Chapter 15: Sixteenth-Century Continental Conditionalists[1]

Note: In its original setting in *The Soul Sleepers* this chapter provided a Continental context for the development of mortalist thought in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Those who held mortalist views rejected traditional belief in the soul's separate existence and innate immortality. They have been variously known as mortalists, conditionalists, or more particularly in their own day, as soul sleepers. They were mortalists because, it was said, they believed in the death of the soul as well as the body, although many of them, notably in the early years of the Reformation, did not quite go that far. They were conditionalists because they held that immortality derived from the work of Christ, personal faith in him, and the resurrection at the last day, and soul sleepers because they considered that death was a sleep during which the soul was non-existent or, in the less extreme view, unconscious though still alive.

Both in Europe and later in England as the Reformation developed, two distinct forms of Christian mortalism developed, known since as psychopannychism and thnetopsychism. Psychopannychists believed in a separate, immaterial soul in common with those who held the traditional view of the soul's immortality, but maintained contrary to them that after death the soul slept until the resurrection. Thnetopsychists did not believe in the soul so defined, maintaining instead that the soul was best understood as the mind, or more usually as the whole person, which existed as the result of the union of breath and body. The soul, therefore, died or 'slept', metaphorically, between death and the resurrection, since the union of breath and body then no longer existed. While both forms of the mortalist 'heresy' were anathema to the majority of the mainstream Reformers, thnetopsychism was clearly more deviant from traditional orthodoxy. Mortalism in both forms appeared early in both the Continental and English Reformation and we will meet them frequently as this chapter unfolds.

The extent to which developing post-medieval doctrine in England was

1 First published as ch. 1 in *The Soul Sleepers: Christian Mortalism from Wycliffe to Priestley* (2008), and reprinted here by permission of James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, UK, with a new title and a revised introduction containing material from the original Introduction to *The Soul Sleepers.*

influenced by contemporary European thought remains largely an unresolved question. It is clear that much Reformation and post-Reformation English theology emerged from the independent thinking of strong English minds open to the catalytic and powerful texts of Scripture recently made available in the original languages and in the vernacular, and interpreted against the prevailing moods and conditions. On the other hand, the presence in England of individuals and congregations fleeing from repression on the Continent, and an awareness of Continental ideas cannot be overlooked. The two-way flow of English and Continental believers across the Channel from the earliest days of the Reformation inevitably enhanced the accessibility and credibility of ideas current on the Continent. A. G. Dickens referred to "substantial examples of transition from Lollardy to Lutheranism" in London during the early 1500s, and more recently Alister McGrath noted the influence of Luther on Tyndale's New Testament.[2] Many of the influential English mortalists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had European contacts of one kind or another which, in terms of the exchange of ideas, were mutually beneficial. The least that can be said is that English beliefs, including mortalism, in the Reformation and immediate post-Reformation era developed with some understanding of what was happening in Europe.

In l597 John Payne, an English refugee in Haarlem, warned against the mortalist beliefs of Dutch Anabaptists,[3] and in 1646 Friedrich Spanheim alerted his English readers to the deviant views of German Anabaptists who taught that the souls of the dead "sleep with their bodies until the last day . . . deprived of all knowledge, both intellectual and sensitive".[4] In 1653

2 Abbreviations used in the references:

CFF L. E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1965)

CM N. T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1972)

LW Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1958-86)

ME *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing, 1955-90)

NCE *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd edn, 2003

ODCC *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 3rd edn, 1997

RR G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (3rd edn, Kirksville, MO: 1992)

Original English works were published in London unless otherwise indicated.

A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: Batsford, 1964), 33; Alister McGrath, *In The Beginning*: *The Story of the King James Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 72-3.

3 [John Payne], *Royall Exchange* (Haarlem, 1597), 19, 22.

4 Friedrich Spanheim, *Englands Warning by Germanies Woe* (1646), 36.

John Biddle translated into English Joachim Stegmann's *Brevis Disquisitio* (1633) which, among other concerns, queried "whether the dead do properly live", asserting that the traditional affirmative answer constituted "the grounds of the greatest errors among the Papists".[5] In reality, however, it was not only Anabaptist or Continental Socinianism that may have helped English mortalism on its way. The psychopannychism of the German reformers Luther and Carlstadt gave Continental mortalism an early degree of respectability which it's later and less respectable associations with Anabaptists and other radicals could never wholly take away. It is, therefore, to Luther and Carlstadt and their rejection of long-standing medieval doctrines which had undergirded so many of the abuses germinal to the Reformation, that we will turn first. But before that, it will be helpful to note developments concerning the soul's immortality in the years preceding the Reformation.

Consolidation of the Traditional Doctrine

It is easily forgotten that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul had appeared relatively late in the development of traditional Catholic theology.[6] Two events in particular may be said to have precipitated a more definitive formulation of the medieval belief in the soul's immortality and hence the later but consequent appearance of an alternative mortalist eschatology. These events were outcomes of the Council of Florence, 1438-45, and the Fifth Lateran Council, 1512-17, relating to the developing doctrines of purgatory and the immortality of the soul. Even before that, however, there had been hints of uncertainty over the nature of the soul and its state after death from within the higher echelons of the Church itself, which may have reflected things to come as well as past doubts and ambiguities.

In 1312 the Council of Vienne, reacting to continued philosophical assertions in some academic circles of the soul's mortality, denounced as heretical and "inimical to the truth of the Catholic faith" certain ideas which appeared to question the superiority of the soul over the body and the possibility of its independent existence.[7] John XXII, the first of the Avignon popes, for some years held the view that the departed souls of the righteous dead do not see

5 John Biddle (tr.), *Brevis Disquisitio; or, A Brief Enquiry Touching a Better Way Then Is commonly made use of, to refute Papists, and reduce Protestants to certainty and Unity in Religion* (1653), 26. See also *CFF,* II, 177.

6 Philippe Aries notes that the concept of an immortal soul, long cultivated in clerical circles, began to spread "from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, until it gained almost universal acceptance", Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: OUP, 1981), 606.

7 G. H. Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, UK: 2000), 22-3.

God until after the last judgment.[8] He is said to have written a work on this theme prior to his election to the papal throne in 1316. After becoming Pope he continued to advance these ideas in sermons as late as 1332,[9] arousing considerable opposition, particularly from the theology faculty at the University of Paris, to the point that he was actually accused of heresy. Under pressure from his theological advisers to conform, he eventually withdrew his divergent views in favour of the more orthodox Catholic position, declaring that his earlier beliefs had been merely a personal opinion.[10] Clearly this was not the mortalism of the Reformation era, but it is difficult to agree entirely with Burns here that the earlier position of John XXII "does not even approach psychopannychism"[11] since it shared one of psychopannychism's major tenets, denial of heavenly glory until after the last judgement.

In 1439 the Council of Florence clarified and declared canonical a belief which had already existed for some time, the doctrine of purgatory, with its essential presupposition that the souls of the dead are conscious and "capable of pain or joy even prior to the resurrection of their bodies",[12] and its corollary that prayers for the dead are valuable and necessary. Few doctrines of the medieval church provoked such widespread opposition from the early Reformers and those who followed them than this idea of an intermediate state between death and a future life where those who had died would undergo purification and punishment prior to the resurrection and the last judgement. The abuses deriving from belief in purgatory were to become one of the major concerns of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, with his open attack on the sale of indulgences and the "audacious" claim that souls could be released from purgatory thereby. Luther would ultimately conclude that the underlying doctrine of the soul's substantiality and immortality was "a monstrous opinion" emanating from Rome's "dunghill of decretals".[13]

Meanwhile the consolidation of purgatory as a major tenet of the Western Church by the Council of Florence had provided the impetus for a renewed focus on the question of human existence with particular emphasis on the nature of the soul. Interest in such philosophical and theological matters was naturally strong in the universities, where in Italy the discussion came

8 *ODCC*, *s.v.* John XXII, states that he maintained this opinion until his death.

9 Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 18.

10 *NCE*, VII, 932, where it is claimed that John XXII's views "threatened the theological foundation of the papacy".

11 *CM,* 152.

12 *NCE*, V, 770; *RR*, 65.

13 *CFF*, II, 73; R. H. Bainton, *Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Mentor,1950), 54; E. G. Rupp and B. Drewery, *Martin Luther* (London: Arnold, 1970), 19-25.

to centre on Aristotelian and Platonic views. At the University of Padua in 1509 it was propounded that Aristotle had taught the mortality of the soul.[14] Pietro Pomponazzi, successively professor at Padua, Ferrara and Bologna, eventually articulated his interpretation of the Aristotelian view in his *On the Immortality of the Soul* (1516) and *Apologia* (1517), maintaining that it was possible to conclude from reason not only that the soul was individual and transient, but that it was also mortal. In so doing, Pomponazzi also asserted that his philosophical conclusions, mere "deductions of human reason", were transcended by the divine revelation of a resurrection to come and needed to cause no offense.[15] Girolamo Cardano of Milan shared Pomponazzi's doubts about the soul, if not his reluctance to cause offence. Cardano's *De Animi Immortalitate* (1545) began by considering "whether human souls are eternal and divine or whether they perish with the body", and proposed fifty-four reasons for concluding that the soul was not immortal.[16]

Any hopes that Pomponazzi may have had of avoiding conflict were clearly naive. The ecclesiastical hierarchy had, in fact, already reacted against the new ideas which had been emanating from Padua for some years. In 1513 the Fifth Lateran Council dealt with the problem caused by the proposition that the soul was mortal, denouncing it as a "very pernicious error" and re-asserting that each individually created soul is "truly, and of itself. . . immortal" and capable of existence after death prior to the resurrection. Williams notes that "this importation of *natural* theology into Catholic dogma" was in actual fact "much closer to Platonic philosophy than to the Bible"[17], and then comments more fully on the pronouncement of the Fifth Lateran Council:

> The natural immortality of the soul had become so integral a part of the massive penitential and liturgical structure of Catholic moral theology that the philosophical threat to it moved Leo X, in the first year of his pontificate, to condemn in 1513, at the eighth session of the Fifth Lateran Council, the philosophical proofs and disproofs of immortality in the universities . . . and academic circles . . . . Leo in council asserted that the soul is naturally immortal and, as the substantial form of

14 *RR*, 65. See also Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 28-30.

15 *ODCC*,. s.v. Pietro Pomponazzi; *RR*, 66. A more detailed account of Pomponazzi's theology of the soul can be found in Don Cameron Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea* (Baltimore: John Hopkins,1964), 29-45. Allen proposes that it was Pomponazzi who "revived the Athenian disease of doubt".

16 Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea*, 56. On Cardano, see Allen, 45-58.

17 *RR*, *66.* The much revised entry on 'soul' in the third edition of *ODCC* claims that "there is practically no specific teaching on the subject in the Bible", stating that in the post-Nicene era "a modified Platonic view" of the soul gained acceptance.

> the body, is susceptible both of the pains of hell and purgatory, and the bliss of paradise.[18]

Those who were soon to deny the soul's immortality, both on the Continent and in England, could never doubt the importance of this doctrine to the entire structure of Roman theology or, perhaps, of the consequences which such denial might incur.

Luther and Carlstadt

Luther's views on the state of the soul after death, arising in large part from his respect for biblical authority over that of the Church, began to appear in his response to Leo X's Bull of 1520, 'Exsurge Domine', which reaffirmed papal endorsement of the now established doctrine. In his defense of the propositions he had earlier put forward and which Leo's Bull had condemned, Luther argued that the church's official doctrine of the soul as a spiritual but substantial substance and the "form" of the human body, was only a papal opinion.[19] While this was clearly not yet an outright expression of the mortalism he was shortly to declare, it nevertheless demonstrated his profound unease with the prevailing doctrine. This fundamental divergence over the soul and its condition after death would, with the exception of Carlstadt, set him apart from the other major Continental Reformers. Indeed, Luther and Carlstadt alone of all the early Reformers seem to have entertained the doctrine of soul sleep, while Calvin, Bullinger and Zwingli were all advocates of the traditional view and strongly opposed any alternative. Luther's essential mortalism has been questioned, but the evidence seems indisputable that, with occasional lapses towards an inherited medieval view, he held a psychopannychist position for most of his life following his break with Rome.[20]

Certainly this was the understanding of the later Anglican mortalist, Francis Blackburne, who added to his historical survey of mortalism, first published in 1765[21], an appendix entitled *An Inquiry into the sentiments of*

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18 *RR*, 66-7. The 'Apostolici regiminis', the document by which the Council's official judgment was promulgated, re-asserted the immortality of the soul as necessary dogma. See also *NCE*, I, 595.

19 *Ibid.,* 197.

20 *CFF*, II, 76. Williams maintains that Luther's occasional ambivalence had a significant outcome: "Little by little within Lutheranism the doctrine of the sleep of the soul was replaced by the idea of a natural immortality", *RR*, 197.

21 Francis Blackburne, *A Short Historical View of the Controversy Concerning An Intermediate State and The Separate Existence of the Soul Between Death and the General Resurrection* (1765). An expanded second edition appeared in 1772 with the same title but for the word *Short*. Unless otherwise stated the 1772 edition is cited in this study. The appendix remained the same in both editions.

Martin Luther concerning the state of the Soul between Death and the Resurrection. Blackburne maintained that Luther had been incorrectly accused of thnetopsychism by Cardinal du Perron, but also noted a letter from Luther to Amsdorf in 1522, commenting that in it Luther appeared "much inclined to believe that the souls of the just sleep to the day of judgement, without knowing where they are".[22] This earliest known indication of mortalism in Luther's thought appears to confirm a psychopannychist position as opposed to the thnetopsychism which du Perron had mistakenly seen and which manifested itself shortly thereafter in the thinking of other Continental mortalists. Blackburne was convinced that Luther remained a psychopannychist to his dying day, using the doctrine to refute medieval teachings of purgatory and the invocation of saints in his definitive struggle with the papacy.[23]

But Luther must be allowed to speak for himself. When he does so, two things are readily apparent: the strength of his convinced psychopannychism, and the distinction between it and the thnetopsychism which was soon to appear elsewhere on the Continent and which would find ready and articulate advocates in radical circles, notably among the Italian Evangelical Rationalists, and which would later flower across the Channel as the mature expression of English mortalist thought. Although it has largely been ignored since, Luther's psychopannychism was recognised and challenged in its own day. In England, Sir Thomas More responded to it in his well-known *Dialogue* with Tyndale in 1529[24], thereby providing Tyndale with the opportunity of defending Luther and at the same time airing his own conclusions. We must, however, first note Luther's own views. Tyndale's opinions and the subsequent and more widespread thnetopsychism of the radical Continental reformers will be considered later.

Despite moments of hesitation and occasional ambiguities, even contradictions, Luther's psychopannychism cannot for a moment be seriously doubted. It is expressed too frequently and too emphatically. Indeed, it is hard to find anywhere a more concerned or enthusiastic spokesman for psychopannychism, either on the Continent or in England, throughout the Reformation and immediate post-Reformation periods. All the essentials of mortalism as interpreted in psychopannychism can be found in Luther's writings, and most of them occur repeatedly: the separate existence of the soul, its unconscious sleep after death, its exclusion from heavenly bliss until

22 Francis Blackburne, *An Historical View of the Controversy Concerning an Intermediate State and the Separate Existence of the Soul Between Death and the General Resurrection (*2nd edn.,1772), 344, 348.

23 *Ibid.,* 14, 15.

24 Generally known as *The Dialogue Concerning Tyndale*, although an introductory note to the 1529 edition begins with the words "A Dialogue concernynge heresyes and matters of religion".

the resurrection, and the vital importance of the resurrection of the body and the re-unification of body and soul at the last day as the way to immortality and eternal life. The meeting point between Luther's psychopannychism and the more developed thnetopsychism is their shared emphasis on death as an unconscious sleep[25] and the necessity of the resurrection. In 1526 in his lectures on Ecclesiastes Luther noted that the dead are "completely asleep" and do not "feel anything at all". "They lie there not counting days or years; but when they are raised, it will seem to them that they have only slept for a moment".[26] Commenting on Ecclesiastes 9:5 Luther said that he knew of no more powerful passage in Scripture showing that the dead are asleep and unconscious. Verse 10 was another text proving "that the dead do not feel anything", since they are "completely asleep".[27] In his commentary on I Corinthians 15 he argues that what was prior to Christ's resurrection "true and eternal death" is now no longer death: "It has become merely a sleep". And for Christ "it is but a night before He rouses us from sleep".[28] Again, the saints who died in faith "died in such a manner that after they had been called away from the troubles and hardships of this life, they entered their chamber, slept there, and rested in peace".[29] For Luther, death is always a sleep, a time of rest and waiting.

The soul, however, is a separate entity which leaves the body at death. Luther says, "After death the soul enters its chamber and is at peace; and while it sleeps, it is not aware of its sleep".[30] In the lectures on Psalms, he states "The crossing of Jordan is the departure of the soul from the body".[31] Of the Old Testament patriarchs, notably Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Luther says that each was "gathered to his people", to rest, to sleep, to await "resurrection and the future life"[32]. The same is true of all who thus sleep, "There is no doubt that those who have been gathered to their people are resting. . .There is a place for the elect where they all rest. . .The human soul sleeps with all senses buried, and our bed is like a sepulchre . . .they rest in peace".[33] Luther holds that we cannot now know the exact nature of the intermediate state, but is sure that the disembodied soul is "freed from the

25 Psychopannychism's literal sleep of the soul as opposed to thnetopsychism's figurative use of the term has been noted previously. It is an important distinction.

26 "Notes on Ecclesiastes", in *LW*, 15 (1972), 150.

27 *Ibid.,* 147.

28 "Commentary on I Corinthians 15", *LW*, 28 (1973), 109-10.

29 "Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 21-25", *LW*, 4(1964), 312-13.

30 *Ibid.,* 313.

31 "First Lectures on the Psalms 1-75", *LW*, 10(1974), 327.

32 "Lectures on Genesis 21-25", *LW*, 4, 309-10.

33 "Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 45-50", *LW*, 8(1966), 317-18.

workhouse of the body".[34] Moreover, "it is sufficient for us to know that the saints in the Old Testament who died in faith in the Christ who was to come and the godly in the New Testament who died in faith in the Christ who has been revealed" are safe in the hands of God, "gathered to their people".[35] But "we do not know what that place is, or what kind of place it is".[36] So for Luther both body and soul rest after death, the body in the grave and the soul, still alive but asleep, in some appointed but undefined place, to await the last day.

Despite the moments of doubt, Luther's psychopannychism appears to have been well settled in the years leading up to his death in 1546. In his massive commentary on Genesis, published in 1544, he states more fully, yet still with a degree of mystery, that after death the soul "enters its chamber and is at peace" and

> while it sleeps it is not aware of its sleep. Nevertheless, God preserves the waking soul. Thus God is able to awaken Elijah, Moses, etc., and so to control them that they live. But how? We do not know. The resemblance to physical sleep - namely that God declares that there is sleep, rest, and peace - is enough. He who sleeps a natural sleep has no knowledge of the things that are happening in his neighbour's house. Nevertheless, he is alive, even though . . . he feels nothing in his sleep."[37]

Yet we know that the sleeping dead will live again and, at least to an extent, how it will happen:

> And so the Christians who lie in the ground are no longer called dead, but sleepers, people who will surely also arise again. For when we say that people are asleep, we refer to those who are lying down but will wake up and rise again, not those who are lying down bereft of all hope of rising again. Of the latter we do not say that they are sleeping but that they are inanimate corpses. Therefore by that very word "asleep" Scripture indicates the future resurrection".[38]
>
> For since we call it [death] a sleep, we know that we shall not remain in it, but be gain awakened and live, and that the time during which we sleep, shall seem no longer than if we had just fallen asleep. Hence, we shall censure ourselves that we were surprised or alarmed at such a sleep in the hour of death, and suddenly come alive out of the grave and from decomposition, and entirely well, fresh, with a pure, clear, glorified life, meet our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the clouds . . .[39]

34 "Lectures on Genesis 21-25", *LW*, 4, 329.

35 "Lectures on Genesis 45-50", *LW*, 8, 317.

36 *Ibid.*

37 "Lectures on Genesis 21-25", *LW*, 4, 313.

38 "Commentary on I Corinthians 15", *LW*, 28, 110.

39 Luther, "Sermon, the Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity", cited in H. T. Kerr (ed.), *A Compend of Luther's Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), 242.

The resurrection at the last day will terminate the sleep of death and bring to reality eternal life and, through the re-unification of soul and body, the fulness of immortality for those who believe. In fact, Luther goes as far as to say of the resurrection that it is "The chief article of Christian doctrine".[40] So Francis Blackburne was undoubtedly correct in saying that Luther's "sleeping man was conscious of nothing", and in concluding that Luther held to "total suspension of thought and consciousness during the interval between death and the resurrection".[41]

Luther found a ready ally for his psychopannychism in Andreas Carlstadt,[42] his unpredictable co-labourer in the German Reformation. The psychopannychism of both Luther and Carlstadt was closely bound up with a strong biblical eschatology, indicating perhaps that a more consistent interpretation of the biblical text as a whole confirmed belief in the sleep of the soul. This was undoubtedly true of Luther. In Carlstadt's case, however, there was possibly more. His psychopannychism may have been generated, in part at least, while a student at Sienna, 1516-17, through contact with the Paduan challenge to the doctrine of immortality, and may therefore have been tinged with the philosophical overtones which characterised Padua's revised Aristotelianism and which, as we have seen, incurred the indignation of the Fifth Lateran Council.[43] Also, Carlstadt's relationship with the radicals of the Reformation was stronger than Luther's, and here again, notably in the case of the Evangelical Rationalists, for whom the immortality of the soul was inconsonant with reason, mortalism was a common denominator.

Like Luther, however, Carlstadt found that psychopannychism was an effective weapon with which to attack purgatory and the elaborate system of indulgences which had grown up around it, together with the pivotal Roman doctrine of the Mass. Carlstadt's psychopannychism was first articulated in the context of his radical reinterpretation of the Mass as commemorative rather than sacramental, based on a more literal biblical foundation.[44] It is also probable that the depiction of purgatory as spiritually purgative in the present rather than as punitive in the future, as advocated in a contemporary Wittenberg publication,[45] helped to clarify Carlstadt's convictions regarding

40 "Commentary on I Corinthians 15", *LW*, 28, 94. More than one hundred and twenty-five references to death as a sleep and the unconscious state of the dead are said to be found in Luther's writings. The count is based on an analysis in J. G. Walch (ed), *Martin Luther's Sammtlichte Schriften* (1904).

41 Blackburne, *Historical View,* 355, 359.

42 Carlstadt is unaccountably missing from Froom's *Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers.*

43 *RR* (1st edn.,1962), 104.

44 *ME*, I (1955), 519-20; *RR*, 110-20, 196.

45 Wessel Gansfort, *Farrago Rerum Theologicarum* (Wittenburg, 1522).

the sleep of the soul. In any event, by 1523 Carlstadt had published in favour of psychopannychism, although it is only fair to say that he does not appear to have given it as much emphasis as did Luther. It should also be said that Carlstadt's understanding of soul sleep, at least at this point, appears to have been just that, i.e. psychosomnolence, rather than the more radical thnetopsychism of some of his contemporaries.[46] Advocates of psychopannychism in Germany at the same period include Gerhard Westerburg in Wittenberg and Frankfurt, and the more radical Augustine Bader, c.1530.[47] Westerberg, a colleague of Carlstadt, may have derived his mortalist eschatology from Carlstadt's 1523 publication. Both were exiled from Saxony in 1524, and in 1526 Westerberg was condemned for his teachings on purgatory and the sleep of the soul.[48] With Westerberg, of course, we have already moved into the ranks of the radicals.

The Continental Radicals

Before we turn to Calvin and his crucial participation in the mortalist debate, it is necessary to trace in more detail the position of the radicals of the Continental Reformation. Opposed vehemently by Calvin,[49] their well-attested opposition to the doctrine of innate immortality may ultimately have contributed more to the continuity of mortalism as a legitimate Christian hope, both on the Continent and in England, than did either Luther or Carlstadt. Williams, in his comprehensive analysis of the radical Reformation, maintains that mortalism in its various forms was a crucial element in the theology of many radicals, equally as important to their identity as anti-Trinitarianism or a revised soteriology. He distinguishes between three types of radicals: Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Evangelical Rationalists,[50] believing

46 *RR*, 197.

47 *Ibid.,* 196-8, 298.

48 *ME*, IV(1959), 930-1; *RR*, 198.

49 Notably in his *Psychopannychia* (Geneva, 1545), which was first published in Strassburg in 1542 with the title *De statu animarum post mortem liber, quo asseritur Vivere apud Christum non dormire animos sanctos, qui in fide Christi decedunt:Assertio,* but which was almost certainly first composed in 1534, Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (tr. William Heynen, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 26. Heynen's translation reads "Dissertation about the state of souls after death, proving that the saints who died in faith in Christ now live with Christ and are not asleep as far as their souls are concerned".

50 The Spiritualists should not be confused with those called by the same name who arose in the nineteenth century. Those of the sixteenth century emphasised the inner, contemplative life as essential to authentic Christian faith. Williams defines the Evangelical Rationalists as "a fusion of Italian humanism or critical rationalism with selected ingredients of . . .Anabaptism and visionary Spiritualism", *RR*, 836.

that "some" of the Spiritualists, "many" of the Anabaptists, and "almost all" the Evangelical Rationalists adhered to the doctrine of "the sleep or death of the soul prior to the resurrection".[51] This, as we have previously noted, Williams rather loosely terms "psychopannychism", and care is sometimes needed in determining whether at a given point he means psychopannychism or thnetopsychism. Mortalism in either of its two more recognisable forms, psychopannychism, more precisely defined as psychosomnolence, or thnetopsychism was "a recurrent feature of the Radical Reformation".[52] Tavard argues that by the time Calvin wrote the first draft of the *Psychopannychia* in 1534 he had been aware for some time of the existence of "false" doctrines about the soul that had "gained considerable ground among some advocates of the reform movement",[53] specifically among the radicals of the Continental Reformation.

The Anabaptist psychopannychists were well represented in Austria in the mid-1520s by three disciples of John (Hans) Hut, or Huth: Leonhard Schiemer, John (Hans) Schlaffer and Ambrose Spittelmaier. Hut himself believed in the imminence of the second coming and preached on the prophecies of Daniel and the book of Revelation, anticipating the imminent end of the world, the resurrection, judgement and the kingdom of Christ.[54] Schiemer, Schlaffer and Spittelmaier, likewise "confident in the imminence of Christ's second advent", maintained a belief "in the sleep of the soul pending the resurrection and the last judgement".[55] Another follower of Hut, Augustine Bader of Augsburg, also held to soul sleep in the context of the general resurrection at the last day.[56] In Switzerland the Anabaptist leader Michael Sattler was burned in 1527, convicted of numerous charges of heresy, including denying the efficacy of the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the saints since, like all the faithful they were asleep, awaiting the judgement. It would certainly have been of great concern to the Catholic establishment to be told that Mary "must with us await the judgment".[57] Psychopannychism was known to leading spokesmen of the Reformation, and equally reprehensible to them. Both Zwingli and his successor at Zurich, Bullinger, attacked the doctrine of soul sleep, Bullinger publishing against it as early as 1526.[58] A later English translation of a work by Bullinger testified to the existence

51 *Ibid.,* xxxi, 70.

52 *Ibid.,* 69.

53 Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 41.

54 *ME*, II (1956), 846-48.

55 *RR*, 266-7, 279-80.

56 *Ibid.,* 298.

57 *ME*, IV, 431; A. M. Mergal and G. H. Williams (eds.), *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia,1957), 140.

58 Balke, *Calvin,* 32.

of Swiss Anabaptist psychopannychism: "They say that the souls, after the death of the body (if they do depart in faith), do sleep in the bosom of Abraham till the day of judgment, and that then they enter into everlasting life".[59]

Among the Spiritualist radicals who advocated psychopannychism we have already noted Carlstadt. The sixteenth-century Libertines of the Netherlands, some of whom, Anthony Pocquet among them, were psychopannychists, should also be considered in this connection.[60] Pocquet, a former priest and doctor in canon law, had worked out an elaborate scheme of history in which the world passed through seven stages, the last being the paradisic age. Within the seven phases of history Pocquet developed a mystical, spiritualised interpretation of the redemptive work of Christ, culminating in the resurrection of the righteous. Believers who had died in anticipation of the resurrection were asleep in the grave, to be "awakened to the life of the redeemed at the end of the seventh age".[61] Pocquet, it seems, also promulgated psychopannychism in France and Navarre, sympathetic, perhaps, to the "French evangelical Paduans", and became one of the principle targets of Calvin's *Psychopannychia* shortly to be published.[62] In a chapter entitled "Sectarianism and Spiritualism in Poland" and in an earlier chapter, Williams discusses the thnetopsychism of Faustus Socinus, pointing out that "the second basic principle of his theology" was the natural mortality of man, and drawing attention to a soteriological scheme which culminated in "resurrection in a spiritual body at the Second Advent of Christ".[63] Whether or not Socinus was truly a Polish Spiritualist,[64] his mortalism deserves to be noted for at least two reasons. It was decisively thnetopsychist in character, and it laid a foundation for the later Unitarian mortalists in Poland and Transylvania. We shall return to Socinus shortly.

The Evangelical Rationalists, essentially Italian in origin though by the latter half of the sixteenth century spread across Eastern Europe, took

59 H. Bullinger, *An Holsome Antidotus . . . agaynst the pestylent heresye and secte of the Anabaptistes* (tr. J. Veron [1548]), sig. N vi *r*.

60 Pocquet is not included in Froom's *Conditionalist Faith*. Of all the radical mortalists mentioned in this section, only Camillo Renato is treated adequately by Froom. Laelius and Faustus Socinus are mentioned briefly, although Froom recognises the importance of Socinian mortalism in general, *CFF*, II, 86.

61 *RR*, 538.

62 In a letter to Margaret of Navarre in 1545, Calvin warned the queen of the dangerous influence of Pocquet and his associate, Quintin Thieffry, estimating that they had 10,000 followers; cited in Balke, *Calvin,* 22.

63 *Ibid.,* 980, 1162.

64 Williams elsewhere defines him as an Evangelical Rationalist, but notes also that ultimately the Polish churches adopted many features of his Christology and soteriology, *RR*, 1253, 1162.

mortalism to what Williams convincingly calls its "extreme" position of thnetopsychism.[65]The Evangelical Rationalists themselves, with their insistence that reason must prevail in the interpretation of Scripture, and for that matter the later English thnetopsychists of the eighteenth century, might have preferred to call it the most logical and consistent formulation of mortalist theology. The Italian Evangelical Rationalists were well represented by Camillo Renato, their most prominent and articulate sixteenth-century spokesman. Wilbur describes Renato as "a man of keen and fertile mind", well-educated and "persuasive and adroit in discussion". It was widely believed in his day that Italian Anabaptism in its entirety could be traced back to him.[66]

Renato had worked through the problems of human nature and mortality to reach a thnetopsyschist position.[67] One of the four main accusations brought against him at his trial in Ferrara in 1540 was his teaching that the souls of "both the righteous and the wicked expire at the death of the body and have no abiding place until the resurrection and the last judgment".[68] Renato's ideas had unsettled many erstwhile more moderate Protestants in Northern Italy, the Republic of Rhaetia and bordering parts of Switzerland. The Anabaptist Council of Venice, 1550, called to settle disputed points of doctrine among the radicals of Northern Italy, Rhaetia and the affected Swiss cantons, all but unanimously agreed on a ten-point statement of belief which stated "that the souls of the wicked die with their bodies; that for the unrighteous there is no hell except the grave, and that after the death of the elect their souls sleep till the day of judgment".[69] That this represented something of a retreat from Renato's fully-developed thnetopsychism to accommodate the psychopannychistic position should not be allowed to minimise the endorsement of radical Italian mortalist doctrine by the delegates of some thirty conventicles.

The influence of Italian Evangelical Rationalism was felt further afield, particularly in Eastern Europe. In Poland and Lithuania the mortalist cause was advanced by Laelius Socinus, who left among his papers a work concerning the resurrection, *De resurrectione corporum*, which, "following Camillo Renato . . . attempted to replace the V Lateran teaching of the natural immortality of the soul" with what he believed to be a more biblical,

65 *Ibid.,* 1149.

66 E. M. Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1945), 103 - 4.

67 *Ibid.,*105. On Renato, see also G. H. Williams, "Camillo Renato (c.1500 - ?1575)" in J. A. Tedeschi (ed.), *Italian Reformation Studies in Honour of Laelius Socinus* (Florence, 1965), 105-183.

68 *RR*, 841-2.

69 *Ibid.,* 872.

mortalist alternative.[70] Socinus was followed by Gregory Paul who, again following Renato, taught that the soul, like the body, is mortal.[71] This sounds like thnetopsychism once more. There is no possible ambiguity, however, with the energetic Simon Budny, the anti-Trinitarian leader in Lithuania and Little Poland, who in 1576 openly advocated a form of thnetopsychism, declaring that the soul was nothing more than the life of the body and had no independent existence.[72] Already in 1572 a group of students had returned to Transylvania from the university of Padua, with similar views to those of Gregory Paul and Camillo Renato, notably "psychopannychism with a lively expectation of being resurrected" as loyal followers of Christ.[73] Despite the pronouncements of the Fifth Lateran Council, Paduan doubt over the immortality of the soul and the reasonable alternative proposed by the Italian Evangelical Rationalists seem to have taken root well beyond the borders of Northern Italy and the Venetian Republic.

We may now return to Faustus Socinus, 1539-1604, whose own theology was influenced both by his uncle, Laelius, and by Camillo Renato. Laelius Socinus, who we shall meet again in an English setting, had also studied at Padua and had himself been influenced by Renato, in particular by Renato's robust thnetopsychism,[74] which he later used to good effect in discomfiting Calvin over the future state of the righteous. Faustus himself came to hold the Paduan view of man's natural mortality and the death of the soul with the body, a conviction which was central to his influential work *De Jesu Christo servatore*, published in 1578.[75] In the context of this important work, Williams comments on the significance of the whole theological system worked out by Faustus Socinus:

> In his Christology, thnetopsychism, and conception of sanctification, Socinus brings together with memorable clarity and baffling simplicity a doctrine of the atonement and justification which (more than any other work thus far discussed) shows how sectors of the Radical Reforma-

70 Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism,* 247. Williams describes Renato as the *praeceptor, dux,* and *informator* of the young Laelius, *Italian Reformation Studies,* 108. Laelius later visited England briefly, 1547/8, at the invitation of Cranmer, E. M. Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England and America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard,1952), 170; *ODCC*, s.v. Socinus.

71 Williams, in *Italian Reformation Studies,* 105.

72 *RR*, 1149.

73 *Ibid.,* 1122.

74 Williams's references to Renato's mortalism as "psychopannychism", e.g., *RR*, 880, are best explained by his willingness to use the term to describe both psychosomnolence and thnetopsychism. In fact, there can be no doubt about Renato's thnetopsychist position, which Williams himself acknowledges elsewhere, e.g., pp. 841-2. See also Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism,* 105.

75 *RR*, 983-4.

> tion, in various thrusts and tentative endeavours, differed profoundly from the Magisterial Reformation."[76]

We must not allow the close relationship of Socinus' thnetopsychism to his soteriology to escape us here. While not necessarily agreeing with the soteriology itself, it was a relationship that later thnetopsychists, including Trinitarians, would defend with equal conviction. It is also worth pointing out again that although the spokesmen of the Radical Reformation differed profoundly in many respects from their counterparts in the mainstream Reformation, there were those on both sides who found in mortalism, in whichever form they expressed it, a statement of authentic eschatological hope.

As for Faustus Socinus himself, his thnetopsychist doctrine of man's essential mortality, already embodied in the theology of the early Polish Racovians from about 1570, was to become an important element in the later, reshaped Unitarian system better known as Socinianism. Williams concludes that almost every aspect of Socinus' theology "would soon be taken over by the Minor Church",[77] notably his "hermeneutical and epistemological principles (and) his doctrine of natural mortality" with its thorough-going mortalist emphasis on the resurrection of the righteous.[78] But with Polish Socinianism fully articulated we have reached the seventeenth century and a point beyond the scope of this brief survey of Reformation and immediate post-Reformation Continental mortalist thought. We must now briefly retrace our steps.

Calvin, Servetus and the *Psychopannychia*

It is clearly evident that Christian mortalism in both its forms was widely known and promulgated across the European continent for much of the sixteenth century. But it should not be thought that the Continental radicals practised or preached their faith, mortalist or otherwise, unimpeded. Spurned and stigmatised for the most part by the leaders of the mainstream Reformation, hunted down frequently by the Inquisition and turned over to the secular authority to be dealt with as deemed expedient, and sometimes betrayed without warning from within, the radicals and their beliefs survived at considerable cost.[79] With respect to mortalist theology in particular, few demonstrated their hostility more consistently than the French reformer John Calvin, both in his treatment of the radical Spaniard, Michael

76 *Ibid.,* 989.

77 The Minor Reformed Church is the name given to the Polish anti-Trinitarian, anti-paedobaptist radicals of the sixteenth century.

78 *RR*, 1174.

79 E.g., the betrayal by the former priest turned Anabaptist Peter Manelfi of many who had subscribed to the conclusions of the Synod of Venice, and the subsequent activities of the Inquisition, *RR*, 871-3

Servetus, and through his own first major theological work, *Psychopannychia*. It is with Calvin, and his contemporary Henry Bullinger, as we shall later observe, that we find clear indications that there may have been a link between the mortalism of the Continental radicals and English mortalism in the sixteenth century.

The episode concerning Servetus which ultimately led to his execution in 1553 is notoriously well-known and has been the subject of much comment. Servetus's psychopannychism, however, appears to be less well-known. Of three quite different lives of Calvin selected at random,[80] all refer to Servetus' life and teachings in some detail but none mentions his psychopannychistic views as one of the several heresies of which he was accused. Even Tavard, who traces the development of Calvin's *Psychopannychia*, seems unaware of the connection. Williams associates Servetus with Camillo Renato as "early representatives" of Continental radical psychopannychism "and the apocalyptic eschatology" in which it was generated. He points out that a meeting arranged between Calvin and Servetus in 1534, for which the latter did not turn up, was to have taken place shortly before the first draft of the *Psychopannychia*.[81] More to the point, perhaps, is the assertion that one of the four main charges brought against Servetus' "matured theological system" was that of psychopannychism, and that at the trial itself Calvin questioned Servetus about his psychopannychistic beliefs.[82] Together with Laelius Socinus, Gregory Paul, John Hut and Camillo Renato, Servetus had advocated his mortalism in the context of an apocalyptic eschatology which anticipated an imminent consummation of history, with the last judgment and the resurrection of the righteous dead at hand. It was this total biblical witness to the future that gave Servetus and those who thought like him their deep eschatological convictions and mortalism its strength and its appeal in sixteenth-century Europe.

Calvin, of course, was not of the same mind at all. He saw mortalism in any form as heresy, and a threat to the order he sought to bring to the Reformation and to the reformed church which he was in the process of shaping and which he fervently hoped would endure into the future. He called mortalists, particularly psychopannychists, "Babblers" and "Hypnologists", and mortalists in general soul-killers, "*psuchoktonoi*, assassins of the soul".[83]

80 J. Mackinnon, *Calvin and the Reformation* (London:Longmans,1936); E. Stickelberger, *Calvin: A Life* (Richmond, VA: Knox, 1961); F. Wendel, *Calvin* (London: Collins,1965).

81 *RR*, 70, 903.

82 *Ibid.,* 929, citing Calvin, *Opera quae supersunt omnia* (1863 - 1900), vol.8, cols. 739-40.

83 Balke, *Calvin,* 29; Tavard, *Calvin's Theology* , 41. Tavard seems to be unaware of Balke's earlier comments on Calvin and the *Psychopannychia,* in Balke,

Calvin clung to the traditional, prevailing view of immortality, believing in the soul's separate existence and its continuing consciousness after death. The term 'psychopannychia' means literally 'the watching wakefulness' of the soul after death, Calvin's own defined position. The title of his now famous work against psychopannychism, therefore, has come to represent the doctrine he opposed rather than the position he advocated, namely both "the doctrine of the death of the soul (thnetopsychism) and the unconscious sleep of the soul (psychosomnolence) pending the resurrection".[84] As we have already noted, the first draft of the *Psychopannychia* is believed to have been written as early as 1534, with a subsequent draft in 1536, before the first printed edition in 1542, and the first edition under the title of *Psychopannychia* in 1545.[85] It is immediately apparent that Calvin was concerned about the development of mortalist views over a period of several years early in his career and early in the history of the Reformation as a whole.

Moreover he clearly understood, by the time his thoughts on the matter were finally committed to print, that there were two mortalist camps advocating different positions. One group, the psychopannychists, as already noted, believed that the soul existed as a separate entity but that it slept during death and thus lost consciousness temporarily. The other group, the thnetophychists, held that the soul was not an entity separate from the body, and that it existed only as long as the body was alive, but that it could and, in the case of the righteous, would exist again following the resurrection. Calvin wrote with commendable clarity and fairness:

> Our controversy, then, relates to the human soul. Some, while admitting it to have a real existence, imagine that it sleeps in a state of insensibility from death to the judgment day, when it will awake from its sleep; while others will sooner admit anything than its real existence, maintaining that it is merely a vital power which is derived from arterial spirit on the action of the lungs, and being unable to exist without the body, perishes along with the body, and vanishes away and becomes evanescent till the period when the whole man shall be raised again.[86]

These were the views which Calvin vigorously set out to combat in the

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Calvin, 25-34.

84 *RR*, 902.

85 Wendel believed that the 1534 version may have been published, *Calvin,* 43; cf. *RR*, 900. Froom also states that the 1534 edition was published, but incorrectly gives the later title, *CFF*, II, 113. Balke, Tavard and Lane maintain that the first known printed edition was that of 1542, Balke, *Calvin,* 26-7; Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 1; A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 70.

86 Calvin, "Psychopannychia", in H. Beveridge (tr.), *Calvin, Tracts Relating to the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), III, 419; cf. Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 54-5.

Psychopannychia. With some reservation, perhaps, concerning the attempted scientific explanation of thnetopsychism, they fairly represent developing mortalist thought in Europe throughout the period.

Williams suggests that the original draft of the *Psychopannychia* may have been directed against Servetus and his mortalist fellow-believers in Paris c.1534.[87] In 1537, much to Calvin's chagrin, psychopannychism was openly advocated in Geneva by two Anabaptist teachers from the Netherlands, Herman of Gerbehaye and Andrew Benoit of Engelen. Calvin's concern apparently arose from the fact that the people of Geneva were "responsive to their preaching". In the following year, while at Strassburg, and perhaps not for the first time, he became aware of French psychopannychists preaching the sleep of the soul, including that of the Virgin Mary.[88] We have already noted that at about this same time, Anthony Pocquet was teaching psychopannychism in France and Navarre. It was all the tip of a dangerous iceberg. "Horrified by the extent of the Anabaptist and Spiritualist movements", with their psychopannychist and thnetopsychist emphases, and seeing in them a serious threat to the stability of the Reformation, Calvin was at last persuaded to publish *Psychopannychia* which appeared, under its earlier title, in Strassburg in 1542.[89] It was, it might be judged, rather too late.

One further fact concerning the *Psychopannychia* must be noted, particularly in relation to Calvin's pending influence in England. It was originally written, if not before Calvin's final conversion to the Reformed faith, then certainly at a time of transition, turmoil and personal stress.[90] Tavard, in fact, argues persuasively that the point of Calvin's actual conversion may have been after the first draft of *Psychopannychia* had been composed.[91] Whatever the truth may be, it is certain that Calvin's reaction to the growing Continental mortalist threat faithfully reflected the traditional medieval view of the soul, a pre-Reformation eschatology which "does not exhibit a reforming orientation".[92] Balke correctly states that in the *Psychopannychia* "there is no evidence that Calvin was at variance with the Roman Catholic Church".[93] In Tavard's opinion, Calvin, the humanist, "entertained a thoroughly Platonic conception of the soul" which he did not surrender "when

87 *RR*, 903. The circumstances surrounding the writing of the *Psychopannychia* are covered in some detail by Williams, *RR*, 899-904

88 *Ibid.,* 916. Calvin may also have been aware of the earlier psychopannychism of Otto Brunfels in Strasburg, c.1530, *ibid.,* 309.

89 *Ibid.,* 918. Both the Reformers Bucer and Capito had urged Calvin not to publish until the time was more propitious, Balke, *Calvin,* 27.

90 Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 10, 39.

91 *Ibid.,* 10, 41.

92 *Ibid.,* 113.

93 Balke, *Calvin,* 34.

he became a biblical scholar".[94] Indeed, a critical evaluation of the *Psychopannychia* reveals that Calvin "has retained Plato's thesis that the soul is a stranger to the body that imprisons it during the present life".[95] It was this view of the soul and its destiny that found its way into Calvin's influential *Institutes*[96](where the influence of Plato is evident, e.g. Bk. I, ch. XV), the first draft of which was being written at the same time that Calvin was revising the *Psychopannychia* for publication and while the questions of mortalism and the soul were still major issues in his mind.[97] There were profound and lasting implications here for both Continental and English Protestantism in their formative years.

The young Calvin's lingering attachment to certain aspects of medieval theology and patristic authority is further evident in his treatment of the relevant biblical texts which, within the scholastic tradition, is undergirded by frequent appeals to the interpretations of these texts by the Greek and Latin fathers. In addition to Tertullian and Augustine, there are recurring references to Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, Chrysostom and Jerome, *inter alios*, those who, in Calvin's mind, "have reverently and discretely handled the mysteries of God".[98] Other considerations aside, if this was the case it is not surprising that the *Psychopannychia* failed to impress those whom it sought to counter, or that it did little to stem the rising mortalist tide across Continental Europe. Such unconcealed respect for the opinions of the fathers would surely have undermined Calvin's impact on more radical minds attracted to the pure word of God and whose own hermeneutic required a "total disregard of the Augustinian and . . . mystical traditions".[99]Arguing that Calvin's "anti-Roman stance" was adopted after he had first written against mortalism and soul-sleep, Tavard concludes that while the *Psychopannychia* betrayed Calvin's hostility to the radical wing of the Reformation, it was not in itself a reforming document. "The position it defended was identical with Catholic teaching, and it did not contain one word that was critical of the medieval church or the papacy".[100] Clearly there are significant implica-

94 Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 53.

95 *Ibid.,* 77.

96 See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* Bk. I, ch. XV and Bk. II, ch. XXV.

97 Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 7, 9.

98 John Calvin, *An excellent treatise of the Immortalytie of the Soule* (tr. Thomas Stocker, 1581), *passim* and 63. Lane emphasises Calvin's "great respect for the teaching of the fathers" from which "he did not lightly depart", although his "refusal to accord them authority on a par with Scripture" should not be overlooked. Lane also appears to endorse the older view that the *Psychopannychia* was Calvin's first post-conversion work, Lane, *John Calvin,* 35, 38, 28, 31.

99 Tavard, *Calvin's Theology,* 112.

100 *Ibid.,* 149.

tions here for English mortalism and the repeated attempts of its opponents in England to suppress it, as well as for the wider eschatology which would later dominate the English-speaking Protestant world. Indeed, we may find in all this a hint of the solution to a question that has remained largely unanswered for four hundred years or more - why mainstream Protestantism, both in England and on the Continent, which in its formative years so emphatically repudiated what it considered to be the doctrinal legacy of the medieval church, retained what was arguably the central plank in the entire dogmatic and liturgical structure of late medieval Catholicism, belief in the immortal soul.[101]

It is enough for now to observe that the confrontation with Servetus and the entire sequence of events which ultimately led Calvin to publish the *Psychopannychia* are indications of the growing strength of mortalist views on the Continent during the first half of the sixteenth century, and of their wide appeal to many European Christians who had been unsettled by the new Reformation theology. The fact that mortalism steadily gained ground and the attention of leading thinkers among the Continental radicals was not, of course, due to Calvin's *Psychopannychia*, but rather in spite of it. It is ironic that the mortalist radicals appealed for their authority to precisely the same court that Calvin, and the English Reformers who followed him, all invoked - God's Word in Scripture. The very least that can be said of the surprisingly widespread dissemination of mortalism across Europe by the middle of the sixteenth century in relation to the development of mortalist opinion in England, is that it confirmed what English tongues and pens were already beginning to articulate.

101 See also *The Soul Sleepers,* ch. 2, 64-68.