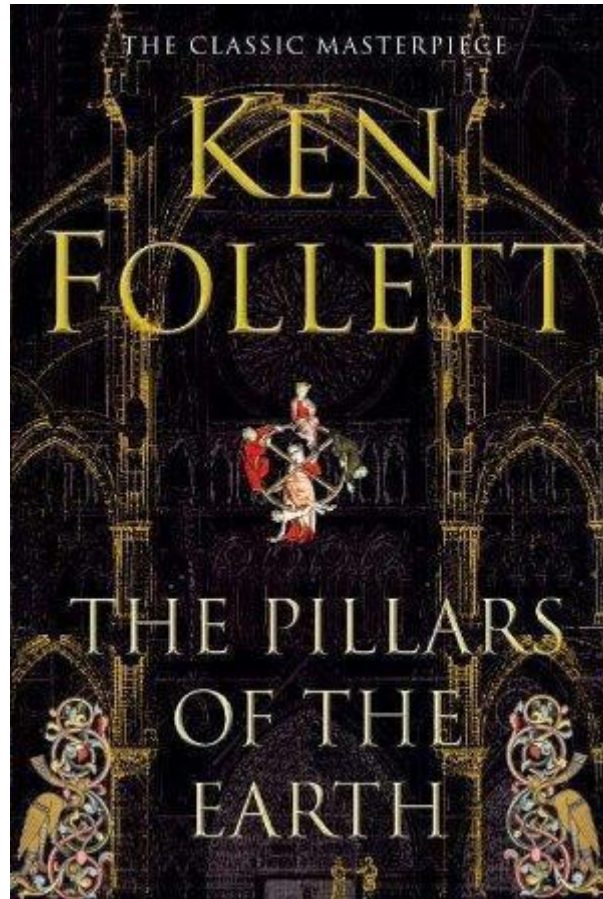


Built on a True Dream: The Medieval Church and Its Representation in Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth*



Daniël M. de Witte

S1516647

July 2018

Master Thesis

Literary Studies: English Language and Culture

Faculty of Humanities

First reader: Dr. K.A. Murchison

Second reader: Dr. M.H. Porck

Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Chapter 1: Financial Corruption in the Middle Ages & The Pillars of the Earth..... 10

Chapter 2: The Corruption of Power in the Middle Ages and in *The Pillars of the Earth*..... 20

Chapter 3: Corruption of Faith in the Middle Ages & *The Pillars of the Earth*..... 34

Chapter 4: *The Pillars of the Earth* as a Literary Historical Case Study of Indulgences 46

Conclusion..... 57

Bibliography 61

Introduction

Corruption is a major theme in Ken Follett's novel *The Pillars of the Earth*.¹ The novel, which depicts the process leading to the construction of the fictional Kingsbridge cathedral in the twelfth century, presents a medieval world rife with corruption. Although medieval culture plays a central role in both the plot and the atmosphere of Follett's work, there has not yet been a sustained investigation of whether the novel's portrayal of the medieval world is accurate—that is, whether its depiction of the medieval world is grounded in historical facts delivered to us through sources.

The popularity of Follett's work makes it worthy of further research; *The Pillars of the Earth* quickly became one of Britain's best-loved books in 2003 and remains a bestseller to this day, spawning a TV-series in 2010 and even a video game, which was released in 2017. After the novel became successful, Follett declared in interviews that he had based his vision of Kingsbridge Cathedral on medieval models, such as the Cathedral of Salisbury and Wells Cathedral.² This thesis aims to illustrate the way in which Follett has depicted the medieval Church of the twelfth century and answer the question of whether this depiction is a historical accurate representation.

Historical accuracy is an important concept in this thesis, and one which must be treated with caution. The notion of historical accuracy, as this research will point out, is somewhat fraught when applied to the medieval period, because much of the information about the period is provided through sources which have been coloured by events that took place at the time of composition. Moreover, the historiographical vision that the scholarly world has of the medieval world is based on a limited number of fragmentary sources. These sources, which vary from law texts to religious texts, form the corpus of cultural residue that

¹ The edition that is used as a primary source is: Ken Follett, *The Pillars of the Earth* (London: Pan Books, 2007).

² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1331731/Salisbury-Cathedral-Ken-Folletts-Pillars-Of-The-Earth.html>, accessed 07-07-2018.

is known to present-day literary historians. The fragmentary nature of these sources makes it hard to determine whether a novel that is set in the medieval world is actually fully representative of the time period, as our views of the time period itself are determined by the sources that have been delivered to us.

It is therefore important to be cautious when determining whether or not a work of fiction is based on true events, and caution is especially necessary when approaching medieval fiction instead of present-day film and literature dealing with more recent time periods—such as novels dealing with World War II or the Victorian era—of which we possess a great amount of sources. By careful analysis of the medieval sources that have been delivered to us and by approaching the events and people in these medieval sources with a critical eye, this research will illustrate where Follett as a fictional author conforms to medieval sources and where he lets the narrative move in a different direction. In this way, a scholarly assessment of the novel's historical accuracy is ensured.

Assessing the historical accuracy will be done by first identifying the forms of corruption that were present in the medieval Church and in medieval culture. Then, the extent to which Follett's novel represents these forms of corruption accurately will be explored. I will determine whether the representation by Follett can be called an accurate example of a novel that incorporates the characteristics of the time period in which it is set. Medieval corruption is not the only component that I will use to establish whether Follett's novel has a historically accurate core. For this research it is also vital to explore the religious practices that were part of medieval life in order to determine whether the representation of religious culture in Follett's novel is accurate.

This brings us to the core of this thesis' aim: to evaluate whether this widely-popular novel presents a historically accurate view on the medieval world. This core question is important with respect to Follett's novel since it represents religious corruption in the

medieval Church and the history of this corruption has often been studied—and, therefore influenced—by historians, in some aspects particularly with a Protestant background, seeking to criticize the pre-Protestant Church. In answering this core question, then, I will determine whether Follett’s view of the medieval Church has been influenced by inherited views of Protestant-inflected nineteenth century historiography. This question can only be answered by looking at the cultural values that have been delivered to us through the actual medieval sources, determining whether they are present in the novel and by re-assessing these Protestant-inflicted nineteenth century sources on the historiographical matter of medieval corruption. Answering this question gives us insight into the relationship between contemporary literature and historiographical trends, which in return enhances existing scholarship on medieval cultural values.

The scope of the research presented here is focused on the twelfth century, the time period in which the storyline of the novel unfolds. For the purpose of this research, however, it has been necessary to look backward and forward in time to see which historical events led to certain elements in the story and, conversely, to see which events depicted in the novel have repercussions for a later period in time. Thus, while the twelfth century forms the historical foundation for this literary research, it has also been necessary to explore events from both before and after it. England has been taken as the main area of research, since the fictional town of Kingsbridge is located in medieval England. Characters in *The Pillars of the Earth* travel to other countries and areas, so while the religious culture in England is at the core of this research, it will also highlight components of religious culture in other communities and countries, such as France.

The first chapter of this thesis explores the depiction of financial corruption in the world of Follett. Corruption is at the core of the novel’s plot because it is unclear where the money to build the Kingsbridge comes from. But is the financial corruption depicted in

Follett's novel an accurate reflection of that of medieval society? The question will be answered by comparing corruption in medieval society to the way Follett depicts financial exploitation. Financial schemes and ways to extort the people of the priory of Kingsbridge in Follett's world will be explored and this will be compared to how financial gain in the Church environment functioned in actual medieval society. The historical basis for Follett's novel will be explored through a discussion of the erection of the New Saint Peter's Basilica, which was financially supported by indulgences.³ The Basilica will be taken as an example of a church built by the support of indulgences and will be compared to Kingsbridge. In this way it will be established whether the depiction of the financial backing behind the building of Kingsbridge finds a model in that of the New Saint Peter's Basilica. A more local example of a building program financed by indulgences will also be explored: the rebuilding of Exeter Cathedral, which was supported by awarding indulgence to people who were willing to help rebuild it.

Secondly, the financial schemes that are organised in the book by both Philip and Waleran Bigod, both churchmen and important characters in Follett's novel, will be explored and compared to ploys that happened in the medieval Church and that are known to the general public through medieval sources. Not all the financial corruption in the medieval Church was covert. The medieval Church was, in its own time, known to be a conglomerate of separate businesses that sought financial gain with the goal of maximizing the experience of faith.⁴ The different regions of Church parishes worked and talked together on several accounts, although it was not known by the people who went to church. These 'partnerships' also ensured the individual financial well-being of the different regions and that of the Church in general. By comparing these fictional events that take place in the novel, which

³ Ginny Justice, "The Role of Indulgences in the Building of New Saint Peter's Basilica," *Rollins Scholarship Online* (Spring 2011).

⁴ Nancy W. Clegg, and Clyde G. Reed. "The Economic Decline of the Church in Medieval England." *Explorations in Economic History* 31, no. 2 (1994): 262.

show the uniformity in the Church and the contrapositions in this system, to their historical counterparts, again, the question of the accuracy of Follett will be commented upon.

The second chapter will explore the corruption of power, both in Follett's world and in medieval society. Conflicts in the world of Follett's novel will be compared to similar events that occurred in the Middle Ages. In particular, events in which the pope or his subordinates used their inherent right of power, will be explored to determine whether there are similarities between Follett's world and that of the historical Middle Ages. Such events occur constantly in *The Pillars of the Earth*. The deal Philip establishes with King Stephen causes ill-feeling amongst his superiors, bishops Waleran and Henry.⁵ This scheme, which leads to the Church gaining a significant amount of land to build the cathedral and the long-term effects of the scheme present a worthy example for comparison to power schemes that happened in the Middle Ages. A great number of disputes in the medieval period can be traced back to a fight for land and the right to own this particular piece of land. Waleran Bigod serves as an excellent example for the desperate need of owning a particular piece of land. Thus, such a dispute tended to happen, too, in the medieval world. As Philip tries to confront Waleran with this behaviour, the true nature of his corrupted mind becomes clear. The train of thought which the reader perceives through Philip in this segment not only displays the mastery of Follett as a storyteller but invites the reader to think even further about the moral stakes of the narrative.

The third chapter will examine the corruption of faith, comparing the sinful behaviour that is committed by main characters in the novel to sinful behaviour in the medieval English church. This comparison, will provide a satisfactory answer to the question of whether the depiction of sinful characters in Follett's work presents a historically accurate view of medieval society. Corruption of faith, in this context, refers to one's motivation to act no

⁵ Follett, *The Pillars of the Earth*, 354.

longer solely being the welfare of the Church. This also means to use one's faith as the reason behind immoral behaviour. This chapter will highlight some of the main characters' decisions and will show how they are abandoning their faith in these cases. Then, the chapter will present a variety of decisions wherein the motivation of clergyman in the novel is doubtful; in other words, decisions in which the choice that is made by the clergyman does not match the inclinations prescribed by the the Church. This type of behaviour in the novel will then be used as a standard to determine whether the decisions of the fictional characters are in accordance with behaviour noted in actual medieval sources.

The focus of the fourth and final chapter will be the presence of indulgences in medieval society and the limited representation of the matter in Follett's novel. Indulgences were an important part of medieval society and were mostly granted to people when deeds were performed, either locally or on a larger scale, that benefitted the Church, such as going on a pilgrimage or even joining a large crusade.. However, the present-day opinion surrounding indulgences is negative, due to the financial corruption that is connected to the trade in indulgences. The chapter will present an impression of the extent to which our ideas of corruption in medieval England have been shaped by the ideas of Protestant historians from the nineteenth century.⁶ By illustrating the opinion of a nineteenth-century historian, and by discussing several contemporary opinions, expressing either positive or negative views on indulgences, that have become central to contemporary attitudes toward indulgences, this chapter will determine whether Follett's world has embodied these contemporary ideas.

By comparing the world in Follett's novel to the medieval world that can be distilled from contemporary literature and existing scholarship, this thesis will show that Ken Follett is well aware of the world and time period in which he is telling his story. The corrupt manner

⁶ A historian that has expressed his criticism in the nineteenth century is: Henry Charles Lea. *Auricular Confessions and Indulgences in the Latin Church* (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers, 1896).

of the clergy is not a matter of Ken Follett's artistic freedom; it proves to be an actual, either conscious or unconscious, component of the lives of medieval churchmen.

Chapter 1: Financial Corruption in the Middle Ages & The Pillars of the Earth

Financial corruption is depicted in a variety of literary works from the Middle Ages. A fine example of this is *The Pardoner's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer, in which the protagonist refuses to hand out the indulgences he is entitled to distribute out of the name of the Pope. Instead, his advice is to keep travelling with him and to keep offering him money in return for the absolution that the person is seeking. Indulgences are a matter that will be dealt with later in this thesis, but it is worth considering here what other means of financial corruption were present in the medieval period and whether they are depicted in *The Pillars of the Earth*. This chapter will present occurrences of financial corruption in the novel and will link these occurrences to situations in actual medieval historical sources in order to answer the question of whether Follett has tried to shape his medieval world in the most representative way possible.

Chaucer as a Basis: Tales of Corruption

When one thinks of extortion and financial corruption in medieval times, Geoffrey Chaucer immediately springs to mind and therefore must be considered here. *The Canterbury Tales* offer valuable insight into the various kinds of corruption that took place in the Middle Ages. The tales survive in a great number of manuscripts and can therefore also be called the popular literature of the fourteenth century. Because they survive in so many manuscripts, it is safe to assume that people were reading Chaucer's works and that they are representative of the general opinion—otherwise they would not have been copied in such extensive numbers. It is, therefore, necessary to include a mention of the types of corruption Chaucer described, to show what was acceptable in the medieval world and what, interestingly enough, was

definitely not accepted. In the case of the *Canterbury Tales*, mockery surrounds behaviour that was not accepted.

Chaucer's life as a government official presents the reader with some insight as to what a bureaucrat would experience. A fine example of this type of insight is *The Friar's Tale*; Brantley L. Bryant has recently claimed it "engages with a fourteenth-century discussion of the psychology and accountability of the intermediary officials who administrated royal, ecclesiastical, and manorial systems of justice and finance."⁷ In *The Friar's Tale*, an important character is the summoner, of which the archdeacon was the superior. A summoner was a non-clerical official who would summon people before ecclesiastical courts. Summoners would, later on, be condemned for extortion of people on several occasion, and were even officially condemned before the Council of London in 1342.⁸ In Chaucer's description, some of the motives for the corruption committed by the summoner become clear almost immediately, however not in a way that is as overt as the reader would expect from a person such as this summoner. The behaviour is a direct result of the system in which the summoner is operating, and by doing so Chaucer, through *The Friar's Tale* offers a critique of both the system in which he is operating himself as a government official and showing the reader which purposes are most punishable within this community.⁹

Although Chaucer was writing in the later medieval period, this chapter will show that even practices in the later period find their basis in the early medieval period. The tales of Chaucer, although being late medieval, should be taken into account when considering malevolent practices in early medieval times, as they depict an important view of medieval society in a great number of manuscripts.

⁷ Brantley L. Bryant, "By Extorcions I Lyve": Chaucers Friars Tale and Corrupt Officials." *The Chaucer Review* 42, no. 2 (2007): 180.

⁸ "summoner." Oxford Reference, accessed 22-06-2018, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100542995>.

⁹ Bryant, "By Extorcions I Lyve": Chaucer's Friars Tale and Corrupt Officials": 180.

Kingsbridge Rebuilt: The Financial Side of the Problem

In Follett's novel, the cathedral of Kingsbridge has to be rebuilt after it is burnt down at the hands of Tom Builder's son, Jack. This process is described by both Philip and Tom as horribly expensive, and it is immediately established that the parish does not have the financial power to have it rebuilt in the way that is desirable for the community. Philip thinks of a scheme, and while it seems as if there is nothing illegal in the scheme, it is worth mentioning that not even Philip likes the idea of making a deal behind the back of one of his superiors, Waleran Bigod. The whole situation is described by Follett in a realistic way, in which Philip meets with subordinates of King Stephen to close the deal. The fact that the first thing Philip thinks about is the rents simultaneously presents the reader with a first hint at Waleran's attempt of financial corruption: "If Waleran was collecting the rents, he would naturally retain a portion for his expenses. He alone would be able to say what that portion should be".¹⁰ The power of bishop Bigod to determine how much of the ordinary folk's money would flow back to the Church or into his own pocket speaks for corruption. This hint is established in a more elaborate way further in the novel: "Waleran must think that pious ends justified dishonest means in the service of the Church."¹¹ This type of dishonesty being rectified in the name of the Church is exactly one of the practices that will be elaborated upon later in this thesis, when dealing with the corruption of power in Follett's novel and the medieval world.

Another hint at the possibility of financial corruption in the novel appears in the deal that Philip establishes between him, the Hamleights and in return, the King. The response by Waleran when this has happens, furious at the fact that he has been outsmarted by Philip, suggests corruption is at hand: "I swear by all that's holy, you'll never build your church."¹²

¹⁰ Follett, *The Pillars of the Earth*, 339-340.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 344.

¹² Follett, *The Pillars of the Earth*, 355.

This indicates that Waleran will do anything that's necessary to ensure his personal well-being. The steps Philip has undertaken can even be acknowledged as corruption, mainly because he is acting above his powers. By doing this, Philip organises a scheme that has financial repercussions, namely the earnings of the Church and how they are to be divided. Even though the financial side of the argument is not laid out on the table immediately, it will later on in the novel become clear why this deal has such impact on the way that the money for the rebuilding of the cathedral is collected, thus speaking for the claim of the presence of financial corruption in Follett's novel even more strongly.

Philip, thus, is not free from blame. The plan he comes up with in the second part of the novel reeks of corruption. When it is discovered that Waleran has invited a subordinate of the king, namely bishop Henry, to come and inspect the building site, Philip fears he will conclude that the process is going too slowly and will move the hub to Shiring. To tackle this problem, Philip comes up with a scam with the help of Cuthbert, namely to announce "forgiveness for sins may be had in return for work on the building site".¹³ Later on in this thesis, other labours that were granted indulgence will be considered, such as participating in a crusade and going on pilgrimage. These practices were condemned in medieval society by the Church, but, as will be proved, happened on a large scale and are also contemporary to the novel's period.

Although the practise of rewarding indulgences in return for labour is depicted as common and widely-practiced in various church parishes, Philip still considers it controversial. Even in the first part of the novel, the reader is confronted with Philip's greediness. The confrontation is prompted by Ellen, Tom's second lover, when Philip is giving away bread as a kind deed. The bread Philip was giving away, however, was gifted by

¹³ Follett, *The Pillars of the Earth*, 461.

the same people Philip returns it to. According to Ellen, it is not an act of kindness; it is a sinful act of greed and a circular train of thought.

There is a historical basis in a lay person repaying a churchmen for his deed.¹⁴ The money offered, however, had to be earned in an honest way; Duffy argues that: “behind such notions (...) lay some notion of a contract, in which the pledged coin was an “earnest penny”, cash on the nail designed to strike a deal with the saint.”¹⁵ The thoughts of Waleran, as previously mentioned, cannot be established as a manner of corruption at first glance, although there is, later on in the novel, proof of his intentions with the money. He wants to use the money earned by this variety of services that Duffy mentions for his own personal gain. In doing this, Waleran prevents the possibility of the Church, which Waleran proclaims to solely serve, benefitting from the practice. Waleran’s train of thought, which is laid out later on in the novel, definitely presents firm evidence for financial corruption, although he does not overtly talk about his motivation to anyone within the priory or his direct inner circle of contacts; at least the reader is led to believe.

Cathedrals of Indulgences: New Saint Peter’s and Exeter Cathedral

The New Saint Peter’s Basilica provides a valuable example of a cathedral that was built with financial aid. The main source of income for this cathedral was money earned through the selling of pardons or indulgences. Although the first stone for Saint Peter’s was laid in 1506, making it rather later than the period under investigation, the building process and the motivations behind it make it a valuable example for this research. After all, completion of a cathedral took decades and sometimes even centuries, so the building process of New Saint Peter’s was initiated at a much earlier date than the sixteenth century. Moreover,

¹⁴ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 184.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the evidence for how medieval indulgences were distributed in general dates from the later medieval period, although there are some examples of early medieval practices, which will be highlighted later on in the fourth chapter on the practice of indulgences.

New Saint Peter's, as the name might suggest, was built when an old cathedral was torn down by Pope Julius II. A new cathedral was commissioned quite quickly, to ensure this important spot remained in the hands of the Church.¹⁶ Julius II wanted to collect the money he needed for the construction as quickly as possible; this is worth noting, since Philip is motivated by the same goal in Follett's novel. A bull that Julius sent out allowed almost any sin to be pardoned, once an indulgence was bought for the sin. This resulted in a major increase in the commercial gain of the Church in this particular area and made it possible for Julius II to fully finance the Cathedral through pardons. But the practice of issuing indulgences as a way of repenting sin was not enough for most bishops, as soon as they realized they were able to profit from this practice. The bishops were free to set their own prices for the indulgences.¹⁷ Most bishops shifted the price range to a more social model, namely charging according to the financial means of a person so that in the end, the poorer people would also be able to buy an indulgence.¹⁸

New Saint Peter's was not the only cathedral to be built with the support of indulgences. Exeter Cathedral was in desperate need of repair around the year 1553, and it is worth considering here since, like the fictional Kingsbridge, it was built in England. In the Trevelyan Papers, a collection of works which was first published by a group of men interested in the reign of Henry VI, it is reported that "it ys to be reme(m)bred that ye great indulgence and pardon, which dyverse holy fathers: popes, cardynalles, archbysshops, and bysshops: have gyven and grau(n)ted to all the brothers and susters, and good doers of the

¹⁶ Justice, "The Role of Indulgences in the Building of New Saint Peter's Basilica", 27.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

cathedrall church of Exeter extendeth to the somme of .11x11. yeres and one lent.”¹⁹ Anyone who was willing to engage in the repair work was granted a large amount of pardon. Thus, not only were pardons used to make it financially possible for the construction process of a cathedral to begin, the same funding structure was utilised when a costly repair had to be carried out. In essence, this same funding structure lies at the core of the storyline depicted in Follett’s novel.

The cathedral of Kingsbridge does not need to be built from scratch, although it is described by Philip and Tom Builder as being in a horrid state. The building needs repair work after Jack causes a significant amount of it to burn down. Tom and Philip immediately realise that such repair work would be extremely costly, and the possibility of raising money for the rebuilding process through indulgences is considered. This approach to financing repair work, would seem to be grounded in historical reality, judging from the aforementioned historical evidence surrounding the repair to Exeter Cathedral. This aspect of the plot, then, seems to be presenting the reader with an image of the medieval world that is historically accurate.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that novel—based in the twelfth century—is depicting a fairly early use of indulgences while the accounts of this practice in the medieval world, as will be seen in more detail in the fourth chapter, are mostly from a later time. How common were indulgences in the twelfth century? R.N. Swanson offers a possible explanation for the indulgence practice being overlooked in its time, namely that, also when the indulgence was a popular practice in the later Middle Ages, “their attraction was of the moment: a new grant might stimulate a burst of piety, but it would not last.”²⁰ Even at a later time, when pardons were formed as contracts, which have a higher possibility to survive through the centuries, the

¹⁹ “Indulgence for the Repair of Exeter Cathedral.” *Camden Old Series* 67 (1857): 218–19.

²⁰ R.N. Swanson, “Indulgences at Norwich Cathedral Priory in the Later Middle Ages: Popular Piety in the Balance Sheet.” *Historical Research* 76, no. 191 (2003): 25.

people granting them knew that the lifespan stated in such contracts was not always set in stone. As we see in Follett's world, the pardons are never noted anywhere or made into a contract on parchment; they are simply passed on through communication between the different parishes.

The two medieval cathedrals examined here, both of which were supported by indulgences, thus serve as valuable case studies for how cathedrals attracted funding and encouraged people to actively engage in (re)building holy places. Taken together, they indicate that the funding schemes described in Follett's novel are grounded in the reality of the medieval Church.

Kingsbridge as a Firm: Financial Gain Through the Experience of Faith

Although the Church is not immediately depicted as a large firm in Follett's world, as the storyline of the novel develops it becomes clear that there are different priories that work together and have close connections. Philip finds it extremely hard to gather the money he needs from other priories to make Kingsbridge financially healthy again. In the early Middle Ages, though, as Nancy Clegg and Clyde Reed established, the Church proved itself highly successful in delivering services to the people of England on a well-organised level as a means of financial support of the organisation, although there were problems with the previously mentioned idea of crusades as one of the aims of Latin Christianity.^{21 22} Follett's story, which takes place in this time period, should present a clear picture of this type of organizational force, as it is set in multiple parishes and communities in which the Church played an important role. The manner of communication between these parishes is depicted when Philip is trying to gather people for his scam. In this instance, the importance of this type of practices in Follett's representation of the medieval Church become clear to the reader.

²¹ Clegg, and Reed. "The Economic Decline of the Church in Medieval England": 262.

²² Richard W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London: Pimlico, 2008), 50.

When Philip promises pardons and his message is spread throughout his immediate environment, over a thousand volunteers show up in a short span of time. The products the Church sold are fairly easy to characterise, namely religious and social services.²³ If Follett's aim was to present a clear image of the medieval church practices, including these two types of services would be vital to a vivid storyline, which he has done on several crucial points in the storyline. Adding to these services, is the powerful position of the Church in Follett's novel, which is made clear immediately by showing the reader that the Crown was also dependent on the welfare of the Church, as was the case in medieval times, further establishing the narrative's aim at historical accuracy.²⁴

Firstly, religious services are depicted frequently in Follett's novel, from the role the Church plays in the acceptance and provision of a marital status to the pardons in return for protection of the cathedral, which Philip and his parishioners are happy to supply. It is the willingness to provide this type of services that inevitably leaves space to place question marks as to the aim of the churchmen. Secondly, the Church's social services, including the support of the old and the poor, which were an important part of medieval society, are mentioned surprisingly seldom in Follett's novel. Philip sees himself as a man of God and in his opinion, he does everything in his power to act as one. However, in the end, the main goal for Philip is the same as that of Waleran, namely financial stability. Although Waleran's motivation is the aim of financial gain instead of stability, in that he wants to use the money to build a castle for his own advantage, Philip also sees the drawbacks of not finishing the Kingsbridge cathedral in time.

In the end, both Philip and Waleran stand behind a scheme that has one purpose: personal gain. Throughout the novel, the completion of Kingsbridge Cathedral gradually becomes a personal matter, with Philip easily warming to the idea of extorting the people in

²³ Clegg and Reed. "The Economic Decline of the Church in Medieval England": 262.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 263.

order to finish the cathedral, or even simply to give Henry the idea that he is making progress on it. The Church does have the characteristics of an organization, with departments in the form of the parishes. These departments had people, such as Philip working for the organization, with a uniform aim, namely the well-being of the Church and worship of God. This is also depicted in Follett's novel, although the churchmen are often motivated by the question whether or not, in the end, they profit from the decision they make, not naming the well-being of the Church as their highest priority.

This chapter has shown how financial corruption was perceived in medieval times. Several instances of financial corruption in Follett's work are remarkably similar to those of the medieval world, including cathedrals being completed through the support of indulgences and the widespread practice of extortion, in which members of the church community pay in excess for pardons through which the Church gains increasing financial independence. It can therefore be stated that this component of the novel's plot is historically accurate.

Chapter 2: The Corruption of Power in the Middle Ages and in *The Pillars of the Earth*

“I’ll make sure you never build your church.” Through these words, Waleran Bigod declares war on Philip. Although Bigod means his words figuratively, he eventually proves that his will is sometimes absolute law. The level of importance that Bigod accords himself, and the number of characters, such as Waleran, who abuse their power, signals that corruption of power plays a significant part in Follett’s novel. Waleran’s hubris, an insatiable hunger for power, becomes clear in several instances throughout the novel.

There are sources that present a firm historical basis for this type of behaviour, which will be highlighted. Research on the medieval Church has shown that some people within it, especially those who were active in the justice system of the Church, were indeed corrupt. But the medieval period also features anti-corruption campaigns, and in this chapter, I will explore whether Follett has incorporated these campaigns not his novel. The campaigns were put into place, in particular in medieval France, to battle the far-reaching corruption of power present in the country’s administrative circle. These campaigns were also instituted in England, when the government became more centralized in the later medieval period.

Lastly, the decisions made by contemporary Councils, gatherings of large church groups, will be taken into account and it will be established whether any of these decisions are found in Follett’s novel, while he is describing the English situation of the abuse of powerful positions within the medieval English church, which will provide a more detailed answer to the question of the novel’s aim at historical accuracy and the representation of the medieval Church.

Fighting Corruption from within: The Anti-Corruption Campaigns of the Middle Ages

No organisation battling the corruption that is present in the Church system in Follett's novel is in place, although there is historical evidence from English sources that imply that such a system was put into effect by successors of King Stephen, who plays an important part in the story. An English example of a king that contributed towards an increasingly centralised government is Edward I.²⁵ Edward ruled from 1273 until 1307, meaning that he is outside the scope of this thesis. At the end of the twelfth century, though, the time period in which the novel's storyline takes place, especially in England and France, corruption by government officials was fought from within the government itself. What presents a problem, though, is that a centralised government was not yet in place in the eleventh and twelfth century.²⁶

Because the campaigns were instituted in England on a large scale in the later medieval period, it is interesting to establish what was already done by the same organizations in the early Middle Ages, that would thus later on fight corruption on a larger scale. To be able to demonstrate whether an important historical feature of these anti-corruption campaigns must be stressed, thus, that they were predominantly successful in the thirteenth century. In France, King Louis IX made the decision to employ monks as royal investigators. The careful selection of these monks eventually lead to the success of the anti-corruption campaign. There are several reasons for its success. First of all, Louis employed only monks of the Dominican and Franciscan orders to perform the governmental duties, and these monks were not poised in the same way that other monks were. This was mainly the case because of their position within the system of the Church. Most of these Dominican and Franciscan orders had been formed only decades ago and their place in the Church system was therefore reasonably

²⁵ Gaines Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought : Public Law and the State 1100-1322* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 244.

²⁶ Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 577.

uncertain.²⁷ Secondly, Louis only employed the people he already knew. In this way, Louis tackled the problem of financial corruption by bribery and the corruption of power by putting these monks on the top of the pyramid; there was no need to become more powerful, when in direct contact with the King himself.²⁸

These campaigns were extremely successful in France and it is therefore logical that Follett would not include them in the storyline. What would have been interesting, is that Follett could have included a mention of these campaigns when some of the main characters are travelling outside of England, which happens towards the novel's finale. An effect of including these anti-corruption campaigns would, thus, have enlarged the tension surrounding the schemes plotted by Bigod. Including a mention of the campaigns would also present a problem for Follett, as these campaigns were, according to medieval sources, officially initiated some years after the novel's storyline and Follett would have to explain the nature of these campaigns, even if he would only shortly mention them, as it would leave the reader wanting more information about the mention of these campaigns.

Problems with the Contemporary: The Meaning of Corruption

According to Jordan, when one was given something in the medieval world without a clear context, it was not hard to figure what the purpose of the gift was; something needed to be done or there was an expectation from the person presenting the gift.²⁹ The meaning of a gift by someone in a powerful position was even easier to distil. The next step seems fairly easy, namely to call this gift, which further points toward the argument of power corruption, a bribe or the practice bribery. The medieval meaning of bribery and its origins in the English

²⁷ William Chester Jordan, "Anti-corruption Campaigns in Thirteenth-century Europe." *Journal of Medieval History* 35, no. 2 (2009): 210.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

language, however, presents an important sidenote that must be stressed for the security of the argument:

Briba, from which our word ‘bribe’ derives, is sometimes unequivocally used for an illicit offering in the middle ages. But the agent noun, which would be bribarius (seen in Middle English as bribour), and the conceptual category briberia (Middle English, bribryes), typically refer not to the offerer and the act of offering but to the recipient and his acceptance. The original or earliest attested meaning of briba is ‘crust of bread’ or by a sort of metonymy, ‘mendicant’ or ‘beggar’ (Old French, bribeor), a category of persons on whom one should have pity.³⁰

Caution is therefore necessary when one is looking at documents from medieval England and seeking to describe the bribery in a medieval source. This is an important aspect of the modern sense of financial corruption and in essence power corruption. The problem with this difference of meaning is that a document that lists this practice of bribery may have intended a different meaning of the word than the meaning that was later on presumed by historians. This could either leave a gap in the knowledge from sources or present an anachronistic view from present-day historians if this background information is not clear.

A striking example of a medieval source that indicates the presence of power corruption in the early medieval period is Gratian’s *Decretum*, which formed the foundation of canon law. Although Gratian was active in Bologna, the ideas in *Decretum* spread throughout Europe, including England. *Decretum* was published around 1140, thus in a period in which a major part of Follett’s story takes place. According to Gratian, justice was a gift of God and therefore no gifts should be awarded to those who served this divine justice. If a

³⁰ Jordan, “Anti-corruption Campaigns in Thirteenth-century Europe”: 205.

judge was to take money from any of the parties that appeared before him, he would have “put justice up for sale”, as Gratian calls it.³¹ Gratian, here, was commenting on corruption that took place in Italy, but this certainly was not the only country in which such corruption was a problem. The example of France has already been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and England, where corruption was also a comment when Gratian’s ideas were spreading, should therefore not be left out of the discussion. According to Helmholz’s research, the Bible was also used as a way to protest against the judges receiving money before, during, or after a case. Justice should only be spoken through wise eyes and should not be interfered by money.³²

Dante Alighieri, although being from the later medieval period, also comments on the power corruption which was present in Italy. Although Dante is not a contemporary of the novel’s story and was writing in Italy, he penned down ideas that must have had its foundation in the twelfth century. Dante reports in his *Divine Comedy* instances of judges, thus people in a powerful position, receiving money from the accused party, and that the goal of the justice system was therefore not always to do justice, but mainly to make sure its officers were well-paid.³³ This is a practice that combines financial corruption and corruption of power because the people that received the money were in a position to take important political and personal decisions. A judge position was, therefore, an extremely delicate position and cases were poised to be overshadowed by these financial gifts. Although Dante was not a contemporary of the novel’s story and was writing in Italy, the ideas that he penned down must have a foundation in the twelfth century.

The immediate establishment of a justice system in *The Pillars of the Earth* is an important component to stress. Although the justice system as such is not mentioned in great

³¹ K. H. Helmholz, “Money and Judges in the Law of the Medieval Church.” *The University of Chicago Law School Roundtable* no. 8 (2001): 311.

³² Helmholz, “Money and Judges in the Law of the Medieval Church.”: 311.

³³ *Ibid.*, 309.

detail later on, the reader is immediately confronted with the hanging of criminals in the prologue to the story and that implies that in Follett's medieval world, there is indeed a firm justice system. These kind of punishments, which were decided upon by judges would not be performed otherwise. The narrative does, nevertheless, not tackle corruption as would be expected from a story that takes place in the time period when Gratian's ideas are spreading through churches in Europe and the instances of corruption Dante later in time describes were, without a doubt, present in society.

The important decisions that have far-reaching consequences for main characters in the novel are made by Philip. Although Philip is not immediately established as a judge in the narrative, he can be brought forward into the argument as an important character that can be corrupted by his powerful position. Philip does, as one might argue, abuse at times, his power to steer a situation in his direction. This becomes especially clear in the third part of the novel, which shows Philip as a benevolent judge, only punishing the people with financial repercussions, while Hamleigh is portrayed as a monster, killing people as soon as an opportunity presents itself. While this contrast may serve as a way for the audience to feel more sympathy for Philip, and to grow a dislike for Hamleigh, it does have historical accuracy in that Hamleigh, who is part of the nobility, does not have to answer to anyone, especially not after Aliena has denied his love.

Philip, throughout the story, performs his deeds mostly for the well-being of Kingsbridge and his aim at a well-established cathedral where services can once more be held. When Philip is in the position of taking important decisions that affect multiple people in the storyline, it becomes a strong vehicle of storytelling, as it shows his true nature. In the end, it lets the reader engage in the storyline and makes the protagonist a more likeable character on the whole. Likeability does not improve the novel's aim at historical accuracy, although the way in which a churchmen, such as Philip, uses his powerful position does in fact improve it.

The Power of the Church: Illegitimacy, Literacy, and Education in the Middle Ages

Churches played an enormously important role in the daily lives of people in medieval England. Decisions were made according to the rules of the Church. Even when towns were developing and one would expect the individual to be making more choices due to the increasingly diverse ways of living becoming available, it was still the Church that dominated the daily life of medieval subjects.³⁴ The Church occupies this role of importance in Follett's novel, so here, too, Follett's plot finds a foundation in medieval sources. The powerful importance of the Church in Follett's novel is depicted when Tom Builder enters Kingsbridge with his illegitimate wife Ellen. The looks that they get as people who do not fit into the religious community are suggestive of the large role the Church plays in the society depicted in the novel

It is often suggested that illegitimacy was an extreme problem in a medieval context. The general opinion among the public today is that extra-marital relationships were forbidden in the medieval Church and that punishments for people engaging in it were rather harsh. This is, however, surprisingly enough, not the case. As Laura Wertheimer has established in her research, one could lose its title of illegitimacy, although only from the end of the twelfth century onwards.³⁵ Before that time period, illegitimate men could only enter high ranked positions by the effect of papal disbursement. This was mainly because of the reform movement, also called the Gregorian reform. This reform had two reasons for establishing these strict rules; firstly, when priests were able to get married they would have the opportunity to bring into their positions what the Church considered sexual filth and secondly, they would have the opportunity (and this happened very often) of passing on their high ranked position to their sons.³⁶

³⁴ Julia Barrow, *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 127.

³⁵ Laura Wertheimer, "Illegitimate Birth and the English Clergy, 1198-1348." *Journal of Medieval History* 31, no. 2 (2005): 212.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

In Follett's novel, Ellen's son Jack is depicted as an illegitimate child, although the child's father is known. The looks the couple get would not have to be that harsh in the time period the story takes place, as illegitimacy thus was widely accepted. A reason for the looks is the fact that she is a woman and the medieval sources mostly deal with illegitimacy amongst men. In the end, though, when Ellen is exiled from the town, the way in which the Church dominates the lives of the people is described at its best. She is believed to be a witch and a fornicator, qualities that are thought to make her unfit for religious environments. On top of that, she is a woman, and, according to Waleran this always causes problems. Philip takes issue with the way that Waleran expresses his opinion, but Waleran's opinion is nevertheless respected, and the other clergymen support Ellen's banishment. Although Ellen takes her exile quite willingly, she leaves the men with the promise that "[a]t dusk the hunter took his prey, The lark his freedom never. All birds and men are sure to die, but songs may live forever", foreshadowing the fate of some men that have sealed her's.³⁷ The addition of the curse takes the reader back to the beginning of the novel, while at the same time enlarging the amount of mystery that surrounds the character of Ellen.

Although the parish is described as being firmly Christian and Philip works hard to let it stay that way, there are certainly hints of an ever-present mixture of pagan traditions and Christian variants. In the third part of Follett's novel, the inhabitants of the village gather for a feast, and the description of the feast is marked by pagan elements. Despite Philip's disapproval opinion, he still visits the feast. His visit, however, is aimed at reasserting the power of the Church. Even when the threat of paganism is raised, the Church in Follett's novel is reaffirmed as the major dominating force in people's daily lives.³⁸ The possession so much power brings up the possibility for people to abuse the power. As shown in the novel, this happens in the case of bishops like Philip and Waleran, as previously mentioned.

³⁷ Follett, *The Pillars of the Earth*, 286.

³⁸ William Mead, *The English Medieval Feast* (Tokyo: Athena Press, 2016), 16.

Philip's desire to have Jack become a monk becomes clear to the audience in a vivid way. Later in the novel, this desire becomes a reality and is even applauded by Jack himself, mainly because the Church has confronted him with the fact that he needs knowledge, and therefore, education in his life. The Church has, up to that point, been willingly to provide it and Jack's way of thinking is that he can only repay this by becoming a monk. Jack's assessment of the Church in this episode provides powerful evidence for the control held by the Church in Follett's novel, and, indirectly, the power held by Philip. This further establishes the argument that power corruption is indeed present in Follett's novel.

Bishop Waleran also has this power, but chooses to abuse it. Not only does he take money for his own personal gain throughout the entire novel, he also uses his position to make a deal with Hamleigh to firstly get his share out of the wool business, and secondly to plan an attack on the town around Kingsbridge cathedral. In the end, Waleran gets what he wants, although not completely through his own doing. The narrative, then, quite frequently shifts towards Aliena's relationship with Jack and forced marriage with Alfred in ways typical of the importance of status in medieval society.

Marriage, another way in which the Church was part of people's lives, played an important role in the lives of medieval Christians. The rules and institutions connected to a wedding in medieval times are loosely followed by Follett, mainly because a vivid representation fits that part of the story in a better way.³⁹ Marriage was an institution that could only be officiated by certain members of the Church. At multiple occasions in the novel, Follett lets the characters discuss the subject of marriage, in particular when the matter of divorce is brought forward, again stressing the significance of the Church's power and the possibility of abusing this power by churchmen, enlarging the aim at historical accuracy in the novel.

³⁹ Charles Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages: Arguments about Marriage in Five Courts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 16.

The power of the Church in the twelfth century is difficult to evaluate, mainly because documentation is lacking for a considerable part of the period. For Follett, using actual historical sources as a foundation for his storyline would thus have proved extremely difficult, as these sources are rare and our knowledge of this period of time is based on sources that were composed in a later period of time. As Campbell states, the main medieval source that is used by historians to filter out the relationship between towns and the importance of people within these towns in medieval England is the Domesday book.⁴⁰ What can be proved as a historically accurate practice in the novel, taking this source into account, is the way that taxes are collected, namely completely centred to towns. This is the power the Church still had in the twelfth century and this would inevitably change towards the thirteenth century, as taxation becomes better organised with a centralised government being realised by, Edward I, as mentioned before.⁴¹ To fully understand the power the characters in Follett's novel receive through their service of the Church, it is important to establish in what component of the medieval Church organisation this type of power was given to the medieval counterparts of bishops such as the fictional Waleran and Philip.

The last point of comparison examined here is the role of the Church in childhood. In the medieval period, the Church exercised powerful control over people through childhood education. It provided a set model for the way children were to behave towards people, establishing that faith was to be held dutifully, and always with the requirements that the Church provided in mind.⁴² After the child was baptised, the father and godparents served as an intermediate party between the child and the Church; the parents took care of the child and

⁴⁰ James Campbell, *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 60.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴² Nicholas Orme, *Children and the Church in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 563.

instructed the child in the ways of the Church, and the Church, in turn, provided rituals needed for the upbringing of the child.

Follett's novel does not delve into the theme of education, although the novel does shed light on the power of church education when Jack establishes for himself that he needs education and the Church will provide it. Tom is never occupied with teaching his son the ways of the Church. This mention of the importance of education by the Church, through the character of Jack, though, makes it clear that Follett is well aware of the fact that the Church provided education in the medieval period. The level of importance of Church education in the medieval period brings us back to the overall argument of the thesis, namely that Follett's novel confronts the reader with this type of importance of the Church through one of its characters. This slightly enhances the aim at historical accuracy, showing that Philip has this type of power. At the same time, he makes his desire to have Jack become a monk crystal clear.

The Power of Unity: The Church Network as a Theme & a Problem

Kingsbridge is described as being part of a hub of parishes. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the parish network was a successful organisation. According to Philip, every parish needs to have its own cathedral. Once the cathedral burns down, the rebuilding process receives Philip's highest priority. The only wish that Philip has, is that the cathedral is professionally rebuilt and that services can commence accordingly, although funding for this building process is lacking.

As previously mentioned, the medieval church was constantly broadening its business up to 1350.⁴³ For this business to thrive, a network was necessary. Although the evidence of frequent meetings of the important hubs in this network is thin, it was common practice for

⁴³ Clegg, Nancy, W, and Clyde G. Reed. *The Decline of the Church in Medieval England*. 262.

bishops of surrounding churches to meet, otherwise the uniformity of the Church, could not be secured. During these meeting, agreements had to be made about regulations within the Church. In reality, large scale meetings did not occur often. The Lateran Councils were for the main part the place where important decisions were made.

Localised councils were held more regularly, thus showing the centralisation of the Church. The two Lateran Councils that are contemporary to the novel are the First and Second Lateran Councils, respectively in 1123 and 1139. The most important decision that was made during these two councils for the novel's aim at historical accuracy is that a clergyman was forbidden to take a benefice from a laity.⁴⁴ This is interesting because medieval clergymen kept receiving benefices, and Follett decides to include this in the novel. In the medieval world it happened frequently that when clergymen were speaking justice, they received gifts beforehand, or after the trial, which was established earlier on in the thesis. The question then arises whether the gift that the judge received was identified as a benefice or a plain 'gift' by the layman. It is striking, though, that even when it is included in canon law, which are the rules that these judges were meant to be following, the possibility of the judges being financially corrupt was still present at times.

The financial corruption in the church network in Follet's novel is depicted in the way that Philip wants to receive the money to build the cathedral, namely from nearby parishes. Because Kingsbridge has such a bad reputation, funding a new cathedral by the surrounding parishes does not work in the end. It does, however, raise the question of historical accuracy.⁴⁵

The most striking answer to this question of level of historical accuracy through power corruption is, again, presented in the form of Waleran, who takes money for his own gain throughout the novel. This financial motivation inevitably led to the person in charge of

⁴⁴ H. J. Schroeder, "Medieval Sourcebook: Tenth Ecumenical Council: Lateran II 1139." Sourcebooks, 1937, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran2.asp>, accessed 04-05-2018.

⁴⁵ Gillian R. Evans, *The Church in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Tauris), 48.

speaking justice abusing his powerful position, as is detected in the character of Waleran. Then again, Philip is not free from blame either. When Jack returns from Paris with the Weeping Madonna statue, Philip immediately sees an opportunity of ameliorating the importance of Kingsbridge as a pilgrimage site. Although Jack has travelled a fair distance for the well-being of Kingsbridge, his efforts are greeted with inconsiderateness; the only important subject that Philip thinks about is how he can assure a stable priory with a cathedral that is ready for service, thus proving that Philip's main motivation is not the well-being of the people in the parish. Philip's focus is aimed at the financial well-being of the cathedral. Philip's mind has been corrupted by the financial stress in his life, which emphasizes that the financial well-being of the Church is his priority.

This chapter has shown in what ways corruption of power was present in medieval society. The abuse of a powerful position is depicted in both Follett's novel and the medieval period by churchmen in powerful positions that receive gifts and being influenced by financial corruption, of which the various practices were touched upon in the previous chapter. Several of these instances occur in Follett's novel and thus it can be stated that the level of historical accuracy of the corruption of power in Follett's novel is thought through.

It has also been shown to what extent the Church played a role in the daily lives of medieval men and women. Education made sure that people were taught the right ways of the Church and councils made sure that the uniformity of the Church was secured. Although Follett decides to not include the matter of education to its fullest extent, the reader is confronted with the importance of the Church providing education to its officials, as Jack points out as one of the reasons he decides to become a monk.

Financial corruption and the corruption of power can not be seen as separable, or as existing apart from each other in a society. Most instances of the corruption of power, as the

medieval sources explored in this chapter point out, find a basis in financial corruption, and vice versa Follett's novel reflects this medieval reality, with Philip willing to do anything that is necessary to ensure the financial stability of the cathedral of Kingsbridge, even if this means using his powerful position.

Chapter 3: Corruption of Faith in the Middle Ages & *The Pillars of the Earth*

Decisions of protagonists in Follett's novel are often fuelled by their faith. This is especially true for the character of Philip, who regularly refers back to his belief in order to justify his actions. Faith can, however, also be used as a justification for deeds that in no way can be redeemed out of the true nature of God's needs. This type of corruption—using faith as a false justification for illicit actions—is the focus of this chapter. By comparing instances of corruption in *The Pillars of the Earth* to medieval examples of such behaviour, the thesis will explore the question of whether corruption in the novel is grounded in medieval history. This chapter will also explore the implications of a contemporary novel representing the Church with historical accuracy.

Waleran has been discussed a number of times in previous chapters to show that financial corruption and corruption of power are present in Follett's novel. Waleran is a bishop who abuses his high position in both the structure of the Church and the administrative branch of leadership, while at the same time excusing his actions by claiming that they are for the well-being of the Church. Although Philip, overall, does not necessarily commit the sin of using money destined for the Church for his own gain, thus being greedy, he does use his power to establish that what he desires most, namely a firm cathedral. For this chapter, it is necessary to focus on characters that intensely deal with their actions through the will of the Church, and thus main characters such as Tom, Alfred and Ellen will be left out of the discussion. For these churchmen, namely Waleran and Philip, committing sinful behaviour is a grave misstep, as the Christian doctrine is clear about the way the clergy have to act in order to be a person of God.

It is, therefore, useful to see which characters these men of faith decide to influence through a corruption of their faith. Placing the behaviour of these fictional churchmen besides

examples that have been delivered to us through medieval, it is possible to establish whether Follett has written these characters from an accurate point of view, taking into account the medieval examples that are available through these sources. The comparison will provide a valuable insight into the question of whether Follett's fictional world represents the churchmen in the medieval world accurately.

Belonging to the Devil's Side: Heresy in the Early Middle Ages

Corruption of faith is not always aimed at personal gain; it can also be aimed at a group of people's gain. The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw popes battling against priests who used faith to become more affluent. The bishops eventually also bought themselves into their positions, not just by buying offices, but, as Madigan establishes in his research, also in some cases, by selling them.⁴⁶ The Church, and especially Gregorians, rallied against the way that some members of the clergy used their faith by pretending to be in a poor state to attract more followers and to enhance their positions within the Church community. Heretic behaviour is sometimes associated with such corruption, but this corruption was not always associated with heresy; the notion of heresy was surrounded by paradoxes and contradictions. It is therefore valuable for a discussion of corruption of faith and its links to heresy to firstly establish what was considered heretic behaviour in the medieval period.

The corruption of one's faith, or using it to perceive a personal gain, can be denoted as heretic behavior. The meaning of 'heresy', or the specification of when one is acting in a heretic way, is mostly found in exegetical texts—ones are aimed at explaining the true meaning of the Holy Text.⁴⁷ It is useful to keep in mind that in sources, most instances of

⁴⁶ Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 175.

⁴⁷ Hans-Werner Goetz, "What is Heretic in Christian Heresies? The Perspective of Early Medieval Catholic Authors", *Millennium* 10, no. 1 (2013): 374.

heretic behavior, or when sources point out a person as a heretic, these denotations are of a subjective manner.⁴⁸ And this presents a problem of gradation, namely the question; when is a person leading a heretic lifestyle or is he part of an entire group of heretics? Church father Augustine already listed 88 groups and another famous church father, Isidore, listed no fewer than 70.⁴⁹ When a comparison of most medieval authors is made, the conclusion is that groups of heretics can be placed in the same groups as people who do not practise the Christian religion, and in that, are all servers of Satan.⁵⁰ For this thesis, it is interesting to see whether or not the people in the novel are behaving in a way that would be perceived as heretic in medieval times, and what repercussions would normally follow.

Damnation is a logical repercussion of committing treason to one's faith in medieval society, in particular because this is depicted as one of the repercussion within the Christian doctrine. It is not used as an immediate threat in *The Pillars of the Earth*, but the characters are afraid of the possibility of damnation. The fear of damnation becomes clear in cursing with "damned", although that is indeed one of the less significant instances in which the reader is confronted with the subject of damnation. An example of this is Aliena calling Jack a "damned fool" when he decides to hire Alfred, after successfully becoming the master builder. In this part of the storyline, Tom Builder, of course, has already perished in battle. The fear of damnation brings us back to the overall argument, namely if the narrative that Follett is presenting is historically accurate. Damnation is the sole reason that the indulgence practice took flight, as people jumped at the possibility of freeing themselves of the time they had to spend in Purgatory. The effects of these practices will be further explained in this thesis.

⁴⁸ Goetz, "What is Heretic in Christian Heresies? The Perspective of Early Medieval Catholic Authors": 374.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 376.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

In Follett's novel, one character who begins to be linked to the corruption of his faith: Remigius. This occurs when he cuts a deal with William Hamleigh, so that Remigius will become the prior of a brand new church that is being built at that moment. Although one might expect Remigius, to then become the embodiment of the corruption of faith, his corruption is overshadowed by that of Waleran, who once more uses his faith to accomplish what Waleran wants, namely the church. Waleran is therefore the most important antagonist in the whole narrative, so this chapter will focus on this character in great detail, in order to establish whether the behaviour of this character is a reflection of historical reality.

A character that relies on his faith in a more positive way throughout Follett's narrative is Philip. When Remigius asks if he can return to Kingsbridge, after the plan of becoming prior of the new church has failed, Philip welcomes him back, to the surprise of the other men. Philip tells the men that: "Jesus said there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people."⁵¹ This is true Christian behaviour, which is applauded in Follett's narrative. Although Philip has caused Jack and Aliena to be apart for over ten years, he has led Alfred to his death, and put the lives of the people of Kingsbridge at risk, Philip is still portrayed as the prior who wants to do right by his faith. In the end, according to the storyline his behaviour is not sinful, simultaneously leading to the question then whether Waleran and Remigius' behaviour is truly sinful throughout the novel, as these two characters undertake similar actions and are portrayed as clergymen that abuse their position.

⁵¹ Follett, *The Pillars of the Earth*, 890.

Sinful Behaviour in Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth*

Sin plays a strong role in the novel; characters are constantly looking towards the bishops for absolution and to prevent damnation, as mentioned earlier on in this chapter. It is important to see how Follett has incorporated sin into the narrative, as sources imply that sin and sinful behaviour are a vital element of medieval society, especially in the later medieval period. The fear of damnation, even if it is another person risking to be damned, becomes immediately clear when Tom is desperate for Ellen to confess her sins in the first part of the novel, which she refuses to do so. She does not want to be a part of the hypocrisy she believes is a big part of Kingsbridge priory. The desire of absolution of sin is represented throughout the entire novel, up to the sixth part, with characters such as Philip constantly worrying about their ability to relieve people of sins.

To be able to determine whether the behaviour of certain characters from Follett's novel can be labelled 'sinful', and thus to fully understand the level of their corruption of faith, one must first go back to the variety of the seven sins, namely pride, envy, wrath, avarice, sloth, gluttony, lust. Although there is discussion amongst historians about the meaning of these seven sins, an extensive amount of information that is known to us is attributed to Dante, who used the sins to construct the Mount Purgatory. Newhauser argues that the order, though, is not solely ascribed to Dante. These seven cornerstones of religious societies through time have had an enormous impact, both in Catholic and later Protestant communities, on how people order their lives.⁵²

For Augustine, one of the early church fathers, an extreme amount of humility is of great importance to be able to enter the Heavenly City, which is the contraposition of pride. To be able to determine the graveness of committing 'pride' as a sin, Alcuin and his *De*

⁵² Richard Newhauser, *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 5.

virtutibus et vitiis liber or *The Book on the Virtues and the Vices* presents the reader with a rich background of the medieval Christian opinion on sins, stressing pride in particular. Alcuin lists eight ‘vices’ or sins, and gives pride as the beginning of all sin and the worst sin to commit in the medieval Church. By committing this sin, distraction of performing good is inevitable. Performing good deeds in the eyes of God, was one of the cornerstones of the Christian religion.⁵³ It was therefore extremely important that a believer performed these deeds on a regular basis, in particular men of God, such as Waleran and Philip.

The sins that Waleran mostly embodies are pride and avarice, although in the beginning of the novel, when Philip wins the powerful position he had desired, Waleran’s behaviour can be categorized as envious. Pride is to some extent one of Waleran’s character traits, namely that all men should look up to him as being the most important figure. Waleran also exhibits narcissism when he considers a deal and is concerned with what kind of personal gain he is able to get out of it.⁵⁴

Waleran commits sinful behaviour and thus is not a true believer of the Christian faith, according to two important Christian religious figures mentioned before, namely Augustine and Alcuin. His behaviour also points towards avarice, the hunger for richness, or even being greedy. Jesus had ordered his true followers to give up all that one owned, but this command was only for the people that wanted to be truly perfect. The desire of power and possession becomes part of Waleran’s character throughout the narrative. This is first of all depicted in his desire to become bishop and secondly his desire to make money out of this position, mostly for personal gain. This is something Philip notices and disapproves at various instances. The cure for avarice was believed to be voluntary poverty. This presents a problem for the narrative, because Waleran does not do this. Instead, he advances his financial position

⁵³ Newhauser, *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*, 37.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

even further by forming pacts and making deals with the nobility—pacts which, in the end, destroy him.

Although Waleran's actions and schemes can be categorised as being against Christian doctrine, Waleran still believes that all his actions are justified because he does them due to his belief in God. This offers a twist on the central question whether or not Follett's narrative depicts a historical accurate view of medieval society, namely the question whether or not the Church condemned this type of behaviour inevitably also committed by actual medieval churchmen. For this question to be answered it has to be established which type of sinful behaviour these medieval churchmen committed, of which a variety of examples is delivered to us through medieval sources. The justification of his behaviour by the will of God is also something that Philip looms towards in the end of the novel, when he gets the power to decide the fate of the men who once crossed him. In the last part of the novel, the reader meets a more aggravated Philip, who loses his self-control once he gets the power he so secretly desired. Philip justifies this behaviour, claiming that it is the will of God, and he even tells Waleran and William that they have misinterpreted the will of God. This type of behaviour, namely explaining and at the same time criticising one's behaviour through the will of God, builds towards a more deeper understanding of the flaws that Philip also expresses. Philip only overtly expresses this critique a number of times throughout the novel, while he keeps most of his critique to himself. The depiction of Philip's character suggests that no man is without flaws, not even those who act out of the solemn will of God.

The medieval Church acknowledged that sinful behaviour was a part of everyday life.⁵⁵ And sinful behaviour was not necessarily punished at all times in the medieval Church. If one would analyse what avarice meant for a medieval audience and how one had to behave

⁵⁵ Newhauser, *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature*, 7

to receive the title of being ‘a person of avarice’, according to Newhauser, it would prove to be extremely difficult, mainly because for a contemporary audience it was already hard to distinguish where the desire for ‘more’ began.⁵⁶ If the sense of when one would become such a person already presented a problem, it must have also been a blurred line between individualism and narcissism. Though, when one’s behaviour was established as sinful, it would not be viewed as a light offense by a medieval audience. Heresy too, as established earlier in this chapter, was identified as a sin, and as an offense against both the state and the Heavenly Father.⁵⁷ Heretic behaviour was recognised as treason to the faith and had to be eliminated. The Church, however, struggled to find a way to extinguish the fire of heretic behaviour that was silently smouldering in its dioceses. The responsibility of eliminating those that did not act out of the will of God was put in the hands of the bishops.

The battling of heretic behaviour is an interesting point in historical sources that does not get highlighted or even talked about in the narrative of Follett, even though it is partly contemporary to the events that occur in the novel, the pontificate of Pope Innocent III. Heretic behaviour is certainly present in Follett’s novel, in particular in the character of Ellen, but the type of punishment that the churchmen decide upon, namely exile, is not explained. The person is at the top of the hierarchy in the medieval Church, and embodies the will of God, is the pope.. Thus, it is interesting to establish which popes had their pontificate during the time period in which Follett’s narrative is set, to be able to say whether the corruption of faith that is committed in the novel and could have been condemned by a bishop or even the Pope, is present, bringing us back to the question of the novel’s level of historical accuracy.

⁵⁶ Newhauser, *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature*, 7.

⁵⁷ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History*, 176.

The Popes and Their Measurements: A Gap in Follett's Corruption of Faith?

Pope Innocentius III was born in 1161 and became pope in 1198. Although the narrative of *The Pillars of the Earth* ends in 1174, it is interesting to see how the decisions of a pope who received his pontificate shortly after the events of the novel confer with actual historical events. This is because the difficulties that this pope had to tackle did already exist before the pontificate of Innocentius, bringing us back to the period of time in which the novel is set. It has also been stressed in the introduction of this thesis that is necessary for the central question to be answered to go back and forth in time to fully understand the implications of events that take place during the narrative's timeframe.

While in power, Innocentius III had to deal with a large variety of heresies. He chose to reward anyone who was willing to participate in the battle against heresy with pardons, or indulgences, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. In so doing, he ensured that those who wanted to fight the people that discredited the faith stayed satiated, while at the same time solving part of the problem with the heretic behaviour of certain groups of people.⁵⁸

Are the policies and decisions of more contemporary popes reflected in Follett's novel? The events in *The Pillars of the Earth* take place from 1135 to 1171, although there are gaps in this chronology. The text often skips over time between chapters and occasionally it skips a number of years; this kind of skip happens, for example, between parts five and six. In the thirty six years during which the story is set, the medieval period saw no fewer than seven popes. Some popes enjoyed only a year of pontificate due to sickness or other reasons, so this section will focus on the popes that were in office for a longer period, namely Innocentius II (1130-1143), Eugenius III (1145-1153), Adrianus IV (1154-1159), and Alexander III (1159-

⁵⁸ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History*, 176.

1181). Focussing on these men is important for the overall argument of this thesis, as the novel deals with religious questions and the men that, in the end, mostly provided the extensive answers to those questions in the actual medieval Church were the popes

Eugenius III is mostly know for declaring the Second Crusade, after the Holy City of Edessa fell into the hands of the Muslims. This enterprise was highly popular, including in England, where the bishop of Salisbury, whose cathedral Follett used as a source of inspiration had to be reminded about the conditions that surround the pardons received when choosing to take up the Holy Cross and join the crusade.⁵⁹ Strikingly enough, a crusade is absent from Follett's novel, whereas he himself has proclaimed to have based his story upon the building process of both the Wells cathedral and the cathedral of Salisbury, which shows that his narrative aims at historical accuracy.⁶⁰

Alexander III enjoyed 29 years of pontificate and dominated most of the time period the last part of the novel is set in. Because of this fact, it is worth asking the question whether Alexander III and his measurements against corruption of the Christian faith have, in any way, been included in the narrative. There is mention, in chapter 17, of the fight that has been going on between the Church and Henry. Henry accuses Saint Thomas Beckett of refusing him the right to be restored in his rightful position. The pope that takes an important place in the negotiations is in fact Alexander III, who would later canonise Thomas as a martyr of the Catholic church.⁶¹ Thomas Beckett, too, plays an important part in the finale of the novel, stating that men such as Waleran Bigod should not hold powerful positions in the Church. However, it is not in his power to do anything about it. When Philip arrives in Paris, he finds

⁵⁹ Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Penguin: London, 2007), 260.

⁶⁰ Ken Follett, "Britain's soaring spires that became Ken Follett's Pillars Of The Earth," Mail Online, 28 November 2010, accessed 07-07-2018, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1331731/Salisbury-Cathedral-Ken-Folletts-Pillars-Of-The-Earth.html>.

⁶¹ David Hugh Farmer, "The Oxford Dictionary of Saints (5 rev. ed.)" Oxford University Press. 2011, accessed 07-07-2018, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-1526>

Thomas living as an outlaw in Sainte-Colombe, safe from King Henry II. Thus, by including one of the most important popes contemporary to the novel, Follett gives his novel an extensive amount of historical background, which contributes to answer the question whether Follett's novel is an accurate representation of the medieval world.

By letting Philip, a fictional character, visit a historical person such as Thomas Becket, the narrative's aim at historical accuracy is established in a more vivid way. The grand finale of the novel offers the reader an insight into Follett's interpretation of medieval events and presents an opportunity to share his knowledge of medieval figures, such as Thomas Becket and pope Alexander III, while at the same time Follett is still keeping the fictional element of the story alive, through the character of Philip. Including these historical figures certainly does not immediately make the novel historically accurate. The inclusion of these figures and their role in actual medieval society, such as Thomas Becket's exile and Becket's voice that resounds through both medieval sources and Follett's novel, gives Follett the opportunity to enhance his aim at historical accuracy.

Although Kingsbridge is built inside the mind of Follett, the way in which figures that comment on it throughout the course of the novel, such as Henry II, pope Alexander III, and Thomas Beckett, are included, put the narrative closer to its medieval counterparts. This makes a stronger case for the novel's aim at historical accuracy, and of presenting a realistic view of the medieval world.

The goal of chapter was to provide a comparison of Follett's novel and the medieval world, specifically focussed on the corruption of faith by churchmen. In this chapter, it has been established that most of the people that commit corruption of faith, both in the medieval world and in Follett's novel, still act out of the thought that they are doing it for the will of God. Sinful behaviour is definitely present, in both people of the Church such as Waleran and Remigius, and laypeople such as Ellen, but is only defined as such for the latter. As has been

established, the nature and level of graveness of sinful behaviour was, also in medieval times, difficult to determine. Measurements that were taken in the medieval Church, do find their way back in the novel, although in a limited amount of instances. The connection between the novel and medieval history becomes clear when Thomas Becket, who would later be canonized, pops up in the narrative.

By letting fictional characters and their corrupted way of thinking, such as Waleran and in length Philip, meet actual historical figures, such as Thomas Becket, Follett finds a way to combine fiction with actual medieval history. Although the inclusion of a historical figure does not necessarily make the novel a clear representation of the medieval world; it is the way in which these fictional counterparts of these medieval figures act. In Follett's novel, the behaviour conforms with medieval sources, as has been established in this chapter by providing a historical background on sinful behaviour by medieval churchmen, the way in which medieval popes, contemporary to the novel's time period, acted against this type of behaviour. This culmination of historical sources and Follett's valid interpretation of the sources, present a stronger case for the novel's aim at historical accuracy.

Chapter 4: *The Pillars of the Earth* as a Literary Historical Case Study of Indulgences

Although indulgences, or pardons, do not play a pivotal role in *The Pillars of the Earth*, it is valuable to take a closer look at how they are presented in the medieval world of Follett's novel. Indulgences were an important component of the medieval world and therefore it is vital to see how an author has included this component in a narrative that aims at historical accuracy.

An indulgence or a pardon could, broadly speaking, decrease the amount retribution one had to undergo for their sins.⁶² In the later Middle Ages it was believed that the time one spent in Purgatory could be reduced when one received an indulgence or bought one, which led to an extensive trade of indulgences. A considerable amount of the historical information about indulgences has been compiled by historians from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These historians have shown that indulgences indeed formed a significant part of everyday life in medieval England, especially from the fifteenth century and onwards. As discussed at length below, these historians, many of whom were Protestant, have taken a particularly negative view of indulgences. In the fifteenth century, indulgences are linked to the Church's power and enabled the Church to thrive as an organisation.⁶³ Indulgences presented this desired uniformity, although it quickly became clear that the practice could also take another route.

This chapter will explore why there is a shortage of information on indulgences from the twelfth century, the period in which Follett's novel takes place. It is also aimed at establishing whether the portrayal of indulgences in *Pillars of the Earth* has been influenced by the negative view of indulgences which was dominant in the historical research of the nineteenth and twentieth century. By taking *The Pillars of the Earth*, a fictional work, as a

⁶² Edward Peters, *A Modern Guide to Indulgences: Rediscovering This Often-Misinterpreted Teaching* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2008), 13.

⁶³ D. L d'Avray, *Medieval Religious Rationalities: A Weberian Analysis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 43-44.

literary historical case study, this chapter will show that the addition to medieval fiction Follett has tried to establish can be acknowledged to its fullest extent. Finally, the central question of the novel's representation of the medieval world will be answered completely.

Limits to Pardons: The Thirteenth Century as a Turning Point

In *The Pillars of the Earth*, indulgences provide a means for Philip to get people on his side and to do labour. Is this use of indulgences grounded in historical evidence? The earliest proof of the widespread distribution of indulgences stems from the eleventh century.⁶⁴ As already noted, the indulgence or pardon would, according to the medieval Church, in particular in the twelfth century, decrease the amount of time a person had to spend in Purgatory—a place, in Christian theology, between Heaven and Hell where a person would be punished for sins they had committed throughout life.⁶⁵ In the medieval period, there was a strict difference between performing a deed to receive a sacrament, which sometimes required confession, and deeds to receive a pardon.⁶⁶ When a pardon was distributed, the person receiving it was expected to have already made a confession that was worthy and valuable enough to receive this remission of sinful behaviour. Only a bishop could assign this remission to a person.⁶⁷ This practice stands in sharp contrast to a penance, which any priest was able to assign to a person, as long as they made the necessary confession to receive it. This made the position of bishop an even more powerful post.

When the distribution of pardons significantly increased, it proved very difficult for a person to receive a pardon. Hard work had to be done to be able to receive such a pardon. The first indulgences were granted to people who took up pilgrimages and, especially later on,

⁶⁴ R.N. Swanson, *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 11.

⁶⁵ Peters, *A Modern Guide to Indulgences: Rediscovering This Often-Misinterpreted Teaching*, 13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Swanson, *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, 11.

those who participated in the Church's largest enterprise, the crusades.⁶⁸ One of the earliest examples of indulgences, according to Henry Charles Lea, is that which was granted to those who fought the Moors in Spain who were terrorizing Christian resources.⁶⁹ The people who went to fight off these Moors would have to be able to be pardoned for sins that could be pardoned. People who committed sins that could not be forgiven, according to the Christian doctrine, would not be allowed to participate in the enterprise.⁷⁰ By participating in this mission, a person could receive a pardon for all sins committed after baptism, which suggests that the pope presumed the soldiers marching into battle had not confessed all of such sins beforehand and that the soldiers who would go marching into battle would never have confessed in the first place.⁷¹ By the time the Fifth Crusade is on full steam, people who contributed to the cause of the endeavour alone, but did not actively participate, such as physicians, received a larger pardon than the soldiers.

The Fifth Crusade was organised in 1217, and because it is only several years beyond the timeline of the novel, it is important to look at a crusade that was fuelled by the importance of indulgences to get a complete sense of the historical significance of the practice. Because indulgences played such an important role for this crusade, it is important to acknowledge that the indulgence practice did not become a widespread distribution in a speedy manner, so it must find its foundation in an earlier time period. This justifies the inclusion of the Fifth Crusade into the argument, as this thesis aims to prove the historical accuracy of Follett's novel, by looking back and forth, as earlier mentioned in the introduction. The insertion of indulgences in the story of Follett, taking place in an earlier

⁶⁸ Peters, *A Modern Guide to Indulgences: Rediscovering This Often-Misinterpreted Teaching*, 13.

⁶⁹ Henry Charles Lea, *Auricular Confessions and Indulgences in the Latin Church* (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers, 1896), 197.

⁷⁰ Swanson, *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, 11.

⁷¹ Lea, *Auricular Confessions and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 197.

medieval period, is therefore interesting and presents the reader with yet another important component of the novel's aim at historical accuracy.

Why have modern historians viewed indulgences in such a negative light? The main critique of indulgences is due to the fact that many bishops who used them in the medieval period were trying to financially improve their own position. This is important to include for a complete discussion on the matter of indulgences. As a trade developed surrounding indulgences the people that took part in the trade, had economic benefits. In the later Middle Ages printers benefitted greatly through printing these indulgences in the form of contracts.⁷² Still, historians have not settled to the question as to what extent the indulgence trade was part of everyday life, so it is logical for Follett to only include pardons for getting people to do labour, as it is known from sources that people received such pardons for labour. This fact was stressed earlier on in this thesis with the examples of the rebuilding process of Exeter Cathedral and the support of indulgences to build New Saint Peter's Cathedral.

Follett's novel does not include crusades and their rewards in the form of pardon of sins, although these enterprises were definitely taking place during the timespan of the novel. The only representation of these enterprises of the Church appears in the fifth part of the novel, when Richard offers to join a crusade as a means to do penance. This proves that Follett is well aware of the fact that, in his storyline, crusades were definitely undertaken by people as a means to be pardoned for misdeeds they had committed, especially later on in the medieval period. The story takes place from 1123 to 1174, in which the Second Crusade (1145-1148) plays an important role in the Christian timeline. It is striking, though, that this crusade is not included in Follett's novel, as the largest force that made it to Lisbon actually came from England. On its way to Jerusalem, the troops contributed to a success of the Christian forces to drive out the Moors that were terrorizing Lisbon, as was done roughly a hundred years

⁷² Swanson. *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, 2.

before this Second Crusade, granting people who participated in this endeavour with indulgences. This enterprise, which has an important English side to it, would be known to people living in medieval Christian England, as it is a successful endeavour of the Church and would be stressed in service. Thus, Follett's decision to disregard this important undertaking for the Christian faith is constraining for the novel's aim at historical accuracy.

Although it is outside the scope of this novel, the period leading up to the year 1215, is worth comparing to Follett's story. Indulgences presented a challenge for the medieval Church at this time. Despite efforts from the Church, pardons and indulgences were distributed in large numbers by people who were not even allowed to do so in the first place.⁷³ This practice was seemingly put to an end by 1215, when it was decided that only bishops were, in fact, able to grant pardons for sins.⁷⁴ The difficulty of ending this widespread distribution of indulgences found its basis in the collection of several grants. As a result of people's collection of different pardons, they could confront the Church with the fact they still owned their 'right' of sin reduction.⁷⁵ Why, then, were these indulgences distributed? In general, they were granted to a person when an act was performed that would benefit the Church, whether it was the local cathedral, or a greater act that would let a whole region thrive.

In medieval times and in the novel, as previously mentioned, indulgences are granted to those who helped to rebuild a cathedral. A historical example, such as Exeter cathedral, which was a cathedral that was in crucial need of repair, although it is from a later period in time, proves that people received these pardons for labour they did in medieval times. People that helped during the process were granted indulgences that covered an extensive period of time. The fact that people were doing labour in return for indulgence in the fifteenth century is

⁷³ Swanson, *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, 242.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

proof that the rewarding of pardons in return for labour would have happened earlier on, as indulgences were also granted to people who performed labour on a larger scale, such as participation in crusades, which was of an earlier period in time. Adding to that, the source which indicates how much pardon a person would receive for labour on the Exeter repair, does not state that this was unique, or had not been done before.

And in the novel, too, Philip considers providing indulgences when he is thinking of ways to complete the cathedral of Kingsbridge. However, he disregards this plan because it is not feasible after all. His only effective of implementing pardons into his plan is providing everyone that is willing to fight with a full pardon of all their sins. This is quite unusual, as it was rare that all sins of a particular person would be pardoned. In this, Follett's novel takes artistic license to give Philip's decision more weight, moving away from the aim at historical accuracy in the area of the rewarding of full pardons, while staying close to medieval sources with the rewarding of a pardon for labour.

Contemporaries on Indulgences: Agreement or Mockery?

A contemporary who was aware of, and actively expressed, criticism of indulgences and the ways in which they were distributed is Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer's works attacked indulgences primarily through the use of comedy and humour. This thesis has previously mentioned the mockery of the summoner in *The Friar's Tale*, but this is not the only story in *The Canterbury Tales* in which criticism of the Church is expressed quite overtly. This is seen in the form of the pardoner figure, who tells the group in his prologue that his methods are based on extortion of poor people.⁷⁶ Chaucer lends authority to the statements of the pardoner by having the pardoner connect his allegiance to the Church—by calling the Pope a lord—. By including specific features of feudality, Chaucer makes sure that the medieval reader

⁷⁶ Eugene Vance, "Chaucer's Pardoner: Relics, Discourse, and Frames of Propriety" *New Literary History* 20, no. 3 (1989): 730.

understands that this is a story that takes place within their own environment. This gives us as modern readers the opportunity to get an insight into medieval culture, which is important for the sake of this thesis' argument.

For Chaucer's pardoner, it does not matter whether a person is illiterate; the pardoner will still try to make money out of the people in the tale by abruptly showing the collection of papers he carries with him to a person's face.⁷⁷ By having a person that has very strong ties to the Church act in such a way, Chaucer mocks the way in which he thinks the Church is trying to make money out of poor people. The Church is not depicted as a collective unit in the tale, but it shows a member of this collective behaving in an extremely fraudulent manner. He is also not too hesitant to talk about his ways in which he sells the indulgences:

That no man be so boold, ne preest ne clerk,
 Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk.
 And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
 Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
 Of patriarkes and bishopes I shewe,
 And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
 To saffron with my predicacioun,
 And for to stire hem to devocioun.

[Or hinder in Christ's most holy work. Then I tell stories, as occasion calls, showing forth bulls from popes and cardinals, from patriarchs and bishops; as I do, I speak some words in Latin – just a few – to put a saffron tinge upon my preaching and stir devotion with a spice of teaching.]⁷⁸

(ll. 339 – 347)

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, transl. Nevill Coghill. *The Canterbury Tales* (New York: Penguin Group USA, 2015), 244.

Including the *Canterbury Tales* in a discussion on indulgences is vital, as it is a medieval source that overtly offers criticism on the practices of the pardoners. This section from the tale presents the reader with a view on Chaucer's opinion of indulgences and how the practice functioned within medieval society.

Thus, Chaucer's voice is quite negative of pardons and pardoners. There are, however, also a number of medieval sources that survive, which voice a positive sound on indulgences and the practice. An example of this is Bishop Quivil, also found in documents as Quinel or Peter de Quivel of Exeter, who wrote this piece in 1287 as part of his *Constitutiones*. This is a medieval source which was later on reprinted, which explains the 'modern' language at times:

O marvellous and ineffable loving-kindness of our God, who, although He hath commanded that tithes and firstfruits be yielded to Himself, as to Him who hath the whole earth and the fulness thereof, not for His own profit but for that of His priests...yet doth also, as giver of all good things, reward fourfold with the abundance of His benefits all who fully pay that tithe which He deigneth to receive—to wit, with abundance of harvest, with health of body, with indulgence of their sins, and with the gracious prize of His heavenly kingdom ! Let none therefore, through avarice, lose so great benefits as this.⁷⁹

Needless to say, this was written by a member of the Church, who was inclined to be positive towards the cause of the indulgences, as, in essence, the indulgence started out as a practice of the church. This was, of course, before it became such a widespread distribution which was pointed towards financial gain, as was stressed previously. It is striking to see that already in

⁷⁹ C. G. Coulton, *Social Life In Britain* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 215.

the thirteenth century, indulgences were used in large pieces of texts by bishops to promote their presence in the Catholic church.⁸⁰

The Opinion of an Historian: Corruption of Fiction or a Strong Foundation?

In 1896, a historian by the name of Henry Charles Lea published his *Auricular Confessions and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, a book in which he expresses firm criticism of the occurrence of indulgences in the Catholic church. Lea was known as a believer of the Protestant faith and his book overtly expresses his opinion from a Protestant point of view. It is important to acknowledge that the scholarly work that has been done on indulgences since the publication of Lea's book may have been coloured by Lea's own opinion, as he has long been considered the leading force behind the research on indulgences. For that reason, one should approach the historiographical scholarship on indulgences in the medieval period with caution. In his introduction, though, Lea presents his research as objective and applauds readers that form their own opinions after reading his research:

With this object I have abstained from consulting Protestant writers and have confined myself exclusively to the original sources and to Catholic authorities, confident that what might thus be lost in completeness would be compensated by accuracy and impartiality. (...) I have purposely been sparing of comment, preferring to present facts and to leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.⁸¹

The fact that Lea has to stress that he is not using any Protestant literature is remarkable. Also remarkable is that even though he aims at objectivity, Lea sometimes lets his opinion shine through; he writes, for example, that: "it would be impossible now to determine with accuracy,

⁸⁰ William Abel Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century Based on the Birkbeck Lectures, 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 194.

⁸¹ Lea, *Auricular Confessions and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, v.

but with the tendency of the Church in the Dark Ages to exploit all its powers it is perhaps not unjust to assume that it served as a precursor to indulgences".⁸² His critique on indulgences is mostly aimed at the inefficiency of the system, because in the end, according to Lea, it did not reach its goal; he stresses: "when we come to treat of indulgences, that various popes about this period, in return for services rendered or expected, made indefinite promises of the pardon of sin without reference to the internal disposition of the sinner."⁸³

Lea also examines the lack of information about indulgences in the twelfth century, which is important because it is the time period in which Follett's novel takes place. Lea blames the infrequency of the medieval period, as he titles his subchapter. By infrequency, he means the striking unpredictability of the time period's sources. This is crucial for the ongoing discussion whether indulgences were a disputable business in the medieval world. Lea's work still provides a foundation for most of the research that is done on indulgences and for many literary historians it is a starting point from which further research is done.⁸⁴

It has been established that the parts where Lea voices his own (Protestant-inflicted) opinion can be filtered out of his *Auricular Confessions and Indulgences in the Latin Church*. Although Lea presents his argument to be free of influence through his own Protestant belief, there are still sections in which the subjectivity of his academic register is present. If a scholar is able to distill where Lea's argument is tinged with subjectivity, there is nothing to be afraid of considering the research done on indulgences.

This approach to the sources is similar to Follett's approach of indulgences. Follett does not necessarily depict the practice of indulgences as a negative component of the medieval world, thus he does not seem influenced by the views of historians such Lea. The granting of indulgences simply is a factor which enhances the narrative's aim to include as

⁸² Lea, *Auricular Confessions and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 90.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸⁴ Swanson, *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, 7.

many historically accurate components as possible, while at the same time having to deal with fictional characters that have to engage with these components.

This chapter has shown that indulgences were an important aspect of medieval life. It is crucial to acknowledge the bishops' misuse of indulgences in the later medieval period. Some bishops' motivations were indeed aimed at making money so that they were able to finance their own religious community. This has been portrayed and simultaneously mocked by both contemporaries such as Geoffrey Chaucer, and led to the climax of criticism on the Church, namely Luther pinning down his theses in Augsburg, initiating the Reformation. In this thesis, the scope is limited to the medieval period. It is, however, extremely valuable to be able to see in which way the medieval society and the role of the Church in everyday life contributed towards this inevitable turning point in history.

The role of indulgences in Follett's storyline is interesting, and has been proved in this thesis to be historically accurate by looking at the history of indulgences and their encapsulated role in medieval life. The way in which Follett has incorporated the practice does indeed have a historical basis, when looking at sources from the later medieval period. Follett does not seem to be influenced by the way that Lea describes the manner in which indulgences were, according to Lea falsely, incorporated in medieval society. Kingsbridge remains a vital portrayal of a medieval parish, despite the limited attention for indulgences in a time period in which a pardon would definitely be granted, however, not only in the way as is depicted in the novel. It shows that Follett is well aware of the different aspects of medieval church life, though, at times the fictional author switches duty with the historical accurate author.

Conclusion

My aim with this thesis was to explore a book that, despite its importance in modern culture, has not yet been the subject of extensive literary research. *The Pillars of the Earth* provides a rich background and an original take on the medieval world, in which scandal and drama were inevitably present. The core of thesis was answering the question whether Follett's aim at historical accuracy is achieved through the novel's depiction of medieval financial corruption, power corruption and the corruption of one's faith.

In the first chapter of this thesis, it has been shown that the antagonist of the novel, Waleran Bigod, is the embodiment of financial corruption. Financial corruption in the church environment happened on a large scale, mostly to secure the positions of the churchmen in charge. Two cathedrals, namely New Saint Peter's and Exeter Cathedral, were taken as examples, as the building process of these two churches was supported by the awarding of indulgences.

Chaucer, in the later medieval period, made sure the medieval reader was confronted with financial corruption in *The Canterbury Tales*. In these tales, of which in this chapter *The Friars Tale* was brought forward as an important example, it is shown how society was functioning in a time that financial corruption, thus, was inevitably present. In Follett's novel, Waleran's financial schemes that have as only aim that he is able to benefit from it and build his own residency, has historical basis. Follett, being a journalist, must have had a look at Chaucer, the main best-selling author of the Middle Ages, for inspiration as to how shape his narrative and how he could incorporate this type of corruption into his own novel. Then there is the way in which Kingsbridge functions as a firm. As this chapter has shown, medieval cathedrals and religious society, in fact, functioned as these centralised organizations, in which the parishes formed important hubs within the network. Lastly, medieval transactions

for religious services, such as weddings and funerals, were brought forward as a possible point of risk, which could lead to financial corruption of medieval church officials. These services provided by the Church were not free and this formed an important aspect of the financial support for the medieval Church. The necessity of the financial contribution to the Church is also the case for Kingsbridge. Philip sees himself as a man of God and in his opinion, he does everything in his power to make sure he is acting as one.

The second chapter of this thesis determined the novel's historical accuracy by determining how the abuse of a powerful position within the Church, tended to happen in the Middle Ages. Medieval sources describe members of the Church, in particular judges, committing to the sin of greed. These judges took money from laypeople before, during and after cases. This was condemned by Gratian, a contemporary of the novel and compiler of *Decretum*. The power of the Church is further depicted in the importance of the education provided to the medieval people by the Church. The rules of educating children which were put in place by the Church and were based on the Christian doctrine. Follett includes this type of power the Church possessed in the medieval period through the vision of Jack. This character decides to become a monk, mainly because he is grateful for the education the Church already provided. This indicates that the Church also holds a specific powerful position in Follett's novel, as the chapter has shown. Furthermore, the chapter has shown that illegitimacy was not such a crucial problem in medieval society, whereas in Follett's narrative this is represented through the condemnation of Ellen by the men of Kingsbridge, who claim that Ellen is a with and a fornicator and should therefore be exiled, in accordance with their faith.

Faith forms the foundation for many characters' decisions in Follett's novel, therefore, the corruption of faith formed the core of the third chapter of the thesis. It is the reason why Philip thinks it is vital to build and rebuild the cathedral of Kingsbridge and, as Philip wants

the reader to believe, his sole motivation to act in the way he does. The chapter further depicted how sin functioned in medieval society and what role it played in the social interaction. Such sinful behaviour plays a key role in Follett's novel; it is represented in the novel primarily through the characters of Waleran, Remigius and the Hamleights. It has therefore been useful to categorise what kind of sins are committed in the novel.

Waleran is, strikingly enough, of the same opinion and stresses on multiple occasions that he is acting out of the will of God. As corruption of faith is committed in the novel, it has been useful to establish how Follett has incorporated the measurements of the most important people of the Christian doctrine: the different popes. Although there is definitely mention of the popes contemporary to the story, the most important historical figure is St. Thomas Becket, who would later on be canonized by pope Alexander III.

Lastly, a part of this thesis has been aimed at shedding new light on the existing scholarship on indulgences and making a contribution by comparing the use of indulgences in the medieval Church to the way indulgences are represented in Follett's novel. Although the presence of indulgences in the novel is limited, the way in which Follett has decided to include them is representative of medieval society. Indulgences were in fact assigned to people who were willing to defend the faith, from protecting a church community, such as Kingsbridge, to participating in one of the crusades the popes ordered. It has also been established that a great part of the scholarship is still based on scholarly work by Henry Charles Lea that has been heavily influenced by Lea's views on indulgences, although Follett does not seem to be dramatically influenced by these views.

This thesis' aim was to illustrate the way in which Follett has depicted the medieval church of the twelfth century and answer the question whether this depiction is a valid representation. An answer to this question has been provided in the form of multiple comparisons between Follett's narrative and historical information that is provided to us by

sources. Follett, then, has provided his audience with a valid representation of the medieval world.

During the writing process of this thesis, another part of the now so-called Kingsbridge series was published. *The Pillars of the Earth* and its best-seller sequels *World Without End* and *A Column of Fire* prove that historical fiction continues to spark interest. This thesis has provided a scholarly approach to a book that is definitely worthy of further research, because of its popularity, historical value and cultural enlargement, spawning a TV-series and even a video game. The novel's aim at historical accuracy is perceived in a striking way, through the representation of the different types of corruption present in medieval society. Although this thesis has pointed out that the novel bears a strong resemblance to the medieval source, there is still a great deal of literary research to be done on the novel and the themes it deals with.

It is only fitting to end with a quote from *The Pillars of the Earth*, which perfectly summarizes the way in which Follett has tried to shape his own version of the medieval world. It also perfectly summarizes the fact that although the novel is a work of fiction, it is impressive that the narrative provides the audience with such a rich background on medieval history, all going back to the construction of a cathedral for the priory of Kingsbridge: “[w]hen things are simple, fewer mistakes are made. The most expensive part of a building is the mistakes.”

Bibliography

D'Avray, D. L. *Medieval Religious Rationalities: A Weberian Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Barrow, Julia, ed. by D. M. Palliser. *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 127–52.

Bisson, Thomas N. *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Bryant, Brantley L. “By Extorcions I Lyve”: Chaucers Friars Tale and Corrupt Officials.” *The Chaucer Review* 42, no. 2 (2007): 180-95.

Campbell, James, ed. by D. M. Palliser. *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 51–78.

Chaucer, Geoffrey, transl. Nevill Coghill. *The Canterbury Tales*. New York: Penguin Group USA, 2015.

Clegg, Nancy W., and Clyde G. Reed. “The Economic Decline of the Church in Medieval England.” *Explorations in Economic History* 31, no. 2 (1994): 261-80.

Coulton, C. G. *Social Life In Britain*. Oxford: Routledge, 2014.

Donahue, Charles Jr. *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages: Arguments about Marriage in Five Courts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Evans, Gillian R. *The Church in the Early Middle Ages*. London: Tauris, 2008.

Farmer, David Hugh. "The Oxford Dictionary of Saints (5 rev. ed.)" Oxford University Press. 2011, accessed 07-07-2018. <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-1526>

Follett, Ken. *The Pillars of the Earth*. London: Pan Books, 2007.

Follett, Ken. "Britain's soaring spires that became Ken Follett's Pillars Of The Earth." Mail Online. 28 November 2010, accessed 07-07-2018. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1331731/Salisbury-Cathedral-Ken-Folletts-Pillars-Of-The-Earth.html>.

Goetz, Hans-Werner. "What Is Heretic in Christian Heresies?" *Millennium* 10, no. 1 (2013): 373-84.

Helmholz, R.H.. "Money and Judges in the Law of the Medieval Church." *The University of Chicago Law School Roundtable* no. 8 (2001): 309-469.

"Indulgence for the Repair of Exeter Cathedral." *Camden Old Series* 67 (1857): 218.

Justice, Ginny. "The Role of Indulgences in the Building of New Saint Peter's Basilica" *Master of Liberal Studies Theses* (2011).

Jordan, William Chester. "Anti-corruption Campaigns in Thirteenth-century Europe." *Journal of Medieval History* 35, no. 2 (2009): 204-19.

Lea, Henry Charles. *Auricular Confessions and Indulgences in the Latin Church*. Philadelphia: Lea Brothers, 1896.

Madigan, Kevin. *Medieval Christianity: A New History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.

Mead, William Edward. *The English Medieval Feast*. Tokyo: Athena Press, 2016.

Newhauser, Richard. *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Newhauser, Richard. *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Orme, Nicholas. *Children and the Church in Medieval England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

“summoner.” Oxford Reference. 22 June 2018.

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100542995>.

Pantin, William Abel. *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century Based on the Birkbeck Lectures, 1948*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Peters, Edward. *A Modern Guide to Indulgences: Rediscovering This Often-Misinterpreted Teaching*. Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2008.

Post, Gaines. *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State, 1100-1322*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Schroeder, H. J. "Medieval Sourcebook: Tenth Ecumenical Council: Lateran II 1139."

Sourcebooks, 1937, accessed 04-05-2018. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran2.asp>.

Southern, Richard W. *The Making of the Middle Ages*. London: Pimlico, 2008.

Swanson, R. N. "Indulgences at Norwich Cathedral Priory in the Later Middle Ages: Popular Piety in the Balance Sheet." *Historical Research* 76, no. 191 (2003): 18-29.

Swanson, R.N. *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Tyerman, Christopher. *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*. Penguin: London, 2007.

Vance, Eugene. "Chaucer's Pardoner: Relics, Discourse, and Frames of Propriety." *New Literary History* 20, no. 3 (1989): 723-745.

Wertheimer, Laura. "Illegitimate Birth and the English Clergy, 1198-1348." *Journal of Medieval History* 31, no. 2 (2005): 211-29.