Introduction

Doubt is a promising subject of inquiry for historians. Its initial definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* reads '[t]he (subjective) state of uncertainty with regard to the truth or reality of anything; undecidedness of belief or opinion', which might be advocated as a necessary mindset for any historically inclined investigator embarking on research. Although not always articulated, historians constantly face the 'state of uncertainty' of knowledge of the past and the continuous need, therefore, to test the evidence. The compilers of the *OED* then, perhaps unwittingly, underscore the particular relevance of 'doubt' as a subject for ecclesiastical historians by further defining it as 'uncertainty as to the truth of Christianity or some other religious belief or doctrine'.[1] The prominent placing of this second definition acknowledges the reality that doubts about religious ideas and individual doctrines, if not faith itself, have long been conspicuous in human language, and not just when speaking about Christianity. Nonetheless, the means and the consequences of communicating doubt depend on, and are intensely revealing of, changing historical circumstance.

The potential for doubt as a barometer of historical change was central to the selection of the twin themes of 'Doubting Christianity: The Church and Doubt' for the Summer Conference and Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society in 2014–15. Like all historical questions, doubt has moved in and out of fashion. In publishing terms the 1980s and early 1990s saw a creative and influential burst of work on pre-modern atheism and scepticism with broad implications for the study of doubt.[2] More recently, historians of religion have pushed harder on unbelief and incredulity, while

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[1] See <www.oed.com>, *s.v.* 'doubt noun 1', last accessed 7 September 2015.
[2] For a few key English-language examples, see Michael Hunter, 'The Problem of "Atheism" in Early Modern England', *TRHS* 5th ser. 35 (1985), 135–57; David Wootton, 'Unbelief in Early Modern Europe', *History Workshop* 20 (1985), 82–100; Susan Reynolds, 'Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval Scepticism', *TRHS* 6th ser. 1 (1991), 21–41 (much quoted by authors in this volume); Michael Hunter and David Wootton, eds, *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1992). An influential earlier work was Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1971).

others have concentrated on epistemological (un)certainty.[3] There has been much imaginative exploration of how different societies have sought to cope with the limitations of knowledge, to construct proof and secure truth. Those working on trust or distrust, reputation, witnessing or false witness, memory and other features of human interaction have all come to deal, explicitly or not, with doubt.[4] It is a good moment for the Ecclesiastical History Society to tackle the subject.

To encourage cross-fertilization, the description of doubt in the call for papers which lies behind this volume was intentionally broad, from individual, existential doubts to epistemic uncertainty. The conferences in Sheffield and London that followed attracted an inspiring variety of papers, and generated lively discussion. Speakers reflected on historians' identification of particular periods as ages of doubt or faith, the interdependence of faith and doubt, the careers of doubters, the experience of doubt between private and public, individual and community, pastoral efforts to cohabit with, restrain or explain doubts, polemical attempts to silence them, textual and material means of articulating the nuance of uncertainties and their resolution, institutional and bureaucratic endeavours to cope with uncertainty, and the many individual and communal struggles to avoid doubt altogether, whether by alternative forms of argument or by changing behaviour and process. Doubt emerged as inevitable, as concomitant to faith, occasionally as a virtue, more often as a struggle, an ailment to be overcome. For many Christian theologians,

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[3] See, to mention only some of those in my own field, John Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London, 2005); Paolo Golinelli, *Il Medioevo degli increduli. Miscredenti, beffatori, anticlericali* (Milan, 2009); Peter Dinzelbacher, *Unglaube im 'Zeitalter des Glaubens'. Atheismus und Skeptizismus im Mittelalter* (Badenweiler, 2009); Dorothea Weltecke, *'Der Narr spricht: Es ist kein Gott'. Atheismus, Unglauben, und Glaubenszweifel vom 12. Jahrhundert bis zur Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, 2010); Alex Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice and Performance* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013); Dallas G. Denery II, Kantik Ghosh and Nicolette Zeeman, eds, *Uncertain Knowledge: Scepticism, Relativism and Doubt in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2014); Dorothea Weltecke, 'Doubt', in John H. Arnold, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity* (Oxford, 2014), 357–74.

[4] For example, Geoffrey Hosking, *Trust: A History* (Oxford, 2014); Thelma Fentress and Daniel Lord Smail, eds, *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 2003); Jamie K. Taylor, *Fictions of Evidence: Witnessing, Literature, and Community in the Late Middle Ages* (Columbus, OH, 2013); Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2003). On memory, a vast field, an interesting starting place is the philosophically based volume by Dmitri Nikulin, *Memory: A History* (Oxford, 2015).

after all, doubt is a consequence of the fall. Dialectically, the 'shadow of doubt' remains something to avoid.

Since the selection of essays that resulted is published here in chronological order and each has its own abstract, this introduction is limited to drawing attention to a few of the common questions which flicker across their pages, some of the many possible ways that links can be seen when reading between their multifaceted arguments. It is worth warning readers at the outset that relatively few writers deal in depth with what 'doubt' might be. Rather they offer insightful readings of how different actors described and dealt with doubt and uncertainty in themselves and in others, often, but not always, the clergy and ministers in relation to their flocks.

Persistent doubting?

In Western Europe, on which the writers in this volume have focused predominantly, post-Enlightenment expressions of fundamental doubts about matters of faith rarely have stark personal, social or political consequences. Yet it is so much easier to hear modern doubters that doubt itself is popularly assumed to be a feature of modernity, regularly contrasted with a credulous, undoubting Middle Ages. Recent work has dismantled some features of this picture, restoring to the late Middle Ages, for example, at least a 'sceptical undercurrent'.[5] Others have questioned the weight of doubt in more recent centuries, but the conventional picture remains powerful. Several of the essays here contribute further ways to deepen and widen the chronological depth of the challenge to its assumptions. Jinty Nelson's study of Carolingian doubt lays out a series of cases designed in the first instance to show that the early Middle Ages also knew doubt. Her evidence begins with a famous handbook written for a beloved absent son by a ninth-century Frankish noblewoman, Dhuoda. The mother warns her son of the suffering and spiritual sadness that may engender uncertainty about divine power and the need to resolve this by turning to prayer. The evidence of Dhuoda's or her son William's doubt requires careful extrapolation: she did not use the word. But this reading of personal struggle provides a backdrop for Nelson's delineation of high-level religious doubts and

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[5] 'Introduction: The Varieties of Uncertainty', in Denery, Ghosh and Zeeman, eds, *Uncertain Knowledge*, 1–12, at 9.

doctrinal divergences set out in male-authored letters, learned commentary and hagiographical texts. These expose disagreements, shifting certainties and doubts. The monk Gottschalk thought doubt inevitable, beautifully pinpointing the difficulty of relying on the senses by evoking the way sight is misled by distortion when a stick is placed in water. He came to be convinced of double predestination – to heaven or to hell – contradicting contemporary orthodoxy, and ended his days in monastic prison. These and other cases in Nelson's analysis point to how doubt moved between private and public and also the importance of particulars of place. Different contexts, from Carolingian court circles to frontier zones between Christian and pagan, or areas under Muslim rule, generated different responses from Christian leaders and scholars who were often themselves unsure.

Whereas Nelson reinstates doubt as a feature of the early medieval Christian experience, both lay and clerical, Charles Stang adds to the bonfire of 'doubt' as a feature of modernity by taking us back to the New Testament. Challenging Lawrence of Arabia's epigram of doubt as 'our modern crown of thorns', he traces how the writers of the four canonical gospels variously built tension and sought to diffuse it, alternately opening up doubts and plugging gaps, reacting to doubt's 'persistent purchase'. He proposes distinct understandings of doubt in each gospel: as a threat to which we are vulnerable; a shadow without obvious origin or purpose but which may provide relief (shade); as something rooted in human desires; or as a 'defiant conditional' between humans and faith. While the different gospel writers may have set out to quicken faith, he argues, the cumulative effect of the gospels is that doubt 'cannot be fully dispelled'. Faith and doubt appear coincident, questions abound.

One of the many gospel questions is also a starting point for my own contribution, focused on the figure of 'doubting John' detectable in Matthew 11: 2–3, the moment when John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Christ whether he was 'the one who is to come'. The essay first seeks to fathom late antique and late medieval currents of doubt by tracing how biblical exegetes handled the uncertainties John's question raised, constructing arguments to distance him from doubt and driving polemical texts seeking a solution to those doubts. Drawing on late medieval anti-heretical dispute literature and feast-day sermons produced in Italy, where John was a popular patron saint, it then illustrates how place, audience and genre

determined when doubt was more likely to be stemmed, or where it might be energetically debated. Doubt emerges as a powerful current that often surfaced and may have had a visual echo in representations of John debating with his anxious disciples.

The power of doubt in the late Middle Ages also flows indirectly from Anik Laferrière's examination of its strategic excision from accounts of the life of their alleged founder, Augustine of Hippo, by five fourteenth-century Augustinian hermit friars. Augustine's own *Confessions* attributed to his mother Monica a central role in helping him overcome his doubts about Christianity. Such doubts were inconvenient, Laferrière argues, not because their resolution was bound up in female authority, but because they did not fit the hermit friars' vision of Augustine as the direct source of their own form of life, itself still apparently vulnerable to a curb on new religious orders reiterated by the Council of Lyons in 1274. In building certainty about their claims to be his longstanding and true sons, and therefore exempt from the 1274 restrictions, Augustine's wavering must be set aside. Monica therefore disappeared, along with her son's doubts.

An alternative approach to the examination of doubt in the late Middle Ages is explored in Robert Swanson's essay, which sets out to revise conceptions of doubt and uncertainty on a broad scale. Explaining the sophisticated interpretations of numerous thinkers, he demonstrates both that doubt and insecurity about belief were much more accepted than most historians recognize and that uncertainty was an inevitable feature of the late medieval Church, a congregation of humans of diverse beliefs and practices in which the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable, orthodox and heretic were unstable. Like Nelson's early medieval clerics, Swanson's late medieval churchmen were not inexorably sure of their ground. Challenging any crude portrayal of belief and unbelief as binaries, he shows how theologians and canonists acknowledged a spectrum, understanding belief as a movement from suspicion, doubt, opinion to conviction, with the danger at any moment of making the wrong choice and ending up heading in a different direction, towards a different place, still unsure whether heaven or hell. Acquiring faith may be helped by reason, but knowledge is beyond belief; true knowledge is not for this world. How the boundaries depended on rival intellectual worlds, how they were to be drawn in the living Church, and how scrupulosity drove uncertainty and reformation are questions which

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tie together the dual themes of doubt and doubting, in Christianity and in the Church.

Kirstie Blair's essay also tests traditional chronologies in the historical discussion of doubt, this time by moving the focus to nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry. She argues that the work of modern poets such as Carol Ann Duffy, creating a poetry of doubt which often rejects churchgoing and the function of Christianity, remains haunted all the same by Victorian religious literature, with its poetics of faith and doubt. Focusing on the sonnet form, she observes how structures, rhythms and language echo the writing of Victorians such as Matthew Arnold, Christina Rossetti or Alfred Tennyson. In Blair's analysis, continuity undermines the conception of the nineteenth century as the eponymous 'age of doubt': what we tend to think of as Victorian anxieties about faith and doubt still resonate.

Living with Doubt

Modern historians have gradually been coming to terms with the reality that doubts and uncertainty (like belief and faith) flow through Christian experience in all periods, if unevenly. This is a faint shadow of the many struggles of the historical actors they study to live with the limits of human knowledge and the inevitability of doubt. As Tim Grass observes in his reading of the newly accessible correspondence of Samuel Rawson Gardiner and his family, this Victorian historian came to the belief that 'all apprehension of truth in this life [is] partial at best: no ideology or system of religious dogma could fully encapsulate it'. Many of those studied here might have agreed with both sentiments, but in Gardiner's case he was able to act upon his doubts about a particular 'system of religious dogma' with relative impunity. He had been brought up in the Catholic Apostolic Church, but new scientific understandings of geological time had kindled his doubts about the dogmatic certainty of his Church's leaders. Their failure to adapt was one reason which led Gardiner to move to the Church of England around 1870, an uncomfortable break from the circle of people among whom he had grown up, as his wife's letters reveal. A further reason for his doubts, Grass suggests, may have been his work as a historian, so that he was no longer able to accept something as true simply on the authority of another. The essay thus neatly illustrates another way in which doubt as a subject and history as a discipline coincide.

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The relationship of doubt to commitment and coercion implicit in Grass's study of Gardiner is a more central theme in Rowan Williams's reconsideration of how certainty and uncertainty, personal conviction and public adherence were handled in the writings of the Elizabethan theologian Richard Hooker (d. 1600). At various different moments Hooker sought to distinguish between what he understood to be certain in itself – the revealed character of God – and issues where doubt would be wise, such as the much debated definition of Christ's presence in the sacrament, the God-given character of any specific Church order, or assumptions about the spiritual state of any other baptized person. But for Hooker, living in the decades when the Church of England was painfully taking shape, doubt about the Church to which allegiance was commanded by law was not wise: legal enforcement of conformity was a pastoral good which allowed the uncertain some stability in the midst of their fluctuating convictions and emotions. It seems unlikely that Gardiner would have agreed (though other Victorians might well have done).

Three other writers demonstrate the longevity of doubts generated by the difficulty of discerning the true from the untrue, the holy from the demonic. Charlotte Methuen reflects on how two third-century churchmen, Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea, and Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, debated the validity of the sacraments. Her account of Firmilian's letter describing his doubts about the eucharist administered by a woman who was later deemed to be demonically possessed first suggests that such discussions helped determine the identity and practices of the early Church. Placing the letter in its original context indicates that gender was not the original issue for Firmilian, but Methuen shows how the modern Roman Catholic Church has taken up his lines in rejecting women priests. The study thus links the selective continuity of institutional memory and the persistence of specific doubts and debates (on which more below).

Doubts about identifying the demonic also surface in the work of the early Dominican master-general, Jordan of Saxony (d. 1237), who included them in his account of the beginnings of his order, studied here by Steven Watts. A hybrid text, Jordan's *Libellus* combines history, hagiography and self-writing, this last including a lengthy account of Jordan's doubts on being faced with an apparently virtuous brother's demonic possession. At first this tale seems incongruous, as most critics have suggested. But drawing attention to evidence for the text's pedagogical purpose and use with Dominican novices,

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Watts argues that Jordan's account of his own attempts to pin down the demon's wiles turns doubt into a teaching tool. The original demonic possession was divinely granted to test the brothers' tenacity, Jordan's own behaviour providing a model of how to cope in the face of doubt. Later versions of his life, keen to promote Jordan's holiness, nonetheless deleted the doubts as inappropriate to the certainty expected of a saint.

Distinct perspectives on how to distinguish the holy and the demonic emerge more fully in Matteo Duni's contribution, an analysis of a number of secular writers' doubts about the reality of witchcraft and therefore the validity of witch-hunts in the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries. Whereas inquisitors – including the author of the *Malleus maleficarum* – now lived with the idea that God permitted demons to carry out malevolent acts in the physical sphere, such as witches' flight or procreation with the Devil, several lay practitioners of law argued that it was extremely unlikely, preferring to restrict demonic action to the spiritual world. These doubters expressed their concerns in ways that variously exploited the arguments of their own discipline and those of medicine and biblical criticism. Their ideas were influential, eventually perhaps feeding into changes in inquisitorial practice, but also to at least one threat to burn the incriminating volume. Alongside science-based reasoning about the inability of demonic spirits to have physical children, comparisons with biblical figures who could fly (as had Christ in the gospel account of his temptations), were rejected as a legal precedent because of the exceptionality of this sort of event; real-life repetition would require too many divine 'special permissions'. These lawyers also identified a fundamental weakness in the assessment of witnesses. They voiced serious doubts about the legality of acting upon witches' testimony or their accusations against supposed accomplices, adopting a stance more in line with the early medieval canon *Episcopi*, which had defined witches' visions as delusional, created by the Devil. Had God wanted to punish humans in this way, they argued, he would have chosen a different kind of witness, not women or 'uncouth country folk', since neither would be widely believed.

The question of trustworthy witnesses is also one of the central elements in the essay by Ian Forrest, who explores one way in which living with doubt impinges on the history of the social and institutional Church. Working from cases in late medieval English episcopal registers, Forrest concentrates on the risks involved in assessing

truth and trustworthiness at a distance and how bishops sought to reduce these 'costs of doubt'. One way they did so was by relying on local knowledge and on the testimony available during visitations and before tribunals from trustworthy men – frequently the sort of country folk whose witness would not otherwise be admitted – with the result that canon law boundaries between opinion and legally accepted fact were elided. Doubts were ignored in the construction of an acceptable, liveable truth. Forrest also reminds historians to keep in mind the sometimes subtle and often varying differences in attitudes to certainty, doubt, or reason underlying the assumptions of writers even when they agreed with one another, let alone when they did not.

THE NEED FOR DOUBT

Faith as a virtue is logically dependent on the possibility of doubt and unbelief. While doubt is often described as a wound, a sometimes incapacitating struggle, the positive connotations occasionally trickle through to pastoral writing. A version of this is evident in the guidance for puritans studied by Lucy Busfield. Focusing on letters written to counsel the faithful, she observes how the personal battles with doubt and despair of a London puritan, Nehemiah Wallington (d. 1658), could be recognized as 'particularly fitting', equipping this layman to assist others in the same predicament. For the individual struggling with the insecurity born of pious self-scrutiny, doubt was a sign of belief (as Hooker would have agreed), one which enabled mutual spiritual growth towards faith. It is this sort of insight that has driven previous historians to assign to Wallington an exemplary role as a Calvinist doubter, expressing individual conscience, part of the narrative of the emergence of the modern individual. In keeping with recent, less optimistic assessments of the autonomy of spiritual memoirs, and recognition of the communal dimensions to religious culture, Busfield disrupts the conventional narrative by showing how Wallington's efforts continue to rely on clerical mediation. He carefully copied out an extensive collection of the published letters of puritan ministers which record the laity turning to them for expert diagnosis of their spiritual health. Doubts may be kept at bay by 'fraternal counselling' in Wallington's own letters, but this differed entirely from the 'paternal', pastoral mode of ministers dealing with doubts and complex cases of conscience.

Doubt is again present as both necessity and virtue – though with broader, social implications – in Kelly Yates's elucidation of the idea of the 'catholic spirit' promoted by the Methodist leader John Wesley (d. 1791). The essay clarifies how Wesley, thinking in tune with contemporary philosophers, including Locke, developed a case for ecumenism through insisting on doubt. As Yates quotes Locke, 'doubt of one's own opinions leads to humility, which leads in turn to tolerance'. The limits of human capacity to know require acceptance that another's opinions may be right. In this case doubt becomes a way for Wesley to argue for liberty of conscience (within Trinitarian limits). It is also an important part of the conceptual work necessary to enable different denominations to tolerate and live alongside each other.

Flickering Doubts

As Robert Swanson writes of the late Middle Ages – a point with wider application – faith is 'not a monolith of clarity, but an amalgam of opportunities for uncertainty and disagreement'. The means to salvation were always unsure, and often hotly debated. In these disagreements, some issues emerge as the staple content of doubts about Christianity and its Churches; what changes is the manner of their articulation and the consequences.

Unsurprisingly, doubts about the eucharist shine brightly. Where Rowan Williams notes Hooker's lack of investment in a precise definition of Christ's presence in the eucharist, Alexandra Walsham hints at a possible reason for Hooker's reserve by setting out how, among other sixteenth-century Protestants, fierce disagreement over interpretations of the Last Supper animated emerging denominational and confessional identities. Her essay also reminds us of the importance of objects, beginning as it does with the Bosworth Hall burse, a remarkable embroidered case for carrying the liturgical corporal. The embroidery commemorates a vision of the crucified Christ seen during the first mass of a friend by the English Catholic missionary priest John Payne in 1575, just seven years before his death as a martyr in 1582. The record of Payne's vision, which came as he was doubting the real presence in the consecrated eucharist, resonates closely with accounts of medieval miracles such as the miracle of Bolsena in 1263, when blood dripping from the host in his hands convinced a doubting priest of the truth of transubstantiation. At the same time as marking continuities in the content of

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doubts, Walsham draws out how the burse came to be read as a symbol of the dogmatic certainties that drove institutional divisions, the conflicts over transubstantiation and the real presence that 'divided Wittenberg, Geneva, Rome and Lambeth'.

A doctrine which has prompted similar recurring doubts is that of the three persons of the Trinity, the nature and meaning of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is one of several doctrinal difficulties raised by Colin Haydon's account of the career of Francis Stone, an Anglican rector, who nearly three centuries after the English Reformation voiced his doubts about Anglican teaching and the Thirty-Nine Articles. Stone preached publicly that Christ was merely human and that the virgin birth was a myth. He doubted the doctrine of the atonement and advocated Unitarian thinking, questioning the Trinitarianism of the Athanasian Creed on the grounds that it could not be 'proved by the Scripture'. Drawing on the biblical texts as proof is an essential tool in debates about belief, but an Anglican clergyman doing so in this radical form in the early 1800s provoked a storm, as Stone must surely have expected. It led to the loss of his living and disaster for his large family, rescued only by Unitarian generosity to a member of the Church of England.

Another staple to which several essays make more or less extensive reference is the story of doubting Thomas, an accustomed biblical witness in pre- and early modern accounts of doubt and sensory belief. Patrick McGhee makes this story the heart of his contribution, probing its extensive explication in the early seventeenth-century work of another Protestant clergyman, Nicholas Bownde (d. 1613). In keeping with much of the pastoral literature of his time (some of it discussed by Busfield, Williams and Walsham), Bownde wrote to offer comfort to those experiencing unbelief and criticized sight and touch as a means to access the spiritual – as we would expect of a post-Reformation Protestant. McGhee explores how Bownde nonetheless acknowledged the place of the senses, materiality and the body in the individual's struggle for faith and in his approach to doubt. In his attempt to explain the relation of faith and believing, Bownde compared belief in Christ with a pregnant woman's ongoing belief in the living presence of an unborn child even in the moments when she cannot feel it stirring. For Bownde, unbelief was akin to a physical affliction that required pastoral comfort, characterized by the search for sensory confirmation of God, a product of a misunderstanding, but one that Christ is nonetheless able to remedy among the

apostles through Thomas. In highlighting the connections Bownde made between doubt, unbelief, the senses and the body, McGhee demonstrates that physicality had not been entirely excluded from the logic of faith by early modern religious writers.

A final commonplace of doubt rekindled here several times is that of the role of women in the social body of the Church, all too often a smoky grey area on the edges of a male-dominated space. Can women administer sacraments? Yes, it seems, in third-century Caesarea, as long as they are not then found to be demonically possessed. Should women be seen to weep profusely in Church? Once again, as we shall see in Kimberley-Joy Knight's essay, the answer is a conditional yes, but it is preferable if this can be explained as a test of sanctity. Can women's words be accepted as proof of miracles? Yes, according to Cordelia Warr's study of one use of the sermons of the Spanish Franciscan mystic, Juana de la Cruz (d. 1524). In the writings of Antonio Daza (d. 1640), another Spanish Franciscan, Juana's words became an important witness to the miraculous truth of Francis of Assisi's unique stigmata. But once again, there is a condition: for Daza, Juana's witness was reliable because God had spoken through her, a woman who herself had received stigmata, a logical challenge to the singularity of Francis's gift that Daza chose to ignore.

Catching Fire

If living with doubt is a feature of Christian experience in all periods, and doubts about particular features of belief and the Church regularly recur, several writers ask what it is that causes these flickering doubts to catch fire and with what effects. Emily Graham takes up these questions in the context of Franciscan lay communities in fourteenth-century Aragon, suspended in the troubled air trailing the condemnation of reformist Franciscan 'Spirituals'. She suggests that in this delicately poised situation, where heretical texts and preaching were recent memory, the provocative actions of an individual were enough to cause waning doubts to fire up once more, generating a pervasive atmosphere of doubt and suspicion. Accusation and counter-accusation about a community's orthodoxy triggered official inquests and destroyed the equilibrium, forcing the community to disperse, even though almost no one was condemned and the provocateur seems to have been expelled, only to wreak havoc elsewhere.

Greg Salazar explores the triggers in another context, demonstrating how changing political plans might stir up anxiety and doubts about adherence to a particular confessional identity in post-Reformation London. He does so by using Protestant accounts of a debate with Catholics in Sheer Lane, in June 1623. The debate was staged against the background of government relaxation of anti-Catholic legislation preparatory to a proposed marriage alliance with the Spanish crown, known to the English as the 'Spanish Match'. Salazar shows how the Protestant controversialists were keen to prevent a Catholic revival, anxious that doubt about the nature of the true Church was prompting undesirable conversion among the laity. In their attempts to prove that Protestantism was the genuine expression of Christianity, they organized a crowded and quasi-public meeting, risking royal displeasure to further their aims, but were rescued by the change of policy accompanying the demise of the Spanish Match.

Like the early modern era, the nineteenth century is another moment when historians have traditionally recognized newly expressed Christian encounters with doubt. Since these took place against a long backdrop of doubt, they do not make the nineteenth century, as Kirstie Blair might observe, an 'age of doubt'. Nonetheless, industrial change and scientific discovery did lead to new modes and reasons for articulating uncertainties and doubts. This is evident in the contributions of Tim Grass and Colin Haydon already discussed and comes to the fore once more in Philip Lockley's study of the early history of socialism, before the rise of the Christian Socialist movement. The New Lanark entrepreneur Robert Owen (d. 1858) gradually developed into a 'classic enlightenment deist, dismissing all beliefs contrary to reason'. Driven by his perception of the effect of industrial working conditions on individual lives, and how circumstances form human behaviour, Owen objected to Christianity's teachings on sin and eventually came to condemn its divisive nature and role in hindering the coming of socialism. His public campaign was followed by men and women on both sides of the Atlantic, including Charles Newman, the forgotten younger brother of John Henry, and Frances Wright, who set up the first secularist Hall of Science in New York City in 1829 and advocated free rational enquiry against the truth claims of revealed religion. Despite many Christians' deep hostility, Lockley shows how each of the issues exercising Owenite doubters also generated alternative Christian answers. The Anglican

philanthropist, John Minter Morgan, praised Owen's plans for housing the poor and argued that such social projects offered 'a better system' which would help remove circumstances conducive to sin. Other writers claimed the idea of cooperation as essentially Christian and capable of realizing the Christian millennium, restoring the early Church's 'pure and perfect communities'. Socialist doubts about Christianity, Lockley concludes, were accompanied by hope about the future in forms that were 'open to recognition and reclamation by Christians'. Whether Owen would have approved is less clear.

Doubt Lines

A final subject which emerges again and again in these essays is the utility of doubt as a tool in producing texts and in moving ideas beyond the text. Several of the contributions already discussed demonstrate how writers deployed or excised doubt as a rhetorical feature of their writing. Kimberley-Joy Knight's essay offers a case study of this process based on hagiographic composition, a *locus classicus* of clerical attempts to overcome doubts. She begins with Jacques de Vitry's *Life of Marie d'Oignies*, written *c.*1215, in which male clerical doubts about the spiritual validity of copious, public, female tears are framed as part of the testing a saint must endure if she is to be proven right beyond all doubt, a topos exploited to promote sanctity. Despite this positive message, and the vast success of Jacques's work, Knight goes on to observe how holy women's tears in later saints' lives are more often described as internalized, invisible weeping. One reason for this change, she proposes, may be both a textual and a real-life reaction to persistent doubts about bodily spirituality and displays of tears.

Jan Vandeburie's essay also starts from the cult of Marie d'Oignies. In a supplement to Jacques de Vitry's life of Marie, Thomas of Cantimpré describes Vitry's gift of a reliquary containing her finger to Cardinal Hugolino of Ostia, later pope as Gregory IX (1227–41). Gregory is described as plagued by the *spiritus blasphemiae*, an allegorical personification of doubt and distrust in God. Jacques also urged Hugolino to read the *Vita* to help him deal with his uncertainties. A simultaneous gift of a silver cup was, however, refused. Confirming Knight's assessment of Vitry's purpose, Vandeburie points out that Marie's reputation in dealing with doubt was well established, but also takes his exploration of the reasons

for Gregory's doubts beyond hagiographical writing, identifying his standing in the curia as one of several possible causes for anxiety, doubts which were only to become louder once he became pope and found himself without time for spiritual contemplation. But Vandeburie's careful reading also identifies other reasons for the account of the exchange between Jacques and Hugolino and the refusal of the silver cup: Thomas was disappointed that a man he greatly admired had risen in power and wealth, betraying Marie d'Oignies's ideals of poverty and humility. Whether or not Thomas's readers caught the criticism of Vitry, doubt in this essay is once more about self and community, individual ways to God and community expectations.

As several writers in this volume underscore, an essential tool in discussions of doubt among Christians is critical analysis of the text of the Bible, itself much contested by the different confessional and denominational groups studied here. Biblical criticism aimed at establishing the integrity of the text plays a prominent role in Gareth Atkins's work on the changing use of prophetic passages in nineteenth-century Britain, an essay which brings us full circle, back to the years when Samuel Rawson Gardiner's doubts were gradually taking him away from his adherence to the Catholic Apostolic Church and into the Church of England.

In the early 1800s demonstrations of the prophetic precision of the Bible might still be used to protect believers against doubt, or to celebrate the success of British naval endeavours by metaphorically comparing them to the 'ships of Tarshish' mentioned in Isaiah, as did the Bolton clergyman Walter Chamberlain in a volume published in 1860. Atkins shows that by 1860 this sort of literal reading was becoming old-fashioned, rejected not only by liberal thinkers – who prized the moral value of the Bible, not its historicity – but also by clerical scholars. New discoveries in geography and natural sciences persuaded Bible students to investigate its account of the lands of the Middle East, confirming the text's historical integrity to their own satisfaction, but in the process undermining its prophetic qualities. As Atkins shows, however, doubts about prophecy did not mean that providential language disappeared. Different approaches persisted: for scholars, the Bible prophecies demonstrated the veracity of the Bible as a set of Near Eastern texts. For poets the text offered a store of powerful language. But Atkins also points to a third group, a 'subculture' that read prophetic passages as a very different kind

of protection against doubt, 'as a code waiting to be unscrambled by faithful exegetes alert to the unfolding of events'.

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This introduction has pointed out only some of the many ways into this collection: very different routes could have been chosen. The essays open up numerous fascinating trails barely mentioned here and point to still others waiting to be investigated. It is hoped that together they may inspire other historians to delight in the rich potential of investigating the history of doubt.

Frances Andrews