

**Creating the Ideal English Catholic:
Martyrs and Their Scripts in Elizabethan England**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Scripts in Martyrdom Accounts and Martyr Writings	20
Chapter 2: Being Both Catholic and English in Martyrdom Account Framing.....	50
Chapter 3: The Impact of Martyrdom Accounts: Examples, Encouragement, and Constancy	70
Conclusion	82
Bibliography	86

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Introduction

On December 10, 1591, a recently ordained priest of twenty-four or twenty-five years old was drawn to Gray's Inn Fields in London where he was hanged and quartered for the treason of being a Catholic priest in Protestant England. Edmund Gennings had only been in England about a year when he was arrested for saying Mass in the home of gentleman Swithin Wells to a group of fellow Catholics, five of whom were executed in addition to Gennings and Wells. In coming to England in 1590, Gennings joined the Post-Tridentine mission working to minister to the English Catholic community and trying to encourage Protestants to return to the Catholic fold. He specifically desired to find and convert his only living family member, his brother John, away from Protestantism, but when the two finally met, John had nothing but contempt for Edmund and threatened to have him arrested. By 1603, however, John Gennings had produced a draft of what became *The Life and Death of Mr. Edmund Gennings, Priest*, a formal martyrdom account published in 1614. In an almost miraculous turn of events, several days after the death of his brother, John Gennings, who had been rejoicing at Edmund's death as that of an enemy Catholic, found himself struck with horror and remorse at the event. His life's mission quickly became to compile a record of his brother's life, which eventually became one of the relatively few formal accounts published in English relating to the Elizabethan Catholic martyrs.¹

Even in the short 1603 draft of John Gennings's account, Edmund Gennings was portrayed as a bright child who became very devout after his conversion to Catholicism when he

¹ John Geninges, *The Life and Death of Mr. Edmund Geninges, Priest, Crowned with Martyrdome at London on the 10th Day of Nouember, in the yeare M.D.X.C.I.* (S. Omers: Charles Boscard, 1614); John Hungerford Pollen, ed., *Unpublished Documents Relating to the English Martyrs, Vol. 1: 1584-1603* (London: J. Whitehead and Son, 1908), 204-207; Bishop Richard Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests and other Catholics of Both Sexes that Have Suffered Death in England on Religious Accounts from the Year 1577 to 1684, Vol. 1* (Manchester: Mark Wardle, 1803), 143-151.

was about fourteen. He received a dispensation to become a priest at the English College in Douai in the Spanish Netherlands at only twenty-three years of age and soon after returned to England. After being captured by Richard Topcliffe, a famed investigator and torturer of Catholics from the late 1580s until 1595, Gennings and his companions were imprisoned. During this time, the gentleman Wells wrote in a letter to his brother-in-law that “the many future rewards in the heavenly payment make all pains seem... a pleasure.”² The entire group was condemned by jury trial in London, with Gennings and Wells to be executed at Gray’s Inn Fields, located very close to Wells’s house where they had been discovered, while the other five were to be executed at the more common site of Tyburn. As Gennings stood atop the gallows, he was asked to confess his treason and seek the pardon of the queen, to which he replied, “I know not ever to have offended her... If to say mass be treason I confess to have done it and glory in it.”³ This reply incensed Topcliffe to such a great extent that he cut Gennings down almost immediately after he was hanged, leaving Gennings alive as he was disemboweled. Even as the hangman cut out Gennings’s heart, Gennings still cried out for his patron St. Gregory to assist him, much to the astonishment of the hangman and of the crowd.⁴

Over the course of the last twenty-five years of Elizabeth’s reign, around 130 Catholic priests and 60 laymen and women were executed as traitors.⁵ These martyrs became subjects of accounts of all different types, from short statements in letters to formal accounts like that of Gennings. When compared across the period, these accounts paint a very interesting picture of martyrdom and English Catholicism. If one were to examine the account of the first popularized Elizabethan Catholic martyr, Jesuit Edmund Campion, martyred in 1581, or even an account of

² Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 152.

³ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 207.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 204-207; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 143-151.

⁵ The total number varies somewhere between 183 and 193 depending on the source.

gentlewoman Ann Line, martyred in 1601 and one of only three Catholic women, aside from Mary Queen of Scots, to be executed by Protestants during this period, one would discover a remarkable number of similarities between Gennings's account and those of the other martyrs. The Protestant enemy figures change, as do some circumstances based on the backgrounds of the individuals being martyred, but many of the same themes and features recur throughout accounts, both formal and informal, regardless of year, location, or status. Martyrs are virtuous. They look forward to the reward of heaven that follows martyrdom. They are subjected to acts of incredible cruelty at the hands of their Protestant persecutors. Miracles and miraculous events precede and follow their deaths. They reject charges of treason as false and claim that they are being persecuted for their religion. They reaffirm their Catholic faith. The Catholic community in England and in Europe more broadly was not the same in 1580 as it was in 1603, but the scripts that shaped martyrdom discourse and martyrdom accounts remained fairly consistent.

These commonalities in scripts allow the historian to see what influenced English Catholics. Some themes and rhetoric are common to writings dating back to martyrs of the early Church, while other aspects of the accounts are clearly direct responses to particular English Catholic circumstances during this period.⁶ Within the Elizabethan English context, accounts commonly emphasized Catholic practices, particularly recusancy – that is, not attending Protestant church services. The focus on recusancy as a necessary Church practice comes in part from the Continent and contrasts with the financial and practical impossibility of true recusancy for many in England. This disconnect is meaningful when considering potentially conflicting English and Catholic influences in martyrdom accounts. To a similar effect, the most universal feature of these writings, whether in letters, formal accounts, or even Protestant court documents,

⁶ Throughout this thesis “the Church” in the sixteenth century context refers to the Catholic Church, and “the early Church” refers to the early Christian Church.

was the distinction made by Catholics that though they were officially executed for treason, they were not actually traitors.⁷ Protestant officials executed Catholics primarily in accordance with a 1581 statute that made reconciling anyone to the Catholic faith a treasonable offence and, after 1585, a statute that made it treason to be a priest or to harbor a priest in England.⁸ English Catholic martyrs claimed they were victims of religious persecution, just like the early Christians before them, regardless of the charges presented during their trials. This persecution, however, was framed not as the product of Elizabeth or of England, but rather as that of certain other Protestant actors. This was done specifically to allow English Catholics, at least outwardly, to remain faithful to their religion and loyal to their country, demonstrating clearly the tension felt by Catholics between their Englishness and their Catholicism.

That these emphases remained fairly constant throughout the period gave martyrdom a particular place within the Catholic community in England. Even as differences emerged within the Church and despite the different and even conflicting influences that are present in martyrdom accounts themselves, martyrdom and martyrs were still presented in much the same way as they had always been. A more English-centric movement within the community did not emerge in martyrdom accounts, where English and Continental influences are both still present. Martyrs retained the support of the Catholic community regardless of what was happening in the larger Church. Elizabethan Catholic martyrdom was characterized by martyrs and writers of martyrdom accounts following scripts that emphasized a few specific features and themes – recusancy and the mistaken charge of treason in particular – with little change over the period.

⁷ In this thesis, “Protestant” court records, officials, or authorities in the English context refer to those of the English government (either royal, local, or both, depending on the context) enforcing the state Protestant Anglican Church.

⁸ Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 275.

Martyrdom therefore provided a sense of constancy for the English Catholic community even during various conflicts within the Church itself, balancing Continental influences and English identity to set an ideal, personal example for those in England, to serve as a rallying point across the body of the faithful, and to provide continuity with the early Church.

The Catholic community in England during this period has been the subject of a variety of analyses by historians in the past forty or fifty years. John Bossy's comprehensive work on the English Catholic community is foundational, particularly in its examination of the population of missionary priests that began arriving in England in the 1570s.⁹ Christopher Haigh provides another analysis of the entire community over this period, examining it as a continuing body from the reign of Mary I through that of Elizabeth, rather than as a new community developed particularly by the influence of missionaries, as Bossy argues.¹⁰ More recently, Alexandra Walsham has influentially analyzed degrees of recusancy among English Catholics, emphasizing non-recusant Catholics, so-called church papists, as a significant group throughout Elizabeth's reign.¹¹ In a slightly different vein, Lisa McClain has worked to contextualize the experiences of Catholics as part of the Catholic Church in their Protestant surroundings, arguing that Catholic priorities changed over the Elizabethan period to accommodate the harsh realities of living as an illegal minority, as compared to what was desired by the Church on the Continent.¹² Peter Holmes also examines the community as a whole, particularly with regard to political discourse often from the perspective of the most respected English Catholic writers of the day, many of

⁹ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community: 1570-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁰ Christopher Haigh, "The Continuity of Catholicism in the English Reformation," *Past and Present* 93 (1981): 37-69.

¹¹ Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993).

¹² Lisa McClain, *Lest We Be Damned: Practical Innovation and Lived Experience Among Catholics in Protestant England, 1599-1642* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

whom were living on the Continent. Holmes emphasizes the differences of views among English Catholics and how perspectives on how one should engage with the rest of the Catholic community both in England and on the Continent changed over the period.¹³

In many of the works focusing on the English Catholic community as a whole, the position of martyrs and their role in the community is touched on only peripherally. A few historians, however, have more directly focused on this subject. Anne Dillon provides perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of this particular topic, focusing on how martyrs and martyrdom were utilized within the English Catholic community as points of identification. In addition to an examination of martyrdom accounts, including a lengthy analysis of the martyrdom of Margaret Clitherow in 1586 and the account of that martyrdom attributed to John Mush, Dillon analyzes the appearance of English martyrs in artwork and writing on the Continent, particularly looking at the English exiles residing there.¹⁴ Arthur Marotti examines the martyrdoms and legacies of Campion and Robert Southwell (1595) in particular, but he also focuses on martyrdom accounts themselves. Marotti contextualizes these accounts and discusses a few of the commonalities that exist among them as part of his broader discussion of the use of language within the Catholic community.¹⁵ Brad Gregory also thoroughly examines the Elizabethan martyrs, as well as martyrs of a variety of other early modern Christian groups, by analyzing accounts, influences, and impacts of martyrdom from both English and Continental Catholic perspectives.¹⁶ From a slightly different context, though one still important to this

¹³ Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹⁴ Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002).

¹⁵ Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Norte Dame: University of Norte Dame Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*.

analysis, Alison Shell provides a discussion of Catholic oral culture in early modern England. Though not directly linked to a discussion of martyrdom and the English Catholic community, Shell examines some elements of oral culture that form important parts of non-account martyr literature, a body which includes ballads and poems as well as works written by martyrs.¹⁷

Most of these more martyrdom-specific works, however, focus less on the accounts themselves or on the scripts presented within the accounts. While some historians have examined the beliefs and practices central to the community and even the function that martyrdom played in the community, this has not been done by a comparative analysis of martyr accounts and martyr writings spanning this entire period. Dillon analyzes Clitherow as a specific case study, but this analysis focuses almost entirely on the particulars of Clitherow without making any real comparisons to other accounts of the period. In other research, Elizabethan martyrs are automatically treated as one body from which to pull anecdotes to examine martyrs as a part of a larger picture of English Catholicism or as points of identification for the community.¹⁸ Both of these approaches to martyrs are important and are part of this thesis, but in automatically examining martyrs as a single body, one ignores the important conclusions that can be drawn if the accounts are looked at comparatively.

Even Marotti in examining several particular conventions of martyrdom accounts does not consider them from a comparative perspective and, like Dillon, limits his conclusions to what the accounts directly did for the community rather than examining the influences behind the different elements of accounts. My analysis does use quotes and stories from various martyrdom

¹⁷ Alison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Gregory, for example, automatically treats the Elizabethan martyrs as one collective body as he analyzes martyrdom across the period, while McClain uses martyrdom as part of the larger picture of English Catholicism.

accounts, but the purpose of this thesis is to look specifically at how martyrdom and martyrs were framed and described at different times and in different contexts, rather than to look at the martyrs themselves or explicitly at the relationship between Protestants and Catholics. The changes in Catholic attitudes over the period cited specifically by McClain and Holmes are extremely interesting, but they take on even more importance when paired with the martyrdom accounts and martyr literature that were produced over the period.

After developing over the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, the Catholic community that emerged in England during Elizabeth's reign had established relationships with the Church on the Continent and with the English government. As Catholics began to be executed for their faith and the community made them into martyrs through various accounts, these relationships came to the forefront of any martyr literature, both implicitly and explicitly. Using martyrdom and martyrdom accounts as a lens through which to view the Catholic community, and vice versa, affords the historian interesting perspectives which cannot be found regarding the earlier Henrician martyrs, not least because few, if any, contemporary accounts were written about those martyrs. Elizabethan martyrdom accounts illustrate the priorities of an illegal minority Catholic community, as well as how this English Catholic community related to the Church on the Continent. In the reverse, using these communities as the starting point for considering martyrdom and martyrdom accounts is equally helpful in attempting to truly understand English Catholics during this period. This story of propaganda and issue framing needs to be told from a primarily Catholic perspective; however, a counterbalancing Protestant frame of reference is also essential to better understand the context in which martyrdom occurred.

My primary method of research for this project was a close reading of various martyrdom accounts and martyr documents. I was particularly interested in discovering which themes and

types of language were repeated in various accounts and other sources and whether these ideas remained consistent or shifted over the period. I used martyrdom accounts and martyr writings written between about 1580 and 1603 when possible, as well as accounts drawn specifically from sources written during the period to supplement the original sources. Moving beyond the direct primary source material, I placed martyrdom in context within the Catholic community by looking at how martyrdom accounts and writings responded to events within the Elizabethan Catholic community during the period. I focused particularly on how accounts represented different concerns for Catholics in England and on the Continent and whether accounts considered these concerns separately or together. Based on the frequency of use of various themes and emphases and how these themes fit within the broader context of English Catholicism in this period, I have drawn conclusions about the role of martyrdom in this community and in the broader European Catholic community as a whole.

Source Material

Accounts of Elizabethan Catholic martyrdom survive in a variety of sources, some formal, others casual, some written in the sixteenth century, others assembled hundreds of years after the fact. This body of primary and older secondary material includes individual or compiled martyrdom accounts published as printed works in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but many accounts did not exist beyond letters or short references until many years later. During the mid-eighteenth century, Bishop Richard Challoner compiled accounts of all, or at least most, martyrs from the period including the locations and years of their deaths, along with as much personal information as was possible for each martyr. Originally published in 1741 and reedited in 1803, the records in the first volume of Challoner's *Memoirs of Missionary*

Priests and Other Catholics of Both Sexes that have Suffered Death in England on Religious Accounts from the Year 1577 to 1684 were primarily written by Challoner based on sources in the archives of the English College in Douai, but he also often cites large sections of text from original accounts or letters.¹⁹ Jesuit John Hungerford Pollen in the early twentieth century released a collection titled *Unpublished Documents Relating to the English Martyrs*, which included letters, formal and informal martyrdom accounts, unofficial martyrologies, and Protestant court records.²⁰ John Morris, another Jesuit, in 1877 released volumes of collected documents titled *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers Related by Themselves*, which included, among other descriptions of persecution, the full account of the life and martyrdom of Margaret Clitherow originally written by seminary priest John Mush.²¹ Similarly, a full account of the life and martyrdom of Robert Southwell drawn from various sources was included in the first volume of *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus* edited by Jesuit Henry Foley in 1877.²² That these collections exist is certainly important, but of greater interest is what kinds of accounts are present in these collections and elsewhere and where these accounts came from originally.

Martyrdom in England was closely linked to Catholic central authorities on the Continent, both English Catholic exiles and the Church hierarchy in Rome. Catholics in England,

¹⁹ Edwin Hubert Burton, *The Life and Times of Bishop Challoner (1691-1781), Vol. I* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 160; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*. In this thesis I have used Challoner's list of 186 (or 187 including one layman listed only in his appendix) martyrs as my sample for quantitative and geographic purposes, though other sources place the number higher or lower. I also use Challoner's spellings for names of individual martyrs and his years for dating executions, though these years are disputed by other sources.

²⁰ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*.

²¹ John Morris, ed., *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers Related by Themselves: Third Series* (London: Burns and Oates, 1877).

²² Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus: Historic Facts Illustrative of the Labors and Sufferings of its Members in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Vol. I* (London: Burns and Oates, 1877).

either eyewitnesses or individuals who had heard from eyewitnesses, wrote to friends and authority figures the Continent identifying and providing background information about individual martyrs, while also describing the actual events of executions. Priests and others living in England specifically went out of their way to learn the identities and circumstances of martyrs so they could better inform the rest of the Catholic community. Letters often informally recounted martyrdoms, making them an extremely important source for examining how the Catholic community in England itself viewed martyrdom.²³ These letters traveled through Catholic channels, most often by way of priests or noble families, which disseminated the accounts throughout England and to the Continent.²⁴ Some English Catholics on the Continent, particularly Jesuits including Robert Southwell, martyred in 1595, and Henry Garnet, convicted in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, received these letters and compiled informal martyrologies using whatever information they could gather from the letters sent from England.²⁵ Instrumental in the spread of these letters was the path traveled by English laymen who became priests on the Continent and returned to England as missionaries. A seminary in Douai in the Spanish Netherlands (now France), which moved to Rheims, France from 1578 until 1593, was purposed with producing Catholic priests from England who returned to the Continent in great numbers to serve their communities back in their home counties or elsewhere in England.²⁶ The Jesuits, as a specifically missionary organization based in Rome, had a more complex network for the transportation of both people and information to and from England.²⁷ Returning to England with

²³ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 288-289; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*.

²⁴ Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 70; McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 151.

²⁵ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 57, 140, 191-194, 227, 288-293.

²⁶ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 2; Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 288.

²⁷ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 288.

these new priests were letters but also, on occasion, some formal martyrdom accounts written in English for the consumption of the English public.

The most prominent of these accounts were those describing the martyrdom of Edmund Campion, the first well-documented English martyr, a popular missionary figure on the Continent before his trip to England, an excellent apologist for the Catholic faith, and, perhaps most importantly, a Jesuit. Protestant records show individuals arrested in possession of accounts of Campion's martyrdom brought to England from the Continent to be distributed to Catholics in England.²⁸ A formal account of Campion's martyrdom was written in England not long after the event by eyewitness and future martyr Thomas Alfield.²⁹ Alfield's account became the basis for a longer and more comprehensive martyrology written by Cardinal William Allen on the Continent covering the martyrs from 1581 to 1582, titled *A brief history of the glorious martyrdom of xii reverend priests, executed vwithin these tvveluemonethes for confession and defence of the catholike faith. But vnder the false pretence of treason.*³⁰ Printed martyrologies like Allen's were shipped to England and disseminated.³¹ The account of the life and martyrdom of Edmund Gennings, as mentioned above, was formally published more than two decades after the fact, but drafts were in circulation more than ten years before its actual publication.³² Formal accounts published in England were comparatively rare, but they did exist. The first accounts of Margraet Clitherow's martyrdom appeared just a few months after her death, and an official

²⁸ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 27-28.

²⁹ Alfield, *A true reporte of the death & martyrdome of M. Campion Iesuite and preiste, & M. Sherwin, & M. Bryan preistes, at Tiborne the first of December 1581 Observid and written by a Catholike preist, which was present therat Wheruuto is annexid certayne verses made by sundrie persons* (London, 1582).

³⁰ Allen, *A brief history of the glorious martyrdom of xii reverend priests, executed vwithin these tvveluemonethes for confession and defence of the catholike faith. But vnder the false pretence of treason* (1582); Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 291-292.

³¹ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 151.

³² Geninges, *The Life and Death of Edmund Geninges*; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 204.

account attributed to John Mush was also written in England, though it differs in various ways from some other accounts of her martyrdom that were circulated at the time.³³

On the whole, however, the majority of the formal accounts were published on the Continent due to the simple fact that it was much easier to do so there. The English press, controlled by the government and the church through a specific process for licensing to prevent the publishing of “heretical” or “seditious” material, ensured that Catholic literature could not be produced legally there.³⁴ Protestant authorities were very concerned with Catholic writing of any kind, as will be discussed in chapter 2. Alfield himself was eventually executed in 1585 for the spreading of Catholic books, particularly those by Cardinal Allen.³⁵ In the absence of persecution from Protestants, Catholics had much more freedom on the Continent and were more easily able to produce and consume these accounts. A larger number of accounts and other pieces of martyr literature from the Continent exist published in Latin, French, and Italian rather than English.³⁶ While some of these accounts may have been intended for consumption by the educated in England, it is more likely that these documents were primarily produced for a Continental audience. Artwork depicting the martyrs also began to appear on the Continent in a way that did not occur in England, since government control of the press would have made it impossible.³⁷

³³ John Mush, “A True Report of the Life and Martyrdom of Margaret Clitherow,” in *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers Related by Themselves: Third Series*, ed. John Morris (London: Burns and Oates, 1877); Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 279.

³⁴ D. M. Loades, “The Theory and Practice of Censorship in Sixteenth-Century England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 24, (1974): 154-155.

³⁵ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 92.

³⁶ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 289. For a more comprehensive analysis of Continental martyrologies, see A. G. Petti, “Richard Verstegan and Catholic Martyrologies of the Later Elizabethan Period,” *British Catholic History* 5, no. 2 (1959): 64-90.

³⁷ See Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, chapters 3-5, 114-276.

Continental Catholics in general had no contemporary martyrs to look to themselves, so they focused on the English martyrs as fellow members of the body of the faithful.³⁸

In addition to formal and informal accounts of martyrdom, references were also made to martyrs in ballads and poetry. Alfield's account of Campion's martyrdom ends with several poems glorifying Campion's death and the future rewards awaiting Campion in heaven.³⁹ Schoolteacher and future martyr Robert White wrote many carols in support of the faith, and John Ingram, martyred in 1594, wrote epigrams while he was in prison.⁴⁰ Jesuit Robert Southwell also wrote many works of poetry, several of which reference specific points of Catholic belief.⁴¹ Numerous ballad writers also took martyrdom on as subject matter for a variety of purposes.⁴² These poems and ballads can be used to better describe the position of martyrdom and martyrs in England, and in the Catholic community more broadly, as well as to provide another avenue for analyzing which beliefs were of the most importance to English Catholics during this period.

Many of the martyrs themselves also produced a variety of writings including treatises and simple letters, which give more context to the plight of Catholics in England, the influence of the missionary communities based in Douai and in Rome, and the actual circumstances of some individual martyrs. Many statements made by martyrs in letters serve to underscore particular points emphasized by the Church, including the value and glory of martyrdom itself. Southwell was particularly prolific, producing a massive quantity of writings from before he was

³⁸ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 297.

³⁹ Alfield, *A true report*, 18-26.

⁴⁰ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 90-99, 270-282.

⁴¹ Arthur Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 28.

⁴² Shell, *Oral Culture*, 114-148.

inducted into the Jesuits at age sixteen up until his death many years later.⁴³ Catholic letters were a particular priority for Protestants concerned about Catholic conspiracies against the Protestant government, as evidenced by the insistence of Protestant authorities on acquiring letters from Catholics who had been arrested.⁴⁴

Protestants provide another source of information related to the martyrs. English Protestant court records include statements regarding arrests, trials, and interrogations, which are certainly as filled with pro-Protestant rhetoric as Catholic martyrdom accounts are filled with pro-Catholic rhetoric, but which serve to confirm words and actions of the martyrs. Accounts of trials and other events that parallel Catholic martyrdom accounts use much of the same kinds of language and follow the same structure. From these records, it seems almost as though the Protestants were following the same scripts the Catholics were using, with certain Protestant questions always receiving the same Catholic answers in both Protestant and Catholic accounts. These correlations in scripts add validity to accounts and prominence to the themes that appear in both types of documents. The Protestant documents, as well as letters written between different Protestant authorities, also demonstrate the priorities of the Protestants with regard to the Catholic population of England; most obviously, the Protestants saw Catholics, and particularly Catholic priests, as more Catholic than English and consequently threats to England and to Elizabeth.

The amount of information available regarding each martyr varies significantly. Those with formal accounts, like Campion, Clitherow, and Gennings, are the most easily accessible, and Jesuits in general are typically the subjects of more documents, as their religious order had a

⁴³ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 294-332; Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 304-307; Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 26.

⁴⁴ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 126, 226-227.

better-established communications network and a fairly significant presence, particularly in London. Martyrs who produced larger quantities of writings, most often Jesuits, also typically have more information surrounding them. The amount of time an individual martyr spent in England ministering to the population also influenced the amount of writing about that martyr, particularly among Protestants, with Catholic priests that had been in England for years evading capture serving as the subjects of numerous Protestant letters and court documents. There are also more documents, including formal and informal accounts and letters, relating to earlier martyrs than later martyrs; after 1595 particularly, the number of documents decreases.⁴⁵

Challoner's extensive records of all of the Elizabethan martyrs provide very scant entries for many of the martyrs, more often lay people, though this was not true in all cases. Many martyrs in Challoner's compilation are only mentioned in passing, though he does manage to attach a rough date and location of execution to every martyr.⁴⁶ Morris, in footnotes in his compilation of recusant documents a century later, makes corrections to the dating of a few of Challoner's martyrs; however, Challoner's information still remains some of the most comprehensive and valuable for looking at the entire body of martyrs in this period, rather than just the ones who had the most support or who were the most prolific.⁴⁷

An important qualification when working with these accounts is that the line between truth and fiction is often blurry. Much of the rhetoric used in the accounts was extremely negative toward Protestants, meaning an amount of it was likely mere anti-Protestant propaganda. In some cases, however, that rhetoric can be compared to accounts of Protestant actions, which – regarding official court documents at least – might have more of a basis in fact.

⁴⁵ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*.

⁴⁶ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, Preface.

⁴⁷ Morris, *Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers*, 224, 355.

The words allegedly said by many martyrs in trials or at the gallows are very similar in many accounts, but this could be due to a shared script by writers of accounts, a shared script by the martyrs themselves, or perhaps portions of both. The fact that Challoner compiled the only extant accounts for many of these martyrs also adds another possibility for inaccuracies and similarities imposed by the author. Statements and actions corroborated by Protestant court records have more validity, but these documents are similarly stained with biases.

Accounts of martyrdom in letters, though containing many of the same elements as more formal accounts, were generally less filled with praise of the martyrs and instead sought primarily to recount the most important facts: the name of the martyr, the location and reason for the martyrdom, and any additional interesting or identifying details. The mere proximity of these accounts to the actual martyrdoms seems to lend to their objectivity in most cases, though accounts in letters are also more likely to be missing basic information than later accounts, and details in letters are still often second- or third-hand before they are actually written down. The fact that accounts in letters contain less fabrication, however, does not take away from the importance of more distant accounts that might contain inaccuracies and exaggerations. In analyzing the scripts present in these accounts, it is of less importance what was actually said than what was spread throughout the community at the time. Similarities in words and actions as presented in scripts are of importance in and of themselves, regardless of the accuracy of the accounts. When taken together, these various accounts, accurate or not, form a comprehensive and coherent collection of works that can be used to examine recurring themes and determine the function and impact of martyrdom within the English Catholic community.

Structure

This thesis begins with an examination of martyrdom accounts and martyr scripts themselves. I look first at the construction and framing of martyrdom, which was based in circumstances related to the Reformation and in early Church history, before turning to a variety of aspects that are common in martyr scripts across the entire period. These thematic commonalities are present in words martyrs said as well as language used by the writers of the letters and accounts, though all qualities are not present in all accounts. In addition to the central emphases on recusancy and the Catholic denial of treason, these features range from propaganda-esque denunciations of Protestants, to emphases on particular aspects of martyrdom itself, such as disputations between Catholics and Protestants and scaffold speeches, to expressions of Catholic virtue accompanied by the elimination of any negative language, to invocations of Christ, the saints, and the reward of heaven. Some of these themes appear in accounts of early Church persecution, but other emphases were newly created in response to the specific circumstances that Catholics had to contend with in England at this time. I also look at the changes that occur in the scripts over the period, most often due to decrees or particularly important events that had repercussions on the treatment of Catholic martyrs.

Following my analysis of the accounts, I examine the different priorities promoted by the Church on the Continent and the Church in England and how these priorities run up against one another in the features of martyrdom accounts. The Catholic Church based on the Continent placed a heavy emphasis on maintaining Catholic practices as much as possible and more explicitly resisting the Protestantism of England. At the same time, however, the Church in England was faced with a reality in which retaining the functions of Catholic practices whenever possible was the primary concern, and any political conflicts between England and the Catholic

Church were of much less importance. Since nearly all of the Elizabethan martyrs had spent some time on the Continent, this influence was certainly important, as seen in the prominence of recusancy in the accounts. This Continental aspect of martyrdom, and of the Catholic community in general, was reinforced by the actions and beliefs of Protestant officials who consistently questioned Catholic prisoners about the threat of Catholic or other foreign invasion. Many Catholic martyrs, however, were far more concerned with administering sacraments, performing confessions, and saying masses than they were with the affairs of the non-English Catholic Church.

Finally, I explore the impact of martyrdom on the Catholic community in England. As distinctly English martyrs living in the same conditions as other Catholics in England, the martyrs served as examples and influences for the community in a variety of ways. The accounts and scripts reinforced Catholic practices related to the saints and to relics and particularly encouraged recusancy. The narrative presented in martyrdom accounts worked to tie the Elizabethan Catholic community to the persecuted early Church. Martyrdom, as a point of constancy across the period, also served to better unite the Catholic community both in England and on the Continent, even as certain groups within the Church found themselves to some degree of conflict with one another. The reality of martyrdom served as a rallying point and a form of encouragement for English Catholics to maintain their faith, while not forcing them to forsake their national identities.

Chapter 1: Scripts in Martyrdom Accounts and Martyr Writings

The scripts present in martyrdom accounts and martyr writings contain many common themes, which will be identified in this chapter and further analyzed in the following two chapters. These scripts had to be constructed in the specific context of Elizabethan persecution, drawing both from traditional accounts of Catholic martyrdom and from the actual circumstances in which Catholics found themselves in England. The result was an array of repeated themes that appear in various sources from across the period. These themes can be divided up into those that appear commonly in early Christian accounts and those that have their primary basis in sixteenth century circumstances. Not all themes are present in all accounts, but examples of each theme examined in this chapter can be found in accounts throughout the period, rather than in just a few years during the period. This consistency will be considered more explicitly in chapter 3. Additionally, this chapter examines aspects of these martyrdom accounts that do change across the period, generally based on specific historical events and the circumstances of individual martyrs rather than any changing religious or political ideas.

Script Construction

Catholics in England had experienced persecution under Henry VIII, but this persecution was of a different character within the community than the later persecution under Elizabeth. The Church of England was only in its initial stages of development when the first Catholics were killed under Henry, and no one knew precisely what the final product of the English Reformation would be. Henry's religion looked much like Catholicism, and the various acts and statements on religion released by Henry and his government went back and forth on various Catholic doctrines. Some Catholics spoke out in defense of their faith in the face of a new religion – Sir

Thomas More serving as the most famous example – and clergy and nobles in the north embarked on the short-lived Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536. Many other Catholics, however, stayed quiet, waiting to see what would happen.¹ Consequently, few formal accounts of Henrician martyrs existed in England until Elizabeth's reign; even More, well-known and prominent on Henry's court, was left without an account until Mary's reign.² The Protestantism of England developed further under Edward VI, but over the course of his very short reign, no Catholics were executed. When Elizabeth took the throne following Mary's five years of rapid Protestant heretic burning, the Church of England fairly quickly laid out a coherent and consistent religious settlement that, particularly as Elizabeth's reign progressed, showed no signs of changing.³ Catholics were left in a position of either conforming to or resisting the state religion, as government policies gradually grew harsher toward Catholics.

Following the Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563, the Catholic Church began to establish new priorities that specifically affected the Church in England. The Church placed a greater emphasis on missionary work, which included the ministry to England.⁴ As the perceived threat of Catholics to the Protestant government grew in the late 1570s and early 1580s, Catholics began to be executed for treason that was unrelated to actual traitorous movements like the Northern Rebellion of 1569.⁵ The Catholic community was not initially prepared to address this new martyrdom. The first martyr of this period, Cuthbert Mayne, was executed in 1577 in Launceston, Cornwall, a good distance away from London where the Catholic community was

¹ Alec Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation: The Tudor and Stewart Realms, 1485-1603* (London: Routledge, 2013), 139-140, 142-143.

² Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 254-255, 259-260.

³ Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation*, 199; Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 34-35.

⁴ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 274.

⁵ Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation*, 247-248.

stronger and where most of the first Catholic executions occurred.⁶ Everard Hanse was executed in 1581 at Tyburn in London, but since Protestants had access to legal printing while Catholics did not, Protestants immediately controlled any account of his martyrdom.⁷ English Catholics in positions of authority, mostly in exile on the Continent, refused to allow this to happen with the next martyrs, so priest and future martyr Thomas Alfield was specifically tasked with witnessing and recording the executions of Jesuits Edmund Campion and Alexander Brian and secular priest Ralph Sherwine. Alfield's account and the subsequent account of the martyrs of 1581 and 1582 by Cardinal William Allen on the Continent constitute the first formal martyrdom accounts in this period.⁸

In the creation of these accounts, the English Catholic Church was without contemporary precedent. While Mary had executed somewhere around 300 Protestants for heresy during her reign, the execution of Catholics on the Continent at this time had not really occurred. More centralized states that would have been able to execute Catholics on a large scale, like France and Spain, were Catholic, while most Protestant areas on the Continent did not have this highly centralized authority. In an even more unique context, these Elizabethan Catholics were being executed for treason rather than for any sort of religious crime. In these circumstances, Catholic writers and Catholic martyrs created their own scripts that were used to describe martyrs and martyrdom, since there were no pre-existing, contemporary scripts for them to use.⁹

⁶ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 7.

⁷ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 19; Alfield, *A true reporte*, 4.

⁸ Alfield, *A true reporte*; Allen, *A briefe historie*; Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 14.

⁹ Sir Thomas More and others before the English Reformation had written treatises regarding the qualifications for what constituted martyrdom; however, these writings were more concerned with differentiating between true and untrue martyrs than with formulating ways to discuss martyrdom in accounts. Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom*, chapter 1: The psuedomartyr debate, 18-71.

These scripts were not entirely the new creations of Elizabethan Catholics; rather, martyrdom accounts and martyr writings from this period share many thematic similarities with martyrs of the early Church. Patristic writers were still influential in the sixteenth century Church, directly connecting the two periods, and persecuted Elizabethan Catholics looked to early Christian martyrs as examples of true faith, comparing their suffering in England to the suffering of members of the early Church, particularly its martyrs.¹⁰ Some Catholic writers wrote prayers to this effect, one asking God to allow the community “to imitate the holy martyr St. Stephen... that by his example [they] may learn patiently to suffer persecution.”¹¹ Martyr John Ingram, executed in 1594, quoted second and third century theologian Tertullian in saying, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” explicitly demonstrating the influence that early Christianity exercised on the Elizabethan Catholics.¹² The accounts of early Church martyrs are typically as formulaic as those of Elizabethan martyrs, though the emphases and framing are slightly different. The Catholic writers and martyrs took the prototypical martyrdom account, which originated as early as the account of Jesus’s crucifixion in the Gospels, and updated and added new elements to the script to accommodate the particulars of Catholicism under Elizabeth.

Martyrdom Scripts

There are a variety of thematic elements and emphases that occur across martyrdom accounts. Some elements concern the framing of the narratives and common uses of particular types of language, while others consider the actions of individuals that are emphasized. Still

¹⁰ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 280-281; McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 236-237.

¹¹ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 239.

¹² Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 172; Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, (197 CE), Chapter 50, section 13. Today, Tertullian’s quote is more often translated “the blood of Christians is seed.” Tertullian, “Tertullian: Apology” in *After the New Testament, 100-300 CE*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 99.

other key themes pertain to the priorities of the Church in England and how Catholics responded to them. In laying out the various continuities, I first examine the themes that are present in early Christian martyrdom accounts, looking at how these themes were used by the Elizabethan martyrs. Nearly all the themes in this first category were adapted in some capacity to fit the Elizabethan context; however, they are similar enough to their traditional counterparts to merit comparison. I then examine the themes and emphases that have less of a basis in the early Church. This distinction is similarly not entirely clear-cut, with some aspects still having tenuous connections to early martyrdom, but these connections are less pronounced than those aspects in the first category. Two themes in this second category are of the most importance to the central argument of this thesis: the importance of recusancy as a Catholic practice and the constant and insistent Catholic argument that they had not committed treason, regardless of their formal charges, but instead were being persecuted purely for religion.

Early Church Themes

One of the more central emphases across martyrdom accounts is that of the virtue of each individual martyr. This virtue was demonstrated through a variety of sources and takes a variety of forms, with the effect of almost or actually turning martyrs into saints. This saint-making was reminiscent of the early Church where perhaps the simplest avenue to sainthood was through martyrdom and where martyrs were upheld by Christian communities as examples for belief and behavior. The emphasis on virtue was often demonstrated by turning martyrs into archetypical saint characters. Margaret Clitherow served as a prime example of these saint archetypes. She was shown as being virtuous in a way that anyone in England at the time could be virtuous, with

saints' lives as the basis for how her life was portrayed.¹³ This sort of everyday virtue was common in accounts of laypeople, though it was also at the heart of accounts of priests as well.

Martyrs of all different types were described as possessing virtue, though this virtue was described differently for different martyrs. Some martyrs had been in England for years before they were arrested and condemned, while others had been there less than a year, or in the case of Henry Walpole, a Jesuit martyred in 1595, as short as twenty-four hours.¹⁴ Despite the differences in time, all martyrs were significant in Catholic accounts, though certainly Protestants paid more attention to some of the Catholics who had been in England for longer amounts of time.¹⁵ There were also differences in education and status among martyrs, with better-educated priests typically receiving more praise than less-educated servants. In 1588, Nicholas Garlick and Robert Ludlam, uncompromisingly Catholic priests, were compared positively to Richard Sympson, their fellow martyr and priest who had defected from the faith and served as a Protestant minister for a time.¹⁶ Regardless, all three men were included in an ode written by an eyewitness, the lines about Sympson reading, "And what if Sympson seem'd to yield / For doubt and dead to die / He rose again, and won the field / And died most constantly."¹⁷ Martyrs acquired importance and virtue merely by being martyrs.

To best emphasize martyr virtue, some accounts began with the childhood or earlier life of martyrs. Edmund Gennings was described as a boy "of modest behavior" who "much

¹³ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 281; Mush, "A True Report," 368-409.

¹⁴ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 183. Walpole was tortured extensively by Topcliffe after his arrest, but he had been in England less than a day before he was captured by authorities.

¹⁵ Monfield Scot, for example, had been in England for roughly 14 years when he was arrested, and Topcliffe boasted at his execution that "the queen and kingdom were highly obliged to him for having apprehended and brought to the gallows a priest so devout and so mortified."

Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 141.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

delighted to view the heaven and stars.”¹⁸ John Finch, martyred in 1584, “was ever from his chylhdhode of a courteous and gentle nature.”¹⁹ Robert Southwell at age sixteen traveled to Rome with the specific purpose of joining the Jesuits, though the group did not admit him initially due to his young age.²⁰ Conversion stories were popular ways to begin more formal accounts. Gennings’s life includes an account of his conversion.²¹ The account of James Bell, martyred in 1584, described how he, an older priest who had served under Mary and had then been part of the Protestant clergy, regained both spiritual and physical health after his confession signifying his return to the Church.²²

The accounts also specifically reference particular qualities or descriptions of martyrs that reflected their virtue. James Fenn, martyred in 1584, was described as possessing “modesty of countenance” and a “tranquility of soul,” while Edward Stransham, martyred in 1586, was commended for his “remarkable zeal and piety.”²³ 1591 martyr Monfield Scot was depicted as meek, his knees made “hard by the assiduity of his prayer,” demonstrating very obviously Scot’s virtue of prayerfulness.²⁴ William Hart, martyred in 1583, was praised for his devotion to the rosary and his charity toward others.²⁵ Another common virtue was a strong faith, demonstrated, as we have already seen, by Robert Southwell. Virtue was not only applied to martyrs themselves; even pious relations of martyrs were lauded. The account of layman John Finch

¹⁸ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 205.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁰ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 304-309. Southwell then wrote a lengthy letter describing his pain and suffering as even greater than that of Agar (also spelled Hagar, Abraham’s servant and the mother of Ishmael) wandering in the desert, stating, “who more than I can be consumed with grief and mourning?” The Jesuits evidently took this dramatic proclamation to heart and admitted Southwell not too long after their initial rejection.

²¹ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 206.

²² Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, 80, 97.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

placed a particular emphasis on the virtue of Finch's wife, and the wife of Swithin Wells, arrested with her husband in 1591 but not condemned, was described as suffering a "more lingering martyrdom in prison."²⁶

Virtue manifested itself in praise from others, Protestants and Catholics alike. In the account of Clitherow, the sentiment of the area with regards to Clitherow was that "everyone loved her."²⁷ Even Protestants who saw the execution of Monfield Scot admired his "constancy... modesty, and spiritual joy."²⁸ A Protestant bystander at the 1590 execution of Antony Middleton called out to Middleton that he had spoken well on the gallows.²⁹ When William Davies was sentenced to death in Wales in 1593, authorities found it almost impossible to get anyone to actually perform the execution because the people of the town "had conceived so great an opinion of the sanctity of Mr. Davies and so great a veneration of him."³⁰ 1595 martyr William Freeman's martyrdom account claimed that "never a one of the standers by... spake any word against hym" and that one witness said that "he thought [Freeman's] soule was in heaven."³¹

Accounts were also interested in how individual martyrs, priests in particular, had benefited the faith community in England. Saying Mass and hearing confessions were commonplace for priests that had been in England long enough to have fully established themselves within a specific community. A usual expression repeated in accounts for priests participating in the mission to England was that they were "laboring in the vineyard" producing

²⁶ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 79; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 151.

²⁷ Mush, "A True Report," 403.

²⁸ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 141.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

³¹ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 360.

“fruit,” saving souls and performing pastoral duties.³² As described earlier, Edmund Gennings was arrested while saying Mass in the home of a Catholic Londoner, and similar circumstances were described relating to other martyrs such as John Cornelius, martyred in 1594.³³ The writing of treatises was also emphasized in accounts, with Campion and Southwell serving as the most prominent examples for Catholic writing.

Another common action demonstrating virtue was converting others, often while in prison. William Pattenson converted six out of seven of his fellow prisoners the night before his execution in 1592. James Fenn, by accounts, also reconciled many of his fellow prisoners, including pirates, to the faith during his two years’ imprisonment before his martyrdom. George Nicols, martyred in 1589, was said to have reconciled a highwayman to the faith during the course of his time in England.³⁴ These actions did not have to be done by priests. Layman John Duckett, martyred in 1602, converted others using Catholic literature he had hidden in his possession, and gentleman Swithin Wells was said to have had “particular talent for bringing over heretics.”³⁵ Margaret Ward, a laywoman, was arrested in 1588 for smuggling a rope to an imprisoned priest and aiding in his escape.³⁶ Unusual Catholic skills were also highlighted in some accounts; those of Robert Dibdale, martyred in 1586, and John Cornelius provided descriptions of exorcisms both men had performed, most often for noble families.³⁷

³² Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 99, 104, 105, 169, 176.

³³ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 156, 80-81, 131.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 217, 226.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 101-102, 166.

Perhaps the most explicit demonstration of virtue was in the desire for martyrdom expressed by many before their deaths.³⁸ A “desire” for martyrdom needed to be tempered with some degree of humility; William Gunter, martyred in 1588, expressed this sentiment, saying, “I am not worthy to suffer so much as those martyrs that have gone before me.”³⁹ Various martyrs were extolled for their desire for martyrdom, including Margaret Clitherow, Ann Line (1601), and Richard Thirkill (1583).⁴⁰ Christopher Buxton, martyred in 1588, stated that “if he had a hundred lives he would willingly lay them all down in defense of his faith.”⁴¹ Martyrs hoped that their deaths would help the cause. George Haydock demonstrated this in his last statement on the gallows in 1584: “I pray my blood may increase the Catholick faith in England.”⁴²

These actions continued while individuals were arrested and even up until their actual executions. While Catholics were in prison, a common practice, particularly with martyrs in the 1580s, was disputations between Catholics and Protestants, ostensibly to give the Protestants a chance to make themselves look smarter than their Catholic counterparts. In martyrdom accounts, however, it was always the Catholics, severely disadvantaged by torture or other persecution, who outperformed the Protestants. Edmund Campion was particularly good at these debates, and Protestants stopped setting up disputations with him after the first few because of his successes.⁴³ John Nutter was described as performing well in debates even while incredibly ill before his execution in 1584, and George Nicols was said to have performed so well in a

³⁸ A “desire” for martyrdom must be distinguished from an individual actually “seeking out” martyrdom, which had been frowned upon in the Catholic Church since the days of the early Christian persecution.

³⁹ Christopher Green, “An Ancient Editor’s Notebook,” in *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers Related by Themselves: Third Series*, ed. John Morris (London: Burns and Oates, 1877), 37.

⁴⁰ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 214, 71.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴² Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 61.

⁴³ Allen, *A briefe history*, 59-60.

disputation that the Protestants changed tactics.⁴⁴ Being able to debate Protestants was not in and of itself an essential skill for virtuous Catholics; rather, what was important was that the martyrs at least understood what they were dying for. The account of priest John Robinson, martyred in 1588, expressed this sentiment by stating that “if [John] could not dispute his faith as well as some others, he could die for it as well as the best.”⁴⁵ The same was true of layman Humphrey Prichard, martyred in 1589, who said that while he could not properly explain Catholicism “in terms of divinity,” he certainly “knew what it was to be a catholic.”⁴⁶

During executions themselves, martyr virtue was expressed in accounts of speeches made by martyrs on the gallows. Martyrs, if they possessed the skills and were given the opportunity, used the gallows as a pulpit to speak to any of the faithful listening and to attempt to convert Protestants.⁴⁷ Robert Southwell gave a particularly lengthy speech at the gallows, as did John Jones, martyred in 1598.⁴⁸ Catholic martyrs were typically asked by Protestant ministers present if they would pray with them, but Catholics universally replied to this request that though they would pray for the Protestants, they would not pray with them in English.⁴⁹ Even Mary Queen of Scots, in likely the most political execution of the period in 1587, denied this request and chose to pray in Latin instead.⁵⁰ Not all martyrs were allowed to speak at their executions, but accounts framed those martyrs who were unable to speak as silenced but faithful. This was the fate of the

⁴⁴ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 84, 132.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁷ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 75.

⁴⁸ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 373-374; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 195.

⁴⁹ George Haydock “sayd secretly a hymne in latin” before being asked to pray in English, which he refused. Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 61.

⁵⁰ Mary Monica Maxwell Scott, *The Tragedy of Fotheringay, Founded on The Journal of D. Bourgoing, Physician to Mary Queen of Scots, and on Unpublished MS. Documents* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1895), 253.

fourteen martyrs executed in various venues around London within a three-day period in late August following the English victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588.⁵¹

Another commonality among the writings was the positive and almost reverent tone that permeated even the barest accounts. This feature was inherent in early martyrdom accounts, which spoke reverently about most martyrs in nearly any context. In the Elizabethan accounts, every martyr was portrayed as good and worthy of universal praise, regardless of any less admirable actions performed by individuals before their deaths. Any individual, like Richard Sympson, who had turned away from the true faith for a time, was still glorified as much or almost as much as his fellow martyrs.⁵² Evidence from Protestant sources demonstrates that Henry Walpole cracked under the pressure of torture, combined with an earlier betrayal by his brother, and recanted his faith to at least some extent. Walpole had not been in England long, but his work with the Jesuits on the Continent was of great interest to the English government, leading to his lengthy torture and then confessions.⁵³ Despite this, more formal accounts of Walpole's martyrdom completely ignored this part of Walpole's time in England, aside from a mention of him being tortured by Protestants.⁵⁴ Any weakness that Catholics displayed during trials or at executions was quickly explained away. Physical weakness was a result of torture, cited specifically to demonize Protestants, as in the case of Campion, who was unable to raise his hand by himself to swear in court.⁵⁵ Even an account where William Harrington, martyred in

⁵¹ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 114-115.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵³ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 244-268.

⁵⁴ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 182-190.

⁵⁵ Allen, *A briefe historie*, 61-62.

1594, acted as though he was struggling against the hangman was explained as just a bodily reaction and not any reflection of a lack of desire for martyrdom.⁵⁶

The accounts, both early Christian and Elizabethan Catholic, also framed martyrdom as part of a battle between good and evil the Catholics were waging with God on one side and Satan on the other.⁵⁷ The account of Margaret Clitherow directly made her life into a conflict between the Catholics and “the Devil and his ministers,” referring to the Protestants who sentenced Clitherow to death.⁵⁸ In “A Yorkshire Recusant’s Relation,” an account from 1586 reprinted in Morris’s collection, the Protestant persecutors were said to “show themselves to be the malicious hell-hounds of Satan.”⁵⁹ Protestant authority was described as “a most wicked and malicious limb of Satan, but also a most injurious and a violent tyrant,” both a religious and political accusation.⁶⁰ In general, the persecutors described by the recusant were said to exhibit “devilish cruelty.”⁶¹ The account of William Freeman describes a plot to kill Freeman and his fellow priests on their way to England as a product of “Sathan’s mallice,” while the plan for the priests to escape was framed as suggested by God.⁶² Some martyrs, including Edmund Sykes and Alexander Crow, both martyred in 1587, were themselves personally troubled and tempted by the Devil in the period leading up to their executions. Sykes told companions in prison that when they heard noises of him disputing with someone else in his cell it was the devil “there to trouble

⁵⁶ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 165.

⁵⁷ For example, the account of the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne of 177 C.E. was framed primarily as a conflict between the Christians and the Devil, with comparisons of their Roman persecutors to the Devil throughout. Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 63-85.

⁵⁸ Mush, “A True Report,” 370.

⁵⁹ John Morris, ed., “A Yorkshire Recusant’s Relation,” in *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers Related by Themselves: Third Series*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1877), 97.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 73, 69.

⁶² Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 346.

and molest him, and to tempt and urge him to renounce his faith.”⁶³ Crow, similarly, was involved in a vicious struggle with “an ugly monster” who attempted to convince Crow that he was “condemned to hell” for most of the night before he was to be martyred, but, by the next morning, Crow had won victory over the monster through his impending martyrdom.⁶⁴

Perhaps the most direct similarity between the accounts of Elizabethan martyrs and accounts of early Christian martyrs comes from their use of implicit or explicit connections to Jesus Christ and particularly his Passion.⁶⁵ Persecution, and particularly martyrdom, was a way for English Catholics to participate in the suffering of Jesus, much like early Christians had done in the centuries after Jesus’s death.⁶⁶ Account writers or perhaps the martyrs themselves created parallels in actions of martyrs to actions of Jesus. Margaret Clitherow the night before her death went off to pray, leaving her companion, reminiscent of Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane with his apostles before his death.⁶⁷ Similarly, Alexander Crow left his companion the night before his execution, saying, “for this one night which remains of my life, I am willing to watch in prayer with Christ our Lord,” taking on the position of Peter, James, and John staying with Christ in prayer in the Garden (though, unlike the apostles, Crow remained awake through the ordeal of the night).⁶⁸ Clitherow, the only executed martyr of the Elizabethan period not to be hanged (aside from Mary Queen of Scots who was beheaded), was pressed to death, her arms

⁶³ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 105.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

⁶⁵ Explicit parallels to Christ’s martyrdom can be found in many accounts including of the Lyons and Vienne martyrs (in which one woman was hung from a post in a manner like that of Christ’s crucifixion) and more explicitly in that of Polycarp which began by saying that “practically everything that had gone before [Polycarp’s death] took place that the Lord might show us from heaven a witness in accordance with the gospel.” Musurillo, *Acts of Christian Martyrs*, 3, 75.

⁶⁶ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 122.

⁶⁷ Mush, “A True Report,” 429.

⁶⁸ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 108-109.

outstretched in a position reminiscent of Christ's death on the cross.⁶⁹ John Bost, martyred in 1594, was said to have been followed by women on the way to his execution, like Christ was followed by his mother and Mary Magdalene on his way to Calvary.⁷⁰ One epigram written by John Ingram after his arrest in 1594 likened the man who had turned him in as a Catholic to Judas, making Ingram himself Jesus.⁷¹ The most common allusion to Christ was the act of forgiving persecutors, as Christ did on the cross in Luke's Gospel. This was done by several martyrs, including Southwell, Bost, and Ralph Sherwine.⁷² Eustachius White, martyred in 1591, directed a statement to Topcliffe just before his death, "I will pray for you sir at the foot of the gallows for you have great need of prayers," in response to a request from Protestants for him to pray with them.⁷³

Early martyrs most often looked to Christ as an example of martyrdom, but references to figures of the early Church were common for the Elizabethan martyrs, who had a whole host of saints from which to draw references. John Ingram invoked St. Paul in his letters to members of the community.⁷⁴ Margaret Clitherow, though also depicted as a Christ figure, was implicitly compared to Mary in her role as a woman and as a mother throughout her account.⁷⁵ George Nicols and Christopher Bales, martyred in 1590, used the example of St. Augustine of Canterbury, the missionary to the English sent by Pope Gregory the Great in 595, during their trials, specifically connecting the English Catholic mission in this period to Augustine's

⁶⁹ Mush, "A True Report," 432.

⁷⁰ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 286.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁷² Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 371; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 170, 35.

⁷³ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 155.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 171-172.

⁷⁵ Mush, "A True Report."

mission.⁷⁶ Campion was referred to as a “new apostle coming to restore the faith with Austine planted here before.”⁷⁷ The ode accompanying the account of Garlick, Ludlam, and Sympson compared Garlick to St. Andrew and Ludlam to St. Stephen.⁷⁸

Miracles or seemingly miraculous events before, during, and after executions were also particularly common features of martyrdom accounts, as they were in early Christian accounts.⁷⁹ William Filbie, martyred in 1582, was said to have had visions of his martyrdom and the martyrdoms of Campion and others before he was executed.⁸⁰ When authorities attempted to shackle John Rigby, martyred in 1600, the shackles would not stay on, an event foreseen by a maid who, according to the account, immediately converted to Catholicism.⁸¹ During executions themselves, a common event was for the heart of the individual being martyred to leap in the hands of the executioner or in the flames of the fire where the individual’s entrails were being burned, as in the accounts of Everard Hanse, Southwell, and William Freeman.⁸² Even more astounding, Alexander Brian, according to Alfield, “after his beheading, himself dismembered, his hart bowels and intrels burned, to the gret admiration of some, being layd vpon the blocke his bellye downward, lifted vp his wholly body then remaying from the grounde.”⁸³ James Thompson, martyred in 1582, was said to have made the sign of the cross to spectators while hanging.⁸⁴ Edward Waterson, martyred in 1593, was tied to a horse that was to draw him to the

⁷⁶ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 168; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 136.

⁷⁷ Alfield, *A true reporte*, 19.

⁷⁸ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 114.

⁷⁹ Various miraculous events can be found in the accounts of nearly any early Christian martyr.

⁸⁰ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 49.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 201-202. Rigby claimed that the fact that his shackles would not stay on was hopefully “a token that the bands of his mortality should shortly be loosed.”

⁸² Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 19; Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 375; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 359.

⁸³ Alfield, *a true reporte*, 15.

⁸⁴ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 65.

site of the execution in Newcastle, but the horse refused to move. The same thing happened again with another horse, and Waterson eventually had to walk to the execution site himself.⁸⁵ The conversion experience of Edmund Gennings's brother falls into this category, as does the story of Lucy Ridley who approached the body of Gennings after his death to attempt to procure a relic and in merely touching his thumb was able to pull the entire thumb off and take it away with her.⁸⁶ These miracles helped make these martyrs into saints, just as emphasis on martyr virtue did.

Many miraculous events were reported to have occurred to the Protestant authorities that caused the executions of martyrs. In the case of Joseph Lampton, martyred in 1593, the executioner was said to have seen a vision in white before Lampton's execution, and during the event the hangman apparently "had so great a horror at what he was doing that he absolutely refused to go on with the operation."⁸⁷ At the trial of Robert White in 1584, the judicial clerk was struck by sudden blindness. The judge in response to the events admonished the clerk, "take care lest the papists make a miracle of this," recognizing the miracle-making that was done by Catholics.⁸⁸ The well from which the officials had taken water to boil the quarters of Edmund Duke, Richard Hill, John Hog, and Richard Holiday in 1590 was said to have dried up afterward. Numerous accidents were said to have befallen the persecutors responsible for the execution of William Davies.⁸⁹ The seemingly divine judgment seen in some accounts gave Catholics assurance that God was on their side in the conflict against Protestant authorities.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 157-158.

⁸⁶ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 207.

⁸⁷ Morris, "A Yorkshire Recusant's Relation," 227; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 159.

⁸⁸ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 90.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 139, 164.

Another common theme in martyrdom accounts was the glorification of martyrdom and the rewards of martyrdom that followed death. Account authors and martyrs themselves referenced heaven fairly often as the specific reward for martyrdom. Swithin Wells wrote, for example, that “the future rewards in the heavenly payment make all pains seem to me pleasure.”⁹⁰ Similarly, Joseph Lampton was said to have told his companions on the night before their executions, “let us be merry for in the morning I hope we shall have a heavenly breakfast.”⁹¹ To be martyred was often referred to as receiving the figurative “crown” of martyrdom, though in the case of Nicholas Horner, martyred in 1590, this “crown” was seen literally by Horner above his head before his execution.⁹²

Language of glorification was also found in contemporary martyr ballads and poems. The ode accompanying the account of Garlick, Ludlam, and Sympson praised each man in his own stanza, glorifying their actions as witnessing to the faith.⁹³ The poetry following Alfield’s account of Campion’s martyrdom looks to the good that can come from martyrdom, addressing England saying, “England looke vp, thy soyle is staine with blood / thou hast made martirs many of thine owne / if thou hast grace their deaths will do thee good / the seede will take which in such blood is sowne.”⁹⁴ As for Campion, stated the poem, in heaven “His quarterd lims shall ioyne with ioy agayne / and rise a body brighter then the sunne.”⁹⁵ A ballad written in honor of Robert Anderton, martyred in 1586, showed Anderton as arriving in heaven after his death, saying, “When that his Judgment passed was / hee spoke these words most sweete / O holy lord

⁹⁰ Ibid., 152.

⁹¹ Richard Holtby, “Father Holtby’s Account of Three Martyrs,” in *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers Related by Themselves: Third Series*, ed. John Morris (London: Burns and Oates, 1877), 225.

⁹² Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 136-137.

⁹³ Ibid., 114.

⁹⁴ Alfield, *A true report*, 20.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 21.

of Saboth god / with whom I nowe shall meete.”⁹⁶ These glorifying ballads recalled prayers to saints, adding to the hagiographic quality of accounts.

Elizabethan Thematic Additions

The most universal piece of rhetoric used by Elizabethan Catholics speaking in martyrdom accounts or other writings was the assertion that while Catholics were being tried (and executed) for treason, they had committed no treason except to be Catholic.⁹⁷ John Body, martyred in 1583, summed up this sentiment in saying, “I never committed any other treason, unless they will have hearing mass or saying the Hail Mary to be treasonous.”⁹⁸ Robert Dalby, martyred in 1589, boldly turned to the crowd before he died and claimed that “the cause of his death was not treason but religion.”⁹⁹ Martyrs also attacked the legitimacy of the charge by pointing out that Protestant officials offered the Catholics freedom if they would agree to attend Protestant church services. James Bird, martyred in 1593, stated that “if by going to church I can save my life, surely all will see I am executed for faith alone.”¹⁰⁰ This was true for any Catholic prisoners, even those not on trial for their lives. According to Morris’s Yorkshire recusant, “These high treasons and felonies are ever pardonable if we consent to go to church.”¹⁰¹ Even when the Protestant authorities could point to particular laws by which Catholic actions constituted treason, Catholics still maintained their stance that their actions were not treasonous.

⁹⁶ Shell, *Oral Culture*, 124.

⁹⁷ The perception of Catholics being executed for religious reasons by a political governing body was the same in Elizabethan accounts as in early martyrdom accounts where the Roman government executed Christians for their opposition to the state by refusing to participate in the state religion. Despite this similarity, the unique context of the English Catholic situation, in which the martyrs were executed for treason without religion technically being part of the charge, merits this theme’s classification as an addition to the body of martyrdom account rhetoric.

⁹⁸ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 75.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰⁰ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 232.

¹⁰¹ Morris, “A Yorkshire Recusant’s Relation,” 95.

In response to the 1585 statute that made the mere presence of seminary priests and Jesuits in England a treasonous offense, Robert Southwell argued that his coming to England was not treason because the law of 1585 was not “agreeable to the word of God.”¹⁰²

Despite the issues that Catholics had with the English government, martyrs throughout all accounts made significant efforts not to implicate Elizabeth in any capacity, choosing instead to demonize particular officials within her government or within local governments. Martyrs, such as Campion, prayed willingly for Elizabeth before their executions, and any negative statements made against Elizabeth were only ever made through force.¹⁰³ When asked if he had anything to say that would prevent his execution, William Freeman replied, “nothing... but God save the Queene.”¹⁰⁴ James Leyburn, a Catholic executed in 1583, reportedly denied Elizabeth “to be his lawful sovereign,” so Challoner deliberately omitted him from his list of martyrs.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to accounts of Marian Protestant martyrs, both martyrs and account writers under Elizabeth were faced with the reality of a living queen with a state at her control. Directly attacking Elizabeth would have been dangerous and potentially deadly in a way that was not the case when Foxe was publishing his famous *Book of Martyrs*. Foxe presented the Marian martyrs as respecting Mary’s authority, but the framing of the accounts seems to be directly opposed to Mary and to Catholicism more generally. Though Foxe’s accounts of the Marian martyrs were published only a few years after the executions occurred, Mary had already died and her religious policies had

¹⁰² Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 367.

¹⁰³ Allen, *A briefe historie*, 49. George Haydock, martyred in 1584, for example, called Elizabeth a heretic because the Protestants questioning him forced him to, but this was “against his will.” Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 77.

¹⁰⁴ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 356.

¹⁰⁵ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, Preface.

been overturned, meaning that English Protestants did not need to respect her in a way that English Catholics needed to respect Elizabeth.¹⁰⁶

Though Protestants attempted to make the conflict for Catholics between the pope and Elizabeth, Catholics rejected this choice. Catholics willingly died for their faith, which they understood to mean dying for the pope; however, dying for the pope did not imply opposition to Elizabeth.¹⁰⁷ Though Elizabeth was purposefully not made a villain to the English Catholics, many of her officials and others associated with the government certainly were. Anthony Munday, a writer turned possible spy for the English government, provided information, both factual and allegedly imaginary, that implicated various priests in treasonous activities on the Continent, specifically at Douai where Munday had met many of the seminary priests now active in England.¹⁰⁸ Walsingham was cast as a villain in many accounts, some including personal interactions with Walsingham in which he showed physical cruelty toward the martyrs, hitting John Munden, martyred in 1584, across the face after a response of which Walsingham did not approve.¹⁰⁹ Robert Dudley, Earl of Leister, was specifically demonized for his alleged implementation of the mass execution in London following the attack of the Spanish Armada in 1588.¹¹⁰ Lesser figures loomed large in the minds of Catholics in counties away from England,

¹⁰⁶ John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of these latter and perillous dayes touching matters of the Church, wherein ar comprehended and decribed the great persecutions [and] horrible troubles, that haue bene wrought and practised by the Romishe prelates, speciallye in this realme of England and Scotlande, from the yeare of our Lorde a thousande, vnto the tyme nowe present*, (London, 1563).

¹⁰⁷ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 294.

¹⁰⁸ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 78; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 87. Walsingham also questioned George Nicols and Richard Yaxley, martyred in 1589, and after they continued to profess the Catholic faith, he had them tortured. *Ibid.*, 133.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 114-115; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 150. Dudley might not have actually been responsible for these particular executions, but he was portrayed as the villain in numerous accounts.

including the earl of Huntington, who persecuted Catholics in the north, and various local judges.¹¹¹

No one, however, was made into more of a villain than Richard Topcliffe. As already seen in the account of Edmund Gennings, Topcliffe was depicted as ruthless and even bloodthirsty.¹¹² During the years he was active as an investigator and torturer, Topcliffe was a constant specter in accounts of martyrs in the London area. Topcliffe tortured Catholics, allegedly lied about them in trials, questioned them before their deaths, and even, as seen in the account of Gennings, acted to increase pain for the martyrs during their executions.¹¹³ Layman James Atkinson actually died while being tortured by Topcliffe in 1595.¹¹⁴ Though Topcliffe was in the employ of Elizabeth, martyrs still maintained the distinction between Elizabeth, their monarch to whom they were loyal, and Topcliffe, a villain of the highest degree. This differentiation can best be seen in the examination and trial of Thomas Portmort in 1592. During Portmort's examination, Topcliffe, by one account, bragged to Portmort about his influence with Elizabeth and specifically described, in very lewd terms, the (most likely fictional) intimacy that existed between them. Portmort recounted Topcliffe's statements during his trial, causing further conflict with Topcliffe. The importance of this event, however, was that Portmort did not take Topcliffe's statements regarding Elizabeth as demeaning her; rather, Topcliffe in using this language about Elizabeth was further demonized.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 183, 169.

¹¹² Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 183.

¹¹³ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 360; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 245. Southwell and Walpole, as Jesuits and subsequently the most threatening Catholics, were tortured particularly harshly by Topcliffe for years in Topcliffe's house using devices of his own invention that were said to be far more painful than the rack.

¹¹⁴ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 287.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 209-210. Topcliffe's alleged comments would certainly have been uncomfortable for Portmort to have heard about his queen. One of the less offensive of the claims was that

The specific treason charges listed in writings were also described as blatantly false by both the martyrs themselves and those writing the accounts. Everard Hanse, martyred before the English government had really established a procedure for treason convictions, was claimed by the government to have said “that Princes had not any supreamicie or souerantie in their ovvne realmes but the Pope only,” when, according to Allen’s account of his martyrdom, Hanse had only admitted that the pope “hath some superioritie” over him in England.¹¹⁶ Accusations that individuals had been plotting against England on the Continent, many times brought by accuser Munday, were often met with the reply that the individuals accused of plotting were in England at the time they were supposed to be at Douai or that, as in the cases of George Haydock and James Fenn, the individuals who had supposedly been plotting together had never actually met before.¹¹⁷ Protestant officials, according to accounts, made up scandalous charges regarding Catholics, such as John Munden, martyred with Haydock and Fenn, though his account absolved him of any wrong-doing, saying that the Protestants were only accusing him to try to hurt the reputation of the faith in England.¹¹⁸ This issue was partly solved by the act of 1585, which made merely being a priest in England a treasonable offense, but for the first few years of Catholic executions, these allegedly false accusations were very common elements of martyrdom accounts.

The Catholic responses to accusations and charges of treason of this kind were similarly scripted. Catholics were permitted to refuse to answer Protestant questions or answer them

Topcliffe “hathe... scene her legges and knees... with his hands above her knees,” but other comments were even more scandalous. The officials at the trial were concerned, but Topcliffe denied everything. Eventually Topcliffe’s actions did become too much for even the Protestants, and he was relieved of his position in 1595. Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 362.

¹¹⁶ Allen, *A briefe historie*, 141.

¹¹⁷ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 77, 81-82.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

incompletely in defense of their own lives.¹¹⁹ This equivocation could take the form of not answering questions or accepting indictments, as in the case of Southwell, or choosing not to plead innocent or guilty, as in the case of Clitherow.¹²⁰ John Finch replied in the affirmative when asked if he would go to church so he would be permitted to see the Anglican bishop; however, when the bishop asked about his promise, Finch replied that when he had said he would go to church he had meant a Catholic Church.¹²¹ Catholic prisoners deliberately only spoke about religion and did not answer questions regarding the English political situation.¹²² This “martyrological sensibility,” as termed by historian Brad Gregory, allowed the martyrs to maintain their position that their executions for treason were nothing more than religious persecution disguised by charges of treason.¹²³

Martyr writings were filled with a wide variety of anti-Protestant sentiment manifested in complaints about a variety of Protestant actions even beyond the allegedly erroneous treason charges.¹²⁴ After being arrested, Catholics were held in prisons where they claimed they were treated worse than other prisoners.¹²⁵ The account of James Fenn demonstrates this in saying that Fenn was treated well by his jailers because they did not know that he was a Catholic, but had they known, they would have treated him much worse.¹²⁶ Perhaps the most reprehensible of

¹¹⁹ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 117-120.

¹²⁰ Mush, “A True Report,” 416-417. Clitherow’s refusal to plead innocent or guilty led to her being pressed to death, rather than hanged or hanged, drawn, and quartered like the other martyrs.

¹²¹ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 83.

¹²² Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 45.

¹²³ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 274.

¹²⁴ Again, the demonization of the party persecuting Catholics was not an entirely new addition to Catholic martyrdom accounts; however, the specific early modern Protestant context was significantly distinct from that of the early Christians.

¹²⁵ Morris, “A Yorkshire Recusant’s Relation,” 78.

¹²⁶ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 80.

Protestant actions by Catholic standards was the use of torture, particularly by Topcliffe, which most obviously demonstrated the cruelty of Protestants.

During martyr trials themselves, the actions of Protestants were portrayed across accounts in a particularly negative light. The trials themselves were described as unfair in nearly all aspects, with Protestant authorities shown as controlling all parts of trials to reach their desired verdicts.¹²⁷ In the case of the martyrdoms of James Bell and John Finch, the Lancaster authorities decided they only wanted to execute two Catholics, so they had the judge pick two men of the group of arrested Catholics to execute, while the others were able to return to prison.¹²⁸ Some Catholics were forbidden from defending themselves, as in the cases of Southwell who was silenced any time he tried to make an argument.¹²⁹ The charges and verdicts brought against Catholics sometimes were alleged based on only one or two witnesses who were often of very poor quality, with testimony that could be quickly refuted by the Catholics on trial.¹³⁰ Edward Jones, martyred in 1590, was sentenced based on a confession he had made while under torture, which Jones fought against during his trial.¹³¹ Criticisms were also leveled against juries. Alexander Rawlins, martyred in 1595, complained that the jury overseeing his trial was too uneducated to find a correct verdict.¹³² Though juries were nearly always portrayed as biased, responsive only to higher authorities who had a particular verdict in mind already, they

¹²⁷ Morris "A Yorkshire Recusant's Relation," 81-83.

¹²⁸ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 78.

¹²⁹ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 366-370.

¹³⁰ Morris, "A Yorkshire Recusant's Relation," 85. Thomas Sprott and Thomas Hunt, martyred in 1600, were tried for being priests even though there were no witnesses to that fact, and they had not confessed anything besides being Catholic. *Ibid.*, 205. Anne Line (1600) and Marmaduke Bowes (1585) were both convicted on the testimony of only one witness. Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 214; Morris "A Yorkshire Recusant's Relation," 84.

¹³¹ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 184.

¹³² Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 181-182.

were often still shown some sympathy, as martyrs often absolved them from blame.¹³³ Mark Barkworth, martyred in 1601, stated that he would not be tried by the jury because they will be obliged to find him guilty lest they be fined so heavily “in the Star-chamber, that they will scarce be able to pay it in their whole lives.”¹³⁴

Protestant behavior regarding executions was similarly demonized. Officials controlled the effects of Catholic executions by publicizing or not publicizing executions at their discretion. Particularly in cases when martyrs were forbidden from speaking before their deaths, as in the cases of the 1588 post-Armada martyrs, executions were publicized and took place in numerous locations to better attract an audience.¹³⁵ From 1588 onward, gallows were set up in various places around London and could be used to execute Catholics closer to where they were active, as in the case of Edmund Gennings and Swithin Wells, executed at Gray’s Inn Fields close to Wells’s home.¹³⁶ Campion’s execution, as the first, large-scale execution, was publicized; however, Campion was able to defend himself to the crowd from the gallows, and accounts, based on that of Alfield, spread afterward, making the Protestants less inclined to publicize executions except in cases like those of the post-Armada martyrs.¹³⁷

When Protestant officials were more reluctant to allow Catholics to be exposed to larger crowds, they could withhold the time and place of execution from the public, as in the case of Robert Southwell, who was able to make an actual speech on the gallows.¹³⁸ Morris’s Yorkshire recusant claimed that the Protestants tried to keep crowds away because they wanted to make

¹³³ The jury in Campion’s trial was informed that the queen desired the verdict be guilty so the jury had no choice but to find him guilty. *Ibid.*, 25. John Paine, martyred in 1582, referred to the jury as “poor, ignorant men.” *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 114-123.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 143; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 207.

¹³⁷ Alfield, *A true reporte*, 9-11; Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 14.

¹³⁸ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 373-374.

sure that other Protestants did not see how ridiculous the charges were or see a more positive side of Catholicism that could cause them to become more favorable to the faith.¹³⁹ Catholics were also deliberately kept away from executions, or at least kept back from the bodies of the martyrs, to prevent them from collecting relics.¹⁴⁰ Persecution of Catholics went beyond just the officials overseeing trials and executions; accounts describe the insults and calls for martyrs to repent that came from crowds accompanying executions. Some accounts, however, show crowds and even officials finding sympathy with martyrs after their executions, as in the case of Southwell where, according to the account, “no one... did speak any evil words against him” after he had died because “the people were so much moved with his charitable ending.”¹⁴¹

A final commonality across martyrdom accounts and writings is the promotion of different aspects of Catholic practice.¹⁴² A few martyrs, most notably Southwell, author of works like his *Epistle of Comfort* directed to persecuted English Catholics, had been prolific writers before their executions, and their surviving writings worked to emphasize particular aspects of Catholic belief.¹⁴³ In general, priests were praised by accounts as essential for the faith. Margaret Clitherow was shown as relying heavily on priests, and even her account, written partly by priest John Mush, possibly Clitherow’s confessor, demonstrated the important role played by priests

¹³⁹ Morris, “A Yorkshire Recusant’s Relation,” 96-97.

¹⁴⁰ This was true in the cases of William Hart (1583) and Robert Dalby (1589). Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 68, 130. A “great fire of straw” was used to burn up any part of Richard Thirkill, martyred in 1583, so no relics could be found. *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁴¹ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 375.

¹⁴² Some Catholic practices can be seen in early martyrdom accounts, but these practices were certainly less formally established than they were by the sixteenth century, and the particularly important issue of recusancy that exists among Elizabethan Catholic martyrs is entirely unique.

¹⁴³ Robert Southwell, *An epistle of comfort to the reuerend priestes, & to the honorable, worshipful, & other of the laye sort restrayned in durance for the Catholicke faith* (Paris, 1587); Marotti. *Religious Ideology*, 26-28.

even in publicizing martyrs.¹⁴⁴ The practice of confession was extolled throughout accounts as a way to help the spirit as well as the body, as in the case of James Bell. Prayer was also present in most accounts, from prayers said by Catholics in prison in the days leading up to their deaths to prayers said on the scaffold.¹⁴⁵ These scaffold prayers were of particular importance, since they were said deliberately in opposition to English Protestants in specific demonstrations of Catholic faith that was itself unquestionably English in its prayers for Elizabeth rather than for the pope or any Continental or Catholic authority just before the martyrs' deaths.

The most important Catholic practice promoted in the accounts, however, was recusancy. Across accounts and writings, attending Protestant services was framed as the worst sin a Catholic could commit, particularly because Protestant church attendance was what officials would use as a metric for whether or not someone was truly Catholic. William Lacy, martyred in 1582, was, according to his account, forced to leave his home due to the extremely high fines he had accumulated for recusancy; however, for Lacy, these crippling fines were far less damaging than attending Protestant church.¹⁴⁶ John Finch broke down and attended a Protestant service but experienced both physical and spiritual pain afterward.¹⁴⁷ One of Robert White's carols summarizes a treatise written by Jesuit Robert Persons that was entirely dedicated to criticizing attendance at Protestant services.¹⁴⁸ There was no account of any one of the Elizabethan martyrs regularly attending Protestant church services, even as a Catholic who did not believe what was being preached at the service. No Catholic priest would attend a Protestant service, and, of the

¹⁴⁴ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 280, 285-286; Mush, "A True Report."

¹⁴⁵ John Nelson, martyred 1578, referred to prayers at his death. Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 13-14. John Amais and Robert Dalby, martyred in 1589, were in prayer until authorities called them to be executed. *Ibid.*, 130. John Rigby, martyred in 1600, prayed to the saints from the scaffold. *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴⁷ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 83.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 93-95.

lay martyrs, all appear to have been recusants, at least for a significant portion of time before their executions. This detail is particularly important when placed in the context of the religious situation for Catholics in England during this period, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Historical Script Changes

The martyrdom accounts and writings from this period are not perfectly consistent across the period, largely due to the particular years of prominence of important figures within the accounts, specific laws enacted by the English government, and the development of Protestant practices regarding the martyrs over the period. The villain figure in accounts shifts over the years as Protestant officials, including Leicester and Walsingham, died.¹⁴⁹ The rise of Topcliffe made torture a more common aspect of accounts. London also came to feature more prominently as the site of the worst torture of Catholics, with individuals arrested in other counties being sent to London to be questioned and tortured before being sent back to be formally tried and executed.¹⁵⁰ Though London and York remained the most common sites for executions throughout the period, as Catholic executions became more common occurrences they spread north and west, though this was not a universal trend and many counties only saw about two or three executions total, often at the same time, if they actually saw any at all. Some years gave rise to more executions than others. The year 1588 saw the most executions, fourteen alone taking place in direct response to the conflict with the Spanish Armada. 1586 and 1591 were the other most common years for martyrdom, but executions per year did not follow a pattern of

¹⁴⁹ The death of Leicester within a week of the 1588 post-Armada executions was actually portrayed as punishment for his executing so many Catholics. Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 115.

¹⁵⁰ John Ingram, martyred in 1594, was sent from the Scottish borders to London and back north multiple times before finally being executed in Newcastle. *Ibid.*, 171.

rising until 1588 and decreasing afterward; rather, martyrdom was highly variable from year to year, though the end of Elizabeth's reign did feature comparatively fewer martyrs than the 1580s and early 1590s.¹⁵¹

As has already been noted, Protestant officials did at various times alter their policies regarding the publicizing of executions to effectively handle their effects, though a desire to keep Catholics away at least from their martyrs seems to have been more common. The addition of the 1585 law prohibiting the entry and harboring of Jesuits and seminary priests in England under the charge of treason changed how Protestants handled cases of treason, since they no longer had to prove an intent to harm the English state or that one had reconciled another to the Catholic faith and instead merely had to prove that individuals either were priests or had sheltered priests in order to convict them.¹⁵² Though these changes did have some effect on martyrdom in England and how specific parts of accounts were framed, in general the effects of these changes were minimal on the actual substance of the accounts. The same themes still prevailed, and perhaps even more telling were the historical events or shifts in Catholic and English thought over this period that were not reflected in the accounts. The fact that these smaller events and shifts could be seen in accounts makes the fact that other shifts were not present of even greater importance. These shifts and the various influences that come together in martyrdom accounts and writings will be the focus of the next chapter.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Contents.

¹⁵² Parliament, "Act Against Jesuits and Seminarists," 1585.

Chapter 2: Being Both Catholic and English in Martyrdom Account Framing

Martyrdom accounts specifically demonstrate the central conflict that existed in the lives of English Catholics throughout Elizabeth's reign: the tension between being English and being Catholic. English Catholics were forced to choose between their Englishness and their Catholicism by their rulers, both secular and spiritual, in ways that grew more and more pronounced as Elizabeth's reign progressed. The most violent conclusion to this conflict was, of course, martyrdom, but the martyrs themselves embodied this conflict as they stood by the gallows proclaiming their Catholic faith and praying for their English queen. Continental and English influences, coming from both Catholics and Protestants, collided in various aspects of English Catholic belief and practice in this period. These influences appear in martyrdom accounts, martyr writings, and even martyrdom itself. It must be noted, however, that the distinction made in this chapter between English and Continental influences was not necessarily clear-cut, explicitly described, or even considered by the individuals at the time. Catholics in England, while concerned with loyalty to the state and with their religion, were certainly not actively looking at aspects of their lives as more English or more Continental. Similarly, English Catholics on the Continent did not necessarily have a particular set of goals that directly conflicted with those of Catholics in England. Despite this, the distinction drawn here helps to illuminate the impact and function of martyrdom in a wider perspective.

Continental Influences on Martyrdom

Even in England, martyrdom was inherently connected to the Continent. The majority of Elizabethan martyrs were priests and the vast majority of those priests were missionaries who had studied on the Continent for at least two or three years, if not longer. The English College at

Douai and then Rheims educated most of these priests, overseen by English Cardinal William Allen; however, since this seminary was situated on the Continent, it was much more closely linked with Rome than it was with England, at least in terms of communication and ease of transportation.¹ Many future martyrs who studied at Douai also studied at the English College in Rome or at seminaries in Valladolid or Seville in Spain, established in 1589 and 1592 respectively.² Even if they did not study elsewhere,² many at least traveled to Rome while on the Continent.³ The Jesuits, even more than the seminary priests, were linked with Rome by their vow of obedience to the pope. No matter what degree of Englishness these priests still possessed, their time spent on the Continent certainly influenced their beliefs and identities.

Other English Continental figures influenced the English Catholic community and martyrs more specifically. Important figures of the English Catholic Church had gone into exile on the Continent during the course of Elizabeth's reign, but they still remained very active in the English Church. William Allen was particularly influential in presiding over the English College at Douai and through the large amount of writings he produced over the course of the period. In addition to his *A briefe history of the glorious martyrdom of xii reverend priests*, Allen wrote, among other things, treatises covering English Catholic persecution more broadly and defending the English Catholic colleges on the Continent.⁴ Within these works, Allen defended and glorified martyrdom, saying, "where God giveth the grace of martyrdom it is a joyful signe of

¹ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 275.

² Ibid.; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 208, 215.

³ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 61.

⁴ Allen, *A briefe history*; William Allen, *A true, sincere and modest defence, of English Catholiques that suffer for their faith both at home and abroad against a false, seditious and slanderous libel*, 1584; William Allen, *An apologie and true declaration of the institution and endeouours of the two English colleges, the one in Rome, the other novv resident in Rhemes against certaine sinister informations giuen vp against the same*, 1581.

mercie.”⁵ He also encouraged, or at least supported, Continental invasion of England as a crusade against the Protestant heretics.⁶ Allen’s works were published on the Continent and brought into England by the network of priests at his disposal, to be spread among English Catholics and English Catholic clergy in particular. Allen, though an Englishman, served as more of a Continental influence than an English one through his support of militant (and technically treasonous, if he happened to go back to England) actions such as the attack by the Spanish Armada in 1588 against the English government for the sake of the Church.⁷

Another influential figure was Jesuit Robert Persons, who had arrived in England in 1581 with Edmund Campion. While Campion was more influential in disputations, Persons was very prolific in his writings, both in England and on the Continent. After Campion’s martyrdom, Persons traveled back to the Continent where he was active for many years, influencing English Catholics in all parts of Europe. His writings encouraged practices like recusancy among the Catholic community, and, while he refrained from criticizing Elizabeth directly, he attacked the Earl of Leicester and English governmental policies. Persons also directly supported King Phillip II of Spain even after the clash with the Armada. The actions and, more specifically, words of English Catholics like Allen and Persons, who served as leaders of the English Catholic movement, worked to link English martyrdom and English Catholicism more broadly with the rest of the Continent. This connection existed even if conditions in England were different than those in France or Spain or Italy and even if the words of Allen or Persons were occasionally much more akin to treason than the words of the Catholics actually in England.⁸

⁵ Allen, *An apologie and true declaration*, 122.

⁶ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 144.

⁷ Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 43.

⁸ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 35, 85, 131, 139-140, 143.

The influence of Jesuits more broadly was significant in England. Even though far fewer Jesuits were active in England compared to seminary priests at any given time, the Jesuits were significantly more influential than their numbers suggest.⁹ The Jesuits created networks of communication between England and the Continent, sometimes in code, and provided shelter for priests arriving from the Continent. Jesuits and even seminary priests coming to England sought Robert Southwell in London to find a safe place to stay before finding a position from which to operate in society.¹⁰

The Jesuits also influenced lay individuals by emphasizing Tridentine practices, though English and Continental Catholics beyond Jesuits pursued this goal as well. John Mush's account of Margaret Clitherow's life, for example, functioned, according to historian Anne Dillon, "as a conduct book that [set] out the new Tridentine religious practices, and as a catechism of Catholic doctrine."¹¹ The account showed Clitherow engaging in prayer and veneration of the Eucharist, attending Mass, and confessing sins to her priest. Clitherow's confessor played a significant role in her account, demonstrating the importance of priests for the faithful. Clitherow also provided a standard for how a Catholic should act in the face of persecution, with a particular emphasis on recusancy.¹² From the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, Continental Catholic authorities encouraged English Catholics to continue to follow their usual Catholic beliefs as closely as possible. These authorities tasked missionary priests in general with demonstrating morality,

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35; R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 83-84. Over the course of Elizabeth's reign, nearly 450 seminary priests ministered in England, compared to only 18 Jesuits in England in 1598 (though by 1607 that number had increased to 130).

¹⁰ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 189, 224-225.

¹¹ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 278.

¹² *Ibid.*, 285-288, 290-291.

charity, and other virtues to the Catholic community in England.¹³ Rome specifically prohibited conformity to Protestantism so as not to give up any control of their English flock, and the Holy See continued to profess this policy throughout Elizabeth's reign, even as recusancy fines increased. Accordingly, English Catholic exiles on the Continent encouraged Catholics in England to follow their old practices as closely as possible by celebrating feast days and attending Mass and confession. The Church hierarchy on the Continent criticized Catholics in England who did not adhere to these stipulations, especially those that did not practice recusancy.¹⁴

Continental authorities encouraged any Catholics in England to avoid going to Protestant church at all costs – literally.¹⁵ Recusancy demonstrated a specific connection with the rest of the Church that the Continent hoped to preserve. This emphasis, as discussed in the last chapter, can be seen very clearly in martyrdom accounts that presented recusant Catholics as separate from the rest of society.¹⁶ Though some future martyrs did at one point attend Protestant services, all of them had stopped well before their executions. Moreover, Protestant authorities in many cases advised their Catholic prisoners that the charges that would ensure their executions would be dropped if the Catholics in question would agree to attend Protestant services. In refusing to renounce their faith by refusing to attend Protestant services, the Catholic martyrs made a statement that explicitly connected them with the body of the faithful back in Catholic-controlled countries on the Continent where no one attended Protestant services, albeit because that was not a legal requirement for them.¹⁷

¹³ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 36.

¹⁴ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 257, 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁶ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom* 100; Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 108.

¹⁷ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 287.

Elizabethan martyrdom accounts present an English Catholic narrative in which the highest honor that one could achieve in the faith was to live the Continental ideal of recusancy to its fullest by dying rather than attending a heretical church.¹⁸ Martyrdom accounts specifically promoted religious resistance against the Protestants through recusancy and other actions like refusing to pray with Protestants, which demonstrated Catholic self-separation from others in England.¹⁹ Regardless of the realities for Catholics in England, the examples set for the community of the most extreme and most praiseworthy actions that Catholics could perform were Continental in influence and motivation. The recusancy involved in martyrdom directly linked England with the Continent in these accounts.

The Continent heavily influenced English martyrdom accounts by the mere fact that many formal accounts were written on the Continent. The accounts coming from the Continent tended to be further removed from the time of the martyrdoms than accounts written or published in England, in addition to being separated from the actual martyrdom sites physically. These degrees of displacement, both temporal and spatial, meant that the writers of accounts had increased opportunity not only to research the individual martyr, but also to engage in more saint-making and martyr glorification than was done in more proximate accounts. This can be seen more clearly in the formal account of Edmund Gennings's martyrdom published by his brother more than twenty years after Gennings's death. The account gave more specific details than earlier accounts certainly must have contained, but the author, John Gennings, also exalted his brother to a larger extent in the final account than he did in an earlier 1603 draft.²⁰ Allen's account of the twelve martyrs of 1581 and 1582 similarly honored its subjects in a more

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 53.

²⁰ Gennings, *The Life and Death*; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 204-207.

hagiographic way than did simple statements in letters.²¹ Various forms of artwork also assisted in this saint-making, though none of this artwork could be produced in England due to the illegality of Catholicism. Continental accounts and Continental artwork implicitly emphasized the Catholicism of martyrs rather than their Englishness to make the martyrs into saints for all Catholics not just those in England.²²

The distant, Catholic archetypical hero created by Continental martyrdom accounts contrasts with descriptions of martyrdom in letters and early informal martyrologies from England or the Continent. Accounts written in England significantly after the fact (such as the formal account of Margaret Clitherow) also took on the glorifying quality of Continental accounts, but the temporal and spatial distance between England and the Continent was certainly demonstrated in Continental accounts. Though letters about individual martyrs often did note their virtues or some miraculous circumstances surrounding their deaths, these letters were primarily focused on presenting basic facts about the martyrs. Later reports based on these letters, however, could become typical long and extoling accounts. Jesuit Henry Garnet, writing to the Continent sometime after 1593, described the martyrdoms of Joseph Lampton and Edward Waterson in very general terms, not even naming Waterson. A slightly later account from Jesuit Richard Holtby in the North, however, filled in the details missing from Garnet's account, including various descriptions of martyr virtue, miraculous events, and other hallmarks of typical martyrdom accounts absent in Garnet's more proximate and basic letter.²³ The accounts

²¹ Allen, *A briefe historie*.

²² Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 116.

²³ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 231; Holtby, "Father Richard Holtby's Account," 221-230.

Challoner compiled come from various sources in the Douai archives, which, in some cases, use different language than the letters documenting executions that were sent from England.²⁴

Some of the anti-Protestant sentiment emphasized in accounts aligned English Catholics more with Continental Catholics and less with other English citizens. Martyrdom accounts framed Protestants as the latest in a long line of persecutors with which Catholics had to contend, just as they had fought against persecution in the early Church.²⁵ Accounts that showed a Protestant crowd as being especially excited about the execution of a particular Catholic, as in the case of the trials and executions of Edward Jones and Anthony Middleton in 1590, deliberately separated English Protestants and English Catholics. In cases like this, accounts framed English Catholics as identifying more with other Catholics than they did with a Protestant community that was actively working against them.²⁶

Protestant Rejection of English Catholics

Protestant officials in England were deeply concerned with the threat of Catholic invasion or rebellion, particularly during the 1580s before the defeat of the Spanish Armada. While some degree of genuine concern about religious belief likely motivated the English government's treatment of Catholics, and perhaps more so in local communities, Protestant anxiety surrounding Catholics in England stemmed largely from a desire for the government to maintain social and political control. From the government's perspective, Catholics were loyal to the pope

²⁴ Certainly some of Challoner's sources were these letters, but Challoner was also working with second-hand Continental accounts.

²⁵ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 237.

²⁶ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 185-186. The crowd shouting against Jones at the trial of he and Middleton was compared to the Jews shouting against St. Stephen, and the "unruly" crowd at their execution was said to have cried "away with him!" after Middleton tried to speak on the gallows.

at the expense of England and the queen, so the government needed to keep this foreign power out of England by imprisoning its agents, attempting to extract information from them, and eventually executing them if necessary.

This fear of invasion is most clearly seen in the “bloody questions,” which were the questions asked to Catholic prisoners that could lead to their executions.²⁷ Officials asked Catholic prisoners for information regarding plans to invade England and about individual loyalty to Elizabeth and to the pope. One particularly difficult question was what would the Catholic being interrogated do if the pope and his army were to invade England, and more specially, would the Catholic fight for his country or against it.²⁸ Only responses that demonstrated “loyaltie and obedience to her Maiestie” could secure a release or reprieve.²⁹ Protestants used the answers to these questions, which were typically evasive rather than definitive one way or the other, as representations of a lack of English loyalty from Catholics.³⁰ For Protestant authorities, Catholic execution provided a mechanism for dealing with what were perceived as very real threats to the English state both from within England and from the Continent. Those that the Catholics counted as martyrs were, if not treasonous villains plotting the downfall of the English government, then at least a community of people disloyal to Elizabeth and potential problems for the state if an event like an invasion or rebellion were to take place. Any expression of support for the Catholic Church was seen as contrary to the English government and subsequently a threat, regardless of what English Catholics said otherwise.

²⁷ Ibid., 105, 151, 169.

²⁸ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 45.

²⁹ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 151.

³⁰ Holmes *Resistance and Compromise*, 45.

Viewed exclusively as agents of the Catholic Church and the pope, priests proved an especially dangerous problem for Protestant authorities. Those that had been in England for long periods of time were of particular interest to the English government, since they were already integrated into society and into the Catholic community, making them more direct threats to English national security. Though Monfield Scot was not martyred until 1591, Protestant officials were concerned about his movements from at least 1584, as authorities sought him out in the North, London, and Norfolk.³¹ John Boste was another person of concern from the same year, though he was not martyred until 1594.³² The Earl of Huntingdon was particularly pleased by Bost's capture, writing in a letter that he, Huntingdon, had been attempting, unsuccessfully, to accomplish it for years, and he thanked "God that nowe at the laste [he had] obtined [Bost] to hir Maiestie's likeing."³³ Several other priests and laypeople alike were also captured, questioned, and released before being recaptured and executed years later.³⁴

Jesuits were a matter of concern more so than were seminary priests, since Jesuits were under the authority of the pope more directly than any other clergy and, as has been discussed, they had well-established and effective networks of communication in England.³⁵ An official at the trial of Southwell blamed Jesuits for spreading Catholic books, accused them of fermenting rebellion, and claimed that "they caused seminaries to be erected where youths weir trayned vp to be sent into England to disuade her Maisties subiects from their naturall obedience."³⁶ Jesuits were also more likely than seminary priests to have spent significant amounts of time on the

³¹ Pollen *Unpublished Documents*, 71, 100, 203.

³² *Ibid.*, 63.

³³ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁴ George Errington was captured 1585, but released and not executed until 1596. Swithen Wells was questioned also in 1585, but he was not martyred until 1591. *Ibid.*, 125, 131.

³⁵ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 288.

³⁶ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 334.

Continent and to have connections with ecclesiastical authorities in Rome as well as political leaders of Catholic countries.³⁷ The trial record of Hugh Moor, a 1588 post-Armada martyr, specifically emphasized his being reconciled by a Jesuit rather than just a regular priest, demonstrating this increased concern with Jesuits.³⁸ The amount of time Topcliffe spent torturing and interrogating both Henry Walpole and Robert Southwell – at least a year for each man, likely longer than any other martyr – testifies to their importance in the eyes of the Protestant government.³⁹ The information possessed by a Jesuit would likely be of much greater value to the English government than information from a seminary priest. In arresting Jesuits with extensive histories on the Continent, government officials had the opportunity to acquire secret information about the plans of Continental Catholics. In contrast, arresting seminary priests who had been primarily in England was more of an effort to curb Catholic practice and weaken the Catholic community in England. This distinction, of course, was not entirely clear-cut, and Protestants were certainly worried both about Continental infiltration and about the persistence of Catholicism in England.

To add to the fear of Jesuits, or perhaps because of it, Protestant authorities often referred to all Catholic priests in England as Jesuits. Following the banishment of priests resulting from the “Act Against Jesuits and Seminarists” in 1585, one official discussed this banishment in terms of “conveying away of the Jesuits,” completely ignoring the much larger population of seminary priests in England.⁴⁰ Orders surrounding the large-scale execution of Catholics in August 1588 after the attack of the Spanish Armada were directed against “Jesuytes semynaryes

³⁷ Ibid., 251. Walpole, for example, had connections with the King of Spain.

³⁸ Ibid., 158.

³⁹ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 360; Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 245.

⁴⁰ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 103. Out of the roughly 20 priests that were banished, only 2 were Jesuits.

and obstinate recusants,” despite the fact that no Jesuits were executed that year or at all between Campion and Brian in 1581 and Southwell in 1595.⁴¹ Certainly other Jesuits were active in England during this time and were likely better protected from capture than some seminary priests, but the fact that nearly fifteen years passed between Jesuit executions demonstrates that the fear of Jesuits was, for the most part, merely a fear and not a reality.⁴² Despite the definite influence of Jesuits in England, their numbers were still small, certainly much smaller than the number about which Protestants seemed to be speaking. Protestants may have been doing this for purposes of propaganda, since seminary priests, who might not have even been to Rome and who were typically ministering to communities in England rather than fomenting rebellion, were not as threatening in the minds of Protestants. Jesuits, in contrast, brought with them the threat of Continental invasion, since they were so directly linked to the papacy. At the same time, it is possible that Protestant authorities genuinely believed that the Jesuit infiltration of England was taking place on a larger scale than it actually was or that Jesuits were more involved in Catholic conspiracy against the English government than they were.

The written correspondence of priests, both seminary and Jesuit alike, concerned Protestants who were anxious about the prospect of Catholic conspiracy. George Errington, captured in 1585 but not martyred until 1596, was questioned specifically regarding letters he was carrying.⁴³ Letters to and from John Bost were particularly important for officials trying to track him down in 1593.⁴⁴ Protestant officials asked Henry Walpole several questions about the letters he had thrown into the sea before he was captured in 1594.⁴⁵ Any Catholic writing, letters

⁴¹ Ibid., 151.

⁴² Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, Contents.

⁴³ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 126.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 226-227.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 249.

aside, interested the English government. An official at the trial of Southwell demonstrated this Protestant concern, asking his audience “What haue they [the Jesuits] not attempted b[y prin]ting and sending over seditious books?”⁴⁶ A book allegedly being written by Robert Persons worried Protestant officials because they thought it would “breed seditious whisperings and expectations” among English Catholics.⁴⁷ The spread of a Continental martyrdom account of Campion, Sherwine, and Brian was of particular interest during the early 1580s. Thomas Alfield, martyred in 1585, was pursued particularly for his part in bringing books into England including William Allen’s *True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics that suffer for their faith both at home and abrode*, though Alfield, for his part, attempted to defend himself by saying that it was “a loyal book” rather than one meant to stir up rebellion.⁴⁸

Protestants also emphasized the Catholicism of English Catholics through treatises against recently executed Catholics designed to function as responses to the Catholic martyr narrative. These individual accounts were published very quickly after executions, almost certainly before Catholics published any formal accounts, though certainly informal Catholic accounts were already circulating in letters. Thomas Alfield’s hurried writing and publishing of his account of Campion’s martyrdom was a stated attempt to avoid the Protestants controlling Campion’s story, as they did to Everard Hanse.⁴⁹ Four years later in 1585, however, a Protestant

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 334.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 108-109, 118, 27-28.

⁴⁹ Alfield, *A true reporte*. Several Protestant accounts of Campion’s execution were still published in 1581 likely before Alfield’s account: William Elderton, *A triumph for true subiects, and a terrour vnto al traitours: by the example of the late death of Edmund Campion, Ralphe Sherwin, and Thomas Bryan, Iesuites and seminarie priestes: who suffered at Tyburne, on Friday the first daye of December. anno Domini. 1581* (London, 1581), George Ellyot, *A very true report of the apprehension and taking of that arche Papist Edmond Campion the Pope his right hand with three other lewd Iesuite priests, and diuers other laie people, most seditious persons of like sort* (London, 1581).

writer published an account of the execution of Alfield himself, as well as his companion Thomas Webley. In the account, set up much like any Catholic martyrdom account with a description of Alfield's childhood at the beginning, the anonymous writer framed Alfield as a "lewd preest" who "hath of long time liued about London, secretly seducing the people to embrace his deuilish doctrine and to win them from their due alleagace towards God and their Prince" and specifically marked him as "a Traitour to his prince and a secret enemy to his country."⁵⁰ A similar Protestant account was written in 1590 regarding the execution of Thomas Bales (called Christopher Bayles by Challoner), who was, according to the account, "iustly condemned for High Treason."⁵¹ These accounts clearly othered English Catholics, turning them into traitorous enemies of the state rather than English citizens.

English Influences

While martyrdom accounts were certainly Continentally focused in some respects, English influences typically existed alongside Continental influences. Though Catholics in England certainly identified with their religion, English Catholics were still English. They had lived in England their entire lives, and England was their home much more than was a distant city like Rome. Certainly, the vast majority of Catholic priests had spent time on the Continent, but that time was minimal compared to the rest of their lives spent in England. Even the

⁵⁰ Anonymous, *The life and end of Thomas Awfeeld a seminary preest and Thomas Webley a dyers seruant in London beeing both traitours who were condemned as fellons for bringing seditious books into this realme and dispersing of the same, among their fauourers: for which they were executed at Tibourne the 6. day of this monthe of July 1585.* (London, 1585), 2-4.

⁵¹ Anonymous, *A true recitall touching the cause of the death of Thomas Bales, a seminarie priest, who was hanged and quartered in Fleet-street on Ashwenesdaie last past. 1590 Wherevnto is adioyned the true cause of the death of Annis Bankyn, who vpon the next day following was burned in Saint Georges fields about sixe of the clocke at night* (London, 1590), 1; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 135.

seminaries attended by priests on the Continent were directly linked to England; the English College at Douai was designed specifically for English missionaries, as was the English College in Rome.⁵² Jesuit influence, though emphasized by Protestants, was significantly less in the grand scheme of English Catholicism than it was (and in some respects, still is) framed as being.⁵³ The Jesuit networks running through London were not the only networks of priests in England, and they did not cover the vast majority of the country. Instead, seminary priests with fewer Continental connections and influences took care of much more of England pastorally. This meant that the priests with more influence among the common people outside of London were far more responsive to the needs of their communities than they were to requests of distant authority figures.⁵⁴

The influential English figures writing from exile on the Continent were also not necessarily parts of the everyday lives of Catholics in England. Historian Peter Holmes bases much of his discussion of ideas of resistance in England on treatises written by these important exiled figures; however, this largely ignores the day-to-day concerns of the populace in England.⁵⁵ Just because Robert Persons or William Allen was urging resistance from the Continent did not mean that this was actually being put into practice in England. Regular Englishmen would not have been reading intellectual arguments made by exiled Catholics let alone acting in response to those arguments. Certainly English Catholics would have liked to maintain all of their Catholic rituals and practices, but this was simply not feasible in many cases in which heavy fines, imprisonment, and even death could result from insistence on strictly

⁵² Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 288.

⁵³ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 38. The Jesuit mission is often seen as the primary effort to promote Catholicism in England, but this narrative greatly diminishes the influence and impact of the much larger number of seminary priests who worked outside of this network.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁵⁵ Peter Homes, *Resistance and Compromise*.

maintaining Catholic practices.⁵⁶ English Catholics on the Continent were inherently unrepresentative of the Catholic community actually in England.

As Elizabeth's reign progressed, Catholics altered their focus from trying to maintain the pre-reformation or Tridentine Church as well as possible to trying to fulfill the functions of sacraments and rituals, even if the actual practices themselves had to be abandoned. After the execution of Mary Queen of Scots and the failure of the Spanish Armada, the reestablishment of the Catholic Church in England no longer seemed like a realistic possibility, and, subsequently, the priorities of the Church in England had to shift. Even the English Colleges themselves began to allow for more flexibility in English Catholic practice out of necessity. A particular area in which this could be seen was with regard to recusancy. Though recusancy was certainly still encouraged as the ideal way of practicing one's Catholicism in England, by the 1590s it had become at least moderately acceptable to clergy and the community within England for Catholics to conform in some respect for their own safety and for monetary reasons. This can be seen in priests beginning to allow non-recusants access to the sacraments as the situation grew more serious, a contrast to the previous policy of denying those who had previously conformed to Protestantism admission to the sacraments. During the last ten or fifteen years of Elizabeth's reign, and even more so during James I's reign, Catholics in England began looking toward toleration as a goal rather than reconversion, even though this remained counter to the policy of Rome.⁵⁷

Interestingly, this decreasing emphasis on recusancy was not reflected in martyrdom accounts. This is partly due to the fact that recusancy, like martyrdom, was still held up as an example for the Catholic community to follow. At the same time, however, this does not account

⁵⁶ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 37, 45.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 37, 257-259, 45.

for the universally harsh language regarding attendance at Protestant churches that was used even into the 1600s. Despite the changes in English Catholic practice in England over the period, martyrdom accounts all through Elizabeth's reign continued to showcase the Continental emphasis on recusancy. The necessity for recusancy shown by priest William Lacy in 1582, who could not "in conscience frequent the protestant churches" was much the same as gentleman John Rigby's refusal to attend Protestant church services to a commissioner in 1600.⁵⁸

When Protestant authorities interrogated English Catholics, these questions were, as previously discussed, directed to a Continental conception of English Catholicism. The English responses to these questions, however, were far more English in nature than they were Continental. English Catholics went out of their way to assure Protestant authorities that they were not traitors and that they were still loyal to Elizabeth specifically. This was partly out of self-interest, since actual language against Elizabeth or against the state would certainly be cause to have an individual Catholic executed, but this was also because English Catholics seem to have been genuinely loyal to their country. Catholics equivocated or avoided answering potentially incriminating or controversial questions, particularly those of a political nature.⁵⁹ John Ingram, in an epigram carved into the wall of the Tower of London in 1594, wrote that "It is allowed to saints to equivocate" as his explanation for the lie he had told Protestant authorities that he was a Scot and not an Englishman.⁶⁰ Equivocation was approved as a practice by Catholic Continental authorities like Persons and Henry Garnet, but the motivations behind it

⁵⁸ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 61, 198.

⁵⁹ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 117-120.

⁶⁰ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 270, 278-279.

demonstrate the dual aims of maintaining the Catholic presence in England and remaining loyal to the state.⁶¹

In maintaining religion as their primary concern, English Catholics were able to walk the line, at least for themselves, between being Catholic and being English. They did not link themselves politically with a foreign power, but they also did not abandon their religion. This included not incriminating themselves or their companions by admitting to actions in England or even, in some cases, not admitting to being priests.⁶² Beyond simpler questions about backgrounds of individuals, Protestant officials asked arrested English Catholics highly political questions. Swithin Wells, for example, was questioned as a Catholic gentleman about his knowledge of the Babington Plot against Elizabeth in 1586, but Wells claimed he barely knew Babington.⁶³ English Catholics in reality likely did not know a lot about the political situation between England and powers on the Continent, and they certainly (except perhaps in the cases of influential Jesuits like Southwell and Henry Walpole) did not have any secret information regarding Continental plans in England.⁶⁴

The answers given by English Catholics to questions regarding Catholic invasion and the supremacy of the queen were particularly telling. Most Catholics did not answer or said they did not know how to answer, or else that their answer depended upon the circumstances.⁶⁵ Priests questioned in 1585 reportedly told their examiners that “when the time cometh” for the invasion

⁶¹ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 122.

⁶² Edward Stranham (1586) freely gave information about his travels on the Continent but refused to answer questions relating to his time in England. Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 124-125. William Freeman (1595) continually denied being a priest. *Ibid.*, 354. Walpole refused to give names of Catholic companions. *Ibid.*, 249.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 132-133. Wells was questioned in August 1586 just after the plot was uncovered, though Wells was only martyred in 1591 for harboring Edmund Gennings.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 107-108, 169-170, 246-252.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 105-106, 249.

they would tell their decision regarding with whom they would fight.⁶⁶ Francis Diconson, martyred in 1590, according to the signed document of his examination apparently stated that he would serve on the side of the Pope against the queen. Pollen pointed out, however, that the very Protestant phrase “Catholyck Romysh religion” used in the written testimony made his authentic belief in this statement suspect.⁶⁷ Thomas Felton walked the line well in his response that he would side “with God and country,” allowing him to retain his Catholicism while not jeopardizing his loyalty to the state.⁶⁸ Alexander Brian answered a question surrounding whether he would obey the Queen in light of the papal bull of excommunication by saying that the question was “too high and dangerous for him to answer.”⁶⁹ More Continent-focused Catholics, such as Allen, used these evasive answers to demonstrate Catholic loyalty to their religion; however, this detracts from the genuine loyalty to England expressed by most English Catholics being questioned.⁷⁰

In most cases, martyrdom accounts made only certain Protestant figures into villains, rather than the Protestant community at large. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, figures in the English government or even the Privy Council itself were the primary adversaries of Catholics. England itself, personified by Elizabeth, was not the enemy. Alfield, for example, when speaking about the book by Allen that he had disseminated (for which he was executed), claimed that “it towched not the Quene any moore then it did the ffrenche king or Spanishe king,” adding that the book was specifically not written “to slander the Quene.”⁷¹ In letters following the 1588 post-Armada executions, Southwell described his desire to glorify martyrs by

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 172, 169.

⁶⁸ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 119.

⁶⁹ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 45.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷¹ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 119.

recounting their struggles while not bringing “more hatred on the English name.”⁷² Even when language of a battle against the devil was used in reference to Protestants, accounts typically applied the characteristics of Satan only to particular ministers rather than to the entire nation or government or even faith. The “malicious hell-hounds of Satan” for Morris’s Yorkshire recusant were specific Protestant persecutors rather than the nation or government itself.⁷³ English Catholics were set apart in accounts by virtue of their faith, but these accounts deliberately did not frame English Catholics as set apart politically, allowing them to maintain the balance between being English and being Catholic.

The emphasis on Catholics not committing treason, both in Catholic accounts and according to statements in Protestant trial and interrogation records, acts as an explicitly English influence in accounts, balancing more Continental ideas. Continental Catholics and even some English Catholics in exile on the Continent, such as Allen, were actively pursuing treasonous courses of action against the English government. The majority of Catholics in England, and in particular the Catholics depicted in martyrdom accounts, however, were not. Despite the fears of English Protestants that the Catholic community in England was plotting rebellion or encouraging invasion, this does not seem to be the case in any real capacity.

English Catholics wanted to be both English and Catholic, and the martyrdom accounts of this period reflect this desire. English martyrs, despite the consumption of their accounts by the entire body of European Catholics, were specifically intended to be examples for the English Catholic community, which will be further discussed in the next chapter. At the same time, however, Continental influences were evident in the accounts throughout the entire period, even as priorities shifted on both sides.

⁷² Ibid., 325.

⁷³ Morris, “A Yorkshire Recusant’s Relation,” 97.

Chapter 3: The Impact of Martyrdom Accounts: Examples, Encouragement, and Constancy

Martyrdom and accounts of martyrdom in this period impacted the Catholic community in England in several ways that fall into two broader categories: martyrs as examples and martyrs as points of constancy and encouragement. The importance of martyrs as examples for the Catholic community was a particularly English feature of accounts. As demonstrated in the last chapter, however, martyrdom and martyrdom accounts contain many Continental influences that shaped the examples set by martyrs. The idea of martyrs as rallying points certainly applied most readily to the immediate English community, but, as the Continent had no Catholic martyrs of its own, English martyrs also became rallying points for the entire Catholic community. The constancy of the accounts and the martyrs serves to demonstrate this point. Regardless of shifts in belief in England or on the Continent, and regardless of conflicts and controversies within the Church, the same emphases are found throughout martyrdom accounts from across the period. Few differences existed between accounts of martyrs' behavior, aside from differences attributed to specific events (such as deaths of certain Protestant figures or the battle against the Spanish Armada) or to the individual circumstances of each martyr. Martyrdom was not necessarily vital to the survival of Catholicism in England, but it was something the majority of the community supported and admired, regardless of political and theological conflicts.

Martyrs as Examples

A primary way martyrs served as examples to their community was through account construction that made martyrs into new saints. The Church did not canonize any of these martyrs until 1970, so no account explicitly referred to them as saints; however, these martyrs

were still considered as such by the Catholic community.¹ As discussed in the first chapter, martyrdom accounts framed martyrs as exhibiting the same qualities of virtue and spirituality that could be seen in accounts of saints, accompanied by the presence of the miraculous. Martyr glorification echoed saint glorification, and the exclusively positive perspective in accounts was similarly hagiographic.² Poems like those praising Edmund Campion, which place Campion immediately in heaven after death looking down on Earth, also served to equate martyrs to saints.³ Margaret Clitherow's account demonstrates saint-making perhaps more than any other account, particularly because, as historian Anne Dillon discusses, the account of Clitherow's life and death was based closely on lives of popular female saints.⁴

Though all martyrs were good martyrs and useful to the community, accounts praised better-educated martyrs, particularly priests and even more so Jesuits, more than their less educated counterparts. These well-educated and explicitly religious martyrs were framed as the ideal to which the community could look. Accounts equated them with the saints of the past, which were also prominent in martyrdom accounts. Since martyrs were compared to saints, both implicitly and explicitly, as discussed earlier, old saints remained powerful within the public consciousness.⁵ At a time when veneration of the saints was a practice rejected in Protestant England, the use of old saints in martyrdom accounts allowed Catholics to retain this part of their

¹ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 5-6; Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 252. Eighteen of these martyrs, including Edmund Campion, Margaret Clitherow, Edmund Gennings, Robert Southwell, and Henry Walpole, were formally canonized by the Pope Paul VI in 1970 among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales from 1535 to 1679. Nearly every other Elizabethan martyr was beatified during the 19th and 20th centuries; in a comparison with the names provided by Challoner, of his listed 186 (or 187 including one layman listed only in his appendix) martyrs, all but 15 are beatified or canonized. *The Book of Saints: A Comprehensive Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Dom Basil Watkins, OSB (New York: A & C Black Publishers Limited, 2002).

² See chapter 1.

³ Alfield, *A true reporte*.

⁴ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 299, 310.

⁵ See chapter 1.

belief and maintain this connection with the early Church more obviously than they could have otherwise.⁶ Saints were still important to Catholics in England during this period, regardless, as a significant part of Catholic belief, but martyrdom emphasized and strengthened this connection.

The saints created by martyrdom were particularly influential in their proximity to regular English Catholics. The saint of a martyrdom account was just like any other English Catholic, trying to find a way to live in England while not denying his or her faith. Those in martyrdom accounts, however, demonstrated the proper way of dealing with this struggle, whether this was in a very idealized account of a Jesuit like Campion or Robert Southwell or in the briefer statements about lay martyrs or more simple priests who had been executed for merely serving their communities. English Catholics could aspire to the specific behavior of these martyrs, in contrast to the behavior of Catholics on the Continent who were not as connected with the lives of those in England and who did not face the same struggles as English Catholics.⁷ Martyrdom accounts could serve to demonstrate proper religious devotion to the community, as well as what actions and behaviors should or should not be performed, through the examples of their new martyr saints.⁸ Clitherow's account, for example, emphasizes recusancy, prayer, Mass attendance, and confession, all of which were common practices highlighted in other accounts.⁹ For these reasons, combined with the English influences discussed in the previous chapter, the saint-making of martyrdom accounts had a specifically English character.

Martyrs were also made into saints through relic collecting. Relic collecting had always been a particularly important Catholic practice from the early Church, and this continued with Elizabethan martyrs, done with restricted approval from the Council of Trent a few decades

⁶ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 306.

⁷ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 281.

⁸ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 312-313; Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 278.

⁹ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 285-288, 290-291. See chapter 1.

prior.¹⁰ Catholics saw relics as the closest objects to heaven that could be found on earth, since the martyrs had, in Catholic belief, gone to heaven immediately after their deaths.¹¹ Anything could be a relic, and Catholics witnessing executions worked to acquire relics even before the executions themselves, sometimes paying a hangman to be allowed to collect relics.¹² Relic collection and dispersal was particularly common in London, but Catholics on the Continent also worked to acquire relics of English martyrs through Jesuit networks.¹³ Since they were the only Catholic martyrs in Europe at this point, the English martyrs were the figures that Catholics all across Europe looked toward for this expression of religious devotion.¹⁴ Remains were distributed by religious orders to friends and acquaintances, with pieces of Campion's rib, Everard Hanse's tooth, and other relics traveling all around the Continent in the years after their deaths, often facilitated by Cardinal William Allen.¹⁵

The practice of relic collecting can be seen itself in several martyrdom accounts. Edmund Gennings's execution was immediately followed by a girl, Lucy Ridley, attempting to acquire a relic from Gennings by pulling off his thumb, which she kept.¹⁶ An account of Campion's martyrdom by fellow Jesuit Henry More recounted how Catholics watching the execution ventured to collect relics, one trying in vain to soak his handkerchief in Campion's blood, another successfully absconding with Campion's finger, and others fruitlessly attempting to buy the clothing of Campion and his fellow martyrs.¹⁷ Southwell personally gave his cap to his executioner as a relic even before he had been killed, and a cloth that the hangman used to wipe

¹⁰ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 98-99; Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 301.

¹¹ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 301.

¹² McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 154.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 153-154; Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 98.

¹⁴ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 98; Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 299-300.

¹⁵ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 299-300; Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 98.

¹⁶ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 207.

¹⁷ Quoted in Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 15.

Southwell's face was similarly treated as a relic.¹⁸ Catholics witnessing Southwell's execution also were said to have "dipped handkerchiefs in the sprayed blood and offered [the hangman] money for a piece of bone or a lock of hair."¹⁹ Protestant concern with relic collecting can be seen in the accounts of William Hart and Richard Thirkill, both martyred in 1583. In these cases, officials specifically acted to stop Catholics from collecting relics of their martyrs, with the officials overseeing Thirkill's execution even using a "great fire of straw" to burn any part of his body so no relics could be found.²⁰ The officials at the execution of John Amias and Robert Dalby in 1589 were said to have been "very watchful to prevent the standers by from gathering any of [the martyr's] blood, or carrying off any thing that had belonged to them."²¹

Sites of martyrdom also took on the quality of the sites of saints. Clitherow was said to have gone on pilgrimages to the sites of martyrdoms in York as an act of religious devotion.²² Journeys to sites of execution and personal presence at them were seen as acts of piety in the Catholic community. Tyburn, as the site of a large number of Catholic executions, became an especially common site for pilgrimages.²³ The miracles associated with martyrs also added to this quality of sainthood, since saints, following in the footsteps of Christ, were traditionally the performers of miracles.²⁴

Catholics doubting themselves in their faith could also look to martyrs for influence and inspiration. Campion functioned as a particularly influential figure in this respect. Witnessing a disputation between Campion and Protestant officials inspired nobleman Philip Howard, who

¹⁸ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 373; McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 154.

¹⁹ Quoted in McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 154.

²⁰ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 68, 74.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

²² Mush, "A True Report," 395.

²³ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 74, 151-152.

²⁴ See chapter 1.

died in prison in 1595 and is counted by some (including the present-day Catholic Church) as a martyr, to join the Catholic faith.²⁵ Henry Walpole, similarly, took Campion's martyrdom, which Walpole witnessed so closely he was splattered with Campion's blood, as a sign directing him to go to the Continent and join the priesthood.²⁶ Another Englishman reportedly traveled to Rome to become a Catholic due to the example set by Campion.²⁷ Similarly, the martyrdom of Edward Stransham in 1586 served as "yf... not the first motive, yet a great confirmacion undoubtedly... in the Catholique faith" for William Freeman, who was martyred in 1595.²⁸ Conversions to the faith in prison or before death by criminals who spoke with martyrs or witnessed their deaths were also reportedly common.²⁹

A particularly important way that martyrs acted as examples for the community was through recusancy, with martyrdom serving as the most extreme and admirable type of recusancy. As discussed in the last chapter, martyrdom accounts and martyrs themselves promoted the virtues of recusancy in their actions, particularly by their universal refusal to go to Protestant church and their implication that such an action should never, under any circumstance, be committed by an English Catholic. Martyr manuscripts disseminated around England served as what Anne Dillon calls "identifying texts of Catholic recusancy" in their demonstration of proper recusant behavior and instructions for how English Catholics were properly to act in the

²⁵ Francis W. Steer, ed., *The Life of St. Philip Howard* (London: Phillimore, 1971), 8. Howard numbers among the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales canonized in 1970.

²⁶ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 76.

²⁷ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 283.

²⁸ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 346.

²⁹ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 283; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 156, 80-81, 131, 217, 226. See chapter 1 examples.

face of persecution.³⁰ Recusancy itself could be seen as an act of martyrdom, with martyrdom as the last step in the process of recusancy.³¹

Martyrs as a Point of Encouragement and Constancy

The English Catholic community identified with the Elizabethan martyrs and used their accounts in much the same way as they used those of old saints. Subsequently, in addition to serving as examples for the faithful in England, the martyrs functioned as a rallying point for the community. Because Protestant authority figures persecuted Catholics through fines and imprisonment, English Catholics were unable to practice their faith except in secret. Their clergy were hidden away in households or moved from place to place with little safety and a definite potential for capture. And beyond all of the other hardships faced by English Catholics, government officials had some of the Catholics executed for their faith while claiming they were committing treason. Because of these conditions, the martyrs became points of connection for the entire community, much like the martyrs of the early Church to which the English Catholics looked.³² Early Church theologian Tertullian's famous quote, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," expressed by priest and martyr John Ingram in a letter in 1594, further underlined this connection and the importance of martyrdom.³³ Even in the face of persecution and impediments to fully practicing their faith, English Catholics had figures to look toward and examples to follow in their martyrs. The members of the Catholic community in England were able to see themselves as being tested in these conditions, and the martyrs were a point at which they could come together and unite rather than allowing themselves to be divided by their

³⁰ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom* 100.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

³² Gregory *Salvation at Stake*, 283-284; McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 151.

³³ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 172.

persecutors.³⁴ The act of witnessing martyrdom as a Catholic also served, in dramatic fashion, to link these Catholics together.³⁵

English Catholics saw martyrs as struggling for the sake of their community, but the martyrs did not hold the Catholic community in England together.³⁶ Catholics clearly were willing to not attend Protestant church services, since they had been accruing fines for decades since Elizabeth took the throne.³⁷ Networks of priests served communities (some more effectively than others), and even if the faith was not able to thrive equally in all areas, it was certainly able to survive in many. Nonetheless, martyrs increased this sense of community and helped tie the faithful together more than they might have been otherwise. Martyrdom sustained Catholic belief and encouraged the faithful in their actions. English Catholic martyrs died for their faith, in some cases after declining to acknowledge the identities of their fellow Catholics even in the face of torture. The mere fact of their dying because they had refused to reject their faith acted to bolster the community.³⁸ The practices associated with martyrdom, particularly the collection of relics, helped preserve Catholic history and link the Church persecuted by English Protestant authorities with the early Church persecuted by Roman authorities.³⁹

Martyrs also held a specific position in various conflicts over belief within the Catholic community, both in England and on the Continent. As demonstrated in the last chapter, martyr accounts and martyrs themselves were clearly subject to both English and Continental influences, but while Catholic positions about belief in England and on the Continent shifted over this period, the framing of the martyrs did not change. For example, the conflict with the

³⁴ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 104.

³⁵ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 153.

³⁶ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 254.

³⁷ Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 34; Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*, 191.

³⁸ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 151; Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 253-254, 283-284.

³⁹ McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 153.

Spanish Armada, a direct attempt at eventual invasion that was supported by Continental Catholics, and the following intense bout of Catholic persecution caused anger directed toward Robert Dudley and perhaps toward the Privy Council as a body. Yet, martyrs and their accounts never criticized or attacked Elizabeth, or England more broadly, following these events.⁴⁰ Robert Southwell even made a conscious effort not to say anything that would reflect too poorly on England and its government when he wrote a letter back to the Continent after the large-scale executions in late August of 1588.⁴¹ From the opposite direction, as Elizabeth's reign wore on and the Catholic Church in England adapted to the reality that recusancy was becoming less possible for some Catholics, martyrs and martyrdom accounts still maintained recusancy as one of their primary focuses. To attend Protestant services, according to the narrative implicit in any martyrdom account, was a terrible act, while some average English Catholics, though they did not want to go to Protestant church services, viewed attending these services as a necessary evil and not an impossible one. The same Continental influences existed alongside the same English influences in accounts and in the actual words and actions of martyrs throughout the entire period with few, if any, changes.

The fact that these influences remained so similar, even in the face of conflicts and changing realities, gave martyrdom a sense of constancy that transcended Catholic conflicts. Regardless of competing or conflicting influences and interests and regardless of different realities for individuals in England and on the Continent, martyrdom was something that everyone in the entire community could support, and accounts were framed as such. The balance of interests emphasized in the accounts further added to this idea. Martyrdom accounts were

⁴⁰ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 150; Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, 114-115; Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 43.

⁴¹ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 325.

neither wholly Continental nor wholly English in outlook; rather, the combination of the two aspects seems to have enabled them to be well-received on all sides without any changes or arguments involved in their writing or reading.

The same sense of constancy can be seen in other conflicts. Near the end of Elizabeth's reign, for example, a controversy arose surrounding the installation in 1598 of the new, possibly pro-Jesuit Catholic Archpriest, George Blackwell, to replace William Allen who had died in 1594. Since the Archpriest oversaw the secular clergy in England, some seminary priests resented the potential Jesuit influence over Blackwell. The resulting situation pitted Jesuits and some seminary priests against other seminary priests in a conflict over authority and the independence of the secular clergy. Despite this tense situation that generated many pamphlets, multiple appeals to Rome, and even the involvement of the queen, there is no evidence that opinions of or writings about martyrs changed their focus due to the "Archpriest Controversy."⁴² Certainly there are fewer extant writings regarding martyrs during the last five years of Elizabeth's reign, but what letters and accounts do exist do not seem to demonstrate any concern over the controversy. Jesuits were not particularly praised or criticized in any account, regardless of the author; rather, the documents read just the same as any others from earlier in the period.⁴³ The "Archpriest Controversy" was important to members of the clergy at this time, but that importance does not seem to have manifested itself in accounts and writings.

This constancy and consistency in martyrs and their accounts gave them a specific purpose. As we have seen, the accounts served as anti-Protestant (though not anti-English) propaganda and as a source of unity for the Catholic community. What these accounts did not do

⁴² Thomas Graves Law, *The Archpriest Controversy: Documents Related to the Dissensions of the Roman Catholic Clergy, 1597-1602*, (Westminster: Nichols and Sons, 1896), xvi-xxvii.

⁴³ Pollen, *Unpublished Documents*, 361-392.

was pit different versions of what was best for the English Catholic community against each other. There was no confusion and conflict over possibly allowing some degree of conformity to Protestantism present in accounts. There was no dialogue about how essential recusancy should be for Catholics. There were no calls to possibly treasonous action against Elizabeth and England. There were no veiled criticisms of seminary or Jesuit priests by each other, and, while some martyrs were praised more than others, there was not belittling of lay martyrs in comparison to their ecclesiastical counterparts. Accounts were neither purely Continental nor purely English; rather, they contained important elements of both Continental and English interests, and this held true for the entire period. The martyrs from the late 1570s until Elizabeth's death in 1603 were all portrayed nearly identically, with just a few individual differences. The purpose of the accounts through this consistency was that the resulting prototypical English Catholic martyr became an individual who had not abandoned his Englishness but had also fully retained his Catholicism. This martyr practiced his or her faith in accordance with the rules of Rome, but he or she was part of the English Catholic community and would never speak against England or against Elizabeth. This effective compromise between Catholicism and Englishness was important because it emphasized the unity that stemmed from the rallying point of martyrdom without allowing intra-Church conflicts to interfere with that message.

The constancy that appeared in these Elizabethan accounts is typical of any body of martyrdom accounts from any period. The specific English Catholic context, however, gives this constancy and consistency particular importance. These accounts preserved the ideal English Catholic martyr to encourage, inspire, and provide examples for the community. This constancy also served to link the Church in the sixteenth century with the early Church, with largely similar

and consistent scripts for martyrdom between the periods but with new villains, obstacles, and purposes under Elizabeth. The fact that the accounts were so consistently scripted meant that their readers could see themselves as part of the narrative of Catholic persecution that had originated with the Romans in ancient times and was now the product of English Protestant authorities. In addition, the constancy of the accounts worked to add to their validity from a contemporary standpoint (though this consistency actually reduces their credibility from a modern perspective). The miracles and miraculous stories in martyrdom accounts gained credence through their repetition, as did Catholic assertions of innocence and accounts of terrible Protestant actions. With more and more accounts of the same Protestant abuses and the same Catholic glorification, it would have been easier for the Catholic community to believe more fully in the events of accounts, regardless of their truthfulness, making martyrdom accounts a more effective method of Catholic propaganda than they would have been otherwise. Connections with the Church of the past, accompanied by the desire for English Catholics to be both English and Catholic, required that these accounts remain constant. This played out in the extant body of martyrdom accounts and writings as the original script that was set for these accounts remained constant across conflicts and ideological shifts.

Conclusion

On May 18, 1970, Pope Paul VI announced his intent to canonize a group of sixteenth and seventeenth century British martyrs, collectively referred to as the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, on October 25th of that year. An article from the English edition of the official Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* laid out the technical case for canonization – the beatification of these martyrs in 1886, 1895, or 1929 and the evidence of a recent miracle attributed to the group – but it is the framing of the martyrs in the article that is most interesting. As the article describes who the martyrs were, the language is oddly familiar. “It is extremely important,” says the article, “to realize the fact... that the Martyrs were not put to death as a result of internal struggles between Catholics and Anglicans, but precisely because they were not willing to submit to a claim of the State which is commonly recognized today as being illegitimate and unacceptable.” More directly, these martyrs “rose in defence of the rights of conscience against State usurpation.”¹ This rhetoric is glaringly similar to the rhetoric in actual martyrdom accounts surrounding treason. That executions of Catholics were not the product of “internal struggles between Catholics and Anglicans” harkens back to the Catholic framing of Protestant accusations of treason, while the language of defending “the rights of conscience against State usurpation” maps onto the sixteenth century Catholic assurance that English Catholics were being executed on purely religious grounds.

Reading further, the article offers brief anecdotes surrounding several of the martyrs, including Edmund Campion and Margaret Clitherow, that read right out of the pages of sixteenth century accounts, almost certainly because that was where these anecdotes originated. Cuthbert

¹ Paolo Molinari, S.J., “Canonization of 40 English and Welsh Martyrs,” *L'Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition in English*, October 29, 1970, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/MARY/40MARTYR.htm>.

Mayne (martyred in 1577) and Campion are quoted as going joyfully toward their executions. Clitherow is implicitly connected to Christ in the manner of her death. Henry Walpole is praised for withstanding incredible torture. Those who were given the opportunity to speak before their executions are described as demonstrating “authentically Christian charity for men” in their scaffold prayers, not only for their fellow Catholics, “but also for all their fellow-countrymen; and in particular for the Head of the State and even for their executioners.” In the article, canonization of saints like these martyrs is said to have “the aim of presenting to the faithful and to all men the unshaken loyalty with which [the martyrs] followed Christ and his law.”² The informal saint-making that occurred in martyrdom accounts in the sixteenth century had precisely this same goal of providing an example of how to live the faith to other Catholics.

Nearly 400 years had passed between the deaths of the first Elizabethan Catholic martyrs and the canonization of eighteen of their number, and yet their framing had not changed. Certainly there were efforts made by Catholic authorities surrounding the canonization to avoid any of the hostility in Catholic and Anglican relations that is another result of the reigns and religious policies of Mary I and Elizabeth. The support of prominent Anglican figures was, in fact, an important factor in the Church’s decision to go ahead with the canonizations. But this effort aside, there were few differences in terms of the presentation of the martyrs. The martyrs of the Elizabethan period exist in Catholic memory just as they always have, and just as any body of persecuted martyrs exists in Christian memory.

The Elizabethan martyrs as a body have become part of the narrative of Catholic (or, earlier, Christian) persecution that has been in formation since the death of Jesus. With the Gospels as the prototypical martyrdom account surrounding Jesus as the prototypical martyr,

² Ibid.

early Christians formed martyrdom accounts in which individual martyrs were less important than their collective use as ideal Christians as part of the narrative of Christian persecution. The same holds true for the Elizabethan martyrs. Some of the martyrs in the Elizabethan period did, and still do, have established reputations in their own rights, Campion in particular taking pride of place among the group of martyrs as the first Jesuit to be executed in England. The majority of the martyrs in this period, however, even among the eighteen canonized in 1970, functioned primarily as parts of a larger whole. Taken together, the constancy and consistency of these accounts effectively turns them into a collective body that is, first and foremost, another chapter in this persecution narrative. While the Catholic Church is not persecuted in this way today, this narrative of persecution remains a part of Christian Church history that continues to provide examples of true faith to the faithful.

Five months after his initial announcement, Pope Paul VI gave a homily in the presence of bishops and priests from England and Wales to commemorate the canonization of the Forty Martyrs. In his conclusion, Paul looked toward the future in a way that would not have been out of place among English Catholics in the sixteenth century: “May the blood of these Martyrs be able to heal the great wound inflicted upon God’s Church by reason of the separation of the Anglican Church from the Catholic Church.”³ Certainly, at the time, Catholic martyrdom did anything but restore unity to the Catholic Church, since Protestants were demonized in accounts nearly as much as Catholic martyrs were glorified. However, this language of unity in Paul’s statement is necessary in talking about this tragic period of English history. Though perhaps the hope of a reunited Catholic Church is far-fetched, and would have been far-fetched even in 1600,

³ “25 October 1970: Canonization of forty martyrs from England and Wales, Homily by Pope Paul VI,” The Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/homilies/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19701025.html.

efforts at bringing Christians together, with the acknowledgment of terrible actions on both sides, are important perhaps not to heal Paul's "great wound" to the Catholic Church, but to depart from a long legacy of antagonism in England.

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