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York Corpus Christi cycle plays : examined in light of the Protestant Reformation

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YORK CORPUS CHRISTI CYCLE PLAYS:
EXAMINED IN LIGHT OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Michelle N. Russell

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ABSTRACT

YORK CORPUS CHRISTI CYCLE PLAYS: EXAMINED IN LIGHT OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

by Michelle N. Russell

Coinciding with the Reformation and the schism within the church, the newly birthed Protestant movement abandoned the European theatrical tradition of Bible based performance. English Corpus Christi cycle plays portraying Bible stories from creation through the life of Christ are one example of plays included in this genre that did not survive the transition into Protestantism.

Recent scholarship has not painted a clear or definite picture of the cycles' end. Their death has been attributed primarily to the changing religious beliefs brought to England by the Reformation and to a new age of theatre. In an effort to provide further examination of these plays, the research presented provides a historical and textual examination of the York Corpus Christi Cycle in light of the Protestant Reformation.

With much appreciation, the following pages are dedicated to my dear Isaac for pushing me to finish, to my readers for their valuable insight and editing, and to my family for supporting me throughout the process.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Coinciding with the Reformation and the schism within the church, the newly birthed Protestant movement abandoned the European theatrical tradition of Bible based performance. English Corpus Christi cycle plays portraying Bible stories from creation through the life of Christ are one example of plays included in this genre that did not survive the transition into Protestantism.

The plays were popular, incorporating the talents and skills of a large portion of the populace, and entertaining the rest. Corpus Christi dramas are recorded in documents as early as the thirteenth century (M.S. xli), and performed as late as the twentieth (Green). Cycles could be found in at least twelve of the largest cities in England on a consistent basis throughout the majority of the Middle Ages, and inconsistently as this period drew to a close. The Reformation and Renaissance brought in a new age and a new worldview. Eventually the cycles came to a close, with only sporadic performances after the Reformation (Davies 269).

In the opening paragraph of his book *The Play Called Corpus Christi* V.A. Kolve clearly and poignantly addressed the popularity and high level of

involvement of the populace:

The Corpus Christi drama is remarkable in many ways – in size, comprehensiveness, tone, and popularity. It was “homemade” – largely written by local clergy, supported by local guilds, and acted mostly by townspeople – yet it was rich and elaborate to a degree we would associate only with professional theatre. It staged the largest action ever attempted by any drama in the West, an action that included the comic and the pathetic, the grotesque and the transcendental, all in one complex dramatic design; and though some fifteen hours were required to play the story out, its audiences came to watch it again and again. It held the stage for more than two hundred years, the most truly popular drama England has ever known. (1)

At the high point of the cycles’ lifespan they functioned as an important part of the Corpus Christi celebration. As the plays traveled through the streets, good seats were sought. Observers claimed seats in windows, on scaffolds or rooftops, in doorways and in the streets. Neighbors mingled and observed as the plays journeyed, and the community was brought together in celebration (Beadle xvii). As glorious as this may have been, the end of these plays loomed as the Middle Ages came to a close. To those involved in the high time of this theatrical experience, the end could not be seen. Lyle Spencer, in his *Corpus Christi Pageants in England*, summarized our knowledge of their gradual and unexpected death:

To one living in the palmy days of the Corpus Christi festival in the

last quarter of the fifteenth century it would probably have seemed impossible that the glory of the day could ever pass away; and yet a century later the pageants were a thing of the past. The death of the plays had been slow and perhaps imperceptible, but nevertheless sure. (248)

Recent scholarship not painted a clear or definite picture of the cycles' end. Their death has been attributed mostly to the changing religious beliefs brought to England by the Reformation and to a new age of theatre that was rising (Spencer 1), therefore leaving the need for such elementary theatre behind. Further examination of these plays is needed to come to better understand reasons for the cycles' end. In an effort to do so, this research will focus on a historical and textual examination of one of these cycles in light of the Protestant Reformation. Many scholars assume that the Reformation was a major influence in the cycles' end (Spencer 248). Further evaluation of this area is important as well, leading this study to focus on Protestant belief and thought, as well as the relationship this had with the demise of this period of theatre history.

1.1 Significance of Thesis

The age of the Corpus Christi pageants acted as a building block to later

theatrical periods, influencing the theatre world in many respects. Renaissance theatre in general, and Shakespeare specifically, show themes and influences of the religious plays of the medieval period, of which the cycle plays are a part (Spencer 1). In regards to Shakespeare being influenced, Matus wrote about Shakespeare's attendance at the Corpus Christi plays of Coventry:

It is widely held that Shakespeare was, in his childhood, among that great confluence that gathered annually until the plays were abruptly discontinued in 1579. Although scope and structure of his earliest plays – the three parts of *Henry IV* and *Richard III* suggest an indebtedness to this mystery cycle enacted in the city only eighteen miles from Stratford-upon-Avon, the clearest resonances of religious drama that have been previously noted by editors are not heard until *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. (197)

Medieval Religious plays focus thematically on morality and “good verses evil.”

These themes commonly carry over into later theatre. Various authors have written on this subject. Lucy Toulmin Smith mentioned this significance:

The value of the religious plays and players in leading up to what is called ‘the regular drama’ has not yet perhaps been fully recognized. Many allusions to them in old writers, Robert of Brunne, Chaucer, Langland, Heywood, &c. have been noticed. (lvii)

Smith further suggests that the value of religious plays to later theatre is evident in their emphasis on “good players.” The emphasis was “one of the steps on which the greatness of the Elizabethan stage was built, and through

steps on which the greatness of the Elizabethan stage was built, and through which its actors grew up" (xxxvii). Smith's assertion that the Elizabethan stage was built upon the foundation of the religious plays is contradicted by Michael O'Connell's article addressing the influence of the mystery plays on Shakespeare. He wrote, "Basic to the understanding of the Elizabethan public theatre has been the notion that it was a beginning rather than a transfiguration or transposition" (151).

Eleanor Prosser saw a need in the 1960s for dramatic criticism to be added to the areas of research included on the subject of mystery plays. The opening pages of her work, *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-Evaluation*, are helpful in providing a complete understanding of the need for further research. Although her introduction and the book as a whole address the need for critical dramatic evaluation, her reasoning can also be applied to the importance of further research and evaluation in all aspects of the cycle plays. Prosser elaborates on three main reasons for further study. The first reason is the "enduring popularity of the mystery play throughout western Europe... with an enthusiasm and devotion perhaps unmatched in the history of the theatre" (3).

While these plays are not nearly as popular as they were throughout the Middle Ages, they have endured. Some examples of this endurance have been

seen in productions by the Poculi Ludique Society in Toronto. They performed the York Cycle in 1977 and 1998, the N-Town Passion Play in 1981 and other N-Town Pageants in 1988, the Chester Cycle in 1983, and the Towneley Cycle in 1985. The players of St. Peter in London have provided portions of the cycles each year for nearly sixty years. York and Lichfield both hosted portions of their own cycles this summer and have performances scheduled in Lichfield in 2009 (www.lichfieldmysteries.co.uk) and York in 2010 (Green). These examples demonstrate the enduring popularity of the cycles, therefore offering a reason for further study on their entire history, especially the time that changed their annual performance to something far less regular and much more sporadic.

A second reason for further study comes from the widespread communal participation of the cycle plays. Prosser writes:

Even if no records remained to us other than the four complete cycles extant from northern England — associated with Chester, Wakefield, York, and, probably, Lincoln — the implications would be significant. Here, within a radius of less than a hundred miles, four communities simultaneously undertook what is surely one of the most enterprising theatrical ventures in history. (4)

Prosser explains that with twelve known cities in Britain celebrating the Corpus Christi festival with performances of these plays, “a national audience of such size may be rivaled only by the one that attended the festival of Dionysus” (5).

Even this great celebration in Athens cannot really be compared to the Corpus Christ festival due to the fact that in England, “the cycles were usually a cooperative effort of the entire town” (5).

Lastly, the importance for further research in this field comes from the deeply rooted meaning that viewers and participants found in the pageants.

Prosser writes:

The York Crucifixion was more than the culmination of a religious festival, more than a colorful act of communal devotion, more than a historical pageant. It was living truth, both past and present. To the citizen of York, this was his forefather Adam, his fall, his Christ whom he daily crucified again by his sin. (14)

For Reformers, the trial and crucifixion were seen in the same way. Calvin wrote in his commentary on the *Harmony of the Evangelists*:

For the Son of God chose to stand bound before an earthly judge, and there to receive sentence of death, in order that we, delivered from condemnation, may not fear to approach freely to the heavenly throne of God. If, therefore, we consider what advantage we reap from Christ having been tried before Pilate, the disgrace of so unworthy a subjection will be immediately washed away. (275)

Modern performances and returning audiences show that there is still meaning and connection for contemporary audiences. Perhaps the reasons are different for modern audience's attendance, but there is a “draw” nonetheless.

Further research is important from a historical standpoint as well as a theatrical one. Filling in the gaps of theatre history is important for the theatre community in order to supply a more complete understanding of modern theatre and the progression that carried us into the theatre we have today. Finally, a depth of knowledge of the time and the people can be found within these plays, even without looking at them with dramatic criticism.

1.2 Literature Review

We are fortunate to have a vast library of medieval theatre as literature and performance. The library addresses medieval theatre's influence on culture and as building blocks for later theatre. Narrowing the search to English Corpus Christi cycle plays holds almost as vast a selection of topics and angles to look into as the general subject of medieval theatre. Preliminary study provided a wide span of information much of which relates specifically to the cycle plays. This information will be explored in the following pages.

Some of the most helpful works on the Reformation and England were *Reformation Principle and Practice: Essays in Honour of Arthur Geoffrey Dickens*, edited by Peter Newman Brooks, *The Reformation and the English People* by J. J. Scarisbrick, and *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* by Patrick Collinson.

Reformation Principle and Practice, is important for this study for its collection of essays on various topics surrounding the Reformation. While this book does not give a comprehensive look at the Reformation, it provides a deeper examination of a variety of topics. Especially helpful for this study was the essay by Claire Cross, "Priests into Ministers: the Establishment of Protestant Practice in the City of York, 1530-1630" for the picture of York life it paints. *The Reformation and the English People* and *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* provided much of the general Reformation history provided in the following pages. Collinson also provided a significant section focusing on specific information regarding the city of York. All provided detailed portraits of the English Reformation, spanning many topics including but not limited to the government, church attendance, education, populations of cities, plays and processions, wills, doctrine, etc.

Looking to the theatre on a general level, the two-volume set, *Early English Stages*, by Glynne Wickham and William Gladstone provides a foundation for the understanding of medieval theatre as a whole through their general examination of the theatre throughout this time period. Following its publication in 1963, many authors have quoted this work due to its provision of a solid foundation of theatre history. Still with a broad scope, but narrowing to address each of the cycles, the newer work *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*

edited by Richard Beadle, provides a framework of context for this research. Beadle's book covers each of the major cycle plays as well as Cornish and East Anglian theatre, morality and saints' plays, and a chapter on criticism of medieval English theatre. Beadle's introduction states that the book "must content itself with being something of an interim report on a field of knowledge and interpretation which has changed out of all recognition over the last two decades or so, but yet continues to develop" (xiii). Interim report though it is, through the above-mentioned chapters, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* has proven to be a valuable resource through its provision of basic understanding of the time and of the cycles. "Concerning English Mystery Plays" by Charles Davidson, "Revisions in the English Mystery Plays" by Grace Frank, and "Typology and the Cycle Plays" by Arnold Williams, are also of a general nature, but provide greater understanding in a few specific areas such as revisions to specific plays and examinations of symbols and language within the plays.

Important to the understanding of the end of this age of theatre is James J. Paxton's "Theorizing the Mysteries' End In England, the Artificial, Demonic, and the 16th Century Witch-Craze." "Contextualizing Performance; the Reception of the Chester 'Antichrist'" by Richard Emerson, "Reforming Mysteries' End; a

New Look at Protestant Intervention in English Provincial Drama” by Paul White, and “The ‘Suppression Theory’ and the English Corpus Christi Play: A Re-Examination” by Bing D. Bills provide a broader understanding of the discontinuance of these cycles by addressing varying Protestant attitudes toward, and involvement in these theatrical endeavors. Bills’ work was the most helpful in the beginning of this research, and will be looked at in great detail later in this section.

Moving more specifically to the cycles themselves, are articles relating directly to plays within the cycles. A very helpful source was Eleanor Prosser’s *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays*. Prosser examined the ways that the mysteries had and had not been researched, coming to the conclusion that they had not been looked at critically and dramatically (3). Prosser addressed this issue specifically through exemplars. While not from the York cycle, her exploration of the plays of *Cain*, *Joseph*, *The Woman Taken In Adultery*, *Magdalene* and *Thomas* provide a greater understanding of the needs of further research in the area, as well as inspecting the title characters.

For information on the York cycle specifically, *York Plays; the Plays Performed by the Crafts or Mysteries of York, on the Day of Corpus Christi in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries*, edited with introduction and glossary by Lucy Toulmin

Smith is an invaluable resource. Besides providing the cycle in print with appropriate annotations, Smith included a wonderful introduction including detailed research regarding the physical and historical aspects of the manuscript, details about the production of the cycles, analysis of the verse and language, and relationship to theatre that followed after. Several authors cite this work as the most detailed and complete (Stoddard, Garnett, Carpenter, Wickham, etc.).

Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King edited the *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling*. This book gives readers a version of the text that is more simplistic and thus easier to understand. Beadle and King chose twenty-two of the forty-seven plays in the cycle, including some plays from each section but primarily focusing on those portraying the life and death of Christ. While they did not stray from the original tongue, the spelling has been adjusted to aid in understanding for its modern readers. Additionally, they have introduced each play in the cycle and have included a running glossary at the foot of each page, providing understanding of difficult words and phrases that have not survived as a part of modern English. This research utilizes their text to a great extent, looking only to Smith for further information in some instances. Play XXVI, *The Conspiracy to Take Jesus*, from Smith and from Beadle and King

demonstrates the difference between the two texts as follows. Line numbers are on the right side of the text:

1. Pil. Vndir þe ryallest roye of rente and renowne,
 Now am I regent of rewle þis region in reste,
 Obeye vnto bidding bud busshoppis me bowne,
 And bolde men þat in batayll makis brestis to brest. 4

To me be-taught is þe thent þis towre begon towne,
 For traytours tyte will I taynte, þe trewpe for to triste,
 The dubbing of my dingnite may noȝt be done downe,
 Nowdir with duke nor dugeperes, my dedis are so dreste. 8
 (Smith 219).

PILATE: Under the royalist roy of rent and renown,
 Now am I regent of rule of this region in rest;
 Obey unto bidding bus bishops me boun,
 And bold men that in battle make breasts to burst.
 To me betaught is the tent this tower-begone town, 5
 For traitors tite will I taint, the truth for to trist.
 The dubbing of my dignity may not be done down,
 Neither with duke nor douzpers, my deeds are so dressed.

1 *roy king* *of rent* having revenue 2 *regent of rule*
 deputy ruler *rest* peace 3 Bishops who are my
 subjects must obey my command 4 *breasts* breastplates
 5 *betaught* entrusted *tent* care [of] *tower-begone* turreted
 6 *tite* swiftly *taint* convict *the . . . trist* to be sure
 7 *dubbing . . . dignity* rights by virtue of my title 8 *with*
 by *douzpers* famous knights *deeds . . . dressed* actions are
 so sure (Beadle 126).

As can be seen in the above comparison, Beadle and King have provided ease of reading and a valuable resource through their glossary. For these reasons, unless

otherwise noted, all quotes from the cycle itself will be taken from Beadle and King.

While the latter three authors give broad and general overviews in their works, covering a wide scope of information from basic history of the city of York and the cycles themselves, other authors examine specific topics in more depth, including influence on the plays by the guilds and politics (Homan, Freeman and Justice), the original identity of the cycle (Clark, Frank, Hoy and Lyle), and language and dialect as in “York Plays: The Plays Performed by the Crafts, or Mysteries of York, on the Day of Corpus Christi in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Centuries” by James M. Garnett.

Two publications by the Surtees Society, volumes CLXXVI and CXXV, prove to be valuable resources for both information on the city of York and the cycle itself. These books, the *York Memorandum Books* hold minutes from the city itself, legal documents, correspondence, etc. As the editor of the latter book stated, “No aspect of the city’s life is omitted. We see the people at work, at play, in health, in sickness, in war, in peace, at home, abroad, at church, and in the tavern” (M.S. lxxiv). These, as well as Davies’ *York Records of the 15th Century* which examines the memorandums, gave great depth of understanding to the context of the time as well as to the cycle itself.

Some sources addressed specifics in the life of York. "Life and Death in the Sixteenth Century in the City of York" by Ursula M. Cowgill contains a detailed synopsis of the life and death of the people of York in the sixteenth century. Jennifer I. Kermode's detailed article "Money and Credit in the Fifteenth Century: Some Lessons from Yorkshire" on the use of credit was also beneficial, as was J.N. Bartlett's "The Expansion and Decline of York in the Later Middle Ages" and P.J. Bowden's "Wool Supply and the Woolen Industry" which provided information on the economics of the town.

In looking at leading reformer's writings, information on Luther's and Calvin's thoughts have been found in various works of their own. These are important, as Luther and Calvin were two of the greatest players in the Reformation. Through both writing and speaking, their beliefs and convictions regarding all aspects of life quickly spread throughout Europe. Other information has been gleaned from the previous articles and books, especially the general works on the Reformation and articles dealing with the "suppression theory." John Northbrooke's treatise, published in London in 1577, "the first work printed in England in which an attack on the stage was considered of sufficient importance to merit mention on the first page" (Northbrook 5), has also given great insight into the changing attitude toward theatre.

Resources for this question are vast and abundant, including contemporary articles and productions such as those aforementioned, works from a hundred years ago or more such as Robert Davies' *Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York, During the Reigns of Edward IV, Edward V, and Richard III* from 1843 and "York Plays: The Plays Performed by the Crafts, or Mysteries of York, on the Day of Corpus Christi in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Centuries" by James Garnett in 1886. Collections of the plays themselves are also readily available, such as Beadle and King and Smith's works on the York Plays, as well as George England's' edited works of *The Towneley Plays*, and Dr. Matthews and Hermann Deimling's editions of *The Chester Plays*. While it is clear through the search for literature that information abounds and study has gone in many influential and informative directions, there is not much research on the relationship of specific plays to the Bible and the birth of Protestantism at the time of reform. This thesis will strive to research the relationship of the plays to the birth of Protestantism, especially focusing on the early years of reform in England.

1.3 Limitations

While it would be ideal to study all accessible cycle plays, restrictions of time and space will not allow for an extensive study of that nature. The York cycle is the oldest and most complete set of English cycle manuscripts and is thought by the majority of researchers to be the original of the extant cycles (Beadle ix). For these reasons, the York cycle play has been chosen for the first step in studying these influential pieces of theatre. Perhaps others will be examined at a later date. This research then, will present a historical and textual examination of the York Cycle plays and the effects of the Protestant Reformation on this cycle.

The York cycle contains forty-eight plays, and although some are very short, all would prove to be too much for this research. The plays chosen for this study have first been limited to those portraying the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus, from XXVI, "The Conspiracy to Take Jesus" to XXXVI, "The Death of Christ." Choosing these plays allows us to look at a portion of the Bible upon which the foundation of Protestant Theology is laid – salvation through the death of Christ. This portion makes up approximately one third of the cycle's total pages and over one fifth of the total number of plays. These plays are also

attributed to the author known as “the York Realist” and make up a portion that has also been looked at in light of the Gospel of Nichodemus by several writers. Each of the aforementioned elements will aid in the historical evaluation of this research. Unfortunately this section is still too extensive for this research. Therefore, further limitation will be to include only those plays translated into modern spelling by Beadle and King.

1.4 Methodology

This historical examination will begin with an exploration of the historical context, examining the social and religious aspects of England generally and York specifically from 1417 to 1617. These two centuries bracket the 1517 nailing of Martin Luther’s 95 theses. The chosen time frame will help to provide as clear an understanding as possible of the Protestant thinking surrounding the theatre without moving into subsequent periods of Protestantism. This limitation has been chosen because the cycle was well established and documented by 1417, and because the new Protestant views and attitudes were well in place by 1617. Additionally, by 1617 the plays had been essentially discontinued, no longer living as the great tradition they had once been. Proof of this will be examined in depth later in this research. We know that the plays were in common practice by

1417 as “The first allusion occurs in the first volume, under the gate 1376, but the entry proves conclusively that they were an ancient institution even at that early date” (M.S. xli). Evidence of Protestantism being in place by 1617 can be seen in records of persecution, education, church doctrine and worship, etc.

The next step in this process will be to generally examine what we know about the cycle itself. Lucy Toulmin Smith’s book on the York plays explains that there were changes made to the manuscript during the time of the Reformation that show an attempt to revise the works (xv). An exploration of these notes will be completed in order to provide a deeper level of understanding regarding the thinking going on at the time. Following this, an examination of the individual stories included in the York cycle will be completed, comparing the stories to their Biblical counterpoints in accordance with basic Biblical interpretation guidelines that have been passed down within the Reformation and Protestant tradition. Quotes from Beadle and King’s edition of the plays will be contrasted with quotes from the King James Version of the Bible. The King James Version has been chosen for this study due to its accessibility and its proximity to the period. The historical examination will include the historical context of England in general and York specifically, between the years of 1417 and 1617. A brief history of the York cycle and an

exploration of the individual plays in comparison with appropriate biblical narratives will follow.

While it would be ideal to look at what reformers had to say about each of these plays, that luxury is not available. There is little written directly about any of the cycle plays, and what we do have is more about the logistics of production than it is about opposition to or support of the productions. Even several decades later when Protestantism was more established and provided us with a significant number of anti-theatrical treatises, they were directed at the theatre in general, not at specific plays or productions. In order to gain understanding of the reformer's mindset and thinking, reformers' sermons and other writings will be explored in order to find subject matter that will speak from the era itself.

1.5 Foundation from Current Scholarship

Finally, before beginning this examination, it is important to remember that authors have attributed the demise of the cycle plays to either anti-theatrical sentiment held by Protestant leaders or to a natural evolution of theatre. Bills explains:

Despite recent scholarship which casts doubt on some of Gardiner's conclusions, the theory which emerged from his book has been the prevailing interpretation. Gardiner asserts that the decline of the

plays resulted not from a natural death such as poverty or 'outdatedness,' but rather they were deliberately forced out of existence by the collaboration of the Church and Crown. (Bills 157)

Recently other opinions have begun to surface, as in Paul White's article, "Reforming Mysteries' End: A New Look at Protestant Intervention in English Provincial Drama" and the aforementioned by Bing D. Bills' "The 'Suppression Theory' and the English Corpus Christi Play: A Re-Examination."

White's article closes with a thought that will help to provide the framework for this study:

I think we need to get out of the pattern of thinking of Protestantism only in terms of opposition to traditional culture in provincial communities, at least during the middle years of the sixteenth century when the adaptation of drama and other local customs to the new Protestant state seemed very possible. Instead, we should look for instances of negotiation, compromise, and conformity, as well as interaction not merely in events and political maneuvers surrounding performances but within the plays themselves, many of which exhibited an uneasy mixing of traditional and reformed elements (140).

This is only a beginning however, and as we look at Bills' article, this becomes clear. Bills' study looks at previous research, examines those thoughts, compares them with other available resources, and draws conclusions based on the context of the time. Bills acknowledges the emphasis on the Reformation as the reason for the demise of the plays, stating the extent of this as follows:

Several studies written within the past thirty years have not only echoed just such a viewpoint, but have also refined it: the plays were popish relics which successive Protestant governments and churchmen actively attempted to abolish. (157)

He acknowledges this further by quoting one of the leading writers, Glynne Wickham, "Recent research shows that successive governments from 1535 to 1575 first undermined the Catholic stage by ridicule, censorship and threats and ultimately directly forbade its continuance" (158).

While these certainly were contributing factors, Bills goes on to explain other factors that were also important to this change. The first of these factors include the fact that the documents used as defense for the above arguments do not refer to the cycle plays specifically, and that the orders to cease the productions "either grew out of, or were a result of, an official distaste for the cycle plays" (159). Second is the observation that regular production of the plays had already lessened by Elizabeth's reign as a result of their dependence upon war, sickness, and craft and town economics" (Davies 266). These latter influences are important to this study and will be addressed in the chapter dealing with the historical context of the cycle. Third, Bills points out an important question that should be asked:

if the plays had been considered papistical by the Crown or even by the Church, why were they not just banned altogether and

outright? After all, the cycle plays were done only once a year – if they were a threat, why not just abolish them? (159)

This question is extremely important. Knowing of the demise of other Catholic art and ritual, much of which was executed in violence, the obvious is pointed out: there must be other influencing factors such as those mentioned previously.

In addition to the latter contributing factors, Bills looks to later Puritan thought as a strong influence. As stated by many writers, Protestant plays were created during the early years of the Reformation, especially during Henry VIII's reign. Bills explains thus:

The Protestant playwrights of the early Reformation did not hesitate to show sacred figures on the stage either. No need was felt to apologize for such a practice. Protestant dramatists turned out moralities and secular dramas as well as Bible plays, and, of course, anti papal dramas... Further, both traditions embellished the sacred stories, both mixed allegory, personification, and fiction into their plays. The difference came in the embellishments: the new playwrights embellished either to make a Protestant point or to imitate the plays of antiquity – quite different from the medieval play. (162)

John Calvin, one of the leading Reformers, had changing thoughts toward drama throughout his lifetime, even permitting some plays in his early years in Geneva.

Calvin died in 1564, but his influence and those who followed his teaching,

Calvinists, continued his belief system and teaching. Bills summarizes the restrictions that followed thus:

In conclusion, it is important to point out some of the key points of Chapter One. During Reformation the involvement of the church with the theatre world diminished almost entirely. Religious cycle plays, which involved entire populations of cities, were a large part of the church theatre tradition. The cycle plays were performed from the thirteenth century onward, and as a part of the Corpus Christi celebration, they became one of the greatest dramatic traditions. The reasons for the decline of these plays have not been clearly shown by modern scholarship. This fact alone provides reason for study of their decline. Further reasons include the cycles' provision of the foundation for Elizabethan theatre, their enduring popularity, community participation, the great meaning found in the cycles by its medieval audience, and the knowledge of the time and people that can be found with a further study of the plays.

The literature review of this chapter provided the background information necessary for this research. Works examining basic historical context and theatrical context were examined. Works looking at cycles generally and at mystery plays' demise in general, individual cycles specifically, and the York play specifically were addressed. This portion of the study showed that while there is much research surrounding the topic, none of the works provide an evaluation of the York cycle plays in light of the Protestant Reformation. A

The literature review of this chapter provided the background information necessary for this research. Works examining basic historical context and theatrical context were examined. Works looking at cycles generally and at mystery plays' demise in general, individual cycles specifically, and the York play specifically were addressed. This portion of the study showed that while there is much research surrounding the topic, none of the works provide an evaluation of the York cycle plays in light of the Protestant Reformation. A methodology was then put in place, covering general historical context of England, and specific historical context of York from 1417 to 1617. A history of the cycle will be given and individual stories will be compared with their Biblical counterparts from a Protestant mindset.

Finally, modern scholarship was summarized, pointing out that previous scholarship has attributed the end of the cycles to anti-theatrical Protestant views or a natural change in theatre. White and Bills were discussed in some detail, providing the foundation for the study. The research set up by White expresses a need for thinking that breaks a pattern which views Protestantism only as a negative factor in the history of theatre. Bills' research breaks down the argument that Protestantism was the main factor, allowing the possibility of something more as well. It is clear from the many authors previously mentioned,

especially White and Bills, that there is ample scholarly support surrounding the question addressed by this thesis. There is also sufficient reason to further the extant research by examining the text. This thesis has been approached in hopes of providing an addition to the historical research of the world of theatre, and of building on the previous research laid out by scholars up to this point.

CHAPTER TWO

Historical Context

2.1 Reformation England

During the years preceding the Reformation England was growing. Patrick Collinson recorded that London doubled its size every fifty years from 1500 to 1600, growing from 50,000 to 200,000 people. However, this amount of growth was the extreme and indeed, most towns were quite small. "No provincial town before 1600 had as many as 20,000 inhabitants, and only ten had more than 7000" (Collinson 33).

Church was a central part of these towns' lives, and there was a unity that was felt throughout England as a result of Catholic influence. T. M. Parker states:

With this doctrinal unity and common recognition of Roman hegemony there had grown up a substantial uniformity of worship and every day religious practice, which meant that, despite many differences of custom in detail, the traveler who visited the many countries of the West would have felt at home in any church he chose for worship and be able to recognize its services as those with which he had been familiar from childhood, whilst the devotional practices and outlook of the people would have seemed to him closely akin to the ideas of his own countrymen. (1)

Further influencing this understanding of the role of the church before the Reformation is the fact that, “the medieval church was emphatically a clerically controlled body. The laity had no voice in doctrinal decisions, in legislation or in the administration of discipline” (Parker 6).

This did not seem to bother the majority of people, however. Religion was an integral part of life, quite acceptable and normal. In the majority of minds there was little to question, and leadership held the final answer when questions arose. J.J. Scarisbrick addressed these concepts in *The Reformation and the English People*, stating that, “however imperfect the old order, and however imperfect the Christianity of the average man or woman in the street, there is no evidence of loss of confidence in the old ways, no mass disenchantment” (12). Scarisbrick later identifies the numerous accounts of donations left to churches and to clergy in wills and the numerous building programs throughout the years preceding the Reformation as support for the latter quote for those who feel that the late medieval church was declining (13).

The Reformation then, began as a movement by those in leadership who began to notice differences between their practice and what the Bible taught. Martin Luther is usually noted as the pivotal player in beginning this movement,

being the one who nailed 95 theses to a church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. His writing was posted with the following introduction:

Out of love and concern for the truth, and with the object of eliciting it, the following heads will be the subject of a public discussion at Wittenberg under the presidency of the reverend father, Martin Luther, Augustinian, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology, and duly appointed Lecturer on these subjects in that place. He requests that whoever cannot be present personally to debate the matter orally will do so in absence in writing. (Aland 50)

Luther posted these theses as an act of encouraging dialogue on questions that had filled his mind, especially regarding the act of selling indulgences that had become a common practice throughout the church.

From that point, discussions, debates, fights and persecutions followed, the accounts of which could easily fill a library on their own. To see this, one need merely search for "Reformation history" on one of the prominent bookseller websites. Barnes and Noble's website currently lists 3045 titles and borders.com lists 5397. Leading Reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Phillip Melanchthon, and John Knox were greatly dedicated to the scholarship and expansion of Protestantism. Further, many highly influential Reformers were martyred due to the extent of this dedication. Widespread writing notes Foxe as a well-known writer of English stories of these martyrs, keeping records of many strong and committed Reformers who were killed, most

often violently, for their faith. The example of those killed demonstrated the importance of the topics of debate, and encouraged those who witnessed the events to look further into the issues.

Some of the key issues in the Reformation included the issue of the physical presence of Christ not being a part of the Eucharist, the priesthood of all believers and the concepts of the five "solas:" *sola gratia* or grace alone, *sola fide* or faith alone, *sola scriptura* or scripture alone, *solus Christus* or Christ alone, and *soli deo gloria* or glory to God alone.

By 1521 there was some discussion of Luther's writing and influence in England. The main catalyst came from a political arena, however, leading from King Henry VIII's desire to divorce his current wife, Catherine of Aragon, and to marry his current mistress, Anne Boleyn. Previously known as the "Defender of the Faith" by the Pope for his defense against Luther's *The Defense of Heresy*, King Henry changed this perception of himself as he appointed himself the head of the church with the Act of Supremacy in 1529 (Ross). This act provided separation from the Catholic Church, thus providing the king freedom to carry out his marriage desires.

Accessibility to the Bible was one of the seemingly simple yet highly influential changes that impacted the church at this time of reform and change.

William Tyndale, one of England's highly influential martyrs, translated the Bible into common English and utilized the newly available medium of print in hopes of increasing the accessibility of the Bible to the common man. In 1536, the king ordered Tyndale executed (Foxe 121). At this point Bibles were still chained to the pulpits of the churches, not free to be read by the common people. This attitude changed within a short period of time however, providing an important step in the development, growth and survival of Protestantism, aiding in the knowledge of the laypeople, and encouraging their learning and discovery on the issues which shaped Protestantism. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes recorded:

Within two or three years after his martyrdom William Tyndale's last prayer, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes," was answered, when, through the instrumentality of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, English Bibles were set up in the parish churches, for any to read for their edification and comfort, and a royal proclamation made it permissible at last of private persons to buy Bibles and keep them in their homes. (15)

Naturally developing with the availability of the Bible to the common man was the importance of Biblical interpretation. One of the key thoughts of the Protestant movement was the commitment to *sola scriptura*, or Scripture alone. This was an emphasis on the Bible being the primary authority, a focus that pushed away from the previous belief that the ultimate authority lay in the Pope

and the governing church body. As for the way the Bible should be interpreted,

Hughes explains:

The emphasis on the understanding of Scripture in its natural sense represented a real revolution in the use of the Bible, which for generations had been the preserve of intellectual charlatans and religious sophists who pretended to an exoteric exegesis which was as fanciful as it was illegitimate. The Reformation restored an approach to the Bible which evinced a proper respect for it not only as the Word of God but also as a revelation addressed to all men. This recovered seriousness was indicative of reverence coupled with sanity and sobriety in expounding the meaning of the text. It was like a fresh wind which blew away the intricate cobwebs that had been spun round the pages over the centuries and allowed the Word to live and breathe again and to speak for itself. (29)

There was a simplicity that resulted from this shift of focus, and with this simplicity came an empowerment for the people to look and see for themselves, to seek out answers and to find them on their own.

Following the death of Henry, young Edward VI took the throne.

Although his reign only lasted six years, his rule was a time of freedom for the reformers in England, and Protestantism prospered in all areas (Olson 430). This time was met with its antithesis, persecution, at Edward's death. As the Catholic faith and belief was challenged and opposed, first regarding indulgences then in regard to most aspects of faith and doctrine, persecution followed. The worst of it came under Queen Mary, especially during the last

years of her reign. J.C. Ryle recorded the number of Protestants who were burned at the stake during her last four years, explaining that in 1555, seventy-one were burned, in 1556, eighty-nine, in 1557, eighty-eight, and her last year, another forty were burned (Ryle 11). That works out to an average of one to two people being burned at the stake every week of those four years. Ryle sums this knowledge as follows:

Indeed, the faggots never ceased to blaze whilst Mary was alive, and five martyrs were burnt in Canterbury only a week before her death. Out of those 288 sufferers, be it remembered, one was an archbishop, four were bishops, twenty-one were clergymen, fifty-five were women, and four were children. (11)

Mary's death brought the reign of Elizabeth who was clearly not Catholic, although she was not a very strict Protestant either. While Elizabeth's rule was influential to the establishment of Protestantism in England, as attested to by several writers, the key to the Reform was in the education of the people. Peter Newman Brooks wrote an article on this, also included in the latter book, stating, "These were the early days when the cause of the Reformation must stand or fail according to the depth and dedication of its scholarship" (124). Patrick Collinson summarized the changes brought about from the Reformation in his book, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*; "The Reformation simplified everything. It affected a shift from a religion of symbol and allegory, ceremony and formal

gesture to one that was plain and direct: a shift from the visual to the aural, from ritual to literal exposition, from the numinous and mysterious to the every day” (163). Important for all researchers and writers, Collinson also reminded his readers of something very important to historical study:

The difficulty with local or regional history is that everywhere is different, so that the subject by its very nature courts particularism and resists treatment on a general or national scale. Ecclesiastically and religiously, the English towns were very diverse. (49)

While much of the church was consistent throughout England and even Europe, many of the details varied depending on the individual region. For this reason, a summary of York at this time is also important for a more complete historical context.

2.2 York

York in the early Middle Ages was one of the largest cities in England, holding a large merchant and trading class. Its governing body consisted of a mayor, twelve aldermen, two sheriffs, and twenty-four counselors. By the center of our timeframe, in 1548, figures have suggested approximately 8,000 lay people in York (Bartlett 33). The introduction to *The York Memorandum Book* covering 1388-1488 states that researchers have given conflicting messages,

“either of unmitigated gloom or exhilarating prosperity – both equally misleading. It was essentially an age of transition, with all the weaknesses and strengths inherent in such a period” (M.S. i).

Ursula M. Cowgill wrote a detailed synopsis of the life and death of the people of York in the sixteenth century. In York, between 1538 and 1601, 4,533 births are recorded. According to Cowgill’s charts, of those born during that time, only 27% survived to the age of twenty, 15% to thirty, 6% to fifty, and very few lived beyond the age of sixty (Cowgill 54).

As for livelihood and income, throughout the Middle Ages, York was largely influential in the wool trade as well as other trades associated with the production of wool. A decline in the industry was felt between 1491 and 1531, which in turn influenced a decline in population (Bartlett 32). J. N. Bartlett looked specifically into York’s rise and fall, focusing on the time just surrounding the beginning of our time frame, and noted the following:

York was also an important centre for the social life of the gentry of northern England, and the luxurious foodstuffs, skilled services, and the wide variety of manufactured goods readily available in York must have led many north countrymen to visit the city for pleasure and encouraged them to prolong their business visits to the city. Country gentlemen frequently made bequeaths to their favourite church in York or requested burial in the Dominican and Franciscan Friaries there, and a number owned property in the city. (19)

One influential element of the economics in the city of York was the establishment of the bill of exchange, a form of credit established in some of the larger cities, “most effective when two-way trade was flowing continuously” (Kermode 479). This form of credit was basically a sophisticated form of trade, and since York had been an influential stop for trade as a result of its many navigable rivers, it was easily adaptable and highly beneficial.

As for the church in York, Brooks recorded “about forty parish churches. This means that York, with a declining population, now [1530] had one church for approximately every two hundred inhabitants” (206). As with all of England, church life in York was a large piece of the community’s foundation and focus, both before and after the Reformation. While there is a perception that Protestantism was quickly adopted, J.C Ryle did not agree with this universally, writing that “where the church was still powerful and wealthily entrenched, towns and especially cathedral cities could remain bastions of religious conservatism far into the new age. This was conspicuously true of York” (41). However, it is also clear that by 1600, only about half the churches “were still in consecrated use” (Ryle 42).

As seen in the records of York, and as explained by Brooks in his *Reformation Principle and Practice*, some of the slow adaptation of Protestantism into the lives of the residents of York can be attributed to the knowledge that much of the clergy was comprised of those born and raised locally (216). Further, there was little evidence of an emphasis on university attendance. Without the influence of Protestant reformers, and without the influence of new thinking coming from students of Oxford or Cambridge, the rate of growth for Protestantism was much slower than for other cities throughout England and Europe. With the rate of growth for Protestantism coming into York at a slower pace, changes within all aspects of social and church life evolved at a slower rate as well.

2.3 Cycle History

The history of the cycle plays provides background necessary for supplying a complete foundation of historical context. The second of the York memorandum books supplies us with an extremely helpful appendix focusing on the York cycle plays. From this, as well as from other documents and publications, we learn that:

From an early period of the Christian era, the performance of plays on religious subjects was restored by the clergy and monastic orders, as a means of instructive recreation, but for many centuries they were not exhibited beyond the pale of the church or the cloister. As civilization advanced, the dramatic taste became more extensively diffused and the laity were no longer content to have an amusement which afforded them so much delight doled out to them by the ecclesiastics. At length, plays were written in the vernacular tongue, and the people took the representation of them into their own hands. (M.S. 228)

Records of money spent and instructions regarding the cycle plays and their procession are found throughout the York records, the first being found in 1394, and implying a history behind the plays, rather than a beginning at this time (M.S. xli).

The plays were produced, created, and performed by the guilds and townspeople on stage wagons, which could be drawn from place to place. Records show that at least some of these wagons were two stories tall, providing a higher playing area, as well as a covered dressing or backstage area underneath. The York Memorandum points out a similarity of these wagons to the stages used in Rome, encouraging the readers to note "how closely this description of the means used for the entertainment of the unenlightened populace of a barbarous age resembles that of the pageants exhibited for the gratification of the polished citizens of imperial Rome" (M.S. 240).

The cycles provided teaching on Biblical passages, giving the people easy access to hearing the narratives in the streets in front of their homes and in their own language. Although this was a time when church was vital to the life of the town, it was impersonal, distant and restricted. The plays were, therefore, a way for the religion of the people to be unchained from the pulpits and taken into the streets in a way that was understandable by every age and every level of society. Kolve states: "The Corpus Christi cycles satisfy two of the deepest needs any audience brings to an experience of theater: they embody both a criticism and an affirmation of human life" (272). The plays point out common flaws present in the characters of the stories and present in the lives of the viewers.

The cycle teaches of the fall of man and of the salvation that is offered him. Eleanor Prosser addressed this in her work, *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-Evaluation*, which took up the task of re-evaluating the cycle plays as dramatic work. She wrote:

At first glance, the connection between the doctrine concerning repentance and the mystery cycles may seem minor... But in fact, there would seem to be an intimate relation between the cycles and the text of the office for Corpus Christi: "Repent now. Partake of Christ's Body unworthily." Recognizing this relationship is, I believe, essential if we are to approach the plays with an accurate understanding of their purpose. The cycles were not compiled by a loose following of chronology, from Creation to Judgment.

Episodes have been carefully selected to fulfill a strictly theological theme: man's fallen nature and the way of his Salvation. (23)

This observation is crucial in understanding the plays in their full context, in providing an understanding as to why the cycle was so deeply associated with the Corpus Christi celebrations, and why the Corpus Christi guild was so deeply associated with the cycle for much of its lifetime.

Continued performance of the cycle was observed until the death of Queen Mary in 1558 (Davies 266). Under Elizabeth, Reformation principles began to be adopted and began to filter through and into the thinking and living of the common people. The cycle was quickly affected however, as the York Memorandum appendix tells us.

That an immediate change was occasioned by the accession of Elizabeth is apparent in the non-observance of the festival during the first two years of her reign; and from thenceforward there was obviously a disinclination on the part of the civic authorities to encourage the popular celebration of the festival, though they were constrained occasionally to comply with the wishes of the citizens. (Davies 266)

An almost immediate change is seen upon the crowning of Elizabeth. This is demonstrated in the inconsistent performances due to sickness and war throughout the following decade, despite a history of continued performance throughout the worst of circumstances (Davies 266). While this change cannot be

attributed fully to the reign of Elizabeth, it is interesting to see how soon after the reign of a Protestant commenced that a change can be observed.

In February of 1568 the Council of York ordered that the Crede play be performed instead of the cycle (Davies 266). The following month a letter from Dean of York and future archbishop, Dr. Matthew Hutton, was written, providing understanding of the developing attitude toward the cycle. As recorded by M. Lyle Spencer, in response to a request for advise by the mayor and city council of York, Dr. Hutton responded thus:

I have perused the bokes that your lordship with your brethren sent me, and as I finde manie thinges that I mucche like because of th'antiquities, so see I manie thinges that I can not allow because they be desagreinge from the senceritie of the gospel, the which thinges, yf they shuld either be altogether cancelled or altered into other matters, the wholle drift of the play shuld be altered, and therefore I dare not put my pen until it, because I want both skill and leasure to amende it, thoughe in good will I assure you yf I were worthie to geve your lordship and your right worshipfull brethren consell, suerlie mine advise shuld be that it shuld not be plaid, for thoughe it was plawsible to yeares agoe, and wold now also of the ignorant sort be well liked, yet now in this happie time of the gospell, I knowe the learned will mislike it, and how the state will beare with it, I know not. (qtd. in Spencer 249)

Dr. Hutton's response shows us clearly that there was a large enough population of reformed Christians to have noticed flaws in the script as well as enough of an interest in reformed thinking to ask for advise from a higher spiritual authority.

The following year, the Earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland began a rebellion. “Their avowed object was to restore the ancient faith, and though the attempt proved to be a signal failure, it would tend to bring into greater disfavour any exhibitions or ceremonies which might be regarded as ‘remnants of the old religion’” (Davies 269). The cycle is not discussed in the York records again until 1572, when the mayor declared that it should be looked at and “amended” along with the Pater Noster play. While the outcome is not discussed, the cycle was performed that year (Davies 269).

1577 seems to be a pivotal point in the history of religious plays throughout England. Collinson describes it thus:

It is well known that the movement conventionally described as the Puritan onslaught on the theatre was a storm which blew up with surprising suddenness in about 1577, its timing apparently linked to the full institutionalization of the drama with the opening of the first permanent public theatres in London. (112)

This also coincides with the publication of one of the most well known and often quoted anti-theatrical treatises, *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays And Interludes With Other Idle Pastimes* by Puritan John Northbrook.

Despite this, and perhaps because York was slow to adopt Protestantism, the Memorandum tells us that in 1579, “it was agreed by the council that Corpus Christi play should be played this year, but ‘first the book shall be carried ‘to my

Lord Archebisshop and Mr. Deane to correct, if that my Lord Archebisshop doo well like theron''' (Davies 271). The records tell us that again the following year, the issue of the cycle was brought up:

''The commons did earnestly request of my Lord Mayor and others the worshipful assemblee that Corpus Xpi ply might be played this yere.'' To this appeal the Lord Mayor coldly answered, ''that he and his brethren would consider of their request.'' This was the last attempt. From henceforth all notices of the Corpus Christi play, as well as of the Credo and Pater Noster plays, disappear from the minutes. (Davies 272)

A brief summary of the key points laid out through the previous pages aids in the understanding of the following chapter. The church was central to the life of the town, and leadership held the final answer to any questions that may have arisen. There was no great disenchantment by the general populace, and the Reformation began as a result of the leadership's questioning.

As a result of the Reformation, the most important change in thought and belief in relation to this study is *sola scriptura*. Luther wrote on the importance of the Bible in *A Treatise on Christian Liberty* in such a way that communicates to us the importance of this new concept of ''scripture alone:''

Let us then consider it certain and conclusively established that the soul can do without all things except the Word of God, and that where this is not there is no help for the soul in anything else whatever. But if it has the Word it is rich and lacks nothing, since this Word is the Word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of

righteousness, of salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of power, of grace, of glory, and of every blessing beyond our power to estimate. (Luther 23)

Accessibility of the Bible was highly influential in the continuance of the reform among the general populace. King Henry's reign vacillated with an inconsistent belief in Catholicism and Protestantism, Mary's reign was filled with persecution of Protestants, and Elizabeth's reign brought a great rise in Protestantism. Knowing the beginnings of the Reformation leads us to understand the mindset of the reformers.

York was not swift to adopt Protestantism, an attribute common to cathedral towns such as York. There was little emphasis on university attendance, so outside ideas were not traveling into York as quickly as into university cities, or towns that encouraged university attendance. The new ideas of Protestantism were therefore slow to take hold in the life of the town. This helps us to understand the stage on which the demise of the plays was set.

Finally, as for the cycle itself, York city records track much of the history of the cycle. From wagon stages, Biblical teaching addressed the fall and salvation of mankind, offering criticism and affirmation of the life of the observers throughout the performances. Performances continued throughout the reign of Mary, and a change was immediately felt with Elizabeth's reign. As

Puritanism rose to the surface of Protestantism, the cycle plays were buried in the past, only to be brought out occasionally throughout the centuries that followed. Whether the rise of Puritanism played a large part in the ending of the plays will be evaluated later. An evaluation of the text must take place before this can be done.

CHAPTER THREE

Textual Examination

The religious, social, and historical context of the cycle was established in chapter two. We may now evaluate the texts. With knowledge of the request for leadership to evaluate the cycle and because of the Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura*, a comparison of the plays with their biblical counterparts provides valuable insight. The evaluation will therefore concentrate primarily on comparisons between the text and the Bible.

Smith wrote of changes made to the manuscripts:

Scattered throughout the volume are frequent small alterations or corrections, little *nota* and indications that '*hic caret*' or '*hic caret de novo facto*,' all of which are later than the text, most of them in a hand of the second half of the sixteenth century. In three places it is thus stated that the plays have been rewritten, but no copy is registered, -- 'Doctor, this matter is newly mayde, wherof we haue no cobby;' in numerous others it is pointed out that a new speech is wanting; in one case '*loquela magna et diversa*;' in another that the text does not agree. (Smith xv)

In hope of finding evidence of significant editing, therefore gaining understanding for the study, each of the examples footnoted in the above excerpt by Smith. Evidence of a reformer editing in such a way to help the plays coincide with the Bible would have been highly beneficial for our understanding.

Unfortunately, Smith's summary explains the extent of the changes rather than pointing to something deeper as was assumed. The changes are minor and do not point to a desire to align the script with the gospel accounts.

Sometimes a line or words omitted in the original are supplied; in three instances the words are glossed to the more modern usage. All these are evidence that the plays underwent careful revision in 1568, when the city council agreed that the books thereof should be perused and otherwise amended before it was played, in obvious anticipation of the correction or censure of the reforming Archbishop Grindal. (Smith xvi)

Smith does not provide specific examples in order to aid in understanding how these changes are proof of anticipation of correction by the archbishop. As a result, these changes cannot be used as evidence of changes by a reformer for the advancement of Protestantism. With this lack of evidence of reform of the plays, it is thus important to analyze the text with other resources, namely the Bible.

Actual portions of the texts will be used throughout this chapter, with quotes from the gospels that contain passages that correlate. All cycle passages will be taken from Beadle and King, and the Bible passages used in the following pages will be taken from the King James Version found on crosswalk.com. In comparing, all gospels with corresponding passages to lines in the play will be used. If four gospels record the given passage, all four will be listed. Unless

otherwise noted, all summaries of the text and stories are original to this research.

As stated in the introductory section addressing limitations, the York cycle contains forty-eight plays, and although some are very short, all would prove to be too much for this research. Instead, one portion of the plays, those portraying the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus, from XXVI, "*The Conspiracy to Take Jesus*" to XXXVI, "*The Death of Christ*" will be examined. Of this selected portion of plays, only seven of them will be used, as there is not a complete collection in modern spelling by Beadle and King. All of the included plays from this section will be used for the textual examination of the cycle. A full analysis of the plays requires further research.

Before approaching the textual examination, it is important to outline the principles of Protestant exegesis or biblical interpretation. Gordon D. Fee explained the different areas used in proper exegesis:

The questions of content are basically of four kinds: textual criticism (the determination of the actual wording of the author), lexical data (the meaning of words), grammatical data (the relationship of words to one another), and historical-cultural background (the relationship of words and ideas to the background and culture of the author and his readers). (Fee 5)

For the following examinations and comparisons between plays and gospels, textual criticism will be the main focus, with some consideration of the historical-cultural background. Limitations will not allow for research in each of the four areas at this time.

In Martin Luther's first sermon for the Holy Week series, he works through a list of introductory points. Number nine is the most important to keep in mind for this study [*italics added*]:

Previously, under the papacy, Christ's passion was preached only as an example for us to follow after. . . . We, however, preach the Lord's suffering *in the way Holy Scripture does*, emphasizing every aspect of Christ's suffering pertained to his obedience under the will of his heavenly Father. (Klug 374)

Before beginning his sermon, Luther emphasized the fact that he preaches according to the Scriptures. This is clearly important, and will be noted throughout the following plays.

Calvin also pointed to the importance of "scripture alone." His thoughts are just as important to this study. He wrote:

Let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word. (qtd. in MacArthur 50)

With the latter quotes in mind, the examination can commence.

3.1 XXVI. The Cutlers (knife makers). *Conspiracy to Take Jesus.*

This play opens with a soliloquy of Pilate, speaking of his greatness, and of the high priests, Annas and Caiaphas, coming in to ask him for help in the capture of Jesus. Pilate has already heard of their hatred for the man, but they continue to explain reasons for their hatred. Two soldiers in the scene also agree and add to the list of reasons for the dislike of Jesus. The clerks, Annas, and Caiaphas continue to discuss the subject with Pilate.

The scene changes, and Judas' key soliloquy educates the audience on the reason for his attitude toward Jesus. This is based primarily on an event in which a woman came into a meeting with Jesus and the disciples and anointed his feet with a very expensive perfume or oil. The perfume could have been sold for a great amount of money, and Judas being the money changer could have kept some of that money for himself. Judas perceives Jesus as unjust as a result of this action, and speaks the following:

That same ointment, I said, might sam have been sold
 For silver pence in a sum three hundred, and fine
 Have been departed to poor men as plain pity would;
 But for the poor, ne their part pricked me no pine—
 But me teend for the tenth part, the truth to behold,
 That thirty pence of three hundred so tite I should tine. (Beadle 131)

When Judas reaches the door, ready to meet with Pilate, he asks the porter to open the door. There is an exchange of dialogue between Pilate and the Porter at this point as the Porter perceives that Judas is up to wicked work as is apparent on his face. Despite this, the Porter does announce Judas to Pilate. Judas addresses Pilate, telling him that he would like to make a bargain to help end the threat to Pilate. They discuss and bargain for the deal and the discussion is ended with Judas' taking of thirty gold pieces. "PILATE: Now what shall we pay? JUDAS: Sir, thiry pence and plete, no more then" (Beadle 134). Although not mentioned specifically, and not taken from the gospel accounts, it is interesting that the author would make a connection in the amount Judas perceived lost from the woman's ointment and the amount he asks for to betray Jesus.

The soldiers who are present call Judas an easy traitor and villain because of the way he betrays his Lord. Judas explains that he will show them who to catch by kissing Jesus. The soldiers and clerks continue to speak of Judas' deceitfulness and wickedness. Pilate instructs the soldiers not to hurt Jesus, and they agree to use only enough force as is necessary to bring Jesus back.

The ordering of events in this play could pose as a problem for a Protestant who is grasping the importance of *sola scriptura*, especially for one in a

leadership position such as Dr. Hutton who was asked for an opinion on the cycle. His need to take into account what the general public was learning would have made his decision making even more vital. This play does not follow the scriptural accounts well. We see this first in Pilate's involvement as Annas and Caiaphas come to him for his help as this took place even before Judas was involved. In the gospels we are told that the high priests discuss Jesus together primarily, that Judas comes and a bargain is reached between them, and that after Jesus' capture he is taken before Annas, then before Caiaphas, then finally before Pilate. This is seen in each of the gospels.

York Cycle

CAIAPHAS: Sir, and for to certify the sooth in your sight,

As to you for our sovereign seemly we seek.

PILATE: Why, is there any mischief that musters his might,

Or malice through mean men us musters to meek?

ANNAS: Yea, sir, there is a rank swain whose rile is not right,

For through his rumour in this realm hath raised mickle reek.

PILATE: I hear well ye hate him; your heatrs are on height,

And heed if I help would his harms for to eke.

Gospels

Matthew 26

1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, **2** Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. **3** Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, **4** And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. **5** But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, **15** And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I

York Cycle

But why are ye barely thus
brath?

Be ruly, and ray forth your
reason.

CAIAPHAS: To us, sir, his lore
is full loath.

PILATE: Beware that ye wax not
too wrath.

ANNAS: Why sir, to skift from
his cathe

We seek for your succour this
season. (127)

*[etc. through more discussion
between Pilate, Caiaphas, Annas,
the Soldiers, and Clerks, and Judas'
soliloquy and dialogue with the
Porter.]*

JUDAS: Of work, sir, that hath
wrathed you, I wot what I
mane,

But I would make a
merchandise, your miscief to
mar.

PILATE: And may thou so?

JUDAS: Else mad I such
masteries to mean.

ANNAS: Thou kens thou of
some cumberance our charge
for to chare?

For cousin, thou art cruel.

JUDAS: My cause, sir, is keen.

For if ye will bargain or buy,
Jesus this time will I sell you.

Gospels

will deliver him unto you? And they
covenanted with him for thirty pieces of
silver. **16** And from that time he sought
opportunity to betray him

Matthew 27

1 When the morning was come, all the chief
priests and elders of the people took counsel
against Jesus to put him to death: **2** And when
they had bound him, they led him away, and
delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

Mark 14

10 And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went
unto the chief priests, to betray him unto
them. **11** And when they heard it, they were
glad, and promised to give him money. And
he sought how he might conveniently betray
him.

Mark 15

1 And straightway in the morning the chief
priests held a consultation with the elders and
scribes and the whole council, and bound
Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered
him to Pilate.

Luke 22

1 Now the feast of unleavened bread drew
nigh, which is called the Passover. **2** And the
chief priests and scribes sought how they
might kill him; for they feared the people.
3 Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed
Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.
4 And he went his way, and communed with

York Cycle

1 CLERK: My blessing soon
have thou forthy –

Lo, here is a sport for to spy.

JUDAS: And him dare I hight
you in hie,

If ye will be toward, I tell
you.

PILATE : What hightest thou?

JUDAS: Judas Iscariot.

PILATE: Thou art a just man

That will Jesus be justified by
our judgement.

But how gates bought shell
he be? Bid forth thy bargain.

JUDAS: But for a little beeting to
bear from this bent.

PILATE: Now what shall we
pay?

JUDAS: Sir, thirty pence and
plete, no more then.

PILATE: Say, are you pleased of
this price he presses to present?

2 CLERK: Else contrary we our
consciences, conceive since we
can

That Judas knows him
culpable.

PILATE: I call you consent.

But for Judas, a knot for to
knit,

Wilt thou to this covenant
accord?

JUDAS: Yea, at a word.

PILATE: Welcome is it. (134)

Gospels

the chief priests and captains, how he might
betray him unto them. 5 And they were glad,
and covenanted to give him money. 6 And he
promised, and sought opportunity to betray
him unto them in the absence of the
multitude.

66 And as soon as it was day, the elders of the
people and the chief priests and the scribes
came together, and led him into their council,
saying, 67 Art thou the Christ? Tell us. And he
said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not
believe: 68 And if I also ask you, ye will not
answer me, nor let me go. 69 Hereafter shall
the Son of man sit on the right hand of the
power of God. 70 Then said they all, Art thou
then the Son of God? And he said unto them,
Ye say that I am. 71 And they said, What need
we any further witness? For we ourselves
have heard of his own mouth. 23:1 And the
whole multitude of them arose, and led him
unto Pilate.

John 18

24 Now Annas had sent him bound unto
Caiaphas the high priest.

28 Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the
hall of judgment: and it was early; and they
themselves went not into the judgment hall,
lest they should be defiled; but that they
might eat the Passover. 29 Pilate then went
out unto them, and said, What accusation
bring ye against this man?

It can be seen, therefore, that the sequence of events and the persons involved are changed from the Bible passages. Additionally, Judas' soliloquy is only based on assumption of what could have take place. To a mindset that said the Bible holds the truth and doesn't need additions, this could pose difficulty.

Judas' soliloquy and the verses it was based on is as follows:

York Cycle

JUDAS: *Ingenti pro inutria* – him
 Jesus, that Jew,
 Unjust unto me, Judas, I judge to
 be loath.
 For at our supper as we sat, the
 sooth to pursue,
 With Simon Leprous, full soon m
 skift came to scathe.
 To him there brought one a box,
 my bale for to brew,
 That bainly to his bare feet to
 bow was full brath.
 She anointed them with an
 ointment that noble was and new,
 But for that work that she
 wrought I waxed wonder wrath.
 And this – to discover – was my
 skill:
 For of his pence, purser was I,
 And what that me taught was
 until,
 The tenth part that stole I ay still.
 But now for me wants of my will,
 That bargain with bale shall he
 buy.

Gospels

Matthew 26
 6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the
 house of Simon the leper, 7 There came
 unto him a woman having an alabaster
 box of very precious ointment, and poured
 it on his head, as he sat at meat. 8 But
 when his disciples saw it, they had
 indignation, saying, To what purpose is
 this waste? 9 For this ointment might have
 been sold for much, and given to the poor.
 10 When Jesus understood it, he said unto
 them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she
 hath wrought a good work upon me.
 11 For ye have the poor always with you;
 but me ye have not always. 12 For in that
 she hath poured this ointment on my
 body, she did it for my burial. 13 Verily I
 say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel
 shall be preached in the whole world,
 there shall also this, that this woman hath
 done, be told for a memorial of her.
 14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas
 Iscariot, went unto the chief priests.

York Cycle

Gospels

Mark 3

That same ointment, I said, might
sam have been sold

For silver pence in a sim three
hundred, and fine

Have been departed to poor men
as plain pity would;

But for the poor, ne their part
pricked me no pine –

But me teened for the tenth part,
the truth to behold,

That thirty pence of three
hundred so tite I should tine.

And for I miss this money, I
mourn on this mould,

Wherefore for to mischieve this
master of mine

Therefore fast forth will I flit,

The princes of priests until,

And sell him full soon ere that I
sit,

For thirty pence in a knot knit.

Thusgates full well shall he wit

That of my wrath wreak me I
will. (130)

3 And being in Bethany in the house of
Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there
came a woman having an alabaster box of
ointment of spikenard ^{E41} very precious;
and she brake the box, and poured it on
his head. 4 And there were some that had
indignation within themselves, and said,
Why was this waste of the ointment made?
5 For it might have been sold for more
than three hundred pence, and have been
given to the poor. And they murmured
against her. 6 And Jesus said, Let her
alone; why trouble ye her? she hath
wrought a good work on me. 7 For ye
have the poor with you always, and
whensoever ye will ye may do them good:
but me ye have not always. 8 She hath
done what she could: she is come
aforehand to anoint my body to the
burying. 9 Verily I say unto you,
Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached
throughout the whole world, this also that
she hath done shall be spoken of for a
memorial of her. 10 And Judas Iscariot,
one of the twelve, went unto the chief
priests, to betray him unto them

This first play demonstrates a lack of consistency with the biblical passages, which, during many times of Christianity has not posed a problem as long as it was not altering the main points of the story. However, for the mindset

of the Reformers, and especially for the rising Puritan mindset, the lack of strict adherence to the Biblical text could have been thought quite offensive.

3.2 XXIX. The Bowers and Fletchers (makers of bows and arrows). *Peter*

Denies Jesus: Jesus Examined by Caiaphas.

Before the start of this play, the audience would have watched the play portraying the agony of Christ, his betrayal by Judas, and his arrest. The company of Caiaphas does not yet have knowledge of the latter happenings however, as they are waiting for word from the soldiers. Caiaphas opens the play with a great speech, pointing out his knowledge, intelligence, authority, power and rule. It is for these reasons that he asks those listening for their respect. Caiaphas then explains Jesus' wrongs; Annas adds to this, and they continue to discuss. It is night, and after a drink of wine from one of the soldiers, they retire to sleep.

The scene changes, and a woman sees Peter and thinks he is a spy because he followed Jesus. She talks about him then addresses him with her assumptions. Peter tells her that he never kept company with Jesus. She presses the issue and he dismisses her once again, this time with a statement about the ill temperedness of women. Malcus, a soldier there, then enters the conversation,

retelling the tale of his ear being cut off by Peter's sword, and the healing Jesus performed for him. Peter denies once more, and Malcus points out that he has denied Jesus three times. Jesus then speaks his prediction of this, and sadness overtakes Peter's heart.

There is another scene change and the soldiers come back to Annas and Caiaphas in order to retell the happenings of the night. Jesus is then brought in to them and Caiaphas asks if he is the Christ, God's son, to which Jesus answers positive. The high priests react deeply to this blasphemy, and Jesus asks why they waited until the night to take him when it would have been easier to take him in the public places he was so often. Caiaphas, Annas, and the soldiers then discuss the latter actions until Caiaphas tells a soldier to go tell Pilate that Jesus' lying breaks their laws, and that he needs to be put to death.

This play shows an improved level of consistency with the biblical text compared to play XXVI. While most of the specifics are not within the biblical text, the general outline does follow the biblical record with the exception of Caiaphas' speech and his dialogue with Annas at the beginning of the play. For the most part, the idea for the dialogue and action can be gathered from the biblical text, but most of it cannot be found specifically in the gospels.

The first section that lines up with the biblical outline is Peter's denial of knowing Jesus. The beginning of this scene, with the woman discussing her recognition of Peter with the soldiers is an addition to the gospel accounts. In this account Peter is approached by the woman twice, and by Malcus once. This is one area where the gospels seem to differ somewhat. None match the cycle's portrayal however, nor the cycle's rendition, even a combination of the gospel accounts. This can be seen below:

York Cycle

WOMAN: Thou caitiff, what moves
thee stand
So stable and still in thy thought?
Thou hast wrought mickle wrong in
land,
And wonderful works hast thou
wrought.

A lorel, a leader of law,
To set him and sue has thou sought.
Stand forth and thrust in you thrive,
Thy mastery thou bring unto nought.

Wait now, he looks like a brock,
Were he in a band for to bait,
Or else like an owl in a stock
Full privily his prey for to wait.
PETER: Woman, they words and thy
wind thou not waste,
Of his company never ere was I
kenned.

Gospels

Matthew 26
69 Now Peter sat without in the
palace: and a damsel came unto him,
saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of
Galilee. 70 But he denied before them
all, saying, I know not what thou
sayest. 71 And when he was gone out
into the porch, another maid saw him,
and said unto them that were there,
This fellow was also with Jesus of
Nazareth. 72 And again he denied
with an oath, I do not know the man.
73 And after a while came unto him
they that stood by, and said to Peter,
Surely thou also art one of them; for
thy speech bewrayeth thee. 74 Then
began he to curse and to swear,
saying, I know not the man. And
immediately the cock crew. 75 And
Peter remembered the word of Jesus,
which said unto him, Before the cock

York Cycle

Thou hast thee mismarked, truly be
trast,

Wherefore of thy miss thou thee
amend.

WOMAN: Then gainsays thou here the
saws that thou said,

How he should claim to be called
God's son,

And with the works that he wrought
whilst he walked,

Bainly at our bidding always to be
bound.

PETER: I will consent to your saws,
what should I say more?

For women are crabbed – that comes
them of kind.

Bit I say as I first said, I saw him
never ere,

But as a friend of your fellowship
shall ye me ay find.

MALCUS: Hark, knights that are known
in this country, as we ken,

How yon boy with his boast has
brewed mickle bale.

He has forsaken his master before
you women,

But I shall prove to you pertly and
tell you my tale.

*[Continues to tell the story of Peter cutting
off his ear and Jesus restoring it.]*

Let see whether grantest thou guilt:
Do speak on, and spare not to tell us,
Or full fast I shall fond thee flit,

Gospels

crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And
he went out, and wept bitterly.

Mark 14

66 And as Peter was beneath in the
palace, there cometh one of the maids
of the high priest: 67 And when she
saw Peter warming himself, she
looked upon him, and said, And thou
also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.

68 But he denied, saying, I know not,
neither understand I what thou sayest.

And he went out into the porch; and
the cock crew. 69 And a maid saw him
again, and began to say to them that
stood by, This is one of them. 70 And

he denied it again. And a little after,
they that stood by said again to Peter,
Surely thou art one of them: for thou
art a Galilaean, and thy speech

agreeth thereto. 71 But he began to
curse and to swear, saying, I know not
this man of whom ye speak. 72 And

the second time the cock crew. And
Peter called to mind the word that
Jesus said unto him, Before the cock
crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

And when he thought thereon, he
wept.

Luke 22

55 And when they had kindled a fire
in the midst of the hall, and were set
down together, Peter sat down among
them. 56 But a certain maid beheld

York Cycle

The sooth but thou say here amell us.

Come off, o tite let me see now,
In saving of thyself from shame

(Line missing from manuscript)

Yea, and also for bearing of blame.

PETER: I was never with him in work
that he wrought,

In word nor in work, in will nor in
deed.

I know no course that ye have hither
brought,

In no court of this kith, if I should
right read.

MALCUS: Hear, sirs, how he says, and
has forsaken

His master to this woman here twice,
And newly our law has he taken –
Thus hath he denied him thrice.

JESUS: Peter, Peter, thus said I ere,

When thou said thou would abide
with me

In weal and woe, in sorrow and care,
Wilst I should thrice forsaken be.

PETER: Alas the while that I cam here,

That ever I denied my Lord in quart,
The look of his fair face so clear

With full sad sorrow shears my heart.

(142)

Gospels

him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly
looked upon him, and said, This man
was also with him. **57** And he denied
him, saying, Woman, I know him not.
58 And after a little while another saw
him, and said, Thou art also of them.
And Peter said, Man, I am not. **59** And
about the space of one hour after
another confidently affirmed, saying,
Of a truth this fellow also was with
him: for he is a Galilaeen. **60** And
Peter said, Man, I know not what thou
sayest. And immediately, while he yet
spake, the cock crew. **61** And the Lord
turned, and looked upon Peter. And
Peter remembered the word of the
Lord, how he had said unto him,
Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny
me thrice. **62** And Peter went out, and
wept bitterly.

John 18

25 And Simon Peter stood and
warmed himself. They said therefore
unto him, Art not thou also one of his
disciples? He denied it, and said, I am
not. **26** One of the servants of the high
priest, being his kinsman whose ear
Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee
in the garden with him? **27** Peter then
denied again: and immediately the
cock crew.

Although the exact biblical narrative is not followed here, we do see the impact of the denial of Jesus demonstrated in one of his followers. This impact parallels the biblical narrative. In his commentary on this passage from the gospels, Calvin addressed this important moment:

Peter's fall, which is here related, is a bright mirror of our weakness. In his repentance, also, a striking instance of the goodness and mercy of God is held out to us. This narrative, therefore, which relates to a single individual, contains a doctrine which may be applied to the whole Church, and standing to cherish anxiety and fear, and to comfort those who have fallen, by holding out to them the hope of pardon. And first it ought to be observed, that Peter acted inconsiderately, when he entered into the hall of the high priest. It was his duty, no doubt, to follow his Master; but having been warned that he would revolt, he ought rather to have concealed himself in some corner, so as not to expose himself to an occasion of sinning. Thus it frequently happens that believers, under an appearance of virtue, throw themselves within the reach of temptation. (260)

In the outline of events in the Bible, Jesus is brought before the high priests before the scene of Peter's denial. However, it is likely that these events happened concurrently as there is no biblical indication that the scene with Peter happened after that of the high priests, just that it was a different event. Since the sequence in XXIX aids the dramatic flow of the cycle, the changes of order could be justified. It is possible therefore that a reformer would not be offended

by the changes. The play appeals to the human nature of its observers, their sinfulness, their mistakes, their pain, their forgiveness, and so on.

The next, and probably most important point in the outline of the story is Jesus' appearance before Annas and Caiaphas. Caiaphas, Annas, and the soldiers discuss Jesus for some time before they address Jesus himself. All the while, Jesus stands still. Biblically, there is no specific discussion of the scene; however, it does speak of witnesses speaking against Jesus as this dialogue implies.

York Cycle

4 SOLDIER: My lord, to wit the wonders that he has wrought,

For to tell you the tenth it would our tongues tire.

CAIAPHAS: Since the boy for his boast is into bale brought,

We will wit, ere he wend, how his works were.

3 SOLDIER: Our Sabbath day, we say, saves he right nought,

That he should hallow and hold full digne and full dear.

4 SOLDIER: No sir, in the same feast as we the sot sought,

He salved them of sickness on many sides sere.

CAIAPHAS: What then, makes he them gradely to gang?

3 SOLDIER: Yea lord, even forth in every-ilka

Gospels

Matthew 26

59 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against

Jesus, to put him to death;

60 But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At

the last came two false witnesses, 61 And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

Mark 14

55 And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.

York Cycle

Gospels

town

He them leeches to life after long.

CAIAPHAS: Ah, this makes he by the mightes of
Mahound.

4 SOLDIER: Sir, our stiff temple that made is of
stone,

That passes any palace of price for to praise,
And it were down to the earth and to the
ground gone,

This ribald he rouses him it rathely to raise.

3 SOLDIER: Yea lord, and other wonders he
works great wone,

And with his loud leasing he loses our lays.

(148)

56 For many bare false
witness against him, but their
witness agreed not together.

57 And there arose certain,
and bare false witness against
him, saying, 58 We heard him
say, I will destroy this temple
that is made with hands, and
within three days I will build
another made without hands.

59 But neither so did their
witness agree together.

The last section of this play's outline is Jesus' speaking with the high priests. Jesus has five lines in this dialogue. Since these lines contrast an entire play of his silence, they are all very important and will be compared with their biblical counterparts. The first comes out of Caiaphas' frustration that Jesus is not responding to anything being asked or told of him.

York Cycle

Gospels

CAIAPHAS: Nay sir,
none haste, we shall have
game ere we go.

Boy, be not aghast if
we seem gay.

I conjure thee kindly
and command thee also,
By great God that is

Matthew 26

63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. 64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. 65 Then

York Cycle

Gospels

living and last shall ay,
 If thou be Christ,
 God's son, tell to us two.
 JESUS: Sir, thou says it
 thyself, and smoothly I
 say

That I shall go to my
 Father that I come fro
 And dwell with him
 winly in wealth always.

CAIAPHAS: Why fie on
 thee, faitour untrue,

Thy Father hast thou
 foully defamed.

Now needs us no notes
 of new,

Himself with his saws
 has he shamed. (149)

the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath
 spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of
 witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his
 blasphemy.

Mark 14

61 But he held his peace, and answered nothing.

Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him,

Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? 62 And

Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man

sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the

clouds of heaven. 63 Then the high priest rent his

clothes, and saith, What need we any further
 witnesses?

Luke 22

67 Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto

them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: 68 And if I also
 ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go.

69 Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right

hand of the power of God. 70 Then said they all, Art

thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them,

Ye say that I am. 71 And they said, What need we

any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of
 his own mouth.

We see that the latter portion follows the gospel account closely. Of the following two of Jesus' lines, the first is not found in gospel narratives, and the second is ascribed to an earlier point in the narrative, when Jesus is arrested in Gethsemane. Despite this detour, Jesus' response in the cycle follows closely with the Bible.

York Cycle

ANNAS: Now needs neither witness ne
council to call,

But takes his saws as he sayeth in the
same stead.

He slanders the Godhead and grieves
us all,

Wherefore he is well worthy to be
dead –

And therefore, sir, say him the sooth.
CAIAPHAS: Ceres, so I shall.

Hears thou not, harlot? Ill hap on thy
head!

Answer here gradely to great and to
small,

And reach us out rathely some reason,
I rede.

JESUS: My reasons are not to rehears,

Nor they that might help me are not
here now.

ANNAS: Say lad, list thee make verse?

Do tell on belive; let us hear now.

JESUS: Sir, if I say the sooth thou shall
not assent,

But hinder, or hast me to hang,

I preached where people was most in
present,

And no point in privity, to old ne
young..

And also in your temple I told mine
intent;

Ye might have ta'en me that time for
my telling,

Well better than bring me with brands
on bent,

And thus to noy me by night, and also

Gospels

Matthew 26

55 In that same hour said Jesus to the
multitudes, Are ye come out as
against a thief with swords and
staves for to take me? I sat daily with
you teaching in the temple, and ye
laid no hold on me. 56 But all this
was done, that the scriptures of the
prophets might be fulfilled. Then all
the disciples forsook him, and fled.

Mark 14

48 And Jesus answered and said unto
them, Are ye come out, as against a
thief, with swords and with staves to
take me? 49 I was daily with you in
the temple teaching, and ye took me
not: but the scriptures must be
fulfilled. 50 And they all forsook him,
and fled. 51 And there followed him
a certain young man, having a linen
cloth cast about his naked body; and
the young men laid hold on him:
52 And he left the linen cloth, and
fled from them naked.

Luke 22

52 Then Jesus said unto the chief
priests, and captains of the temple,
and the elders, which were come to
him, Be ye come out, as against a
thief, with swords and staves?

53 When I was daily with you in the
temple, ye stretched forth no hands
against me: but this is your hour, and

York Cycle

Gospels

for nothing. (150)

the power of darkness.

It is an odd decision of the author to place this line out of the context of the arrest and instead to put it into the context of Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas. It is likely that this is something a reformer set to the task of evaluating the play would have deemed worthy of alteration in order to keep closer to the original, thereby educating the people more accurately as they enjoyed the performance.

The cycle continues with Jesus being beaten for insolence. These lines are familiar but not quite accurate. In the biblical record Jesus is struck for his response to the high priest, as his words were perceived as disrespectful. Jesus questions the striking. The difference within the play can be seen in the comparison below.

York Cycle

Gospels

CAIAPHAS: For nothing, loasel? Thou lies!

Thy words and works will have a wreaking.

JESUS: Sire, since thou with wrong so me wries,

Go speer them that heard of my speaking.

CAIAPHAS: Ah, this traitor has teened me with tales that he has told.

Yet had I never such hething of a harlot as he.

1 SOLDIER: What, fie on thee, beggar, who made thee so bold

John 18

19 The high priest then asked

Jesus of his disciples, and of

his doctrine. 20 Jesus

answered him, I spake openly

to the world; I ever taught in

the synagogue, and in the

temple, whither the Jews

always resort; and in secret

York Cycle

To bourd with our bishop? Thy band shall I
be.
JESUS: Sir, if my words be wrong or worse than
thou would,
 A wrong witness I wot now are ye;
 And if my saws be sooth they mun be sore
sold,
 Wherefor thou bourds too broad for to beat
me.
2 SOLDIER: My lord, will ye hear? For
Mahound,
 No more now for to neven that it needs.
CAIAPHAS: Go dress you and ding ye him
down,
 And deaf us no more with his deeds. (150)

Gospels

have I said nothing. **21** Why
askest thou me? ask them
which heard me, what I have
said unto them: behold, they
know what I said. **22** And
when he had thus spoken, one
of the officers which stood by
struck Jesus with the palm of
his hand, saying, Answerest
thou the high priest so?
23 Jesus answered him, If I
have spoken evil, bear witness
of the evil: but if well, why
smitest thou me?

To summarize this play, it seems fair to conclude that the portrayal of Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas is roughly in line with the King James Version of the gospels. The author takes liberties, expanding on the dialogue that is written in the gospel accounts, and adding a speech by Caiaphas in the opening of the play. Once we look on a more detailed scale however, there is less consistency and more liberties taken to the order, context and content of the dialogue. Although no writings give us a definite answer, there is evidence leading us to understand that this play, XXIX, would have required less adjustment in order for the Protestant leader to approve of it than the previous

play, XXVI; however it is likely that it would not have reached the level of accuracy needed for a *sola scriptura* mindset.

3.3 XXX. The Tapiters and Couchers (tapestry and bedding makers). *Dream of Pilate's Wife: Jesus Before Pilate.*

The play opens once again with Pilate speaking highly of himself and his position. Procula, his wife, then takes his attention, and he addresses her beauty. She speaks highly of Pilate as well, and their dialogue soon turns to discuss the goodness of their physical relationship. A character named Beadle interrupts them. The dialogue is unclear for a few lines following, but it is clear that Procula is to leave. Pilate gives her a drink, tells her to share with her maid, and they say goodbye.

Procula arrives home, having been accompanied by her maid and an undefined "boy" who was sent to accompany them. The devil then enters, unrealized by the rest of the characters. The devil is already aware that the redemption is coming, and he acknowledges Jesus as God's son, noting that he will be killed, and "our Solace will cease," as man's souls are saved. He then addresses Procula in a dream, telling her of Jesus being unjustly judged, that her efforts and strength will be destroyed, and her richness taken with the vengeance

Satan promises. Disturbed by this, Procula asks the boy to go and bow before Pilate and explain the dream to him.

In another scene, Annas talks to Caiaphas about Jesus, and the fact that they should take him before Pilate. Caiaphas agrees and orders the soldiers to bind Jesus to take him in to Pilate. As they bind him, the soldiers talk about how Jesus said he was God's son, but is now stupefied with fright. Annas joins in, mocking Jesus' words about not being able to be overthrown in the Last Judgment. The Beadle comes to see what the commotion is and the soldiers tell him they've come because of the wretch Annas and Caiaphas have taken by force.

Pilate asks for them to bring him, and they come to him. The boy who was sent by Procula also arrives at this moment and Pilate inquires of the health of his lady. The boy tells of her dream, and of her wish to save Jesus. Caiaphas and Annas believe this is an example of witchcraft set out by Jesus. Beadle tells Pilate of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Pilate asks Annas and Caiaphas what they think of the event, and they call the words misleading.

Pilate calls Jesus, telling him not to be afraid. Caiaphas tells Pilate he hopes that he'll trust their tale, to which Pilate responds that he would, except their accusations have not been to the point. Annas and Caiaphas then attempt

to put forth specific examples of wrong doings to which Pilate asks them what they want. Death is their answer, so Pilate addresses Jesus, asking him if he is the Christ, God's son. He answers positively once again, and Pilate, Caiaphas and Annas discuss the matter until Pilate decides to beat him and send him on to Herod.

This play, XXX is similar to XXVI, "The Conspiracy," the first play discussed in this paper, in that some pieces of the cycle account are found in the biblical accounts. However, the cycle account lacks adherence to the story's biblical order and elaborates with a large amount of extant details. The opening of this play is entirely based on building the characters, not on staying true to the biblical records. The opening of this play does not meet that priority of aligning with the biblical text. Pilate's opening speech, his dialogue with his wife, and the soliloquy of the devil, are not attributable to the gospel accounts. This is sure to have raised flags for those reading the play in order to evaluate it for accuracy.

The dream of Pilate's wife is the first piece we see that can be attributed to the gospels. It has been elaborated however; the Bible does not detail the dream of Pilate's wife. In the Biblical account, we learn of this dream when Jesus is before Pilate, and a messenger brings word of the dream from Pilate's wife. In the play we see the devil speak to Procula as she sleeps, watch the process of

Annas and Caiaphas deciding to take Jesus before Pilate and coming into his presence. As they come before Pilate we see the dialogue between Pilate and the boy in regard to Procula's dream.

York Cycle

DEVIL: Oh woman, be wise and ware, and won in thy wit
 There shall a gentleman, Jesu, unjustly be judged
 Before thy husband in haste, and with harlots be hit.
 And that doughty today to death thus be deghted,
 For his preaching, Sir Pilate and thou
 With need shall ye namely be noyed.
 Your strife and your strength shall be stroyed,
 Your richness shall be reft you that is rude,
 With vengeance, and that dare I avow. (161)

[Continues with the story through Jesus coming into the presence of Pilate.]

PILATE: Now bienvenue beausire, what bodeword hast thou brought?

Has any languor my lady new latched in this lede?

BOY: Sir, that comely commends her you to,
 And says, all naked this night as she napped
 With teen and with tray was she trapped,
 With a sweven that swiftly her swapped
 Of one Jesu, the just man the Jews will undo.

She beseeches you as her sovereign that simple to save,

Deem him not to death for dread of vengeance.

Gospels

Matthew 27

19 When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

York Cycle

Gospels

PILATE: What, I hope this be he that hither harled
ye have.

CAIAPHAS: Yea sir, the same and the self – but this
is but a skaunce,

With witchcraft this wile has he wrought.

Some fiend of his sand has he sent

And warned your wife ere he went. (165)

As can be seen, this scene adds much to the simple line that gives us knowledge of the wife's dream. From here, there is little that coincides with any of the gospels until Pilate speaks to Jesus directly. There is a good deal of dialogue between Annas, Caiaphas and Pilate that could have happened, but again, from a view of scripture only, it is something that is added rather than being biblically sound.

After much discussion, Pilate finally decides to speak to Jesus himself.

Caiaphas' response to this is to ask Pilate to believe their story. In the gospel of Matthew, this action takes place prior to Pilate's hearing of his wife's dream.

Other differences and similarities can be seen below.

York Cycle

Gospels

ANNAS: Misplaye not your person, ye
prince without peer,

It touches to treason, this tale I shall
tell:

Yon briber, full bairly he bad to

Matthew 27

11 And Jesus stood before the
governor: and the governor asked
him, saying, Art thou the King of the
Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou

York Cycle

forbear

The tribute to the emperor, thus would
he compel

Our people thus his points to apply.
CAIAPHAS: The people he says he shall
save,

And Christ gars he call him, yon
knave,

And says he will the high kingdom
have –

Look whether he deserve to die.
PILATE: To die he deserves if he do thus
indeed,

But I will see myself what he says.
Speak, Jesu, and spend now thy space
for to speed.

These lordings they ledge thee thou
list not leve on our lays,

They accuse thee cruelly and keen;
And therefore as a chieftan I charge
thee,

If thou be the Christ, that thou tell me,
And God's son thou grudge not to
grant thee,

For this is the matter that I mean.
JESUS: Thou sayest so thyself. I am
smoothly
the same

Here woning in world to work all my
will.

My Father is faithful to fell all thy
fame;

Without trespass or teen am I taken
thee till.

PILATE: Lo bishops, why blame ye this

Gospels

sayest.

Mark 15

"Are you the king of the Jews?"
asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say,"
Jesus replied.

Luke 23

3 So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the
king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you
say," Jesus replied.

John 18

33 Pilate then went back inside the
palace, summoned Jesus and asked
him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"
34 "Is that your own idea," Jesus
asked, "or did others talk to you
about me?" 35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate
replied. "It was your people and
your chief priests who handed you
over to me. What is it you have
done?" 36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is
not of this world. If it were, my
servants would fight to prevent my
arrest by the Jews. But now my
kingdom is from another place."
37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.
Jesus answered, "You are right in
saying I am a king. In fact, for this
reason I was born, and for this I
came into the world, to testify to the
truth. Everyone on the side of truth
listens to me." 38 "What is truth?"
Pilate asked. With this he went out

York Cycle

Gospels

boy?

Me seems that it is sooth that he says.

Ye move all the malice ye may

With your wrenches and wiles to

writhe him away,

Unjustly to judge him from joy. (171)

again to the Jews and said, "I find no

basis for a charge against him.

The beginning of Jesus' response corresponds to its gospel counterparts: "Thou sayest so thyself. I am soothly the same" (Beadle 172), but the end of his response is added: "Here woning in the world to work all my will. My Father is faithful to fell all thy fame; Without trespass or teen am I taken thee till" (172). Even the extended account in John is not echoed in this portion. It is interesting that the author would choose to ignore John's statements of the "kingdom not of this world" and truth, and replaces it instead with statements about the Father being faithful to bring an end to Pilates' fame and that he is without offence. This is a clear example of a change from the biblical text. It is not an elaboration for the sake of extending a play, bringing out character traits or emphasizing situations that may have happened in order to help move the story along, but a straightforward change of content, one that alters the emphasis of the play.

In both the gospel accounts and the play, some dialogue carries on until Pilate learns that Jesus is from Galilee and thereby decides to send Jesus to

Herod. This portion of the play is merely an elaboration of the original text. The play as a whole can be summarized in the same way. Outside of the example of Jesus speaking to Pilate and a slight adjustment to the order of action, the majority of the text is merely an elaboration of the gospel accounts. While it does not stray too far to give reason for dismissal of the play, the text also does not align closely enough to give good reason for the reformers to keep it either.

3.4 XXXI. The Listers (dyers of cloth). *Trial Before Herod.*

Once again, this play is begun by one of the powerful players, the king, speaking to those around him. Herod silences everyone, and addresses those around him with an elaborate speech. One of the few dramatic instructions in this selection of plays tells us “Then the King drinks” and the Duke then encourages him to go to bed. When he lies down, the Duke asks him how he lies, to which the king answers well and wishes Satan to save them all and to give a good night.

As has been a common pattern among the leadership characters of this play, first with Pilate, then with Caiaphas, Herod is then awakened after discussion between soldiers and the Duke, and the soldiers speak to him about why they have come. He asks them not to say Pilate’s name in his presence, and

after much dialogue, asks why the matter was brought before him. The soldiers tell him it's because it touches treason, and because Jesus is known to be blameworthy of many points. Herod asks for Jesus to be brought in so that they can "have good game with" him.

While in the presence of Herod, there is discussion of the "masteries and marvels" Jesus had done and a great mocking of Jesus. All the while, Jesus is silent. The soldiers, dukes, and Herod discuss Jesus at great length, until the sons enter the conversation. These "sons" are not described or defined; they are simply named as such in the script. Perhaps they are Herod's sons? Whatever the case, these men ask Herod why he bothers with a madman. Herod looks for fault, and finding none, sends him back to Pilate.

As has also been a common pattern in these plays, Herod's opening speech cannot be found in the gospels, and can be added to the list of occasions where the author has taken liberty to give us some information about a character through dialogue and action that fits with the scene, but is not taken from the biblical narratives. Luke is the only gospel that records this event, doing so over the span of only four verses. Without even looking at these verses, it can be assumed that this play, measuring over 420 lines, and being the second longest play of those included in this research, has been created with a large amount of

creative license. Since this play works with only one passage of Luke, it will be worked through in the order set forth by the biblical narrative. Line numbers will be included in parentheses at the beginning of each of the cycle sections in order to identify where the quote came from within the play.

York Cycle

Gospels

(113) KING: Why then, can you neven us his name?

Luke 23

1 SOLDIER: Sir, Christ have we called him at home.

8 When Herod saw Jesus,

KING: Oh, this is the ilk self and the same –

he was greatly pleased,

Now sirs, ye be welcome iwis.

because for a long time he had been wanting to see

And in faith I am fain he is fun,

him. From what he had

His ferlies to fraryne and to feel;

heard about him, he

Now these games were gradely begun. (181)

hoped to see him perform some miracle.

... ..

(159) KING: Well, sirs, draw you adrigh,

And beausires, bring ye him nigh,

For if all that his sleights be sly,

Yet ere he pass we shall appose him.

Oh my heart hops for joy

To see now this prophet appear.

We shall have good game with this boy –

Take heed, for in haste ye shall hear.

I leve we shall laugh and have liking

To see how this lidderon here he ledges our laws.

(182)

This portion scarcely hints at the point of the biblical narrative, that Herod had already heard of Jesus and his miracles, and that he was hoping to see a sign.

It does seem that he wanted to look into the miracles of Jesus; however, there is no indication in the play that Herod had previous knowledge of Jesus' miracles. Instead, the play shows that the king is told about Jesus' works through those around him. The king is joyful for someone to laugh at and to play games with, but there is no indication of a previous knowledge, nor much of a desire to see a miracle performed by Jesus once he does hear about some of the miracles Jesus had performed.

York Cycle

(269) KING: Go, answer them gradely again.

What, devil, whether dote we or drem?

SOLDIER: Nay, we get not one word, dare I well
we,

For he is wrest of his wit or will of his wone. (186)

.....

(285) KING: Great lords ought to be gay.

Here shall no man do to thee dere,

And therefore yet nemn in mine ear –

For by great God, and thou gar me swear,

Thou had never dole ere this day.

Do carp on tite, carl, of thy kin.

(186) 1 DUKE: Nay, needlings he nevens you with
none.

.....

(308) KING: Now do forth, the devil might him
drown!

And since he frames falsehood and makes foul

Gospels

Luke 23

9 He plied him with
many questions, but Jesus
gave him no answer.

York Cycle

Gospels

fray,

Roar on him rudely, and look ye not round. (187)

..

(327) 3 SON: My lord, this faitour is so feared in your face here,

None answer in this need he nevens you with none here.

Do, beausire, for Belial's blood and his bones,
Say somewhat – or it will wax war.

1 SON: Nay, we get not one word in these wones.

2 SON: Do cry we all on him at once.

SONS: Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

KING: Oh, ye make a foul noise for the nonce. (188)

Herod questions and mocks Jesus and is frustrated by Jesus' lack of speech. Jesus' silence is a distinct aspect of this play. Throughout the entire play, he is silent. Not one word is scripted for Jesus to speak, although the opportunity is given him by Herod, the soldiers and the sons.

The action of Jesus' silence is clearly seen throughout the gospels and in many of these plays. Although the impact is great, the implication is open for clarification. Calvin wrote of this silence, and although speaking directly about his silence before the priests, the words ring true in light of this play without one word from Jesus: "Christ was silent, while the priests were pressing upon him

on every hand; and it was, in order that he might open our mouth by his silence”

(Calvin 275).

York Cycle

(199) 1 DUKE: This mop means that he may mark
men to their meed;

He makes many masteries and marvels among.

2 DUKE: Five thousand fold fair gan he feed

With five loaves and two fishes to fang.

KING: How fele folk says thou he fed?

2 DUKE: Five thousand, lord, that came to his call.

KING: Yea, boy? How mickle bread he them bid?

1 DUKE: But five loaves dare I well wed.

KING: Lo sirs, he meeks him no more unto me

Than it were to a man of their own town.

1 DUKE: We! Go, laumere, and learn thee to lout

Ere they more blame thee to-bring.

KING: Nay, dreadless without any doubt

He knows not the course of a king.

And here be in our bail, bourd ere we blin –

Say first at the beginning withal, where was thou
born?

Do fellow, for thy faith, let us fall in.

First of thy ferlies, who fed thee before?

What, deigns thou not? Lo sirs, he deafens us
with din.

Say, where led ye this lidderon? His language is
lorn. (183)

Gospels

Luke 23

10 The chief priests and
the teachers of the law
were standing there,
vehemently accusing
him.

The chief priests and teachers are absent from this scene as far as we can
gather. There are no lines spoken by them, and there is no other reference to

them that would makes us believe they are even present. The previous table shows us the closest to the chief priests and teachers accusing Jesus as the gospels pointed out. The Dukes speak of some of the miracles that Jesus had done previously. While it is hard to understand tone and there is no direction as to attitude in their dialogue, it is unlikely the Dukes are Jewish. Had the intention of the author been to make these men Jews, it seems that a name associated with Judaim would have been used rather than a name associated with English. For this reason it is doubtful that the Dukes had any reason to be accusatory.

York Cycle

(335) 1 SON: My lord, all
your mooring amends not
a mite,

To meddle with a
madman is marvel to me.

Command your
knights to clothe him in
white

And let him cair as he
came to your country.

KING: Lo sirs, we lead
you no longer a lite,

My son has said sadly
how that it should be –

But such a point for a
page is too perfect.

1 DUKE: My lord, fools

Gospels

Matthew 27

27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.

30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Mark 15

15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed

York Cycle

that are found they fall
such a fee.

KING: What, in white
garments to go,

Thus gaily gird in a
gown?

2 DUKE: Nay lord, but as
a fool forced him fro.
(188)

Gospels

him over to be crucified. **16** The soldiers led Jesus
away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and
called together the whole company of soldiers.
17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted
together a crown of thorns and set it on him. **18** And
they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the
Jews!" **19** Again and again they struck him on the
head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their
knees, they paid homage to him. **20** And when they
had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and
put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to
crucify him.

Luke 23

11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and
mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they
sent him back to Pilate.

John 19

1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. **2** The
soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put
it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe
3 and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail,
king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.

This is another example of elaboration and mis-ordering of the biblical text. Jesus was dressed in white costume as a court fool, portraying the king of fools. Putting each of the biblical accounts together, it is clear that the intent of the soldiers was to dress Jesus in a royal robe. However, for the medieval public, the point would have been well taken, pairing the fool's costume with Herod's

statements of Jesus being a fool. Puritans believed that any portrayal of God was offensive due to His being outside description. Therefore, this portrayal of Christ would have been even more offensive. Even so, the influence of Puritan thought on the end of these plays is questionable as it was only beginning to rise at this time, and was probably not influencing York much as demonstrated earlier in this study. Earlier and less conservative Protestants may or may not have been offended by this portrayal. It is hard to know since the spectrum of Protestant belief was so wide and examples that can be applied to this situation are not as readily available as they are for the Puritans.

York Cycle

(127) 2 SOLDIER: My lord, when Pilate heard he had gone through Galilee

He learned us that that lordship longed you,
And ere he wist what your wills were,
No further would he speak for to spill him.

KING: Then he knows he that our mights are the more?

1 SOLDIER: Yea, certes sir, so say we there.

KING: Now certes, and our friendship therefore
We grand him, and no grievance we will him.

(181)

.....

(380) KING: Well then, falls him go free.

Sir knights, then graith you goodly to gang,
And repair with your present and say to Pilate
We grant him our friendship all fully to fang. (190)

Gospels

Luke 23

12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends-- before this they had been enemies.

This short tag at the end of the scriptural account, regarding the establishment of friendship between Herod and Pilate, is accounted for in two places in the play. Toward the beginning of the play it is stated due to the king's belief that Pilate thinks Herod is the more powerful of the two of them, which he is. Toward the end of the play, Herod simply sends the Soldiers back with a statement that Pilate is to have their friendship. There is not much to go by in the gospels and the play does a good job of not elaborating much, but simply giving the main information that their friendship was restored.

As can be seen by looking at the line numbers and page numbers of each of the sections above, the outline of this play does follow the outline of the verses in Luke that serves as the foundation for the context. There are no major textual changes other than omission of the high priests and teachers, and elaboration of what we do have in the way that could have been a possibility. For these reasons, of the plays we have looked at thus far, it seems this one would have been the easiest for the reformers who were chosen to look at and evaluate the plays to leave it in its original state, even though we do not have writings from reformers directly addressing the cycle.

3.5 XXXII. The Tilemakers. *Second Accusation Before Pilate: Remorse of Judas: Purchase of Field of Blood.*

This play begins with Pilate addressing the people, Annas and Caiaphas among them, emphasizing that anyone who does anything without his consent will be put in chains and punished, and anyone who “tells tales” when Jesus comes back in will be beaten by Pilate himself. Annas and Caiaphas give affirmation to Pilate’s words and as they see the soldiers bringing Jesus back, they wait in anticipation to hear what happened during Jesus’ visit with Herod.

The soldier and Pilate exchange greetings, and the soldier explains Jesus’ silence throughout his time with Herod and the fact that Herod found no fault in the man. Pilate asks Caiaphas and Annas what they think of this and of course they are not happy with the response. Annas believes this contact with Herod is another example of trickery that Jesus has done before, worrying and emphasizing that he will only do the same again. Caiaphas’ anger grows as he speaks of the outrage of Jesus’ saying he is God’s son, and explaining that their law says that Jesus should be slain for this. Witnesses are offered to Pilate but Pilate’s belief is that Annas and Caiaphas bribed the people they are presenting. They discuss this further and finally Jesus himself is brought before Pilate.

Pilate speaks to Jesus again and asks him to clear up the charges that are brought before him. Jesus gives Pilate no reason to condemn him, so Pilate offers him to Caiaphas and Annas to do with as they wish, commanding a beating instead of a death sentence.

After Jesus is brought in from his beating, there is a section of manuscript that is missing (Beadle 208), so the story seems to jump somewhat. As recorded in the script, and all of the gospel records of this story, Pilate washes his hands as a physical representation of removing the responsibility of what is about to happen and releases the prisoner Barabas. Barabas wishes an increase in status to Pilate for granting his freedom, and Pilate makes a speech about Jesus' judgment and coming crucifixion. Annas presses the soldiers to hurry, and as they leave, Pilate affirms the soldiers, and acknowledges an evil hour they will be walking in (Beadle 210).

Before looking at the passages directly, we are fortunate to have a commentary by Calvin on this section of the gospel account. It will help to fill in that which is missing from the text:

Here is described to us, on the one hand, the insatiable cruelty of the priests, and, on the other, the furious obstinacy of the people; for both must have been seized with astonishing madness, when they were not satisfied with conspiring to put to death an innocent man, if they did not also, through hatred of him, release *a robber*. . .

There can be no doubt that *Pilate*, in order to prevail upon them through shame, selected a very wicked man, by contrast with whom Christ might be set free; and the very atrocity of the crime of which *Barabbas* was guilty ought justly to have made the resentment of the people to fall on him, that by comparison with him, at least, Christ might be released. But no disgrace makes either the priests, or the whole nation, afraid to ask that a seditious man and a murderer should be granted to them. (Calvin 281)

In this play, there are larger passages in each of the gospels to draw from, which on first look, seem to align with the action. The following comparisons will show us the extent of this alignment. The first section of this play, with Pilate's speech, and the report from the soldier regarding Jesus' visit with Herod is not found in any of the gospel accounts, unless you wish to include a brief reference in Luke:

Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death." (Luke 23:13-15)

This definitely implies that something was spoken to Pilate so that he knows what went on while Jesus is with Herod, but that is the extent of it. Nor is there any of the dialogue of Annas or Caiaphas speaking of their upset, or of their offering of witnesses to Pilate.

The first section of this story that can be found in the gospels is when Jesus is brought before Pilate and questioned by him. Each of the gospels contains a questioning between Jesus and Pilate. John is the only book that seems to have an additional questioning however, as the others have all been used beforehand.

York Cycle

PILATE: Why, what harms has this hathel here haunted?

I ken to convict him no cause.

ANNAS: To all gomes he God's son him granted,

And list not to leve on our laws.

PILATE: Say man,

Conceives thou not what cumberous clause

That these clergy accusing thee knows?

Speak, and excuse thee if thou can.

JESUS: Every man has amouth that made is on mould,

In weal and in woe to wield at his will;

If he govern it goodly like as God would,

For his spiritual speech him thar not to spill.

And what come so govern it ill,

Full unhendly and ill shall he hap;

Of ilk tale thou talks us until

Thou account shall, thou can not escape.

(203)

Gospels

John 19

7 The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

8 When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, 9 and he went back inside the palace.

"Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said.

"Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

In this passage, Pilate's distress seems to match the biblical account, but Jesus' words in these two examples do not match at all. This would have been an

area that would have needed to be altered for correct teaching through the performance if Dr. Hutton or others had taken an opportunity to revise the play for the sake of aligning with the gospels. From here the play leads into Jesus' second beating as ordered by Pilate, which is not found in any of the gospels. There is an occasion where the soldiers beat Jesus with rods although not ordered by Pilate. In order to remain accurate according to the biblical narratives, the 90 lines of dialogue between section wherein the scourging the soldiers during the beating, could remain, but should then be the only is included.

Following this section, as recorded by Beadle and King:

A leaf is missing from the MS here, and about 50 lines are lost. The incidents which are lacking probably included the call by the Jews to crucify Jesus, Pilate's offer that Jesus be the prisoner customarily released at the Passover, and the decision to release Barabas instead. The text resumes with the scene of Pilate washing his hands of the matter. (208)

From the hand washing, we see the last moments of the play's action, the release of Barabas, and the final speech by Pilate, none of which is directly taken from the biblical accounts. Most of what we would expect to be included in the Barabas portion of this play is most likely included in the missing leaf. What remains can be seen in the comparison below:

York Cycle

Gospels

BEADLE: Here is all, sir,
that ye for send.
Will ye wash while the
water is hot?

Then he washes his hands

PILATE: Now this
Barabas's bands ye
unbend,
With grace let him
gang
on his gate
Where he will.

BARABAS: Ye worthy
men that I here wot,
God increase all your
comely estate,
For the grace ye have
grant me until. (208)

Matthew 27

16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? 18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

.....

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

Mark 15

7 And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8 And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. 9 But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? 10 For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy. 11 But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.

.....

15 And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.

Luke 23

18 And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: 19 (Who for

York Cycle

Gospels

a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder,
was cast into prison.)

..

23 And they were instant with loud voices, requiring
that he might be crucified. And the voices of them
and of the chief priests prevailed. 24 And Pilate gave
sentence that it should be as they required. 25 And
he released unto them him that for sedition and
murder was cast into prison, whom they had
desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

It is evident that the gospels contain a great deal of information regarding this portion of the play. Unfortunately, with a missing leaf, we cannot assess the accuracy of that portion of the play. Since it goes so far as to include words by Barabas, the assumption would be that it is an elaboration of the extant biblical record. This is not a completely reliable assumption, however, as we have seen that the author is not consistent. Some plays follow more than others without much pattern. With that said, with the exception of the latter portion which cannot be assessed without the missing leaf, this play seems to be loosely based on the gospel accounts, perhaps more so than any of those previously examined. Several writers have acknowledged that this play is based on the Gospel of Nicodemus, a popular document of the time. Knowing that the Gospel of Nicodemus was not even considered to be part of the canon by the Catholic

church at this time, it's influence in shaping the play will have to be saved for later study. Reformers would not have included it as they did not consider it an authoritative document.

3.6 XXXV. The Pinners. *Crucifixion of Christ.*

Save two sections spoken by Jesus, as in the latter play with Jesus' scourging being narrated by the soldiers, this play relies completely on the dialogue of the soldiers involved in hanging Christ. The soldiers first discuss and describe Jesus' death, "The foulest death of all shall he die for his deeds" (Beadle 212). This is echoed and elaborated by Luther in his fourth Holy Week sermon:

But now the cross, the most shameful piece of wood on earth, an abominable, repugnant place, becomes the altar for our high priest and bishop. There he is offered up as the most accursed man who has ever lived on earth. . . . No thief or murderer dies so shamefully and disgracefully as does Jesus here on the place of the skull where scoundrels, rogues, and murderers were buried. Not only does a crown of thorns pierce his head, but he is also spit upon, vilified, and taunted. Nowhere in history does one read that a human being was ever so unmercifully punished, as was this man. (Klug 423)

The audience then hears Jesus' first speech, his speaking to God the Father. Following this, the soldiers continue their dialogue, nail Jesus to the

cross and lift him up. At this point, Jesus' second speech comes, delivering the beginning of the passage to those around him then addressing the Father about them. The soldiers mock Jesus' words, and cast lots for his robe as the play ends. This play is simple in its outline, but is also a considerably poignant moment for the cycle. Unfortunately, from a textual standpoint, this play would need to be passed over completely by a reformer as the following comparison demonstrates. For lack of time and space, only the words of Christ and those associated with the casting of lots will be compared.

York Cycle

Gospels

JESUS: Almighty God, my Father
 free,
 Let these matters be made in
 mind:
 Thou bade that I should buxom
 be,
 For Adam's plight for to be
 pined.
 Here to death I oblige me,
 For that sin for to save
 mankind,
 And sovereignly beseech I thee
 That they may favour find.
 And from the fiend them fend,
 So that their souls be safe
 In wealth without end –
 I keep nought else to crave.
 (213)

Matthew 27
46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" **47** When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah." **48** Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. **49** The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."
50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.
 Mark 15
34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have

York Cycle

JESUS: All men that walk by way
or street,

Take tent ye shall no travail
tine.

Behold mine head, mine hands,
and my feet,

And fully feel now, ere ye fine,
If any mourning may be meet,

Or mischief measured unto
mine.

My father, that all bales may
beet,

Forgive these men that do me
pine.

What they work, wot they not;
Therefore, my father, I crave,
Let never their sins be sought,
But see their souls to save. (220)

.....

1 SOLDIER: Nay, good sirs, not so
soon.

For certes us needs another
note:

This kirtle would I of you crave.

2 SOLDIER: Nay, any, sir, we will
look by lot

Which of us four falls it to have.

3 SOLDIER: I rede we draw cut for
this coate –

Lo, see how soon – all sides to
save.

4 SOLDIER: The short cut shall
win, that well ye wot,

Gospels

you forsaken me?" 35 When some of those
standing near heard this, they said, "Listen,
he's calling Elijah." 36 One man ran, filled a
sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick,
and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave
him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take
him down," he said. 37 With a loud cry,
Jesus breathed his last.

Luke 23

34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they
do not know what they are doing." And
they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

.....

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when
you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus
answered him, "I tell you the truth, today
you will be with me in paradise."

.....

46 Jesus called out with a loud voice,
"Father, into your hands I commit my
spirit." When he had said this, he breathed
his last.

John 19

26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and
the disciple whom he loved standing
nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear
woman, here is your son," 27 and to the
disciple, "Here is your mother." From that
time on, this disciple took her into his
home. 28 Later, knowing that all was now
completed, and so that the Scripture would

York Cycle

Gospels

Whether it fall to knight of
knave.

1 SOLDIER: Fellows, ye tharf not
flite,

For this mantle is mine.

2 SOLDIER: Go we then hence tit,
This travail here we tine. (221)

be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." **29** A
jar of wine vinegar was there, so they

soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a
stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to

Jesus' lips. **30** When he had received the

drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that,
he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The latter statements from the cross are very important. Unfortunately,
the author of the plays did not feel that he should hold true to the gospel text.

The original statements are poignant, touching and inspirational on their own.

The statements in the play are cluttered and full of points not included in the
gospels, and some of the depth that can be found otherwise is lost.

Calvin wrote insightful points on these words delivered by Jesus from the
cross. In regards to Jesus' asking for God to forgive them he writes, "For not
only does he abstain from revenge, but pleads with God the Father for the
salvation of those by whom he is most cruelly tormented. . . . But this is a far
higher and more excellent virtue, to pray that God would *forgive* his enemies"
(Calvin 300). Commenting on both the "Father, forgive them" and "why has
thou forsaken me" statements, Luther wrote:

Who can tell all that deserves to be said about such love and
adornment? His heart overflows with more ardor that the entire
world could ever understand or muster. In his greatest suffering,

torment, and disgrace, he appears not to see or feel anything; his only concern, all that he sees and cares for, is our misery, our anguish, and great distress. (Klug 427)

Additional commentary can be found in subsequent sections.

York Cycle

1 SOLDIER: Nay, good sirs, not so soon.
 For certes us needs another note:
 This kirtle would I of you crave.
 2 SOLDIER: Nay, any, sir, we will look by lot
 Which of us four falls it to have.
 3 SOLDIER: I rede we draw cut for this coate –
 Lo, see how soon – all sides to save.
 4 SOLDIER: The short cut shall win, that well ye wot,
 Whether it fall to knight of knave.
 1 SOLDIER: Fellows, ye tharf not flite,
 For this mantle is mine.
 2 SOLDIER: Go we then hence tit,
 This travail here we tine. (221)

Gospels

Luke 23
 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.
 John 19
 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

The latter section follows the gospel account fairly accurately. The gospel account is not very long and does not have a lot of detail, and neither does the play's version. Unfortunately the earlier sections of the play shadow this fact. And, as has been stated time and again throughout this paper, *sola scriptura* was highly valued and greatly emphasized by Protestant leaders. While there are

lines that portray Christian beliefs and aspects of the crucifixion story, none of this play can be found directly in any of the gospels. The main issue for a reformed mind would be the fact that this was adding significantly to the gospel accounts, and for one who was looking for proper teaching and appropriate representation of the crucifixion, this rendition would not have met the reformed standard. Adding to our collection of reformed thinking on this matter, Ulrich Zwingli, one of the influential early Reformation leaders felt strongly about adding to the Bible:

His chief objective in preaching was to repeat the Word of God unabbreviated and unadulterated, clearly setting out the Law and the Prophets, vehemently calling his hearers to repentance and, with the gentleness of a shepherd, guiding the community to salvation. (MacArthur 48)

3.7 XXXVI. The Butchers. *Death of Christ.*

In the last play to be studied Pilate begins the play with a lengthy speech, about his rulership, judgment, ability to send people to their hangings, and about his feelings regarding Jesus' coming death. Annas and Caiaphas, as always, are firm in their belief and reasons for the decisions that were made. Pilate is still pleading his guiltlessness, going so far as to wish death upon Annas and Caiaphas instead of Jesus.

Caiaphas and Annas mock Jesus, speaking of his claim to be king, his talk about destroying and rebuilding the temple, and taunting him to save himself. A significant section follows with Jesus speaking of his suffering, and his mother speaking of the pain the scene is bringing to her. Jesus comforts his mother and appoints his disciple John to act in his stead as the son. Mary Cleophas joins the dialogue in helping to comfort the mother Mary.

The thieves on the either side of Jesus then speak, the first asking Jesus to free himself if he is really God's son. The second tells the first that they deserve their punishment and asks Jesus to remember him. Jesus tells him they will dwell together, cries out to God and complains of his thirst. Soon after, Jesus dies, and Mary Cleophas and John encourage Mary the Mother once more.

Caiaphas reminds Pilate that the men cannot be moved on the Sabbath, and informs him that he needs to hasten their deaths. Pilate tells the knights to kill them, choosing and instructing Sir Longinus to pierce Jesus in his side.

Longinus, who is blind, receives his sight at the moment of the piercing, causing him to acknowledge the greatness of Jesus while another centurion also acknowledges Jesus as God's son.

Joseph requests the body for burial and Pilate grants the request.

Nicodemus and Joseph speak, and then go together to prepare his body with

myrrh and aloes before burying him. This play ends as Joseph worships God, and Nicodemus asks for God to remember him and to forgive his sins.

Simply looking at a rough outline, there are many pieces that seem to align with the gospel accounts. However, there are also areas that raise questions as to their accuracy in accordance with the biblical narratives. We will look at each section closer to see if this is an accurate assessment.

As has been the case thus far with the opening speeches of each play, Pilate's speech cannot be found in any of the gospel accounts nor his additional dialogue with Annas and Caiaphas. The first lines that can be found in the biblical narrative are the mocking words spoken by Annas and Caiaphas. The comparison with Matthew and Mark's accounts can be seen below:

York Cycle

CAIAPHAS: He called him king,
 Ill joy him wring.
 Yea, let him hang
 Full madly on the moon for to mow.

ANNAS: To mow on the moon has he
 meant.
 We! Fir on thee, faitour, in fay!
 Who, trows thou, to thy talkes took
 tent?
 Thou saggard, thyself gan thou say,
 The temple destroy thee today,
 By the third day were done ilka deal

Gospels

Matthew 27
 39 And they that passed by reviled
 him, wagging their heads, 40 And
 saying, Thou that destroyest the
 temple, and buildest it in three days,
 save thyself. If thou be the Son of
 God, come down from the cross.
 41 Likewise also the chief priests
 mocking him, with the scribes and
 elders, said, 42 He saved others;
 himself he cannot save. If he be the
 King of Israel, let him now come
 down from the cross, and we will

York Cycle

To raise it thou should thee array.
 Lo, how was thy falsehood to feel,
 Foul fall thee.
 For thy presumption
 Thou hast thy warison.
 Do fast come down,
 And a comely king shall I call thee.

CAIAPHAS: I call thee a coward to ken,
 That marvels and miracles made.
 Thou mustered among many men,
 But, brothel, thou bourded too broad.
 Thou saved them from sorrows, they
 said –
 To save now thyself let us see.
 God's son if thou gradely be traid,
 Deliver thee down of that tree
 Anon.
 If thou be found to be God's son,
 We shall be bound to trow on thee
 truly, ilkone. (225)

Gospels

believe him. **43** He trusted in God;
 let him deliver him now, if he will
 have him: for he said, I am the Son
 of God.

Mark 15

28 And the scripture was fulfilled,
 which saith, And he was numbered
 with the transgressors. **29** And they
 that passed by railed on him,
 wagging their heads, and saying,
 Ah, thou that destroyest the temple,
 and buildest it in three days, **30** Save
 thyself, and come down from the
 cross. **31** Likewise also the chief
 priests mocking said among
 themselves with the scribes, He
 saved others; himself he cannot
 save. **32** Let Christ the King of Israel
 descend now from the cross, that we
 may see and believe. And they that
 were crucified with him reviled him.

In both Matthew and Mark those passing by mocked him, speaking of
 Jesus' words regarding the destruction and raising of the temple and telling Jesus
 to come down from the cross and save himself. Other than this point, and slight
 additions to Caiaphas and Annas' lines, these sections of the play and of the
 gospels line up well, and would not need to be changed to align with a *sola*
scriptura mindset.

The next section does not line up as well with the biblical narrative, however, as we look at Jesus' first spoken words of this play in the dialogue which follows. Jesus speaks of being crucified for the sake of sinners. This was not spoken of directly during this time, as none of the disciples realized what Jesus' death was about prior to his resurrection, teaching and ascension.

Mary's words are also not recorded in the gospels. We know from the gospel of John that she is present at the crucifixion with John, Cleophas' wife Mary, and Mary Magdalene. We also know from this gospel that Jesus speaks to her, but we are not told any of her words surrounding this. We can see the comparison, beginning with Jesus addressing John and his mother below:

York Cycle

JESUS: Thou woman, do way of thy weeping,
 For me may thou nothing amend.
 My Father's will to be working,
 For mankind my body I bend.
 MARY: Alas, that thou likes not to lend,
 How shall I but week for thy woe?
 To care now my comfort is kenned.
 Alas, why should we twin thus in two
 Forever?
 JESUS: Woman, instead of me,
 Lo, John thy son shall be.
 John, see to thy mother free,
 For my sake do thou thy dever.
 MARY: Alas, son, for sorrow and site,

Gospels

John 19
 25 Now there stood by
 the cross of Jesus his
 mother, and his mother's
 sister, Mary the wife of
 Cleophas, and Mary
 Magdalene. 26 When
 Jesus therefore saw his
 mother, and the disciple
 standing by, whom he
 loved, he saith unto his
 mother, Woman, behold
 thy son! 27 Then saith he
 to the disciple, Behold thy
 mother! And from that

York Cycle

That me were closed in clay.
 A sword of sorrow me smite,
 To death I were done this day.
 JOHN: Ah, mother, so shall ye not say.
 I pray you, be peace in thi press,
 For with all the might that I may
 Your comfort I cast to increase,
 Indeed.
 Your son am I,
 Lo, here ready;
 And now forthy
 I pray you hence for to speed. (227)

Gospels

hour that disciple took
 her unto his own home.

[Continues with more dialogue between Mary, John, and Mary Cleophas. This will not be included at this time as it is not found in the gospel accounts.]

Although elaborated, Jesus' words are definitely based on the gospel of John's account. The others' words are made up according to speculation.

Although emphasized many times in this paper it will be repeated once again -- at this point in time when there was a strict emphasis on going back to the Bible and the Bible alone, additions of this type were definitely not appropriate to a reformer focusing on *sola scriptura*.

Following this section of the play Jesus has another long section of dialogue that is not found in any of the gospels. While the thieves are mentioned in each section of the gospels, the dialogue with the thieves is only included in

the gospel of Luke. In the play, Jesus' words go directly into his exclamation to God, His Father. This will be looked at in the next section however, as it is found in all three of the synoptic gospels.

York Cycle

1 THIEF: If thou be God's son so free,
 Why hangs thou thus on this hill?
 To save not thyself let us seem
 And us two, that speed for to spill.
 2 THIEF: Man, stint of thy steve and be still,
 For doubtless thy God dreads thou
 nought.
 Full well are we worthy theretill,
 Unwisely wrong have we wrought,
 Iwis.
 None ill did he
 Thus for to die.
 Lord, have mind of me
 When thou art come to thy bliss.
 JESUS: Forsooth, son, to thee shall I say,
 Since thou from thy folly will fall,
 With me shall thou dwell now this day
 In Paradise, place principal (229)

Gospels

Luke 23
 39 And one of the malefactors
 which were hanged railed on
 him, saying, If thou be Christ,
 save thyself and us. 40 But the
 other answering rebuked him,
 saying, Dost not thou fear God,
 seeing thou art in the same
 condemnation? 41 And we
 indeed justly; for we receive the
 due reward of our deeds: but this
 man hath done nothing amiss.
 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord,
 remember me when thou comest
 into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus
 said unto him, Verily I say unto
 thee, To day shalt thou be with
 me in paradise.

This is perhaps the most directly biblical section. It is taken almost word for word from the gospel of Luke. Having seen so much that is created only out of the context of the Bible stories, or that is taken from extra biblical works, this section of the play would have been a breath of fresh air to any critical, reformed eye. Calvin writes of this important event:

Though Christ had not yet made a public triumph over death, still he displays the efficacy and fruit of his death in the midst of his humiliation. And in this way he shows that he never was deprived of the power of the kingdom; for nothing more lofty or magnificent belongs to a divine King than to restore life to the dead. So then, Christ, although, struck by the hand of God, he appeared to be a man utterly abandoned, yet as he did not cease to be the Saviour of the world, he was always endued with heavenly power for fulfilling his office. (Calvin 312)

This is clearly an important portion of the last hours of Jesus' life, powerfully impacting the author's need to retain accuracy.

The following section begins where the last lines of Jesus end.

York Cycle

JESUS:

Eli, Eli!

My God, my God full free,

Lama sabachthani?

Whereto forsook thou me

In care?

And I did never ill

This deed for to go till,

But be it at thy will.

Ah, me thirsts sore.

BOY: A drink sheall I dress thee, indeed,

A draught that is full daintily dight.

Full fast shall I spring for to speed,

I hope I shall hold that I have hight.

CAIAPHAS: Sir Pilate, that most is of
might,

Hark, 'Elias' now heard I him cry.

He weens that that worthily wigt

Gospels

Matthew 27

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? 47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.

48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. 49 The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

York Cycle

In haste for to help him in hie
In his need.

PILATE: If he do so

He shall have we.

ANNAS: He were our foe

If he dress him to do us that deed.

BOY: That deed for to dress if he do,

In certes he shall rue it full sore.

Nevertheless, if he like it not, lo,

Full soon may he cover that care.

Now seet sir, your will if it were,

A draught here of drink have I
dressed;

To speed for no Spence that ye spare,

But boldly ye bib it for the best.

Forwhy

Eisell and gall

Is menged withal,

Drink it ye shall –

Your lips, I hold them full dry.

JESUS: Thy drink it shall do me no dere,

Wit thou well, thereof will I none.

Now Father, that formed all in fere,

To thy most might mak I my moan:

Thy will have I wrought in this wone,

Thus dolefully to death have they
done.

Forgive them, by grace that is good,

They ne wot not what it was.

My Father, hear my boon,

For now all thing is done.

My spirit to thee right soon

Commend I, *in manus tuas*. (230)

Gospels

Mark 15

33 And when the sixth hour was
come, there was darkness over the
whole land until the ninth hour.

34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried
with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi,
lama sabachthani? which is, being
interpreted, My God, my God, why
hast thou forsaken me? 35 And some
of them that stood by, when they
heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.

36 And one ran and filled a sponge
full of vinegar, and put it on a reed,
and gave him to drink, saying, Let
alone; let us see whether Elias will
come to take him down. 37 And Jesus
cried with a loud voice, and gave up
the ghost.

Luke 23

46 And when Jesus had cried with a
loud voice, he said, Father, into thy
hands I commend my spirit: and
having said thus, he gave up the
ghost.

John 19

28 After this, Jesus knowing that all
things were now accomplished, that
the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I
thirst. 29 Now there was set a vessel
full of vinegar: and they filled a
sponge with vinegar, and put it upon
hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

York Cycle**Gospels**

30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Much of this section is elaborated on from the gospels. Jesus' first lines are increased, and his second is not found in these Bible passages. The boy's lines are contrived out of what could have happened, and Jesus' denial of the drink is taken from an earlier passage in Matthew and Mark when he denies the drink mixed with gall, or myrrh. The statement about Jesus calling to Elijah is not specifically Caiphas' in the gospel account; rather, it is simply some who were standing by who spoke it. Jesus's second set of lines, although not based on the biblical narrative at first, do align with the biblical counterparts at the end when he cries out to the Father, and commits his spirit unto him. This section contains key moments of accuracy, but has also taken liberties that would be placed on the list of needed changes.

Following Jesus' death, another section between John, Mary Cleophas and Mary the mother begins, and again, as with their previous dialogue, none of it can be found in the gospel accounts. Other pieces can be found in each of the gospel accounts, as can be seen in the comparison below:

York Cycle

Gospels

CAIAPHAS: Sir Pilate, perceive, I you pray,

Our customs to keep well ye can.
 Tomorn is our dear Sabbath day,
 Of mirth must us move ilka man.
 Yon warlocks now wax full wan,
 And needs must they buried be.
 Deliver their death, sir, and then
 Shall we sue to our said solety
 Indeed.

PILATE: It shall be done

In words fone.
 Sir knights, go soon,
 To yon harlots you henly take heed.
 Tho caitiffs thou kill with thy knife –
 Deliver, have done they were dead.

SOLDIER: My lord, I shall length so their
 life

That those brothels shall never bite
 bread.

PILATE: Sir Longinus, step forth in this
 stead;

This spear, lo, have hold in thy hand.
 To Jesus thou rake forth, I rede,
 And stead not, but stiffly thou stand
 A stound.
 In Jesu's side.
 Shove it this tide.
 No longer bid,
 But gradely thou go to the ground.

LONGINUS: O maker unmade, full of
 might,

O Jesu so gentle and gent
 That suddenly has set me my sight,
 Lord, lofing to thee be it lent.

John 19

31 The Jews therefore, because it
 was the preparation, that the
 bodies should not remain upon
 the cross on the sabbath day, (for
 that sabbath day was an high
 day,) besought Pilate that their
 legs might be broken, and that
 they might be taken away.

32 Then came the soldiers, and
 brake the legs of the first, and of
 the other which was crucified
 with him. 33 But when they came
 to Jesus, and saw that he was
 dead already, they brake not his
 legs: 34 But one of the soldiers
 with a spear pierced his side, and
 forthwith came there out blood
 and water. 35 And he that saw it
 bare record, and his record is true:
 and he knoweth that he saith true,
 that ye might believe. 36 For these
 things were done, that the
 scripture should be fulfilled, A
 bone of him shall not be broken.
 37 And again another scripture
 saith, They shall look on him
 whom they pierced.

Matthew 27

54 Now when the centurion, and
 they that were with him, watching
 Jesus, saw the earthquake, and
 those things that were done, they
 feared greatly, saying, Truly this

York Cycle

On rood art thou ragged and rent,
 Mankind for me to mend of his miss.
 Full spitously spilt is and spent
 Thy blood, Lord, to bring us to bliss
 Full free.
 Ah, mercy, my succour,
 Mercy, my treasure,
 Mercy, my saviour,
 Thy mercy be marked in me.
 CENTURION: Oh wonderfuy! worker, iwis,
 This weather is waxen full wan.
 True token I trow that it is
 That mercy is meant unto man.
 Full clearly conceive thus I can
 No cause in this corse would they know,
 Yet dolefully the deemed him then
 To lose thus his life by their law,
 No right.
 Truly I say,
 God's son verray
 Was he this day,
 That dolefully to death thus is dight.
 (231)

Gospels

was the Son of God. 55 And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: 56 Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

Mark 15

39 And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

Luke 23

47 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.

All of this section is altered in some way. First, the John account does not assign Caiaphas to asking Pilate about breaking the legs of those on the cross, but simply assigns it to "the Jews." Second, the soldiers went to the men on either side of Jesus and broke their legs, then when they came to Jesus they decided not to as he was already dead. In the play, Pilate assigned someone specific, Sir

Longinus, to Jesus and instructed him specifically to spear Jesus according to his instruction.

Third, the entire occurrence of Longinus receiving his eyesight and praising Jesus as Lord as a result is taken from the last verse in the passage from John, "And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced" (John 19:37). Although not all reformed thinkers were completely accurate exegetically, as has been true throughout all time periods, any educated Reformer would have recognized that this verse was being taken outside of its intended meaning. From observation alone, the quote is "they," not "he," which would imply that there were others who received their sight if the play's use of the verse was correct.

The meaning of this passage comes in the context of the original verse in Zechariah, as well as the later quote found in Revelation. Both verses are apocalyptic in nature, referring to the Jews looking upon Christ:

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. (Revelation 1:7)

The thought of Longinus being blind came from medieval legend that developed over time, but is mostly attributed to "The Golden Legend," a popular Italian work on the saints that was widely popular throughout Europe and had other influences on these plays as well. This point in itself would also be a deterrent for any reformer that was reading and evaluating the plays as the latter work was a compilation of stories of saints, of which Longinus was considered, and was beginning to be accepted into mainstream Catholicism. (newadvent.org)

Calvin also gives us insight into this portion in the Bible, expressing commentary on a spiritual blindness:

And yet, amidst such gross blindness, God did not permit the testimonies which he gave respecting his Son to be buried in silence. Not only, therefore, did true religion open the eyes of devout worshippers of God to perceive that from heaven God was magnifying the glory of Christ, but natural understanding compelled foreigners, and even soldiers, to confess what they had not learned either from the law or from any instructor. (326)

Although lengthened and placed somewhat out of order, the moment the Centurion notes the change in the weather and accepts Jesus as God's son is based on passages from all the gospels. Despite the differences, this is the closest to the gospels of all the pieces of the play that follow Jesus' death thus far.

The final portion of the play includes dialogue between Joseph and Pilate, and Joseph and Nicodemus regarding the burial of Christ, which can be found in each of the gospels in a simpler and less detailed account. This section is nearly two hundred lines so it would be too much to quote here as has been done with so many of the previous sections. However, it is mainly an elaboration of the biblical sources, so this is not necessary. The one area that is important to look at is the very end of the play:

JOSEPH: This deed it is done ilka deal,
 And wroght is this work well, iwis.
 To thee, king, on knees here I kneel,
 That bainly thou bield me in bliss.
 NICODEMUS: He higt me flul hendly to be his,
 A night when I nighed him full near.
 Have mind, Lord, and mend me of miss,
 For done are our deeds full dear
 This tide.
 JOSEPH: This Lord so good,
 That shed his blood,
 He mend your mood,
 And busk on his bliss for to bide. (235)

The importance of this section is that it ends the story of the trial and death of Christ, yet does not contain anything that matches the gospel stories. In fact, Joseph and Nicodemus' words seem to show that they already had knowledge of the meaning of Christ's death, which is not even hinted at in the gospels. For an event that serves as the defining moment for all of Christianity, its inaccuracy

would have stood out to any reformer reading and evaluating the text. Luther noted the importance of this as follows: "Above all, however, we must carefully note the chief thing in preaching about the passion – we certainly must not neglect or omit it! – namely the ground and ultimate meaning of Christ's suffering" (Klung 373).

A summary of the latter notes is relatively simple. Changes mentioned in Smith's work were minor and unbeneficial, perhaps pointing to an effort, but not for the sake of creating plays that follow the biblical accounts. Therefore, these changes cannot be used to aid in our understanding of Protestant thinking or action in regards to the plays.

Seven plays from Beadle and King's edition of the plays, covering the trial and crucifixion of Christ were chosen to examine and compare with their biblical counterparts. Play XXVI contained a general lack of integrity compared to the gospel accounts with changes in the sequence of events and persons involved. Play XXIX followed the gospel account generally, but once details were examined, it was clear that liberties were taken with the order, context and content. There was less adjustment to this play than the first, but its accuracy was still questionable. Play XXX was mainly an elaboration of the original text with the exception of Jesus speaking to Pilate and a slight adjustment to the

order. Play XXXI followed the outline of the gospel, and while there was some elaboration on the text there were no major changes, proving this play the most accurate thus far. Play XXXII has been documented as being based on the Gospel of Nicodemus, not the biblical narratives, and can be seen in the comparison. None of play XXXV could be found directly in the gospels. Lastly, play XXXVI contained key moments of accuracy, but for the most part is a collection of elaborations from the biblical counterparts.

The majority of these plays are elaborations of the original texts, plays built on a basic foundation created by the gospels, or composed almost completely from extra-biblical works, none of which would have been acceptable for a reformed mind. Calvin can be looked at once again to reiterate this assumption of unacceptability:

Calvin was most concerned with clarity and brevity in declaring, "The chief virtue of the interpreter lies in clear brevity." He described the paramount duty of the expositor: "Since it is almost his only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author." (MacArthur 49)

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

4.1 Summary

Discussions of historical context regarding England in general and York more specifically, and concerning the cycle plays, both in general and specifically related to the York cycle, laid the foundations of understanding for this research. Discussions of basic Protestant belief in *sola scriptura* and the importance of the Bible furthered understanding. Each of these areas laid the groundwork for the examination that was to follow, comparing the plays themselves with passages from the gospels.

An important note in the historical context of York at the time of the Reformation can be seen in the records of York. The evolution of the religious climate from Catholicism to Protestantism was attributed to the fact that little evidence points to an emphasis on university attendance, and that the majority of the clergy residing in York was native to the city. It is this lack of new knowledge coming into the city from Oxford, Cambridge and other influential cities, that resulted in the delay of the adoption of Protestantism (Brooks 41).

Bing D. Bills encourages new research methodology:

What now needs to be done is to approach the old evidence with new eyes – eyes not filled with assumptions from some of the

traditional scholarship. This requires an examination of the materials from each town without a conscious or unconscious attempt to fit it into the academic box which I have called the suppression theory. (168)

This thesis addresses Bill's challenge – to examine the material from York, without forming any conclusions regarding the positive or negative influence of the Protestant Reformation on the cycle plays without proper evidence and assessment. Evaluations of the text with a mindset of *sola scriptura* as well as specific portions of writing by Luther and Calvin have pointed to a fairly consistent lack of loyalty of the plays to the gospel accounts. This loyalty was extremely important to the Protestant leaders of the time. Martin Luther wrote that "The Word comes first, and with the Word the Spirit breathes upon my heart so that I believe" (63). This demonstrates the dedication and love of the biblical text first and foremost found in the thinking and preaching of the reformers, and is indicative of the foundation of *sola scriptura*.

Bills also negates the theory of the church causing the demise of the plays. He includes the following question: "if the plays had been considered papistical by the Crown or even by the Church, why were they not just banned altogether and outright?" (Bills 159), and the following thought: "The Protestant playwrights of the early Reformation did not hesitate to show sacred figures on

the stage either. No need was felt to apologize for such a practice” (162). He continued, explaining that the difference between the new Protestant plays and the medieval plays: “The difference came in the embellishments: the new playwrights embellished either to make a Protestant point or to imitate the plays of antiquity—quite different from the medieval play” (162). While a comparison between the Protestant plays and the cycle plays did not fit within the limits of this research, both the latter points and the former question demonstrated that there was not a complete opposition to the concept of Biblical plays during the early years of Protestantism. It merely shows that the content and the method used in approaching the portrayal of the Bible stories differed.

A summary of the findings of each of the plays shows relatively few moments of accuracy. The majority of the plays included in this study were built upon the foundation of the gospel accounts, however they were greatly embellished, and important details were either lost or altered within the plays. Included in these changes were the ordering of events, the persons involved and the original context. In addition to these points, extra biblical works not considered acceptable to the Protestant church also influenced several portions of the play. The Dean of York, Dr. Hutton, upon his critical reading of the text for the city of York wrote:

I have perused the bokes that your lordship with your brethren sent me, and as I finde manie things that I mucche like because of th'antiquities, so see I manie things that I can not allow because they be desagreinge from the senceritie of the gospel, the which thinges, yf they shuld either be altogether cancelled or altered into other matters, the wholle drift of the play shuld be altered, and therefore I dare not put my pen until it, because I want both skill and leasure to amende it, though in good will I assure you yf I were worthie to geve your lordship and your right worshipfull brethren consell, suerlie mine advise shuld be that it shuld not be plaid, for though it was plawsible to yeares agoe, and wold now also of the ignorant sort be well liked, yet now in this happie time of the gospel, I knowe the learned will mislike it, and how the state will beare with it, I know not. (qtd. in Spencer 249).

The request for Hutton to examine the plays points to proof that there was a population of reformers in the York community large enough to voice concern over the accuracy of the plays' content. This knowledge helps us to see that although the adoption of Protestantism may have been comparatively slow in York compared to other areas of England, there was indeed a Protestant focus within the city by 1568 at the latest.

Through the course of this research, the knowledge gleaned points in such a way as to affirm the words within the letter, revealing the true key to understanding the demise of these plays. The plays were lacking in accuracy, and no one made changes necessary for accurate portrayal. Hutton said he lacked skill and time, and indeed it would have been a time consuming project to

revise and reform the plays even for the most learned of reformers of the time.

He also writes that the necessary changes would alter the entire dramatic make up, essentially leaving the plays without a possibility of reform.

Prosser wrote:

The cycles were not compiled by a loose following of chronology, from Creation to Judgment. Episodes have been carefully selected to fulfill a strictly theological theme: man's fallen nature and the way of his Salvation. (23)

This was important to Protestant teaching. Martin Luther, in his introduction to his series of sermons during the Holy Week entitled, "Holy Week, Or Story of the Suffering and Death of Jesus Christ, Our Saviour" in 1534, spoke the following to the congregation:

We are approaching the season when in our sermons we give special attention to the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we want to arrange our customary preaching schedule in such a way that we give due consideration to the account of Christ's passion. Though it is always right and proper to have our Saviour's suffering and death in remembrance, so that we grow in appreciation of his tremendous love and blessing, it is nevertheless very good and necessary to set aside a special time during the year to devote our preaching to the story of Christ's suffering, so that our maturing young folks and people in general not forget it but always have the story refreshed in their minds. (372)

Luther went on to emphasize the importance of a biblically accurate portrayal of the event. "We, however, preach the Lord's suffering in the way Holy Scripture

does, emphasizing every aspect of Christ's suffering in the way the Scriptures do" (374).

Prosser's evaluation of the cycles point to an attempt to guide the observers to a knowledge of the salvation provided by Christ. However, through Luther's aforementioned emphasis on the importance of portrayal coinciding with the biblical account and the clear demonstration that the plays did not accomplish this, we see that the plays failed in the focus that Prosser pointed out – at least from a Protestant view. In sum, this research has pointed to a lack of biblical accuracy that led to a lessened care for the plays, and a final assessment that the rise of Protestantism did indeed influence the discontinuance of the plays for many years.

4.2 Areas of Future Study

Despite the latter conclusions, due to the historical nature of this study, and the importance of continuing to paint a complete portrait of theatre history, further research is needed. Continued modern performances and returning audiences to each of these events prove their ongoing appeal. This provides further reason for additional research to be conducted on the remainder of the York cycle plays. For the same reasons the other extant cycles should be

examined in a similar format. Using the other three areas of biblical interpretation, lexical data, grammatical data, and historical-cultural background, throughout the study would also be beneficial for a complete evaluation of biblical accuracy. Evaluation of Protestant plays, comparing their level of accuracy with the level of accuracy of the cycle plays stands as the next step of future study of the cycle plays in order to provide a complete evaluation. Further investigation into anti theatrical treatises will also provide a more complete picture of the climate and thinking surrounding the time of the cycle's demise.

Once an evaluation from a Protestant standpoint is complete, an investigation regarding the assumption that a changing climate of theatre was a main influence can take place. Since Protestantism has already been established to be an influence of the demise of these plays, the final decision will be whether a changing climate of theatre did, in fact, play a role or if Protestantism was the only influence. The possibilities are exciting, and should be pursued, providing a more complete picture of the cycle plays.

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