, including a number of her apparent associates. Happily, these men left behind them what Askew did not: a variety of signed documents written by them, their interrogators and witnesses to their public statements, describing both their experiences and their strategies for survival. While Askew exists only briefly in Henrician public records, Crome, Latimer, Robert Wisdom, Thomas Becon and others left paper trails much more substantial than hers, outside the published texts that may or may not have been written by her, or even anyone who knew her. For Askew’s very authorship of the *Examinations* is a thorny issue in Askew studies, and in a recent study of John Foxe’s editing of the *Examinations* for the *Acts and Monuments*, Thomas Freeman and Sarah Wall warn that as texts of which no autograph manuscripts remain extant, they can neither be accepted in their surviving form as Askew’s nor read apart from her first two editors’ commentary and shaping: Foxe and, more importantly, Bale, must be considered not just as conduits of, but also as collaborators in, the *Examinations’* production.10 In effect, reading the *Examinations* as Askew’s is a risky business. This does not mean, however, that the *Examinations* are useless as a source for studying a historical Askew as opposed merely to one of her editors. Whatever it is that Askew wrote that became the *Examinations* was produced within a particular historical context, one not bound by the walls of the martyrologist’s study. If the published *Examinations* cannot be trusted accurately to reflect either her interrogations and prison experience (their declared subjects) or her distinctly female voice, they do, nevertheless, have their genesis in a historical time and place, one in which Askew existed, was persecuted, seems to have written something and was burnt. When considered against the experiences and strategies for survival of Askew’s evangelical contemporaries, the *Examinations* seem a plausible exercise in evangelical self-presentation, and in this they have a great deal to tell us.

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about what was happening when they were produced. While accepting the principle that
the Examinations, as published, were controlled, probably moulded, and possibly even
substantially altered by Bale, this article also embraces the agency in their production
of the historical Askew, a woman real and documented.

The central argument of this article is that Askew, whether as author or merely
subject of the Examinations of Anne Askew, was a liar. In the Examinations she both
uses and presents herself using ‘ways of lying’, as Perez Zagorin describes them,
first, under persecution, to try to avoid martyrdom, and then, when clearly faced with
it, to convince others of her constancy, past and present. While the strategies she
employed to do this have led to interpretations of her spirituality as fundamentally
inexpressible, Askew was, rather, very much a late-Henrician evangelical fighting for
her life, resorting at times to dishonesty in that fight, and showing herself doing so with
the knowledge that the strategies she employed — or showed herself employing — were
considered legitimate within and by her evangelical community. While Nicodemism —
the practice of outwardly conforming to the mandated religion of one’s country while
concealing one’s own religious convictions — was condemned by Jean Calvin and other
magisterial Protestant writers, dissimulation, as Zagorin argues, ‘appears as a central
feature of practically all forms of religious dissidence in the early modern era’. Such
dissimulation, however, took different forms, from casuistry (specious and overly subtle
reasoning) to hypocritical conformity to idolatrous practice. In effect, while idolatry
was inevitable for a Protestant Nicodemite, dissimulation did not necessarily imply a
willingness to commit idolatry; rather, the dissimulation practised by Askew as she
appears in the Examinations was of a sort employed and even recommended by her
contemporaries, men who would nevertheless have, at least in theory, drawn the line
at Nicodemism. As Zagorin notes, William Tyndale, the ‘father of the English bible’
himself, drew a distinction between sinful and non-sinful dissembling in his 1533
Exposition upon the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Chapters of Matthew, arguing that ‘to lye
also and to dissemble is not alwaye sinne’: when David, for example, told the king of
Philistine that he had robbed the Jews rather than admit to slaying the Amalchites, ‘that
lye was no more sinne, then it was to destroy the Amalekytes those deadly enemies of the
fayth of one almighty God’. While this is as far as Tyndale would go in acknowledging
the legitimacy of dissimulation for the sake of self-preservation, evangelicals more
central to the story of Askew and her Examinations went further, misrepresenting
themselves, feigning submission to authority in order to escape death, and justifying
and even praising what amounts to lying by omission: practising ‘discretion’ when
faced with persecution.

Edward Crome was notorious during the 1540s for his numerous ‘false’ public
recantations, which inspired one Londoner to write to his brother of ‘Dr Crome’s
canting, recanting, decanting, or rather double decanting’. Susan Wabuda has skilfully
traced his three ambiguous recantations, along with his ultimate capitulation of June
1546, arguing that his strategy of public dissimulation was a common one shared by
many of his evangelical associates who managed ‘to satisfy . . . recantation, and also
in the same sermons to utter out the truth’. Crome was motivated by a desire to save
himself, but while doing so also to convince others of his strength of faith. In 1531,
for example, he had his own written statement of faith, produced under compulsion,
printed for distribution as a means to reinforce his peers’ belief in his steadfastness,
and he frequently lamented rumours of his submission. In a forced statement of May
1546, intended by the authorities as a recantation, he makes this explicit, according to a witness of the event:

He stode upp and saide these words, ‘Worshippfull audience I come not hither to recant nor yet am I commanded to recant nor god willing I will recant yet not with standing . . . men have sent letters abrode informing their frynds that I shoulde recant to the great slander of gods worde’, then [he expressed] the wish that they ‘wolde send halfe so many letters enformyn theyr frynds that I have not recanted’.17

When Crome finally and unequivocally recanted in June 1546, in the ugly aftermath of his final false recantation of the previous month,18 he was compelled to admit to having approached his earlier statements, not ‘with a symple mynde according to the true sense and meaning of them but having one meanynge secreatelye in myne harte knowynge in my conscience the sense and meaning of the articles to be contrarie to the same’. He used, he admitted, ‘collusion and colour’ to ‘appeare bothe to mantayne myne owne former evyl opynyn and neverthelesse to satysfie my promise’.19 This admission must have caused Crome profound embarrassment: the implications for members of the evangelical community forced into such humiliation as his is evident in the reactions to their joint statements, made in July 1543, of the noted propagandist Thomas Becon, and Robert Wisdom, a friend of Crome’s also linked to Askew.20 Flanked by Wisdom and a third reformer, Robert Singleton, Becon offered a lengthy, but clearly disingenuous recantation. Its substance amounts to a wordy recital of his ‘heretical’ writings accompanied by the destruction of various of his books, but Becon avoids declaring his writing false or incorrect, rather using the occasion as an opportunity to restate his beliefs, for example:

In the same booke speakinge of the confession of our faythe, I say mooste sedytiouslye theese woordes folowinge noo menacyng woordis noo imprisonment, noo cheynes noo fetters noo . . . faggott no fyer oughte to pluck us from this confession no tyrannye oughte soo to be feared that godd . . . shulde not be confessed as thoughe theese punyshements were used againste the true confession of faihfe. And therefore I cutte that booke also herein peeces.21

Wisdom, on the other hand, offered an unequivocal recantation written for him by the Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner. In his statement he was compelled to acknowledge, as Crome would be in 1546, the reality of the problem of false confession: ‘howsoever I have counterfett before, thynck not that I counterfett now, for I declare unto you playnely what I am’.22 Utterly humiliated (especially in light of the fact that in pursuing him Gardiner made public an earlier but secret recantation performed before Edmund Bonner), Wisdom produced when released from prison the ‘Revocatyon of that shamfull byll that Wincheste divised and Wisdome reedde’, in which he both apologises for his recantation and attempts to explain his past and present weakness, asking to be ‘reconciled to the trewe churche of Christ’.23 In a 1951 article, Sherwin Bailey questions Wisdom’s dangerous decision to write and distribute the ‘Revocatyon’, contrasting him with Becon, who seems to have ‘regarded the affair of July with complete indifference’.24 Bailey suggests a reason for the difference was the true apostasy of Wisdom’s recantation against the deliberate falseness of Becon’s, a falseness recognised by their community. Bailey’s argument resonates with Wabuda’s in that Crome’s recantations were not ‘self-serving betrayals’, but were rather used by him as opportunities to proclaim his faith for the benefit of and with the approval of his community. Among these men false recantation was clearly an accepted part
of the rhythm of evangelical life, but in 1543, having truly recanted, deviating from that rhythm, as Crome would three years later, Wisdom salvaged his experience by producing the ‘Revocabation’.

A similar need seems to underlie the Askew Examinations and possibly motivated their production.25 For following her condemnation of June 1546, when she had been tortured and was waiting to die, a secret of hers was made public: her embarrassing recantation of March 1545 – unpublished, as had been Wisdom’s – coming as it did between the release it earned her and her subsequent reimprisonment and condemnation.26 A heretic to her enemies, she was now apostata to her friends, because she had saved her life by denying her faith and she could do so still.27 If the public announcement of her recantation was not bad enough, it is clear that in light of its publication Lascelles had questioned her courage. The Examinations, produced after publication of Askew’s recantation, confirm both her strength of faith and her recantation as false.

Askew is shown rather apologetically describing signing her confession in the First Examinacyon and, again, in a letter to Lascelles included in the Lattre. When given the paper by Bonner to sign, she claims in the Examinations to have insisted to him that she believed, ambiguously, so much ‘as the holye scripture doth agre to’, asking him to add this to the confession. Upon his refusal, however, and under pressure from him and her supporters to sign, Askew did so, as she recalled: ‘I Anne Askewe do beleve all maner thynges contayned in the faythe of the Catholyck churche’. In a fury, she reports, Bonner responded, ‘that I was a woman, and that he was nothynge deceyved in me’.28 Within this exchange, by her appeal to the ‘Catholyck churche’, – the universal church of Christ – Askew is shown acting the part of the pretended recanter, a role she had seen played by men she respected: she signed a confession of faith written by another which did not reflect her beliefs, able to do so in conscience through the addition of a few ambiguous words. Bonner in this version of events did not reject Askew’s reliance upon the ‘Catholyck churche’, and he eventually released her, but he clearly understood her deception, as he made plain. The reader of the Examinations is assured that while she signed a confession in order to save her life, Askew did not betray her faith.

Askew’s addendum is missing from the official version of her confession, as copied into Bonner’s register, making of it ‘true’ apostasy.29 This troubling fact underlies her distressed letter to Lascelles, included among the documents comprising the Lattre Examinacyon. In it, she raises three points: she assures Lascelles that her faith is such that she does not fear death despite his concerns to the contrary; she tells him that she has heard that the king is angry that she had been tortured; and she informs him, ‘I have rede the processe, whych is reported of them that knowe not the truthe, to be my recantacyon. But as sure as the lorde lyveth. I never ment thynge lesse, than to recant’.30 She then describes the circumstances of her signature as they appear in the First Examinacyon. The tone of her letter is embarrassed: Lascelles has indicated to her that he fears she will not stick to her faith – a concern it is reasonable to suppose is the result of his having learnt that she had previously found herself unable to do so. In the process of assuring her friend that he is wrong, she reminds him of her torture; her recent show of steadfastness under extreme pressure. Finally, she herself refers to her newly publicised confession, called by them that ‘knowe not the truthe’ a recantation, rather plaintively protesting that she did not mean to recant.
The description of Askew signing the confession composed by Bonner constitutes the climactic event of the *First Examinacyon*, towards which her preliminary interrogations led. The confession’s publication in June 1546 contextualises the documents comprising the *Lattice*, and must have haunted Askew as she awaited death. If her version of her agreement to sign the confession is true, then she earned her release from prison using a strategy common to her contemporaries and publicly utilised by her friend, Edward Crome: the strategy of false recantation. Even if it is not, however, the *Examinations*, as an exercise in self-representation, serves, like Crome’s many public statements, to deny recantation and at the same time affirm faith. Unlike Crome, whose false recantations and explicit refusals to recant were well-attended public spectacles, Askew can only rather weakly assure her audience that official reports of her actions are untrue: she plaintively writes to Lascelles, ‘I never ment thynge lesse, than to recant’.31 Her tone is apologetic and not, as Crome’s, indignant. The *Examinations* thus serve a double purpose: denying recantation and affirming belief in the process, but also apologising for it – Askew did not *mean* to recant, but she might *accidentally* have done so. She guarantees her steadfastness, present and past, but also implicitly apologises for past weakness, resembling not so much Crome as his less audacious friend, Robert Wisdom.

Unlike Crome, whose eventual ‘true’ recantation left surprise and distrust in its wake, or Wisdom, who pleaded for forgiveness for an apostasy he could not deny, the Askew of the *Examinations* emerges as an equivocal but intact confessor.32 Shown avoiding denying her faith, she uses ambiguity to prevent directly implicating herself as a heretic during interrogation, and when finally compelled to put her name to a confession, she does so but artfully manages in the process to ‘utter the truth’. Her evasiveness under interrogation, while frequently interpreted as indicating either a distinctly feminine interiority or an indefinable faith or both, instead reflects a savvy awareness of her legal options, as McQuade has pointed out, but also a familiarity with the tactics of others, such as Crome, Latimer and Lascelles. Her evasions, for example ‘that that I had sayd, I had sayd’,33 resemble Crome’s: ‘I think as I have thought always’, and ‘I have said nothing to my knowledge but that thing that I will say again’.34 Her clear desire to protect herself is echoed in the desperate fight for survival of Latimer and her friend, Lascelles, when brought into danger following Crome’s arrest in June 1546. Whereas Askew refuses to speak to an unnamed priest – ‘I wyll not do it, bycause I perceyve ye come to tempte me’35 – Lascelles, according to a Privy Council memorandum, ‘will not answer . . . saying that it is neither wisdom nor equity to kill himself’; he refuses to answer interrogatories, writes the recorder, ‘for to answer them might bring him in danger . . . Finally he was persuaded to answer . . . and has done so, but little to the purpose’. Latimer, according to the memorandum also describing Lascelles’s reticence, proved himself a master of delay: ‘After answering two or three [written interrogatories] . . . he said that he had been “light to swear to answer the interrogatories before he had considered them . . . for to answer them might bring him in danger” . . . Finally he was persuaded to answer the interrogatories; and has done so, but little to the purpose’.36

In the *Examinations*, showing herself, like Lascelles and Latimer, desperately answering questions while trying to avoid self-incrimination, Askew, like Crome and Wisdom, also used her account of herself as an opportunity to affirm her faith to her reading audience. She did this through erudite and artful appeal to scripture, even while appearing to hide her beliefs from her persecutors. These beliefs, as she repeatedly affirms, derive from her reading of the New Testament in English. This constant
appeal to vernacular scripture is unsurprising, as her most compelling agenda, which she shared with all her fellow reformers, was to promote biblical authority – and universal access to the English Bible – over the ‘traditions of men’. But this strategy itself has prompted interpretations that remove her from her alliance to the community with which she identified herself, interpretations that see her dependence on scripture as the means to her faith, and the medium of her expression of it, rather than its substance: her faith itself. Kim Coles, for example, has argued that Askew writes from a ‘singular, marginalized position’, disclosing herself through scriptural citation rather than associating herself with the ‘early Protestant community’. Megan Matchinske has taken a similar approach to Askew, arguing that her evasive answers gesture towards ‘the unmarked, toward notions of interiority and self-sufficiency that may be Reformation-inspired but are hardly “reformist” in allegiance’. Both Coles and Matchinske see Askew supplanting allegiance to a religious community with private scriptural interpretation at least in part because of her gendered debarment from polemical discourse: to Coles, Askew’s ‘radically interior self-construction’ replaces the male option of entering into public debate over established theological positions, while Matchinske sees Askew manoeuvring to find a ‘legitimate and resistant voice’ in a world in which such a thing was denied outside the ‘venues’ of male discourse.

The nature of Askew’s system of belief is not, however, really in question. She was tried a sacramentarian, and she died a sacramentarian, her position informed by her reformist conviction that belief in the real presence constituted idolatry and was thus a violation of God’s law. But in arguing for her privatised and unaffiliated faith, scholars have posed her evasive attitude under interrogation – particularly her strategy of responding to questions by pointing to scripture – as reflecting a gendered interiority. This is problematic, as the strategy of biblical quotation – or of self-declared absolute dependency upon scripture – was, by the sixteenth century, a well-tried means of trying to escape danger. Coles has read the Examinations against two other Protestant prison epistles emerging during Henry VIII’s reign: Lascelles’s, first published in John Foxe’s Acts and Monuments (1570), and John Frith’s, The Articles wherefore John Frith Died (1533). While arguing that another work of Frith’s, A Boke . . . answeringe unto M. mores lettur (1533), was the treatise that seems to have had the ‘greatest influence’ on Askew (which would in itself suggest Askew’s adherence to reformist sacramentarian principles), Coles contrasts Askew’s mode of expression to that of both Frith and Lascelles. While Frith, for example, endeavours to assert the doctrine of a group – even ‘fix’ its doctrine – Askew, barred from the ‘arena of sermonizing in which Frith or Lascelles, with their masculine privilege, feel free to engage’, merely cites scripture. While Lascelles writes down his belief on the sacrament of the altar in an attempt to persuade his readership, Askew’s ‘only tactic’, in contrast, ‘is to point to Scripture’. While it is probably true that Askew felt less equipped than Frith to ‘fix’ doctrine for the English Protestant community, her deviation from his more rhetorically forceful self-expression is misread as a symptom of her gender. Frith’s and Lascelles’s were not the only Protestant prison epistles to have emerged from the press during the reign of Henry VIII, and Frith’s was not the only one of the reign to bear a resemblance to Askew’s: in 1530, Tyndale had published The examinacion of Master William Thorpe, the autobiographical account of a Lollard examined for heresy early in the fifteenth century, in which the male subject also avoided answering direct questions about his
belief concerning the nature of the sacrament by appealing, again and again, to scripture. Thorpe’s *examinacion*, like Askew’s *Examinations*, portrays a prisoner attempting to avoid the death that full expression of his beliefs would bring. Like Askew would 140 years later, Thorpe succeeded (if not in surviving his persecution) in frustrating his examiner, in his case Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury:

And the Archebisshop said to me . . . what saist thou now? Restith there/ after the consecracion in the [h]oste materiall brede or no? And I said/ Sir/ I knowe in no place in holy scripture/ where this terme/ materiall brede/ is written: and therefore Sir when I speake of this matter/ I use not to speake of materiall brede. Than the Archebisshop said to me. How teachest thou men to beleve in this sacrament? And I said/ Sir as I beleve myself so I teache other men. He said/ tell out plainly thy beleve hereof. And I said with my protestacion. Sir I beleve that the nyght/ before the Christe Jesu wold suffer willfully passion for mankynde on the morne after/ he tooke breade . . . and gave it to his disciples saying to them. Take and eate of this all you: This is my body: And that this is and ought to be all mennis belefe Matthew/ Marke/ Luke/ and Paul witnessith. Other beleve sir have I none/ nor will have/ nor teache . . . I beleve and teache other men to beleve/ that the worshipfull sacrament of the altare/ ys the sacramente of Christis flesche and his bloode in fourme of bread add of wine. And the Archbisshop said to me. It is soche that this Sacrament is very Christis body infourme of breade. But thou and thy secte techist it to be substauence of brede. Thynke you this true teachinge? And I said. Nother I nor any other of the secte that ye dampne/ teache any other wyse than I have tolde you/ nor beleve other wise/ to my knowynge.44

Thorpe and Arundel continued in this manner to the latter’s increasing frustration, until finally Thorpe (Askew-like) disingenuously declared himself intellectually unequal to the task of satisfying his interrogator: ‘But syr for as meself as your asking passeth myne understonding I dare neither denye it nor graunte it/ for it is skole mater’.45 Like Askew, Thorpe had not been trained in the ‘course of scoles’.46

Thorpe was a Lollard, a member of a sect known to have used ‘ways of lying’ to avoid persecution.47 While developing late in the fourteenth century, Lollardy survived well into the sixteenth, and an ongoing question in the historiography of English Protestantism is the precise nature of its relationship with the earlier movement: it is increasingly clear that points of contact existed between Lollards and early English reformers and that the increasing radicalism of 1540s English reformism, in particular with regard to the question of the real presence, might have had something to do with the influence of Lollardy.48 Certainly, Lollards frequently responded to direct questions by quoting biblical passages, and they also offered pretended recantations rather than suffer the flames. It is thus as much a misunderstanding to read ‘mere’ scriptural citation as indicative of an indefinable spirituality, as it is to interpret such rhetorical evasiveness as a strategy rooted in gender.

Like Thorpe, who was writing not for Arundel but for the community of his brethren outside the walls of his prison, Askew not only showed her strategies of attempted self-preservation in the *Examinations*, she also revealed the reason for them: her fear. This is so from the opening exchange of the *First Examinacyon*, in the first question put to her before the quest, by Christopher Dare:

**first Christofer dare examined me at Sadlers hall, beynge one of the quest, and asked yf I ded not beleve that the sacrament hangynge over the aultre was the verye bodye of Christ reallye. Then I demaundedy this queystone of hym, wherfore S. Steven was stoned to death? And he sayd, he could not tell. Then I answered, that no more wolde I assoyle hys vayne question.**49
Next, accused of claiming ‘how God was not in temples made with handes’, Askew refers to Acts 7 and 17, and when asked to elucidate, answers that she ‘wolde not throwe pearles amonge swine, for acorns were good ynough’.

In this, her first exchange with the quest, the opening interview of the First Examinacyon, Askew protected herself from self-incrimination, while at the same time revealing her hidden answer to her (reading) community, affirming her denial of the real presence in the sacrament of the altar. Her comparison of herself to St Steven, stoned to death (Acts 7) for insisting that God is not to be found in temples made with human hands, suggests rather than obscures her position on the nature of the sacrament, as does her reference to Acts 17, in which Paul reinforced Steven’s teaching. At the same time, in her identification with Steven, Askew both revealed her awareness of her own danger and implicitly identified her persecutors with the Pharisees who procured his death. When asked to be explicit she refused, but her refusal took the form of another scriptural allusion, this time to Matthew 7, according to which Christ teaches, ‘Geve not that which is holy/ to doggs/ nether cast ye youre pearles before swyne/ lest they tredae them under their fete/ and the other tourne agayne and all to rent you’. While her answer has the effect of insulting her questioner, this is not its point: her ‘truth’ is not beyond the understanding of Dare and his fellow jurymen, but expressing it will bring violence upon her.

Both Askew’s fear of this violence and its inevitability permeate the Examinations, informing every exchange and every letter, whether to Lascelles, the Lord Chancellor or the king himself. In June and early July 1546, when she probably composed the entirety of the Examinations, Askew was a woman, of course, but she was also many other things: a lonely prisoner; a degraded public figure; a parent who had lost her children; a lapsed heretic; a known apostate; a reluctant hero; recently tortured; and days from excruciating death. As she put it so very poignantly, ‘O lorde, I have more enemyes now, than there be heeres on my heade’. She was also, apparently, a writer. She was under siege, near death, and had only two weapons with which to fight: her ability to write and her knowledge of scripture. Her act of taking up these weapons, however, was voluntary, and if we wish to accept her as the first author of the Examinations we must also accept that she chose to write them, to ‘utter’ in them in discernible language, language not intended to obscure her beliefs but to illuminate them. Askew may have been conscious in her authorship, as Susannah Brietz Monta has recently argued, that in writing down her experiences she was also shaping herself as her ‘own sort of martyr’. She may have, as Elaine Beilin has insisted, seen herself as a ‘Protestant hero’ of ‘intellect, assurance, and strength’. In her interrogations themselves, Askew may have drawn, as Coles and Matchinske have both argued, on her role as a woman to find room to manoeuvre, as she shows herself doing, for example, in her following exchange with Bonner:

Then layd it my Lorde unto me, that I had alleged a serten text of the scripture. I answered that I alleged no other but S. Paules owne saynge ... in the xvii. chapter of the Apostles actes ... Then aked he me, what my faythe and beleve was in that matter? I answered hym. I beleve as the scripture doth teache me. Then enquired he of me, what if the scripture doye, that it is the bodye of Christ? I believe (sayd I) like as the scripture doth teache me. Then asked he agayne ... My answere was styll, I beleve as the scripture infourmeth me. And upon thys argument he tarryed a great whyle, to have driven me to make hym an answere to hys mynde. Howbeit I wolde not, but concluded thus with hym, that I beleved therin and in all other thynges, as Christ and hys holye Apostles ded leave

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them... Then he asked my, whye I had so fewe wordes? And I answered. God hath geven me the gyft of knowledge. But not of utteraunce. And Salomon sayth, that a woman of fewe wordes, is a gyft of God, Prover. 19.56

But if she did, it was with a purpose different from that which motivated her self-portrayal — her portrayal of herself speaking these words. Askew may or may not have spoken these words to Bonner. The only certainty we have with regard to them is that they appear in a written, polemical and didactic account, one in which the sentiment they express — with regard to female speech — has previously been explicitly rejected. Well before her portrayal of this interview with Bonner, Askew makes plain her disinclination to accept strictures against female speech,57 and her didactic expressions of eucharistic doctrine, particularly and unarguably explicit in the Lattre Examinacyon, give the lie to any pretended acceptance on her part of a gendered exclusion from utterance, and even teaching. Her self-effacing assertion must therefore be intended to express something to her reading audience, something other than merely that she was a woman of wit.58

Askew’s rhetorical betrayal of her own short career as an outspoken woman is deceptive. It is prefaced by a series of affirmations of her belief in scripture as the source for truth: ‘I beleve as the scripture doth teache me... I beleve (sayd I) like as the scripture doth teach me... My answere was styll. I beleve as the scripture infourmeth me’. What does scripture teach Askew? She has previously argued (rather problematically) that it does not teach her that because she is a woman she must hold her tongue: in an argument over the famous Pauline prohibition of women speaking in church (1 Corinthians 14), Askew misrepresents Paul, or as Matchinske has it, interprets him, to limit his bar to the pulpit.59 Similarly, Proverbs 19 does not read as Askew renders it, that a woman of few words is a gift of God, but rather, that ‘a discrete woman is the gyfte of the Lord’.60 As is her wont, Askew closes the argument with a scriptural reference, but in doing so here she creates a red herring. Proverbs advises discretion for both men and women, linking it with wisdom: the wise woman — with knowledge — knows when to keep quiet, but is not required to do so simply because she is female.

Askew’s misquotation of Proverbs 19 constitutes a defence of her own discretion in the face of persecution, just as does her declaration to Christopher Dare that she will not throw pearls before swine. In defending or even recommending such silence, she is faithful to the values of her peers, men like Robert Wisdom who, also writing from prison, suggests the same in the style of Solomon:

Lett al yo conversation be such as becometh the children of light in al sobrietie, rightwisnes, and godlines/ as ye have ever be taught by the holy gospel of Christ and as I have ever admonished and warned you. Walke wisely because of such as yet are estranged from the trewth, and redeem the tyme for the dayes are evill. Let your words and talk be evermore powdred with grace, and beware what ye speake, and to whom.61

This is certainly how Askew was read by Bale, who elucidating on her evocation of Solomon, praised her silence, comparing it, in it, to Christ:

When Christ stode before Cayphas, he asked hym, moche after thys sort, wherfor he had so few wordes?... Neverthelesse he held hys peace. Mar. 14. But whan he was ones throughlye compelled by the name of the lyvynge God, to speake, and had uttered a verye fewe wordes, he toke hym at soche advauntage, though they were the eternall vertye, as he was able through them, to procure hys deathe, Matth. 26. Lyke as thys bloudye Bishopp Bonner, of the same wycked generacyon, ded at the lattre, by thys faythfull woman.62
Bale sees Askew’s discretion as a justifiable attempt at self-preservation, one in keeping with biblical example and even *imitatio Christi*.

As we have seen, the discretion exercised by Askew when faced with persecution was far from unique to her, nor was it a symptom of her gender. While false recantation lost some of its appeal over the decades following her death, possibly in part due to its growing recognition by ecclesiastical authority, discretion remained a tool of the persecuted, and permeates the Marian stories presented in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*. For example, despite the discretion of the Marian martyr John Fortune, it is doubtful that Elizabethan Protestants would have failed to recognise his rejection of the real presence, as guarded as Askew’s, when faced with his autobiographical account of his examinations, reproduced in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*:

> First Doct. Parker asked me how I beleved in the Catholike fayth.  
> And I asked him which fayth he ment: whether the fayth that Stephen had, or the fayth of them that put Stephen to death.  
> D. Parker beyng moved, sayd: what a naughty fellow is this? you shall see anon he will deny the blessed Sacrament of the aultar.  
> M. Foster. Then sayd M. Foster: I know you well enough. You are a busse marchaunt. How sayest thou by the blessed Masse?  
> Fort. And I stode still and made no aunswere.  
> Fost. Then sayd M. Foster: Why speakest thou not, and make the Gentleman an aunswere?  
> Fort. And I sayd: silence is a good aunswere to a foolish question.

Like Askew, Fortune answers to his opinion on the sacrament of the altar with a question, identifying himself with Steven. He, like her, refuses to elaborate, and shows himself mocking the intelligence of both question and questioner. Also like Askew, while revealing his own attempt to avoid self-incrimination, Fortune also reveals his belief regarding the real presence to his reader. He signals the answer to his examiner’s question even as he refuses to answer it, sharing not just Askew’s tools but also her analogy. His meaning, like hers, is clear, if couched in terms reflecting his desire to live.

False recantations like Askew’s, however, seem to have been a different thing for Marian and Elizabethan Protestants than for Henrician ones. Freeman and Wall have noted the efforts made by Foxe in his editing of the *Examinations* to prove that the copy of Askew’s recantation appearing in Bonner’s register was a fake, and Freeman has noted elsewhere Foxe’s tendency, increasing in the second (1570) and later editions of the *Acts and Monuments*, to back-pedal from an earlier tolerance for Henrician backsliders. Wabuda has noted a similar tendency, and has pointed out that while Foxe treated Crome favourably in the first edition of the English *Acts and Monuments* (1563), as he learned more about Crome’s habit of recantation (true and false) during Henry’s reign he removed favourable references to him from the second edition, criticising him for his weakness. While John Fortune, as described above, can serve as an instructive example both of the influence of the *Examinations* on Marians facing similar persecution, and of the continued legitimacy both to them and to their Elizabethan martyrrologist of defensive evasion, the story of the Marian martyr Ralph Allerton is equally significant for its condemnation of exactly the sort of false recantation signed by Askew in 1545. Allerton despised in his own written confession, which had previously earnt him release, the dependency upon the broadly defined ‘Catholice Church’ that Askew felt justified her own, ‘in the which I did not disclose my minde, but shamefully
dissembled, because I made no difference between the true Church and the untrue Church’. 68

This was not the case, however, when Askew wrote her *Examinations*, and in this respect she has more in common with Crome, her fellow (if, in his case, surviving) Henrician persecutee, than with Allerton, the Marian martyr. Both Crome and Askew recanted their beliefs, she in March 1545, and he in June 1546, just when she was facing condemnation, torture and death. While he lived, and in the public nature of his submission, Crome could not rewrite his own history – but Askew could rewrite hers. Did she know that her friend had submitted? It is likely that she did, and her readers must have marked the contrast between her refusal, under torture, to reveal the names of her supporters (if they were in fact supporting her), so poignantly described in the *Lattice Examinacyon*, and Crome’s delivery to the Privy Council of his, including Lascelles. She almost certainly knew that another friend had succumbed before and rehabilitated himself, like Wisdom, ashamed of her earlier apostasy. Askew attempted, like him, to vindicate herself; in her case to her intimate, Lascelles, and, more widely, to her expected reading audience – her fellow evangelicals – through written self-justification. Unlike Wisdom, however, rather than admit her earlier failure to stick to martyrdom, she claimed for herself both ‘false’ recantation and discretion under interrogation, strategies acceptable to her peers. Like Wisdom in 1541 and 1543, and Crome within a month of her own death, Askew probably betrayed her faith to save her life. Unlike them, she ultimately died for her denial of the real presence. The words she left behind her, whether still actually hers or not, portray a woman both fighting for her life and attempting to reconcile herself to her community, by expressing beliefs common between them. They show her doing this using strategies developed and used by others, male others. Like the men with whom she worshipped and finally died, she was sure of her faith and fully capable of expressing it:

> The sacramental breade was left us to be receyved with thankes gevnge, in remembraunce of Christes death, the onlye remedye of our sowles recover. And that therby we also receyve the whole benefytges and frutes of hys most gloryouse passion . . . But as concernynge your Masse, as it is now used in our dayes, I do saye and beleve it, to be the most abhomynable ydoll that is in the worlde. For my God wyll not be eaten with tethe, neyther yet dyeth he agayne.69

If Askew wrote these words, she expressed herself forcefully and with confidence, in terms that she knew her peers – male and female – would understand.

**Notes**

1. Anne Askew to John Lascelles, as in John Bale, *The Lattice Examinacyon of the worthye servaunt of God mastres Anne Askewe the yonger daughter of Sir Wylyam Askewe knyght of Lyncolne shyre, latelye martyred in Smithfelde by the wycked synagoge of Antichrist* (Marburg, 1547), 53r.
2. Latimer was the former Bishop of Worcester, and Shaxton the former Bishop of Salisbury. Both men had resigned their sees in protest against the 1539 Act of Six Articles. This act, as described below, was a blow to the English evangelical movement: among other things, it confirmed the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacramental elements and reinforced the prohibition on clerical marriage. According to the act, offenders against the first article regarding the real presence were to be denied the option of recantation and punished by burning.

6. I use the term ‘sacramentarian’ to describe Tudor evangelicals who denied the real presence rather than adopting the Lutheran view of the Eucharist. Askew’s contemporaries described this heresy as sacramentarianism, and those adhering to it sacramentaries, or sacramentarians, as in, for example, Henry VIII’s 1538 injunctions against ‘Englishe bookes, Sectes, and Sacramentaries’ in John Foxe, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 2 (London: John Daye, 1570), p. 1294, and Mary I’s 1554 Injunctions, according to which ‘no person be admitted or received to any ecclesiastical function . . . being a sacramentary’ in W. H. Frere and W. M. Kennedy (eds), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation* (London: Longmans and Green, 1910), vol. 2, p. 325.


14. Otwell Johnson to his Brother John Johnson (London, 2 July 1546), in James Gairdner and R. H. Brodie (eds), *Letters & Papers Foreign and Domestic of the reign of Henry VIII* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1862–1932) (hereafter L&P), XXI, i, 1180. Poignantly, Johnson then notes that Askew had received her judgment of the Lord Chancellor, ‘to be burned . . . the gentlewoman and the other man remain steadfast; and yet’, he continues, ‘she hath been racked since her condemnation (as men say), which is a strange thing in my understanding. The Lord be merciful to us all’.

15. As one of his supporters, Askew may have witnessed Crome’s final ‘false’ recantation of May 1546, as well as the Passion Sunday sermon which led to it. (She was free and in London at the time.)


18. When arrested after his false recantation of May, Crome revealed to the Henrician authorities that he had been counselled against recantation by a number of fellow reformers, including Lascelles (who was subsequently burnt), Nicholas Shaxton (who preached his recantation at Askew and Lascelles’s execution), Hugh Latimer, Dr Huick (one of Henry VIII’s doctors) and Robert Wisdom, who fled to the continent. J. R. Dasent (ed.) *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1542–1547* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1890), I, 424; L&P, XXI, i, 898, ii, 790, 810, 823, 835, 848.

19. Guildhall Library MS 9531/12, 109v.


21. Guildhall Library MS 9531/12, 44r–45r.

22. Guildhall Library MS 3591/12, 44r.

23. Emmanuel College Library, Cambridge MS 261, 88r–130v, 88r.

25. This conclusion lends itself to dating Askew’s authorship of the *First Examinacyon*. I would suggest that she composed or at least completed it following her condemnation in 1546, when she also wrote the documents comprising the *Lattre*. Had she written it following her first series of examinations, but before her second imprisonment, I do not believe she would have included in it the description of signing the confession.

26. The publication in 1543 of Wisdom’s *1541 recantation* outraged him, as he had been promised its secrecy, Emmanuel College Library, Cambridge MS 261, 92v–93r.

27. According to Foxe, *The Ecclesiasticall History*, vol. 2 (1570), 1420, Askew was offered the opportunity to recant in exchange for pardon at the stake, immediately prior to her execution.

29. Guildhall Library MS 9531/12, 109r.
36. On Lascelles and Latimer, *L&P*, I, 823 (14 May 1546). Both men’s interrogations were the result of Crome’s exposure of them for counselling him against recantation.

37. As Ryrie, ‘The Strange Death’, pp. 85–6, has noted, for English reformers – whether Lutheran or more radically reformist – the point at which ‘willingness to compromise stopped’ was the English Bible.

41. Matchinske, *Writing Gender*, pp. 27, 41.
46. Compare with Askew: ‘he [and unnamed priest] asked me, if the host shuld fall, and a beast ded eate it, whether the beast ded receyve God or no? I answered, Seynge ye have taken the paynes to aske thyself questyon, I desire yow also to take so moche payne more, as to assoyle it your selfe . . . And he sayd, it was agaynst the ordre of scoles, that he whych asked the questyon, shuld answere it. I tolde hym, I was but a woman, and knewe not the course of scoles’ (Bale, *First Examinacyon*, 13v–14r).


50. In the 1534 Tyndale New Testament, Steven’s words in Acts 7, ‘How be it he that is hyest of all/ dwelleth not in temple *made with hondes*, are asterisked; the marginal comment reads: ‘God dwelleth not in temples or churches made with handes’. William Tyndale, *The newe Testament*, dylygently corrected and compared with the Greke by Willyam Tindale (Antwerp, 1534), 100.67r. In Acts 17, the passage praising the Thessalonians for their reading of scripture is marked, with an accompanying shoulder-note reading, ‘Searche the scriptures, for by them may ye trye all doctrine’ 100.83v. Not only does Askew reveal a relationship with scripture ‘fettered’ as it were by magisterial gloss, she also, by consistently citing passages isolated in the Tyndale Bible as articulating the fundamental tenets of the evangelical faith – where it departs from traditional Catholicism – provides clear and obvious clues to a contemporary evangelical audience of her faith, clues they would have understood.

57. Askew rebuked a priest for counselling her that in speaking of religious matters she was in violation of Pauline stricture. Bale, _First Examinacyon_, 10r.


59. Matchinske, _Writing Gender_, p. 42.

60. *The Byblye in Englyshe, that is to saye the content of all the holy scrypture, bothe of the olde and newe testament* (London: Rychard Grafton and Edward Whitchurch, 1539), 33r. This is so in both the 1537 Thomas Matthew Bible, and the 1539 ‘Great’ Bible, placed in every parish church by order of Parliament. In the Vulgate, the full proverb reads ‘Domus & sustantia possessio est patria, a Jehova autem est uxor intelligens’. *Sacrae bibliae. in quo continentur* . . . (London: Thomas Betheletus, 1535), Proverbs 19: 14, n.p. In a popular contemporary edition of Proverbs: ‘House & goodes come from the fathers by heritage: but a wyse wife is given of the lorde’. *The prouerbes of Solomon newly translated into Englyshe* (London: Thomas Godfray, 1534), n.p.

61. BL MS Harleian 425, 4r–7v, here 7v.

62. Bale, _First Examinacyon_, 29r.

63. Askew, Wisdom and Bale all made statements justifying discretion remarkably similar to those made by the German humanist and mystic Sebastian Franck (1499–1542/3), a convert to Lutheranism who developed a radical spiritualist belief that Christianity had nothing to do with belonging to a visible church. In a letter to John Campanus published in 1531, Franck stressed the necessity of discretion in a dangerous world, like Askew drawing on Matthew 7 to discourage ‘giving holy things to dogs, who might turn and rend the giver’. Much as Wisdom would twelve years later, and Bale would in his elucidation of Askew, Franck went on, citing St Paul, to advise that ‘one should speak prudently and where it fits in. For everything has its time’. Franck was an important influence in the development of the thought of Hendrik Niclaes, who founded the Family of Love in Emden during the 1540s, a sect that embraced Nicodemism as a viable alternative to persecution. The Family of Love is known to have established itself in England by the 1550s. Zagorin, _Ways of Lying_, pp. 115–17.

64. Foxe, _The Ecclesiastical History_, vol. 2 (1570), p. 2099.

65. In the first Elizabethan abridgement of the _Acts and Monuments_, the encounter between Askew and Bonner leading to the signature of her confession in the _Examinations_ omits her actual capitulation: ‘subtilly he drew out a circumstance, as it were a recantation, & required her to subscribe to it. Which she saide shee woulde do so far forth as the holy scripture doth agree unto. From thence she was carried againe to prison’. Timothy Bright (ed.), _An abridgement of the booke of acts and monuments of the Church: written by that Reverend Father, Maister John Fox: and now abridged by Timothe Bright_ (London: J. Windet, 1589), p. 70.


69. Bale, _Lattre Examinacyon_, 33r, 59r.