

# Memory, myth and memorialization: Catholic martyrs and martyrologies in early modern England

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Michael Questier, *Catholics and Treason: Martyrology, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Reformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. pp. xxix + 648. £85.00.

Eighteen years ago, Thomas McCoog hailed Anne Dillon's *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603* as a giant step forward which moved the study of recusant martyrologies away from being 'a self-satisfied cottage industry'.<sup>1</sup> Michael Questier's new monograph, *Catholics and Treason*, is another major step in this journey. These two books are, in many ways, complementary. Dillon's monograph provides an incisive survey of sixteenth-century English Catholic conceptions of martyrdom and the ways in which martyrdom was depicted in text and images. Dillon, although she consulted manuscripts, based her analyses largely on printed sources. Questier provides an authoritative overview of English Catholic martyrdoms from Elizabeth I's reign to the execution of Archbishop Oliver Plunkett in 1681. Questier does not discuss images extensively and although he certainly examines a significant number of printed sources, manuscript sources are central to his analyses.

The monographs of Dillon and Questier are part of a monsoon of writing about early modern martyrdom, which since about 1985, has utterly transformed the historical landscape.<sup>2</sup> Yet the downpour may

<sup>1</sup> Thomas M. McCoog, 'Construing Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1582-1602', in Ethan Shagan, ed. *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation': Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 95.

<sup>2</sup> An extensive list of works on Reformation martyrs in western and central Europe is provided in Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 363-5. As will be partially seen from further notes in this article, the current century has seen a continuing stream of works on martyrs, martyrdom and persecution in early modern Europe as well as the publication of important primary sources, notably the British Academy's digitalization of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and Victor Houlston's continuing publication of the correspondence of Robert Persons. See *The Correspondence and Unpublished Papers of Robert Persons, SJ, Volume I, 1574-1588* eds. Victor Houlston et al, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2017) and *The Correspondence of Robert Persons, SJ, Volume II, 1588-97*, eds. Victor

seem more extensive than it actually is because the land on which it has been falling was so parched and neglected. For the first eight decades of the twentieth century, apart from desultory confessional cheerleading, few areas of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations have been as lacking in serious scholarship as those dealing with martyrdom and martyrologies. While research on martyrs and martyrdoms has significantly increased since then, many scholars feel, and sometimes express, a certain discomfort with the subject. One reason for this is a natural revulsion at the agonising physical punishments the martyrs endured, and the graphic detail with which these were described by contemporaries. This distaste, if not revulsion, permeates a not atypical passage from a (deservedly) respected scholar: ‘Although Foxe is only too capable of describing the gruesomely tedious process of burning someone to death, as his infamous accounts of Cranmer’s and Ridley’s deaths attest . . .’<sup>3</sup>

Added to feelings of disgust are feelings of fear. Throughout the world, terrorists are one of one of life’s existential threats and, in the modern world, martyrs are associated with terrorists.<sup>4</sup> The resulting wariness in discussing martyrs has resulted in a certain marginalisation of the entire topic which has taken some surprising forms. In 2021, an exhibition at the British Museum on the Emperor Nero and his ‘myth’ contained nothing in it on the martyrdom of Christians in his reign, even though their martyrdoms form an essential part of Nero’s *nachleben*. The book accompanying the exhibition mentioned Tacitus’ assertion that Nero persecuted the Christians as scapegoats for the catastrophic fire that engulfed Rome in 64 C.E., only to dismiss the claim as an ‘anachronistic back projection’ and while the book mentions the persecution of the Christians briefly, it does not address the issue of early Christian martyrdom or even use the words ‘martyr’ and ‘martyrdom’.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the book’s single paragraph on the subject is a meagre discussion of Tacitus’ claim, which even the author admits was ‘of tremendous historical consequence’.<sup>6</sup> Another British Museum exhibition, on the murder of Becket is similarly circumspect,

Houliston et al, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies [2023]). A third volume covering the correspondence for the years 1598-1610 is forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Frances E. Dolan, “‘Gentlemen, I have one more thing to say’: Women on Scaffolds in England, 1565-1680”, *Modern Philology* 92 (1994): 157-178 at p. 161 (my emphasis).

<sup>4</sup> Among the numerous works discussing the connections between martyrdom and terrorism are David Cook and Olivia Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks: The Faith and Politics of Martyrdom Operations* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007); Madawi Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin, eds. *Dying for Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009) and Assaf Moghadam, *Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafī Jihad and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Thorsten Opper, *Nero: The Man Behind the Myth* (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 208-9. Admittedly, Opper’s scepticism over the accuracy of Tacitus’ passage is shared by many scholars.

<sup>6</sup> *Op cit.*, 208.

despite its topic. The book for the exhibition deals at length with Becket's murder, canonization, cult and posthumous miracles but the closest it comes to a discussion of martyrs and martyrdom is a single sentence stating that the deaths of Thomas More and Thomas Becket were viewed 'through the lens of political martyrdom' (no further explanation is given).<sup>7</sup> I can only guess at the reasons for these curious omissions but considered together they are more than coincidental and would seem to indicate a fear of the controversies that an explicit discussion of martyrdom might incite. The placing of martyrs and martyrdom on the peripheries of both relevance and academic respectability reached a height (or perhaps one should say a nadir) with Seymour Byman's attempt, published in the eminent *American Historical Review*, to psychoanalyse the Marian martyrs. According to Byman, the Marian martyrs were compulsive neurotics and their readiness to die a pathology. Byman's premise is problematic and his methodology questionable, but his article epitomises the disquiet, even disdain, that many scholars feel about early modern martyrs.<sup>8</sup> This unease is accompanied by a tendency to minimise the religious 'fanaticism' of some early moderns. Thus the biographer of Thomas Norton (who supervised the torture of Edmund Campion and was known as the 'Rackmaster-General' to Catholics) portrays him as a religious moderate, ignoring his ferocity as both a polemicist and a hunter of priests.<sup>9</sup> On a more popular level, there is a similar transmutation in depictions of the zealous evangelical Thomas Cromwell into the tolerant secularist of the television series *Wolf Hall*.<sup>10</sup>

This reluctance to contemplate, much less analyse, martyrs and martyrologies may seem difficult to reconcile with the recent surge in writing on them. But much of the work on early modern English martyrs is a kind of spillover from other popular topics, which are inextricably linked to martyrdom. Thus, for example, interest in Foxe's martyrology has been stimulated by its putative impact on the origins and development of English national identity.<sup>11</sup> The work of Michel Foucault on the punishment of crime and his theory that the state, through mutilation, torture and execution inscribed its own propaganda messages on the body of the condemned, has led to scholars

<sup>7</sup> Lloyd de Beer and Naomi Speakman, *Thomas Becket: Murder and the Making of a Saint* (London: British Museum Press, 2021), 220.

<sup>8</sup> Seymour Byman, 'Ritualistic Acts and Compulsive Behavior: The Pattern of Tudor Martyrdom', *American Historical Review* 83 (1978): 625-43; also see the comments on Byman's article in Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake, Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 100-101.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Graves, *Thomas Norton: Parliament Man* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> *Wolf Hall*, directed by Peter Kosminsky and written by Peter Straughan (BBC, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> See William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: J. Cape, 1963) and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1992), ch. 1.

examining martyrdoms as an opportunity for the martyr and martyrologist to transmit opposing messages.<sup>12</sup> A powerful desire to learn more about early modern women who defied authority and social norms has led to an academic engagement with early modern female martyrs, and, in particular, an almost obsessive interest in Anne Askew and, a less intense, but still active, interest in Margaret Clitherow.<sup>13</sup> And a concern with the history of the book has led to close study of the production and dissemination of early modern martyrologies.<sup>14</sup>

## II

Although the study of all early modern martyrs has been somewhat circumscribed, English Catholic martyrs, as Michael Questier observes, have failed to attract even the limited scholarly attention

<sup>12</sup> Notable examples include David Nicholls, 'The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation', *Past and Present* 121 (1988): 49-73 and Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Agency, Appropriation and Rhetoric under the Gallows: Puritans, Romanists and the State in Early Modern England' *Past and Present* 153 (1996): 64-107. Also see Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 166-9.

<sup>13</sup> There are quite a few works on how women martyrs were presented in English Protestant martyrologies, the best of these is Megan L. Hickerson, *Making Women Martyrs on Tudor England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005). Much less writing has been done on the actual experiences of female martyrs apart from Anne Askew and Margaret Clitherow. For a sample of the works on Anne Askew, written from different disciplines and perspectives see Thomas Betteridge, 'Anne Askew, John Bale and Protestant History', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern History* 27 (1997): 1165-90; Kimberly Ann Coles, "'The Death of the Author (and the Appropriation of her Text): The Case of Anne Askew's Examinations', *Modern Philology* 99 (2002): 515-40; Paula McQuade, "'Except they had Offended the Law" Gender and Jurisprudence in the Examinations of Anne Askew', *Literature and History* 3 (1994): 1-14; Thomas S. Freeman and Sarah Elizabeth Wall, 'Racking the Body, Shaping the Text: The Account of Anne Askew in Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"', *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001): 1165-90; Megan L. Hickerson, "'Ways of Lying": Anne Askew and the Examinations', *Gender and History* 18 (2006): 50-65 and Elizabeth Mazzola, 'Expert Witnesses and Sacred Subjects: Anne Askew's Examinations and Renaissance Self-Incrimination' in Carole Levin and Patricia M. Sullivan, eds. *Political Rhetoric: Power and Renaissance Women*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995, 157-71. On Margaret Clitherow, see Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethan England* (New York and London, Continuum, 2011); Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 277-322 and Claire Cross, 'An Elizabethan Martyrologist and his Martyr: John Mush and Margaret Clitherow', in Diana Wood, ed. *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 271-81.

<sup>14</sup> This has been particularly the case with John Foxe. See Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas Freeman, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Also note the ongoing work of Mark Rankin, including "'Accuracy" and "Error" in the Production of John Foxe and John Day's *Acts and Monuments*' *The Library* 7<sup>th</sup> series, 24 (2023): 25-50 and 'John Foxe and the Earliest Readers of William Tyndale's *The Practice of Prelates* (1530)', *English Literary Renaissance* 46 (2016): 158-93. For Jean Crespin, the Genevan martyrologist and printer see Jean-François Gilmont, *Jean Crespin: Un éditeur réformé du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1981). For Catholic martyrological book and pamphlet production see Christopher Highley, 'Richard Verstegan's Book of Martyrs' in Christopher Highley and John N. King, eds. *John Foxe and his World* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 183-97; Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 120-276 and Paul Arblaster, *Antwerp and the International Culture of Catholic Reformation* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004).

devoted to their Protestant counterparts. There are several reasons for this relative neglect. Among these are problems with the sources. A great proportion of the sources for Catholic martyrs were unprinted for centuries, if ever printed at all. A number of these manuscripts were destroyed, especially when the Society of Jesus was abolished. Those that survived were often stored in relatively inaccessible and little-known repositories. The collections of these repositories were also often poorly catalogued (pp. 24-25). An even more important reason for the relative neglect of Catholic martyrs has been a still-lingering Protestant triumphalism that regards the Catholic martyrs as having little importance within the main narrative of English history. As Peter Lake and Michael Questier have observed:

Because England was or became a protestant country (and arguably because 'protestantism' became a central part of English national identity until well into the twentieth century), it is in practice widely assumed (but not, of course, stated) that after some indeterminate point in Elizabeth's reign, if not before, protestants and protestantism are central to the national story in a way that catholics and catholicism are not.<sup>15</sup>

Leaving aside the issue of Protestantism and English national identity, there is a myth that post-Reformation English history was a triumphal march towards religious tolerance and constitutional monarchy, in which both the Marian persecution, on the one hand, and the Catholic martyrs on the other, were bloodstained blind alleys. That said, there is, however, one respect in which Protestant martyrologies actually are a key to understanding English culture: the considerable degree to which they influenced English literature. Bale, Foxe and others laid a crucial foundation for such writers as Edmund Spenser, John Bunyan and John Milton while the influence of English martyrologies on English drama is almost impossible to exaggerate.<sup>16</sup> Although the contribution of Catholic martyrologies to early modern English literature is far from insignificant, it is not as central as that of Foxe and his Protestant colleagues.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the relative neglect of Catholic martyrs, they remain crucial to an understanding of early modern English Catholicism. At the most basic

<sup>15</sup> Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 321.

<sup>16</sup> Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); David K. Anderson, *Martyrs and Players in Early Modern England: Tragedy, Religion and Violence on Stage* (Ashgate: Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2014), particularly ch. 1 and Marsha Robinson, *Writing the Reformation: Actes and Monuments and the Jacobean History Play* (Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> See Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) for the contribution of religious writing to early modern English literature.

level, it is somewhat surprising that English Catholicism survived over a century of intense persecution which saw the Church threatened by dangerously fissiparous tendencies. The execution of hundreds of priests and the imprisonment or execution of lay people who materially assisted them as well as fines and punishments, increasing over the years, for non-participation in Protestant church services might have been expected to divide a geographically and socially diverse Church into scattered, hidden, and isolated fragments. This, after all, is what happened to the Lollards in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Worse yet the leadership of the English Catholics was fiercely contested, and the clergy split into contending factions. Yet through all of this, the English Catholic martyrs were models who inspired constancy and fortitude in Catholics, clerical and lay, and emphasised Catholic cohesiveness despite internal divisiveness and external repression. The memory of the martyrs also helped to renew the zeal of the Catholic priests. In the Jesuit College of St Omer, around the year 1620, the students' devotional exercises included the reading of the martyrologies containing the legends of Catholic martyrs past and present. The source for this story, a former student at the college, described the other students listening with admiration to the deeds of Edmund Campion, Henry Garnet, Thomas Becket and Thomas More (p. 447).

Martyrdom is the rejection of compromise and in some respects the Catholic martyrs, as is the case with all martyrs, brought not peace but a sword. For one thing, the execution of hundreds of priests perpetuated the adversarial nature of the relationship between English Protestants and Catholics even after persecution diminished and the threat of foreign invasion receded. This did not necessarily entail hatred of or enmity towards Protestants but it did inspire the Catholic community to maintain a separate identity and status. And there was also an additional paradox at work with the martyrs, if their memory fostered Catholic unity, they were also a powerful weapon in disputes between factions of English Catholics.

The exploitation of martyrs to enhance the credibility and prestige of one religious group against its confessional rivals was hardly unknown during the Reformation.<sup>18</sup> Deploying martyrs against one's co-religionists, however, was rarer.<sup>19</sup> In the bitter and protracted

<sup>18</sup> For example, Dutch Calvinists successfully used the example of their martyrs to win supporters against both Catholics and Anabaptists: Phyllis Mack Crew, *Calvinist Preachers and Iconoclasm on the Netherlands 1544-1569* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 73-74.

<sup>19</sup> For Dutch Anabaptists citing their own martyrs against rival Anabaptist religious communities see Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 240-3. Among the Marian Protestants, those who believed in predestination very successfully used the writings and examples of Marian martyrs who championed the doctrine against their 'Freewillier' opponents. Thomas Freeman, 'Dissenters from a Dissenting Church: The Challenge of the Freewillers, 1550-1558' in Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie, eds. *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 129-56, esp. 152-5.

quarrels between the Jesuits and the secular clergy in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, both sides worked zealously, even frantically, to appropriate the Catholic martyrs to their own cause.<sup>20</sup> A particularly convoluted example of this occurred with the martyrdom of a Welsh priest, Roger Cadwallader in 1610. A Welsh Jesuit, Robert Jones, wrote an account of Cadwallader's incarceration and execution, which strove to associate the martyr with the Jesuits. According to Jones, Cadwallader made his final confession to a Jesuit and bequeathed his library to the Society of Jesus. Jones went on to accuse the seculars of being afraid to visit Cadwallader while he was awaiting execution and thus, in effect, of having abandoned the martyr. Secular clergy indignantly denied Jones' charges and produced their own testimonies, painting a very different story (pp. 384-91). Questier describes other examples of the attempted appropriation of a martyr. (Interesting examples of the secular clergy using a martyred colleague as propaganda for a Catholic episcopal hierarchy in England are recounted on pp. 391-4 and 473-4). The desire to commandeer martyrs for a particular faction is powerful testimony to the reverence felt towards the martyrs.

The martyrs, along with the documentation their lives and deaths generated, are, as Questier repeatedly points out, crucial sources into what were key issues of the early modern era such as the succession to the Crown, English foreign policy and the religious policies of the Crown. The accounts of Catholic martyrdoms give us direct access into what English Catholics thought about their loyalty to the Pope and to their monarchs and the obligations of these authorities to them.

### III

If the topic of Catholic martyrdoms and martyrologies is a major one, perhaps even a paramount one, in understanding English Catholicism, Questier's book is undeniably a ground-breaking contribution to understanding Catholic martyrdom and, beyond that, the political and religious history of post-Reformation England. Questier has exhaustively combed through the Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster and the Archives of the British Province of the Society of Jesus, as well as the British Library and The National Archive and lesser known collections such as the papers of Alban Butler and the manuscripts collected by John Knaresborough. While in other parts of this review, I will articulate some criticisms or caveats about what Questier says, I hope that this does not conceal my considerable admiration for (and it must be said envy of) the breath-taking mastery of the sources

<sup>20</sup> McCoog, 'Construing Martyrdom', 106-20 and Lake and Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 281-314.

displayed in this volume. It is neither cliché nor hyperbole, but the simple truth, to maintain that the study of this book is essential for any student of early modern English Catholicism.

*Catholics and Treason* is divided into three sections of unequal length. The first section consists of Questier's reflections on the state of studies of early modern Catholicism and of martyrdom within this framework. It also contains discussion of the sources on Catholic martyrs and, in particular, on the work of Richard Challoner, whose *Memoirs of Missionary Priests* is the golden bough which Questier uses as a passport into the Tartarus of early modern martyrdom. And in this section, Questier discusses the structures and conventions of Catholic martyrological writing. The second section examines state violence and sanctions against Catholics in the reign of Elizabeth I, focussing on the years from 1577 onwards into the early 1590s. And in the third section, Questier scrutinises Catholic martyrdoms from the accession of James I to the execution of Archbishop Oliver Plunkett in 1681.

*Catholics and Treason* is based on archival sources, from the testimonies of those close to the martyrdoms to the official records of them, Questier's knowledge of these is almost equalled by his knowledge of the devotional, polemical and martyrological sources in print (his annotations are often extended mini-narratives on their own and rich with detail and insight). This command of primary sources is accompanied by extensive citation of secondary sources; particularly impressive is Questier's diligence in reading through unpublished doctoral dissertations for the treasures they contain. Yet while he is usually punctilious in acknowledging his debts to other scholars, there are unsettling lacunae in Questier's citations. For example, Questier maintains that the belief that James VI had actually abandoned his mother to Elizabethan justice, despite the king's formal protests of her treatment, was a 'justified suspicion' (p. 171) although Susan Doran, in an article Questier does not mention, has persuasively argued that James' protests were neither half-hearted nor insincere.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, although the question of James VI's succession to the English Crown looms over a significant portion of *Catholics and Treason*, Paulina Kewes' impressive work on this topic is never mentioned.<sup>22</sup> Most surprising is that a book of nearly 600 pages on early modern English Catholicism cites the scholarship of Alexandra Walsham only once (on p. 20 n.52). On numerous topics (e.g., Church papistry, Catholicism and print culture,

<sup>21</sup> Susan Doran, 'Revenge her Most Foul and Unnatural Murder? The Impact of Mary Stewart's Execution on Anglo-Scottish Relations', *History* 85 (2000): 589-612.

<sup>22</sup> See Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes, eds. *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014) and Paulina Kewes and Gordon McRae, eds. *Stuart Succession Literature: Moments and Transformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).



William Hackett, the 'Fatal Vespers' of 1623, and tales of providential retribution) Walsham's works and insights are directly relevant to Questier's text, and the failure to cite them is a disservice to the readers.

Apparently, Peter Lake warned Questier that the contents of this book risked being 'one bloody martyr after another' (p. 45). Given the strict chronological narrative of the second and third sections of *Catholics and Treason* as well as Questier's assiduous and detailed descriptions of virtually every Catholic martyrdom, this was a real possibility. The danger is largely avoided, however, by Questier's skilful interweaving of the details of political, diplomatic, and even cultural events with the accounts of individual martyrs. The accounts of the martyrdoms of Cuthbert Mayne, Everard Hanse and Edmund Campion (pp. 84-118) or of Catholic priests executed in the years 1640-1641 (pp. 504-517) are, in particular, masterpieces of religio-political analysis. Unlike much of the past writing on English Catholic—or for that matter, Protestant—martyrs, Questier pays ample attention to the impact of events in Europe on the persecution of Catholics in England and their resistance to persecution. Questier also closely analyses the reciprocal influence that the disputes among English Catholic clergy had on the course of English Catholic martyrdoms, from the ways in which the martyrs were recorded and their martyrdoms remembered, on the one hand, to the roles that these martyrdoms played in shaping the politics of the Catholic Church, as well as the politics of Britain itself.<sup>23</sup> This successful multi-dimensional approach, along with the exhaustive archival research on which it is based, ensures that Questier's book will be an invaluable resource for a long time to come.

Oxford University Press has produced a volume worthy of Questier's text. It is handsomely and sturdily bound, with numerous well-produced illustrations (some of them in colour). More importantly, the text is impeccably proofread, and the index and annotations are voluminous. My one caveat is that this book does not contain a bibliography. This regrettably common practice is particularly unfortunate in a text of this size as a book or article that is only mentioned once or twice in earlier chapters, will often be referred to in later chapters so tersely that it is difficult to identify.

#### IV

All scholarship is, and should be, subject to criticism and this volume, despite its impressive strengths is no exception. One major area where Questier's work is open to challenge is his tendency to discount, or at least minimise, linguistic and rhetorical strategies as well as cultural

<sup>23</sup> A particularly impressive example of the synthesising of these different approaches and perspectives occurs in the tenth chapter of Questier's book.

analysis as tools, for deconstructing and analysing martyrological narratives. Questier insists that the study of early modern Catholicism should be based largely on primary sources and should also avoid secularization and the imposing of modern readings on early modern texts (see pp. 27-29, 47 and 565-7). To an extent, I sympathise with these views for several reasons. First of all, the danger of interpreting sources in the light of the modern analyst's concerns rather than early modern concerns, is considerable. An example of this is William Haller's well-known (and despite his barely engaging with the text of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, very influential) thesis that Foxe extolled England as the Elect Nation of God and promoted English nationalism.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, there have been far too many studies of Protestant and Catholic martyrologies, such as those by Catherine Randall Coats and Alice Dailey, which are based on secondary sources and make minimal use of the martyrological texts that they ostensibly examine.<sup>25</sup> It is sadly indicative of this trend that while there have been some biographies and monographs devoted to John Bale, who greatly influenced both Foxe and English Protestant ecclesiastical historical writing, there has been virtually no sustained examination of his greatest work of historical scholarship, the *Catalogus*.<sup>26</sup> What is the validity of a book length study of an author that does not engage with that author's major works?

Yet the study of any persecution and its martyrs is unavoidably a study based on historical texts such as martyrologies, eyewitness accounts, official records, trial documents and polemics. Some study of the wording of these documents is essential. If you cannot legitimately study martyrdoms without extensive examination of martyrologies and their sources, you also cannot completely assess the accuracy of a martyrological narrative without assessing the rhetoric of the account, its tropes, conventions and formulas. Brad Gregory has cogently

<sup>24</sup> Haller, *Foxe and the Elect Nation*.

<sup>25</sup> Catherine Randall Coats, *(Em)bodying the Word. Textual Resurrections in the Martyrological Narratives of Foxe, Cresspin, de Bèze and d'Aubigné* (New York, 1992) and Alice Dailey, *The English Martyr from Reformation to Revolution* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). On Coats, see the comments of Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 365 n. 10. Dailey's analysis of Foxe, in *English Martyr*, 53-97 is in very large part devoted to what modern authors have said about Foxe. Neither Coats nor Dailey pay serious attention to the sources of the martyrological texts that they analyse. For an example of Coats analysing what she considers to be particular features of Foxe's writing style based on passages which were word-for-word translations from another author see Coats, *(Em)bodying*, 46-7 and cf. *Johannis Hus et Hieronymi Pragensis confessorum Christi Historia et Monumenta* (Nuremberg: Johann von Berg and Neuber, 1558), II, fos. 349r-354r with Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), 632-7.

<sup>26</sup> There has been a partial translation of the book: *John Bale's Catalogue of Tudor Authors: An Annotated Translation from the Scriptorum Illustrum Maioris Brytanniae... Catalogus*, trans. J. Christopher Warner (Binghamton, NY, State University of New York Press, 2010). This translates and annotates Bale's biographies of British authors but does not translate, or print, the discussions of Church history and the papal biographies that comprise about half of Bale's two-volume work.

argued for the general veracity of eyewitness accounts of martyrdoms, but nevertheless, the matter is not always that simple.<sup>27</sup> For example, Foxe's account of the Marian martyr William Hunter's burning, is, as Andrew Pettegree has observed, full of tropes and martyrological commonplaces.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Foxe's source for the martyrdom was William Hunter's brother, making the possibility of hagiographical distortion in the narrative even stronger.<sup>29</sup> When the sun bursts through the clouds upon Hunter's prayer, at the stake, that the Son of God shine upon him, one might well suspect a hagiographical embellishment. But what does one make of Bishop Bonner's purported offer to Hunter of £40 and being made a Freeman of the City of London if he recanted? On the one hand, the martyr refusing tempting offers made by a persecutor, in return for submission, is a common element in martyrologies. On the other hand, Bonner was probably concerned that Hunter's death would be, from the viewpoint of the Marian authorities, counterproductive. Hunter was not only one of the first lay people to be condemned for heresy in Mary's reign, but his youth (he was nineteen years old at the time of his death) made him likely to attract sympathy. Bonner's offer could be invention, exaggeration or accurately recorded. Similarly, while the cry attributed to Hugh Latimer—'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle as I trust shall never be put out'—at his burning, is the most famous quotation in Foxe's martyrology, there are two indications that it is probably apocryphal. One is that while Foxe prints a detailed account of the burning, based on the accounts of two trusted eyewitnesses on his first edition in 1563, the remark first appears in the second edition of his work. The second is that this exhortation echoes what a voice from heaven supposedly told the early Christian martyr Polycarp.<sup>30</sup> In the cases of Hunter and Latimer, and many other accounts of martyrs, Catholic and Protestant, a literary analysis of the rhetoric of martyrdom must inform our assessment of the veracity of apparently straight-forward, factual narratives. Nor is this goal unattainable: scholars such as Anne Dillon, Susannah Monta and others have produced studies of martyrological texts that combine sophisticated literary analysis with a precise understanding of historical contexts.

<sup>27</sup> Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 16-23.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Pettegree, 'Haemstede and Foxe' in David Loades, ed. *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), 288-94.

<sup>29</sup> For Foxe's account of Hunter's death see John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of matters most special and memorable*... (London: John Day, 1583), 1535-9.

<sup>30</sup> See the discussion of this in Thomas S. Freeman, 'The importance of dying earnestly: the metamorphosis of the account of James Bainham in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*', in R. N. Swanson, ed. *The Church Retrospective*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), 285-6 and John N. King, 'Fiction and Fact in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*' in Loades, ed. *Foxe and the English Reformation*, 23-4.

Questier's self-denying ordinance regarding literary analysis impacts his book in a number of ways. For one thing, it creates something of a paradox when combined with Questier's insistence that Bishop Richard Challoner's *Memoirs of Missionary Priests* is the starting point for his book (pp.3-9). Although he often cites the *Memoirs of Missionary Priests* as a source, Questier says relatively little about the author and the circumstances in which the book was written. He says even less about Challoner's methodology. As a result, Challoner's appearances in Questier's text are rather like those of the Cheshire Cat: frequent but apparently random and, in the final analysis, rather enigmatic. Also, by not discussing the literary aspects of martyrologies, Questier ignores a major factor which linked Catholic martyrologies of the sixteenth century with Catholic martyrologies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

And this leads us to another consequence of Questier's focus on political and religious history at the expense of literary analysis: it is one cause of the neglect of Henrician Catholic martyrdom in Questier's volume. There are other reasons for Questier's focus on Catholic martyrdoms after 1577. For one thing, here he is following the lead of Richard Challoner, for another, this accords with Questier's own expertise and specialization. Yet the chronological framework of Questier's volume is also shaped by his interest in the political and social contexts of the Catholic martyrdoms. There are significant differences in these contexts between the martyrdoms of Henry VIII's reign and those of the reigns of Elizabeth and her Stuart successors. As Questier puts it, it is 'probably true to say that there was a qualitative difference between, on the one hand, the kind of confrontation which occurred over religion in the first half of the sixteenth century and, on the other, the violence inflicted on Catholics after 1558 . . . ' (p. 29).<sup>31</sup> Yet, as Questier is very well aware, the ways in which martyrdoms were described, the language of Catholic martyrdom itself, were remarkably consistent throughout the early modern period, from the reign of Henry VIII to the reign of William III and beyond. It was in the 1550s that Catholics reached back through the decades and commemorated the brutal suppression of the Carthusians, and under the auspices of Reginald Pole, the martyrdoms of John Fisher and Thomas More.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Also see pp. 29-30 and 77-9. Questier also argues, less convincingly, that there is often not enough historical information on the Henrician martyrs.

<sup>32</sup> See Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 268-72, Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 326-63 as well as Fred Smith, *Transnational Catholicism in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 117 and 211-14. Anne Dillon also explores, in remarkable detail, the dissemination and influence of a broadsheet illustrating the martyrdom of the English Carthusians: Anne Dillon, *Michelangelo and the English Martyrs* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). Admittedly, Thomas McCoog has maintained that the Henrician martyrs did not really interest their Catholic successors until the Appellant Controversy: McCoog, 'Construing Martyrdom', 160, but McCoog is basing his judgement on printed works, not those which

And it was in this period that Pole and his protégés (particularly Nicholas Harpsfield) established the standards for Catholic martyrology and anti-martyrology.<sup>33</sup> By essentially beginning his study with the events of 1577, Questier has ignored crucial early steps in the development of English Catholic conceptions of martyrdom.

Another criticism of *Catholics and Treason* is that the Elizabethan and Stuart authorities who ordered the persecution of Catholics tend to be depicted as faceless entities glowering dimly, if malevolently from the shadows. It takes persecutors as well as the persecuted to make a persecution and a weakness of Questier's book is its lack of coverage of the former. Although Questier is usually detailed and often insightful on the contexts of individual executions, the framers of the overall policy of persecution and the reasons for enacting it, are often not discussed. As a result, the reasons for the persecution, and hatred of, Catholics seem inexplicable and paranoid. English Protestants certainly could be, at times, hysterical and delusional; the grossly (in every sense of the word) exaggerated images of the savagery of the Irish rebels in 1641 and the fears that they would invade England provide examples of this. But English Protestant fears were not entirely groundless: the Ridolfi Plot, the Babington Plot and the Gunpowder Plot (all only cursorily mentioned by Questier) were all real and the deaths of William the Silent and Henri IV demonstrated that the threat of the religiously motivated assassination of monarchs was not a chimera. But whether the spectres and monsters which motivated persecution were actually on the doorstep or simply imagined under the bed, they all need to be examined. As Peter Lake has famously observed, conceptions of the papal 'enemy' developed over time, dividing English Protestants.<sup>34</sup> How did these changes in perceiving Catholics affect the persecution of Catholics? And how did the differing views of powerful ministers such as Lord Burghley, Christopher Hatton, Robert Cecil and the Duke of Buckingham influence the persecution of Catholics? Did the views and policies of the primates of England—such different figures as Parker, Grindal, Whitgift, Bancroft, Abbot and Laud—impact the treatment of

were circulating in manuscript the reigns of the later Tudors. And even with this borne in mind, I feel that recent scholarship has shown this view to be mistaken, although McCoog's point about the Appellant Controversy stimulating interest in the Henrician Catholics is correct and demonstrated throughout Questier's book.

<sup>33</sup> Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 52-66 and Thomas S. Freeman, 'Over their dead bodies: concepts of Martyrdom on Late-Medieval and Early-Modern England' in *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, c. 1400-1700*, eds. Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press: 2007), 18-22.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Lake, 'Anti-popery: the Structure of a Prejudice' in Richard Cust and Anne Hughes, *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics 1603-1642* (Longman: London and New York, 1989), 72-107.

Catholics?<sup>35</sup> This is an area in which Questier needs to move beyond the Catholic archival sources utilised so well in this book.

A final criticism that I would make is a matter of style, not substance, but still—I think—worth making. In general, Questier writes smoothly and lucidly, but his text is strewn with colloquialisms which, to paraphrase Raymond Chandler, the master of vivid colloquialisms, stand out like tarantulas on an angel food cake. Questier is an engaging public speaker, and his irreverent slang is part of his appeal. But what works in a lecture or talk does not necessarily work in print. At a minimum, such phrases as a declaration that that Elizabeth I ‘had an almighty bust up with Leicester’ (p. 131), that the deportations of Catholics were ‘a chucking out exercise’ (p. 151) and the description of a ‘po-faced truth and reconciliation process’ (p. 560) are distracting, while his account of the report of Henrietta Maria praying at the site where Catholic priests had been executed—‘the buzz of it went like a dose of salts through London. Charles [I] reportedly hit the roof’ (p. 465)—is jarring. Worse yet, some of the colloquialisms, such as Questier’s characterisation of Anthony Munday as a ‘hack journalist’ (p. 108) and his description of Lord Burghley as ‘Elizabeth’s principal spin doctor’ (p. 137) are anachronistic and misleading. Worst of all, some of them—such as Questier’s description of a pregnant woman as ‘beginning to resemble a beached whale’ (p. 276) and his reference to the ‘distinctly queenly bitterness’ of Titus Oates (p. 548)—are insensitive, if not offensive.

## V

Questier amply demonstrates in this, as well as other writings, the importance of persecution and martyrdoms to English Catholicism. A key, if hardly isolated, indication of this importance are the efforts by English Catholics to collect and preserve testimony and eye-witness accounts of the martyrdoms of Catholics. Before Challoner, sustained efforts were made by Richard Smith, the bishop of Chalcedon, in the 1620s to gather and organise accounts of the martyrs, while John Knaresborough, in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, wrote a massive martyrology based on the testimonies that he had collected (pp. 10-18 and 459-64).<sup>36</sup> The materials gathered by Smith, Knaresborough and Challoner had originally been collected and transcribed, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in order to be

<sup>35</sup> Questier himself has elsewhere meticulously the different motives of provincial priest hunters in ‘Practical Antipapistry during the reign of Elizabeth I,’ *Journal of British Studies* 36 (1997), 371-96.

<sup>36</sup> Liesbeth Corens has written an important article on the formation and role of Catholic archives ‘Dislocation and Record Keeping: The Counter Archives of the Catholic Diaspora’, *Past and Present Supplement 11* (2016): 269-87. Corens’ concept of a ‘counter archive’ is potentially seminal, especially if it would be applied in comparative martyrology.

sent to priests and religious superiors on the Continent, where they were often incorporated in Catholic martyrologies. These martyrologies would be sent back to England and be disseminated there, but they would also be translated into numerous European languages and circulate widely on the Continent, where they would influence national policies towards England as well as win support and aid for English Catholics.<sup>37</sup>

The Continental circulation of Catholic martyrological accounts, was foreshadowed by the circulation of English martyrological accounts on the Continent in the reigns of Henry VIII and Mary I. And this underscores an important feature of early modern English history. In the development of martyrdoms and martyrologies, the English influence on their Continental co-religionists was considerable. I have just referred to the impact of Catholic martyrological narratives in Europe and the impact of Protestant martyrologists was also noteworthy.<sup>38</sup> After all, early modern English monarchs produced more martyrs, over a longer period, and of more diverse religious opinions, than any of their contemporaries. (Notice that I said martyrs, not victims of religiously motivated riot or massacre. The difference is important. Martyrdoms involve trials and executions, and both involve formalized rituals in which both martyr and persecutor can dramatize their causes, often in the floodlight of maximum publicity. Most importantly, the trial and execution of a martyr afforded parallels with the trial and execution of Christ, which potentially glorified the martyr). English martyrs were sometimes of remarkably high status, including aristocrats (e.g., Blessed Margaret Pole and St Philip Howard), archbishops (Cranmer, Plunkett and arguably Laud) and even royalty (Mary, Queen of Scots and Charles I). It is hardly surprising then, that in theological and religious terms, illustrious martyrs and prominent martyrologies were among England's most successful exports to both Protestant and Catholic Europe.

Catholic martyrologies also played a decisive role in the development of English conceptions of martyrdom in general. They were able to do this because, to a very considerable extent early modern Protestant and Catholic martyrologies shared the same ideas of

<sup>37</sup> McCoog, 'Construing Martyrdom', 103-6; Dillon, *Constructing Martyrdom*, 78-82 and Arthur F. Marotti, 'Manuscript Transmission and Catholic Martyrdom Account' in *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 69-74. Questier notes that the great Spanish playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca wrote a drama on the English martyrs, which was based on Pedro de Ribadeneira's martyrological text, which, in turn, was based on reports English Catholics has submitted to the Jesuits, p. 468.

<sup>38</sup> For two detailed case studies of this see Thomas S. Freeman and David Gehrig, 'Martyrologists without Boundaries: The collaboration of John Foxe and Heinrich Pantaleon', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69 (2018): 746-767 and Thomas S. Freeman, '1077 and all that: Gregory VII in Reformation historical writing', *Renaissance Studies* 35 (2021): 118-45.

martyrdom and employed the same standards in judging martyrs and ‘pseudomartyrs’.<sup>39</sup> There were differences between Protestant and Catholic martyrologies, usually due to doctrinal differences and these have been emphasised by numerous scholars. Arthur Marotti, for example, has highlighted the distinctiveness of Catholic martyrological writing. He lists the following conventions as characteristic features of Catholic martyrdom accounts: the cruelty of the persecutors, repeated references to expressions of sympathy for the condemned by spectators, the ‘gallows humour’ of the martyrs, a highlighting by martyrologists of the final words of the martyrs, descriptions of the martyrs sacralising the instruments and site of martyrdom (e.g., the martyrs kissing the implements used in their executions), and a documentation of the wonders and miracles accompanying the execution as well as the collection and veneration of the relics of the martyrs.<sup>40</sup> Yet almost all of these conventions are also ubiquitous features of Protestant martyrological narratives.

The description of miracles and the collection of relics are areas of difference, but these differences are not as clear or absolute as one might expect.<sup>41</sup> Admittedly, the miracles associated with Catholic martyrs tended to be more spectacular and marvellous than those associated with Protestant martyrs, but the latter were not absent. The most numerous Protestant miracles were tales of the providential punishment, often by overtly supernatural means, of the persecutors of Protestant martyrs.<sup>42</sup> There was also a relative abundance of prophetic dreams and visions which Protestant martyrs were said to have received from God.<sup>43</sup> But other miracles—notably the appearance of the Holy Spirit (in the guise of a dove) over the heads of Protestant

<sup>39</sup> See Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 18–71 and Freeman, ‘Over their dead bodies’, 12–25.

<sup>40</sup> Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 77–89. Marotti, drawing on Lake and Questier, claims that there is another key difference: Catholics were anxious to concentrate, in graphic detail, on the physical sufferings of the martyrs, while Protestants focused on the spiritual state of the martyrs and only dealt with the physical sufferings when they reflected the martyr’s spiritual condition. Marotti, *Religious Ideology*, 77. I think that this observation is mistaken. There are numerous martyrdoms, such as the burnings of John Lambert, George Wishart, John Hooper, Nicholas Ridley and Perotine Massey (with her infant son) which are recounted by Foxe in the grisliest detail. And, in fact, apart from Wishart’s execution all of the martyrdoms that I have mentioned are illustrated with large woodcuts depicting the physical sufferings of the martyrs.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion summarizing this argument this argument, see Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature*, 53–78.

<sup>42</sup> See Thomas S. Freeman, ‘Fate, Fact and Fiction on Foxe’s “Book of Martyrs”’, *Historical Journal* 43 (2000), 601–23 and for the death of persecutors in Huguenot martyrologies see Nicholls, ‘Theatre of Martyrdom’, 67 n. 61. In two particularly striking cases, judges who ordered the mutilation of Protestant martyrs are providentially mutilated in graphically appropriate ways. See Theodore Beza, *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France*, eds. W. J. Baum and A. E. Cunitz, 3 vols. (Paris: Libraire Fischbaker, 1883–1889) I, 411–12 and Agrippa d’Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, 8 vols. (Geneva: Libraire Droz, 1981–94), I, 243. The divine chastisement of persecutors was a theme common to Catholic and Protestant martyrs, which has roots in patristic literature, notably Lactantius’ *De mortibus persecutorum*, which was written c. 316 C.E.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), 1538, 1604, 1704, 1893 and 2032–3.



martyrs,<sup>44</sup> or a white cross which miraculously appeared on the breast of another Protestant martyr<sup>45</sup> or martyrs being able to speak after their tongues were cut out<sup>46</sup> or the incombustible corpses of martyrs<sup>47</sup> were also reported by Protestant martyrologists. Foxe and other Protestant martyrologists also glorified spectacular feats of endurance—such as Cranmer holding his hand in the fire—as proof of a miraculous constancy bestowed on God’s suffering saints by the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup> Although it reverses the positions that are stereotypically attributed to Catholics and Protestants, one can understand Nicholas Harpsfield’s exasperated outburst at Foxe’s fondness for fictitious and ridiculous miracles said to be performed by his ‘pseudomartyrs’.<sup>49</sup> (It is also worth remembering Anne Dillon has adduced a number of instances where sixteenth-century Catholic depictions of martyrs eschewed miracles).<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, while the Catholic collection and veneration of relics of the martyrs was intense, it was not unknown to Protestants. The Marian Catholic polemicist Miles Huggarde contemptuously described crowds at the burning of Protestants ‘wallowing like Pygges in a style to scrape that hereticall dongehill for the sayd bones’.<sup>51</sup> Huggarde goes on to describe bones of the martyrs being grated and mixed with ale in order to cure illness. A year earlier the Privy Council ordered the arrest of two men who had been displaying the bones of the martyr William Pygot as relics.<sup>52</sup> Foxe recounts that the bystanders at Ridley’s execution, eager for even one rag, plucked the clothes off his body and a crowd of spectators rushed to the stake in Cambridge where John Hullier was burned in April 1556, avid to seize bones, body parts or whatever remained of the martyr.<sup>53</sup> These

<sup>44</sup> Miles Huggarde, *The displaying of the protestantes* (London: R. Caly, 1556), fo. 62r. Similarly, a dove was supposed to have descended on the Huguenot martyr Geoffrey Varagle at his burning in 1558; see Jean Crespin, *Actes des martyrs* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1564), 895-7.

<sup>45</sup> John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of these latter and perilous days*... (London: John Day, 1563), 1640. (The ‘miracle’ is only described in this edition).

<sup>46</sup> See David el Kenz, *Les bûchers du roi: La culture protestante des martyrs (1525-1572)*, (Paris: Champ Vallon, 1997), 156-7.

<sup>47</sup> Heinrich Pantaleon, *Martyrum historia* (Basel: J. Oporinus, 1564), 110.

<sup>48</sup> See Patrick Collinson, ‘“A Magazine of Religious Patterns”: An Erasmian topic transposed in English Protestantism’ in *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1982), 510-25 and Freeman, ‘Importance of dying Earnestly’, 267-88. For other examples of Foxe hailing the constancy of his martyrs as miraculous see Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), 1030 and 1521.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Commenticiis et ridiculis illis Psuedimartyrum signis (quae tantopere exasculant Foxus)’ (Nicholas Harpsfield, *Dialogi sex contra summi pontificatus, monasticae vitae, Sanctorum, sacrarum imaginum oppugnatores, et pseudomartyres* [Antwerp: Christopher Plantin, 1566], 966).

<sup>50</sup> Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 85-8.

<sup>51</sup> Huggarde, *Displaying*, fo. 54v.

<sup>52</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council of England (1542-1628)*, eds. J. RR. Dasent et al. 32 vols. (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1890-1907), V, 120.

<sup>53</sup> John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), 1769 and 2004. Foxe neither praised or condemned this behaviour.

incidents might be dismissed as remnants of older beliefs in a time of religious transition but such beliefs and behaviours were manifested by English Protestants from radical to 'high Churchmen' across the centuries. Questier has pointed out that at the execution of Francis Kett, the anti-Trinitarian, in 1589, relic hunters scrambled through his remains (pp. 38-9). At the judicial mutilations of Henry Burton, John Bastwick and William Prynne in 1637, an eyewitness described puritans keeping the sponges and bloody rags that had been dipped in the martyrs' blood.<sup>54</sup> The collecting of relics of Charles I as well as the belief that they had healing power might be considered exceptional and solely due to the divinity that was supposed to hedge kings, but the spectators at William, Lord Russell's execution dipped their handkerchiefs in his blood.<sup>55</sup> Lutherans and Calvinists also venerated the relics of their martyrs.<sup>56</sup> Protestant collection of relics by no means rivalled Catholic zeal in hunting relics and building shrines to house them; the activities of the remarkable Luisa de Carvajal have no Protestant parallel.<sup>57</sup> Nor does Protestant diligence in recording the miracles of their martyrs match the pervasiveness and grandeur of the miracles in Catholic martyrologies. In their attitudes towards martyrs, miracles and the miraculous, Catholicism and Protestantism were like trees which grew in markedly different directions but whose roots were intertwined in common soil. (It is worth remembering the fundamental kinship between the two confessions on these points since, as Questier observes, Catholic glorification of the relics and miracles of their martyrs have led to some people regarding Catholic martyrologies as exaggerated and factually unreliable [p. 560]).<sup>58</sup>

The substantial, although far from absolute, overlap between Catholic and Protestant martyrologies helped to ensure that early modern martyrologies differed sharply from their medieval predecessors.<sup>59</sup> Admittedly, some scholars have insisted on the unbroken continuity both of concepts and conventions of martyrdom

<sup>54</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1637-8*, ed. John Brice (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1869), 332.

<sup>55</sup> Lois Schwoerer, 'William, Lord Russell, The Making of a Martyr, 1683-1983', *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985): 50. For the collection of relics of Charles I and these relics being credited with healing miracles see Andrew Lacey, "'Charles the First and Christ the Second": The Creation of a Political Martyr' in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, 206-7.

<sup>56</sup> Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 175-6.

<sup>57</sup> Glyn Redworth, *The She-Apostle: The Extraordinary Life and Death of Luisa de Carvajal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> There is one area where, due to doctrine, there was a great gulf fixed between Catholic and Protestant martyrologies. There is no praise in Protestant martyrologies of martyrs as intercessors for the faithful or for people of a particular city or region. Such praise is a ubiquitous feature of Catholic martyrologies.

<sup>59</sup> This at least is argued in in Freeman, 'Over Their Dead Bodies', 18-24 and Thomas S. Freeman, ' "Imitatio Christi with a Vengeance": The Politicisation of Martyrdom in Early-Modern England', in *Martyrs and Martyrdom* 43-54. On late-medieval martyrology see Danna Pirovansky, "'Thus may a man be a martyr'" in *Martyrs and Martyrdom*, 70-87, 207-11 and 321.

from the early Church through the Reformation.<sup>60</sup> If this is the case, one wonders why there was such a critical backlash against the *Legenda aurea* from Catholic humanists such as Juan Luis Vives, Melchior Cano and Cesare Baronio?<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, there is some truth to the continuity argument and it is worth remembering martyrdoms are often as resistant to generalization as the martyrs were to authority. While most Christian martyrdoms have shared some common features over the ages—e.g., the steadfastness of the martyrs, the rage and cruelty of the persecutors and the divine punishment of the persecutors—there were also profound differences between medieval martyrological texts and those of the early modern period. For example, in the Middle Ages, contemplatives and ascetics were regarded as martyrs through their mortification of the flesh.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, an innocent who was killed, could be popularly venerated as a martyr, without any hint of the martyr dying for religious truth; a sinister example of this type of martyr was the child who was believed to have been murdered by Jews.<sup>63</sup> In the early modern period, the definition of a martyr was restricted, by both Catholics and Protestants to those who died or were imprisoned for adhering to true doctrine.<sup>64</sup> Going back to Cyprian and Augustine, both Protestants and Catholics endlessly declared that it was not the severity of the punishments that the martyrs endured that ensured their sanctity, but the truth of the cause for which they suffered.<sup>65</sup>

In many medieval hagiographies, including the *Legenda aurea*, a strong emphasis was placed on the miraculous invulnerability of the martyr to pain or (before death) injury.<sup>66</sup> The death of the martyr was

<sup>60</sup> Alice Dailey is a leading proponent of this view in her *The English Martyr*.

<sup>61</sup> On this critical reaction against the *Legenda aurea* see Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of its Paradoxical History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 11-14, 26-32, 37-43 and 51-7. Morgan Ring has persuasively qualified Reames' findings on the completeness of the decline of the *Legenda aurea's* reputation, but she does not deny that there was a significant reaction against the work. See Morgan Ring, 'The Golden Legend' and the English Reformation, c. 1483-1625' PhD diss., (University of Cambridge, 2017), 91-6 and 149-58.

<sup>62</sup> See André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 300-3, 212-5, 329-36, 350-5, 376-85 and 439-43.

<sup>63</sup> Pirovansky, 'Notion', 79-80. For other examples of innocent victims—including people struck by lightning—being regarded as martyrs see Vauchez, 89 and 147-54. An extreme example of this is the popular veneration of St Guinefort, a greyhound unjustly slain by his master, as a martyr. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Martin Thom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). It should be added that the Church unequivocally denounced the veneration of this 'martyr'.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas Harpsfield went even further and maintained that only death suffered for Christ made a true martyr *Dialogi sex*, 821-2.

<sup>65</sup> Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 329-39.

<sup>66</sup> Freeman, 'Politicisation', 53-4. A major reason for Catholic, as well as Protestant, attacks on the *Legenda aurea* was the painless deaths that martyrs experienced in this work. Reames, *Legenda aurea*, 51-4.

also accompanied in these works by wondrous miracles, which shattered any natural laws.<sup>67</sup> In early modern Protestant and Catholic martyrological texts, the focus is on the martyr suffering pain, yet through the agency of the Holy Spirit, overcoming it, rather than being impervious. When the martyrs displayed the expected stoicism despite agonizing torments, this had the potential to impress even those who rejected the religious beliefs of the martyrs. A famous example of this, reflecting the transition from medieval ideas to early modern ideas of martyrdom is Poggio Bracciolini's letter praising the stoicism of Jerome of Prague and comparing the heresiarch to Socrates.<sup>68</sup> Over two and a half centuries later, in London in 1679, at the height of the fears aroused by the 'Popish Plot', the calm courage of five Jesuits executed for treason greatly impressed the hostile crowd witnessing their executions.<sup>69</sup> And as worldly an observer as Samuel Pepys, commented that Sir Henry Vane's courage at his execution (for treason, as a leading figure in the Interregnum regime) 'is talked on everywhere as a miracle'.<sup>70</sup> Another feature of early modern martyrologies that separates them from their medieval predecessors is their highlighting the humiliation and indignities, particularly mutilations on both the living and dead bodies, endured by their martyrs.<sup>71</sup> These degradations, stoically endured, completed a martyr's imitation of Christ, allowing him or her to suffer debasement as well as agonizing death, just as Jesus Christ had done. In a blatant example of this, the puritan polemicist William Prynne boldly claimed that the letters 'S. L.' (for seditious libeller) branded on his cheek stood for 'stigmata Laudis'.<sup>72</sup> (Archbishop Laud had been responsible for Prynne's prosecution for libel). In other words, Prynne was comparing the mutilation inflicted on him to the visible signs of Christ's martyrdom and passion.

Foxe on the one hand, and Harpsfield (and later Robert Persons), on the other, established the new standards for martyrology and anti-martyrology for Protestants and Catholics respectively because of their systematic treatments of these topics. Protestants and Catholics, through their constant attacks and defences of co-religionist martyrs,

<sup>67</sup> For a few examples, out of many, see the *Legenda aurea* accounts of St. Christina being thrown into a fiery furnace and walking in it, for five days, conversing with with angels or St. Dionysius (St. Denis) being beheaded, and taking his head in his hands, walking for two miles. See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), I, 387 and II, 240. For such extravagant miracles not being a feature of post-Reformation Catholic martyrologies see Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 496. n.271.

<sup>68</sup> Renee Neu Watkins, 'The Death of Jerome of Prague: Divergent Views', *Speculum* 42 (1967): 118-24.

<sup>69</sup> Andrea McKenzie, *Tyburn's Martyrs: Execution in England 1675-1775* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 226.

<sup>70</sup> John Coffey, 'The Martyrdom of Sir Henry Vane the Younger from Apocalyptic Witness to Heroic Whig' in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, 222.

<sup>71</sup> Freeman, 'Politicisation', 43-8.

<sup>72</sup> William Prynne, *A new discovery of the prelates tyranny...* (London: 'M.S.', 1671), 65.

exchanges characterized by agreement between the writers of both faiths as to the qualities that made a martyr and what constituted martyrdom, as well as complete disagreement as to the identity of contemporary martyrs, shaped new standards for martyrological texts and ultimately new types of martyrs.<sup>73</sup> The shaping of this transformation was not confined to England, but it was more intense there because of range of religious groups that suffered persecution and the length of time that religious persecution persisted there.

The keystone which held this new, early modern form of martyrdom together was its stress on the martyr as a Christ like figure in all respects: stoicism in the face of pain, voluntarily assumed death or imprisonment for human salvation (in the case of martyrs after Christ this involved suffering for Christ's Church and true doctrine), non-violence, passivity and forgiveness of persecutors.<sup>74</sup> (This image of the martyr as an exact imitator of Christ, shared by early-modern Catholic and Protestant writers, was not entirely unknown in the Middle Ages, but it was rare).<sup>75</sup>

## VI

The impact of martyrologies and martyrdom in early modern Britain was immense. One purpose of any historical narrative, including martyrological narratives, is to heal past wounds and to resolve old grievances. But a narrative about past events necessarily involves remembering them and when the past events are religious persecutions, the narratives inevitably perpetuate religious divisions. Because every religious group in England had suffered persecution at one point in time, martyrologies, by keeping old wounds raw, exacerbated confessional division within England. Yet because having martyrs identified allowed religious minorities to claim membership in the True Church, martyrologies also perpetuated religious division by giving religious minorities legitimacy and cohesion. The anti-Catholicism generated by Foxe's great martyrology is well-known and has often been discussed.<sup>76</sup> The role of Catholic martyrologies in fostering and maintaining Catholics is extensively discussed in Questier's volume (pp. 23-46 and 560-7). But martyrological narratives, often inspired by Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, also helped to shape the identities of

<sup>73</sup> Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 36-72 and Freeman, 'Over Their Dead Bodies', 20-22.

<sup>74</sup> Freeman, 'Politicisation', 43-51.

<sup>75</sup> *Op. cit.*, 56-9.

<sup>76</sup> See Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) and Peter B. Nockles, 'The Changing Legacy and Reputation of John Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" in the "Long Eighteenth Century": Varieties of Anglican, Protestant and Catholic Response, c. 1760-c. 1850' in *Religion, Politics and Dissent, 1660-1832: Essays in Honour of James E. Bradley*, eds. Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 219-48.

Quakers and other British dissidents. Not only did the Quakers form—if I might appropriate Liesbeth Corens' term—counter archives of their own, but they used Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' as a template for their narratives and documentation of their own martyrs.<sup>77</sup> Nor was this unique to Quakers, as Alexandra Walsham has observed, among religious minorities in early modern England, only the Family of Love did not generate its own narratives of persecution.<sup>78</sup> In Scotland, the intense commemoration of the Covenanters has fostered sectarian divisions in both Scotland, and Ireland, that have persisted to the present.<sup>79</sup>

The kaleidoscope of martyrological traditions within Britain not only perpetuated religious division, it also ensured the endurance of martyrological traditions, and the familiarity of the British with these traditions from the sixteenth century down to the present. For centuries the British were, in effect, marinated in the blood of the martyrs. And this has helped to foster a further development which has had significant repercussions down to the present: the secularization of martyrdom. Since the Reformation, the martyr has been transformed from someone suffering for religious causes to someone who suffers for political or social causes. This transformation was not unique to England, but it developed very swiftly and intensely there. Because so much of the opposition to particular English governments was religiously based, it was natural for those who suffered for such opposition to be regarded as religious martyrs. This conflation of religious martyrdom with political martyrdom was facilitated by the official insistence—I will not stop here to debate its veracity—that Catholics were executed for treason and political offenses, not their religious convictions. The identification of political martyrs with religious martyrs reached a watershed with the execution of Charles I, who was at once a political leader with both an army and an army of followers but was also venerated by many as a saint and martyr who died on behalf of holy causes.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> For Corens' concept of the 'counter archive' see note 36 above. For Quaker documentation of their martyrs and martyrological methodology see Freeman, 'Over Their Dead Bodies', 27-28. For Quakers using Foxe's martyrology as a template and model see Brooke Sylvia Palmieri, 'Compelling Reading: The Circulation of Quaker Texts, 1650-1700' (PhD dissertation, University of London, 2017), 84-123. For New England Quakers martyrs imitating Foxe's martyrs see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 187-9.

<sup>78</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 173.

<sup>79</sup> Edward J. Cowan, 'The Covenanting Tradition in Scottish History' in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, eds. Edward J. Cowan and Robert J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 130-53 and James J. Coleman, *Remembering the Past in Nineteenth Century Scotland: Commemoration, Nationality and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 130-53.

<sup>80</sup> Lacey, 'Charles the First', 202-220.

The king's death and his sanctification in works such as the wildly popular *Eikon Basilike* opened the floodgates. Yet the deaths of regicides and Whigs were also hailed by those who shared their political views as martyred saints. Roger L'Estrange sourly commented that if the apologists for the condemned Rye House plotters were to be believed then 'every man that suffers for treason, shall presently at this rate be made a martyr for the Reformation'.<sup>81</sup> Yet Royalists hailed their fallen as martyrs with at least equal alacrity. In one Royalist martyrology, the earl of Strafford was lauded—in a reference to St Stephen—as the 'proto-martyr' of the Royalist cause and two men executed for leading an uprising against the Parliamentary garrison in Bristol in 1643 were hailed as 'glorious martyrs now lying under the altar'.<sup>82</sup> A victim did not have to suffer death to be hailed as a martyr and he or she could be compared to Christ even while suffering in an overwhelmingly secular cause. John Tutchin, a prolific Whig martyrologist and propagandist, hailed Thomas Dangerfield, who had received four hundred lashes for libelling James II with a blatant comparison of Dangerfield's ordeal to the passion of Christ: 'Thy Master thus, thus thy Lord Jesus dy'd, He must be scourg'd before he's crucify'd'.<sup>83</sup> And the secularization of martyrdom had already gone even farther than this. In 1651, when English merchants at Ambonya were massacred by the Dutch, the massacred merchants were extolled (in an effort to galvanise support for the English East India Company) in language which directly imitated Foxe, with an illustration, modelled on a picture in Foxe and descriptions of the providential punishments inflicted on their 'persecutors'.<sup>84</sup>

There is no time or space here to explore fully, or even partially, the increasing secularization of martyrdom in the English-speaking world through the following centuries when figures dying for unmistakably secular causes such as Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Emily Davison and Edith Cavell were honoured unreservedly by their supporters as martyrs.<sup>85</sup> The importance of the politicization of martyrdom is twofold. It provided an extraordinary powerful propaganda weapon that had wide appeal and added an aura of righteousness to causes that were (and some cases remain) bitterly

<sup>81</sup> Roger L'Estrange, *Considerations upon a printed sheet entituled the Speech of the late Lord Russell to the Sheriffs* (London: 'T.B.', 1683), 18.

<sup>82</sup> James Heath, *A new book of loyal English martyrs and confessors . . .* (London: 'R. H.', 1665?), 15 and 140. The comparison to saints under the altar is, of course, a reference to Revelation 6:9.

<sup>83</sup> John Tutchin, *The Western Martyrology or the Bloody Assizes* (London: John Tutchin, 1705), 909.

<sup>84</sup> Anthony Milton, 'Marketing a Massacre: Ambonya, the East India Company and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England' in Steve Pincus and Peter Lake, eds. *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 198-24.

<sup>85</sup> Some of this is briefly sketched in Freeman, 'Politicisation', 66-69.

controversial and desperately threatened. The inspirational value of the martyr is still strong today; figures such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela wielded international influence not only through the perceived righteousness of their causes, but also through what they suffered for it.

There has been no equally effective means of legitimating political dissent. Classical models of republicanism and tyrannicide lack popular appeal. It legitimises the martyr's cause while damning the powers and authorities that condemn him or her. Political martyrdom has also democratised dissent. Through it the powerless could mount effective dissent; in fact, with martyrdom weakness became an asset. An individual, no matter how controversial the cause who is ready to suffer for a cause, and able to present those sufferings in a way that conforms to the passive, stoic model of Christ can energise resistance and destabilise the most authoritarian regimes.

Let me conclude by citing a painting: Richard Hamilton's 'The Citizen'. This picture, painted sometime in 1981-3, depicts Aodh O Ruanai (Hugh Rooney), one of the 'blanket' protesters incarcerated in the Maze prison, in a way which unmistakably identifies him with Christ. In a 1983 interview Hamilton said that he decided to paint Rooney after seeing a 1980 documentary about the 'blanket' protests. Hamilton added that he was moved to create the painting because 'the declared British view of the IRA as thugs and hooligans did not match the materialisation of Christian martyrdom so profoundly contained on film'.<sup>86</sup> Bobby Sands succeeded in attracting international support, and his memory remains potent in Northern Ireland to this day, because he succeeded in presenting himself as a Christ like martyr.

English Catholic martyrdoms and martyrologies are, as Questier inarguably demonstrates, essential to the formation of English Catholic identity. But instead of being understood, as many have done, as an isolated subject and a historical *cul de sac*, the persecution of English Catholics and the martyrological narratives written about them are (and again this is described in Questier's book in masterful detail) are an integral part of the history of early modern England. But beyond that, through their interaction with the martyrological works by and about English Protestants, English Catholic martyrologists helped to create a tradition of dissent of global significance. Whatever criticisms I have made about this book (and I should observe that my criticisms have mostly been of what Questier has not done, rather than of what he has achieved), they do not change my opinion that not only is this a triumph of scholarship but also a seminal work on a vitally important—and still painfully relevant—topic.

<sup>86</sup> *The Belfast Telegraph* 9 May 2013.