

Martyrs' blood in the English Reformations

Abstract: Protestant and Catholic martyrologies evolved in dialogue; however, they did not articulate a common conception of martyrdom. Viewing Protestant and Catholic martyrologies and notions of martyrdom as essentially similar obscures highly significant confessional differences, which generated fiercely opposed constructions of martyrdom. This argument is examined through an analysis of the treatment of martyrs' blood in English martyrological texts, since this encapsulated core confessional theologies.

Key Words: Martyr, blood, Reformation, confessional polemic, Foxe

Over the past two decades, scholarship has increasingly argued that early-modern Protestant and Catholic conceptions of martyrdom evolved in dialogue and must be discussed together.¹ This is part of the wider historiographical trend towards emphasising similarities between early-modern Protestantism and Catholicism, even in works exploring other considerable,

¹ The strongest proponent of this approach has been Thomas Freeman, beginning with his 2001 review of Brad Gregory's *Salvation at stake: Christian martyrdom in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1999) (Thomas Freeman, 'Early modern martyrs', *Journal of ecclesiastical history* (hereafter *JEH*), 52:4 (2001): 696-701), and explicated in greater depth in his introduction to Thomas Freeman and Thomas Mayer (eds.), *Martyrs and martyrdom in England, c. 1400-1700* (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007), 1-34. Freeman's position, which has influenced recent works, such as Susannah Brietz Monta's *Martyrdom and literature in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005),

fundamental differences between the two confessions.² This shift towards analysing Protestant and Catholic constructions of martyrdom in conjunction has, however, its own Achilles' heel, namely the common supposition that the rival confessions shared 'the same conception', 'the same ideals', and 'the same ideas' of martyrdom.³ It is my contention that, while recent historiography's emphasis on comparative martyrology is fruitful in allowing us to understand how Protestant and Catholic martyrologies evolved more in dialogue than isolation, we should be wary of overstating the degree of dialogue, and should see what dialogue there was as revealing a substantially different understanding of martyrdom. While both shared *some* similar qualities, a superficial similarity of motifs and themes has sometimes led scholars to an overstatement of their essential similarity: motifs and themes were generally employed in dissimilar ways, to construct two strikingly different understandings of the meaning of martyrdom.⁴ Moreover, scholarship has tended to depict a common conception of martyrdom in the early-modern world which stands in significant contrast to

² For example, Alison Shell, whose work explores important differences between the confessions, nonetheless writes: '[there was] very little *real* difference... between Catholic and Protestant spirituality' [*Catholicism, controversy and the English literary imagination, 1558-1669* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, first ed. 1999, reprinted 2001), 16]

³ Freeman and Mayer (eds.), *Martyrs and martyrdom*, 26-7.

⁴ It is true that Protestant and Catholic martyrs often appeared to die in similar fashions (dying for their faith, subjected to painful forms of execution, yet appearing peaceful, joyful, steadfast, and intending to imitate Christ), and this similarity of deaths posed a problem to contemporaries in attempting to distinguish true martyrs from pseudo-martyrs. (For discussion of the European context, see Gregory, *Salvation at stake*, 315-341, and for the English context, see Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and literature*, e.g. 2-5.) However, the construction of martyrdom encompasses far more than the manner in which individuals behaved during their deaths; it concerns the vast theological and epistemological frameworks through which these deaths are understood, and here the confessions are more different than similar.

medieval conceptions of martyrdom;⁵ however, while Protestant martyrologists aimed, self-consciously, to depart from medieval Catholic precedent, Catholic martyrologists, equally self-consciously, aimed to reaffirm it and their deployment of key medieval themes is better seen as a continuation of medieval trends than as a departure from them.⁶

This article will contend that representations of martyrs' blood reveal these continuities and divergences particularly clearly, since a rhetoric of martyrs' blood encapsulated many discourses and theologies of martyrdom.⁷ Blood was essential to early-modern understandings of salvation, sanctification, vengeance, mercy, apocalypticism, and gender. Yet, Reformation constructions of

⁵ 'By the late seventeenth century, the varied conceptions of martyrdom prevalent in late-medieval England had largely been replaced by a single dominant conception of the martyr', Freeman and Mayer (eds.), *Martyrs and martyrdom*, 27. '[In] the later half of the sixteenth century Foxe and Harpsfield between them defined and crystallised an idea of martyrdom, largely dormant through the later Middle Ages', *Ibid*, 30.

⁶ This can perhaps be said of English Catholicism more widely. Recusant Catholicism could even be seen as a partial continuation of medievalism within early-modern English culture, in England and the English diaspora. Alison Shell has argued: '... a greater awareness of the Catholic contribution to English culture would result in some important modifications to received ideas of when medievalism ended in the British Isles. Medieval patterns of life, religious and social, were sustained on the Continent by English Catholic religious orders – in some cases to this day – and continued, as far as was practicable, within many Catholic households.' Shell, *Catholicism, controversy*, 12. This continuity was at least partly self-conscious, as Shell has demonstrated, looking at manuscript culture, imaginative writing, and antiquarianism among English Catholics. *Ibid*, 11-12, 169-193. See also Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious ideology and cultural fantasy* (University of Notre Dame: Notre Dame, Indiana, 2005), 3, 203-4, for further discussion of some of the important continuities between medieval and early-modern English Catholicism which were not present in English Protestantism.

⁷ By examining the rhetoric of the Reformations, we gain invaluable insight into their essences. Brian Cummings depicted the English Reformations as a 'literary struggle for the soul of England' in *The literary culture of the Reformation: grammar and grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 188.

martyrs' blood have received little detailed scholarly attention, an omission which this article will address.

Blood constitutes a potent, central element in Judeo-Christian beliefs and practices.⁸ In the Old Testament, blood carries life, mediates atonement, and seals covenants; shedding innocent human blood creates a spiritual stain, often with dire consequences.⁹ In the New Testament, Christ, the ultimate blood sacrifice, creates a new covenant in his blood.¹⁰ His blood forgives, cleanses, saves, and sanctifies.¹¹ Christians, in the Eucharist, commemorate Christ's sacrificial death, eat his body and drink his blood.¹²

Blood is crucial to Judeo-Christian constructions of martyrdom. In the first Biblical martyrdom, Abel's blood 'cries out' to God.¹³ The depiction of the Maccabean martyrdoms involves bloodshed.¹⁴ St Paul urges Christians to resist sin even 'to the point of shedding your blood.'¹⁵ In Revelation, the souls of the martyrs 'under the altar' call out 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and

⁸ David Biale, *Blood and belief: the circulation of a symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2007).

⁹ Stephen Geller, 'Blood cult: towards a literary theology of the priestly works of the Pentateuch', *Prooftexts*, 12:2 (1992): 97-124. William Gilders, *Blood ritual in the Hebrew Bible: meaning and power* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004). Gerard Sachs, 'Blood feud', *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 36:4 (2008): 261-2.

¹⁰ Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 8:6-13. See also John Dunnill, *Covenant and sacrifice in the letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, first ed. 1992, this ed. 2005).

¹¹ E.g. Col. 1:14; Hebrews 8:6-13, 9:12-14, 10:19-29, 12:24, 13:20; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5.

¹² Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25.

¹³ Genesis 4:10.

¹⁴ 1 Macabees 7:17; 2 Macabees 14:45-46.

¹⁵ Hebrews 12:4.

true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’¹⁶ And, above all, a rhetoric of shedding blood is integral to descriptions of the redeeming death of Christ, which all Christian martyrs imitated.

A bloody language of martyrdom was common in early-Church writings, a complex theology of martyrs’ blood developing.¹⁷ Martyrdom was closely associated with bloodshed and sacrifice, and martyrs’ blood was seen as supernaturally powerful; it helped the Church to grow, possessed transformative powers over matter, and was expiatory.¹⁸ The cult of martyrs’ blood relics thrived.¹⁹

By the medieval period, however, as martyrdom became uncommon in western Europe, blood became a minor theme in western European martyrologies, even as western Christianity developed an almost obsessive fixation on Christ’s blood.²⁰ For example, although almost every

¹⁶ Revelation 6:9-10. Note the sacrificial and Eucharistic dimension implied by their souls being under the altar. For further discussion, see: Paul B. Decock, ‘The symbol of blood in the apocalypse of John’, *Neotestamentica*, 38:2 (2004), 157-182.

¹⁷ Most famously expressed in Tertullian’s ‘the blood of Christians is seed’, *Apologeticus* 50.13..

¹⁸ Frederick C. Klawiter, ‘Living water’ and sanguinary witness: John 19:34 and martyrs of the second and early third century’, *The journal of theological studies*, 66:2 (2015): 553-573. Blake Leyerle, ‘Blood is seed’, *The Journal of religion*, 81:1 (2001): 26-48. Joyce E. Salisbury, *The blood of martyrs: unintended consequences of ancient violence* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 60, 137-8.

¹⁹ Salisbury, *Blood of martyrs*, 59-60, 94.

²⁰ See Caroline Bynum, *Wonderful blood: theology and practice in late medieval northern Germany and beyond* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) for a full account of the centrality of Christ’s blood to medieval Western Christianity. See also Mitchell B. Merback, *The thief, the cross, and the wheel: pain and the spectacle of punishment in medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion, 2001), for depictions of Christ’s death and bleeding in medieval art, and the relationship between these and the perception that the executions of criminals reflected Christ’s Passion; and Peggy McCracken, *The curse of Eve, the wound of the hero: blood, gender, and medieval literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) and Bettina

martyrological account in the *Golden legend* and *Speculum sacerdotale* describes the martyr's suffering and death, only twelve of the ninety-six martyrological accounts in the former and two of the twenty-five in the latter feature any details of martyrs bleeding.²¹ But, with the advent of the Reformation, as martyrdoms proliferated across Western Europe, blood again suffused martyrological writings, and martyrology became, as in the early Church, the dominant genre of hagiography and key to religious apologetics.²²

At first sight, the use of martyrs' blood in Reformation martyrologies would suggest a common conception of martyrdom. Protestant and Catholic martyrologies abound with references to martyrs' blood, and their rhetoric appears extremely similar: compare John Bale's statement 'those blood thirstye woulues that hath rente the poore Lambs in péeces' to the line in a Catholic

Bildhauer, *Medieval blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006) on rhetorics of blood in medieval literature.

²¹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The golden legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, introduction by Eamon Duffy (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012). Anon, *Speculum sacerdotale*, Edward Howell Weatherly (ed.) (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

²² E.g. the frequency of references to martyrs' blood in de Voragine's *The golden legend* is 0.01%; 0.2% in Simon Fish, *A supplicacyon for the beggers*, Antwerp, 1529, in Frederick J. Furnivall and J. Meadows Cowper (eds.), *Four supplications* (London: Trübner, 1871); 0.08% in Anne Askew and John Bale, *The first examinacyon of Anne Askew* (Marpurg [Wesel], 1546), in Elaine V. Beilin (ed.), *The examinations of Anne Askew* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); 0.1% in Thomas Alfield, *A true report of the death & martyrdom of M. Campion lesuite and prieste, & M. Sherwin, & M. Bryan priestes* (London, 1582), RSTC 4537; and 0.1% in John Mush's *A true report of the life and martyrdom of Mrs Margaret Clitherow*, in John Morris (ed.), *The troubles of our Catholic forefathers* (London, 1877).

martyrological poem, 'The bloody wolf condemns the harmless sheep.'²³ However, on closer inspection, these apparent similarities dissolve.

First, Protestant and Catholic martyrologies in England rarely used an extensive language of martyrs' blood simultaneously.²⁴ The era of anti-Catholic martyrological polemic in England dates from the late 1520s, when martyrdom began to be employed as an apologetic weapon in English Protestant writings, to John Foxe's *Eicasmī sev meditationes in sacrum apocalypsin* (1587).²⁵ Such works were filled with references to martyrs' blood. English anti-Protestant martyrological polemic began with Thomas More's *Dialogue of comfort* (1534) and continued into the eighteenth century; however, frequent references to martyrs' blood entered this genre in only the late 1570s in letters

²³ John Bale, *The image of both Churches* (first edition c.1545, ?Antwerp; this edition London, 1570), 125.

Alfield, *True report*, sig. E3v.

²⁴ In discussion of martyrs' blood, I include words derived etymologically from blood (e.g. bloodstained, bloodshed). This article focuses specifically on the English context; however, a rhetoric of martyrs' blood also suffused some Continental martyrologies. Its role in Luther's martyrological writings is discussed in Neil R. LeRoux, *Martin Luther as comforter: writings on death* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), ch. 3, pp. 81-131.. Similarly, during the French Wars of Religion we find common and striking imagery of martyrs' blood, such as Agrippa d'Aubigné's depiction of the Protestant Robert-Jean- René Briquemaut, count of Villemonais, upon seeing the spilled blood of his fellow martyrs, lifting his face and bloodied hands to heaven and asserting that God would avenge them (Book V, lines 356-362) : Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Les tragiques*, Frank Lestringant (ed.) (Paris : Gallimard, 1998), p. 239.

²⁵ John Foxe, *Eicasmī sev meditationes in sacrum apocalypsin* (London, 1587). English Protestant writings from the late 1520s using martyrdom as an apologetic weapon include William Tyndale's *The obedience of a Christian man* (Antwerp, 1528), Fish's, *A supplicacyon*, and William Roy and Jerome Barlowe's *Rede me and be nott wrothe* (Strasburg, 1528).

and diaries, and appeared in widely-read works and in print only in the 1580s.²⁶ Protestant and Catholic constructions of martyrs' blood were less part of a conversation than something closer to a Protestant monologue, which petered out as the Catholic monologue was beginning. Thus, the very idea of these confessional martyrologies operating 'in dialogue' needs to be considered with caution. English Protestant and Catholic constructions of martyrdom during much of the sixteenth century differed also in their imagery and tone. From the beginning, depictions of martyrdom in Protestant confessional polemic tended to be vivid, highly emotive, and often focused as much on the martyrs' persecutors as the martyrs themselves, seeking to inflame anti-Catholic sentiments. The genre was preoccupied also with notions of the body, as Protestantism sought to redefine what was holy, natural, and sinful, with regards to the body and bodily appetites. In contrast, Thomas More's *Dialogue of comfort* set a different tone to which Catholic martyrological writings of the next forty years mostly conformed, scarcely referring to martyrs' blood, focusing more on the martyrs' godly life than their wicked enemies. A chief weapon of Catholic confessional polemic, beginning with More, was the 'pseudo-martyr' debate, which sought to identify the true and false Churches by identifying true and false martyrs.²⁷ Thus, the spotlight in Catholic martyrology of the 1530s-70s fell squarely on the martyrs themselves, who were revealed to be true martyrs because they were holy, educated men, dying for correct doctrine. A rhetoric of bloodthirsty enemies was inconsequential within this framework: true and false martyrs alike could have bloodthirsty enemies, but false martyrs could not be pious, erudite men, dying for religious truth. This Catholic focus was also

²⁶ Thomas More, *A dialogue of comfort against tribulation*, Monica Stevens (ed.) (London: Sheen and Ward, 1979).

²⁷ Anne Dillon, *The construction of martyrdom in the English Catholic community, 1535-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 18-26. Eamon Duffy, *Fires of faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 177.

largely non-corporeal, since the argument hinged on true martyrs' erudition and adherence to orthodoxy; thus, martyrs' blood was rarely mentioned.

Even when the treatment of blood in Catholic martyrologies became more similar to that in Protestant martyrologies, there is no evidence that this was a deliberate or direct response. Scholars have fruitfully highlighted the ways in which Protestant and Catholic martyrologies spoke directly to each other; however, the ways in which they did not engage in dialogue are also significant. Very rarely did either side comment on, let alone analyse, each other's use of a rhetoric of martyrs' blood, despite its prominence.²⁸ Therefore, the mere presence of this theme in both Protestant and Catholic martyrologies does not demonstrate that these works were engaged in close conversation; indeed, the late entry of martyrs' blood into English Catholic martyrological polemic, half a century after its first appearance in English Protestant writings, perhaps suggests the opposite.

The emergence of blood as a theme in English Catholic martyrology rather reflected wider socio-political currents in the European Reformations. Two developments were particularly important. The Jesuit mission to England, coinciding with the papal-Hispano orchestrated Irish rebellion and Elizabeth's contemplation of the Anjou match, led to harsher anti-Catholic reprisals

²⁸ A rare, late, example is found in John Gerard's 1606 narrative of the Gunpowder Plot. In his account of the trial of Henry Garnett, Gerard depicts Edward Coke, Attorney General, as acknowledging that Catholics describe as a 'bloody law' the legislation which makes it treason for Englishmen who have been ordained Catholic priests abroad to set foot on English soil; but, Coke protests, this law was, in fact, not 'made to spill their blood' but 'to save their blood by keeping them there which by coming hither would be spilt in bloody practices.' In response, Gerard expostulates that the law was indeed made to spill the priests' blood: 'Yes, either to spill the Blood of Christ by the loss of souls, if the Priests came not in, or if they did, then theirs.' John Gerard, *The condition of Catholics under James I: Father Gerard's narrative of the Gunpowder Plot*, John Morris (ed.) (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1871), 230-233.

and the depiction of English Jesuits, and – to a lesser degree – all English Catholics, as traitors.²⁹ Additionally, the French Catholic League emerged in the 1580s as a powerful force, which could aid the beleaguered English Catholic community, and which required emotive Catholic martyrologies for its anti-Calvinist propaganda.³⁰ These factors made a rhetoric of innocent English Catholic martyrs, shedding their blood for their faith and country, unjustly executed by blood-seeking Protestants, an invaluable weapon for the English Catholic community and their continental ally, the Catholic League.

The descriptions of martyrs' blood in Protestant and Catholic works can appear very similar, but closer inspection reveals more differences than similarities. Both repeatedly describe martyrs' blood 'witnessing'. For example, in the *Acts and monuments*, Hooper states, 'I have taught the truth with my tongue, and... my pen... and... shortly will confirm the same by God's grace with my blood.'³¹ Similarly, Thomas Alfield, speaking of Edmund Campion and his fellow martyrs, depicts 'their last protestation, washed, sealed, & confirmed with their blood'.³² Both here draw upon the Greek etymology: 'μάρτυς' in the New Testament means a 'witness', while the verb 'μαρτυρέω'

²⁹ Thomas M. McCoog, 'Constructing martyrdom in the English Catholic community, 1582-1692', in Ethan Shagan (ed.), *Catholics and the 'Protestant nation': religious politics and identity in early modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 95-127.

³⁰ For detailed discussion, see Dillon, *Construction of martyrdom*, 116, 145-169.

³¹ John Foxe, *Acts and monuments of these latter and perilous days, touching matters of the Church* (hereafter A&M) (first ed. London, 1563; this ed. TAMO: Sheffield, 2011), 1126, accessed at: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> (accessed 26th January 2017). I reference the modern page numbers of TAMO's edition. See also, for example: A&M (1583), 549, 634, 1116, 1140, 1143, 1211; Askew and Bale, *The lattr examinacyon of Anne Askew* (Marpurg [Wesel], 1547), in Beilin (ed.), *Examinations*, 138.

³² Alfield, *True reporte*, D3v. See also, for example: *Ibid*, F4^v; Frank Lestringant (ed.), *Le théâtre des cruautés des Richard Verstegan* (1587) (Paris: Editions Chandeigne, 1995), 139; Mush *True report*, 363-4, 395.

means to bear witness/testify/declare/confirm. Yet, there are critical confessional differences in understandings of the witness of martyrs' blood. For Catholics, it witnesses to the true faith and has supernatural power. For Protestants, the witnessing power is its only function: they deny that it possesses supernatural power. Moreover, Protestant martyrs' blood bears witnesses both to the true faith and to the impending apocalypse.

In Catholic writings, the supernatural power of martyrs' blood can change objects and people around it. This is illustrated by two incidents described by the missionary priest John Gerard. The first involves a pilgrimage in 1601 to St Winefrid's well (Wales) by the missionary priest Father Oldcorne. Gerard recounts that when St Winefrid was beheaded (7th century AD) a powerful spring burst forth from where her head had lain. In the stream 'can [still] be found stones covered or at least sprinkled with blood'.³³ These stones were transformed, by St Winefrid's blood, into relics with healing powers. Oldcorne had been suffering from cancer of the mouth, but on encountering one of these stones he 'began to lick the stone and hold part of it to his mouth. He prayed silently all the time. After half an hour he got up – all his pain was gone and the cancer cured.'³⁴ Thus we see a Catholic understanding of martyrs' blood as able to change objects into relics, and to change pious people by effecting healing.³⁵ The second incident concerns the conversion to Catholicism of the future-martyr Henry Walpole. Present at the execution of Edmund Campion, his clothes had been

³³ John Gerard, *The autobiography of a hunted priest*, Philip Caraman (trans. and ed.), (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, first ed. 1952, this ed. 1988), 56. For another example of the supernatural power of martyrs' blood over matter, see 'Garnett's straw' in Gerard, *Condition of Catholics*, 301-7.

³⁴ Gerard, *Autobiography*, 57-8.

³⁵ The same passage relates how a Protestant, trying to prove the Catholic cult to be foolishness, jumped in: 'Scarcely had he touched the water than he felt its super-natural powers which he had refused to believe in. There and then he was struck with paralysis', demonstrating that these powers could also cause the impious bodily harm. Gerard, *Autobiography*, 57.

smattered with Campion's blood, and he subsequently converted to Catholicism, writing 'some beautiful English verses... telling how the martyr's blood had brought warmth into his heart'.³⁶ Thus we see that in Catholic thought martyrs' blood had the power to effect a change of heart.³⁷

For Catholics, martyrs' blood also possessed expiatory power: it functioned as a sacrifice (similar to Old Testament sacrifices and Christ's expiating sacrificial death), calling for God's mercy and forgiveness of sins.³⁸ William Allen reproduces a letter Edmund Campion wrote to his superior while on the English mission, stating, 'Very many even at this present being restored to the Church, new soldiers give up their names, while the old offer up their blood. By which holy hosts and oblations, God will be pleased: and we shall no question, by him overcome.'³⁹ Similarly, Richard Holtby, reporting persecution in the north, reproduces a letter Anthony Page wrote from prison to his Protestant mother, a few days before his martyrdom:

... the shedding of my blood... I offer unto Almighty God as a sacrifice, not only for mine own sins, which are most grievous, but... particularly, in the behalf of your poor soul..., I desire you, by the bitter passion of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to accept this my voluntary oblation of my life, and shedding of my blood, as a most forcible vocation and calling of Almighty God...⁴⁰

³⁶ Gerard, *Autobiography*, 130. Walpole's poem is probably *Why do I use paper, pen and ink*, which states 'This martyr's blood hath moistened all our hearts.' Printed in Alfield, *True reporte*, sig. F^r.

³⁷ For a similar example, see Gerard on Henry Garnett's blood in *Condition of Catholics*, 307-8.

³⁸ See Dillon, *Construction of martyrdom*, 137.

³⁹ William Allen, *A briefe historie of the gloriovs martyrdom of XII. reverend priests* (Rheims, 1582), RSTC 369.5, sig. e4^v, sig. e7^v. See Marotti, *Religious ideology*, 84 for a discussion of how the priest martyrs at the scaffold, through their behaviour, evoked the celebration of the Eucharist.

⁴⁰ 'Father Richard Holtby on persecution in the north' (c. 1594), in Morris (ed.), *The troubles*, 103-219, 142-143.

And, the martyr Robert Southwell's poem 'Christ's bloody sweat' paralleled Christ's blood sacrifice (in both his Passion and the Eucharist) with Southwell's desire to sacrifice his own blood in martyrdom.⁴¹ Sacrifices, in Judeo-Christian theology, have a communal rather than an individual impact; thus, this shedding of martyrs' blood was an expiation and sacrifice for the whole community, as expressed in Parsons' *An epistle of the persecution of Catholickes in Englande*, where he beseeches God to accept the martyred priests' innocent blood for the community of the English nation (both Catholics and their persecutors).⁴²

This sacrificial function of Catholic martyrs' blood highlights the strong continuities between medieval and early-modern Catholic theology. In the medieval west 'a soteriological theory... is reflected everywhere... it is the theory of sacrifice. The wonderful blood of the lamb – shed, sprinkled on the altar, and lifted to God – is the instrument of salvation', and this ubiquitous notion of salvific sacrificial blood is not limited to Christ's blood, but includes the blood of Christians.⁴³ From the early Church, Christians had believed that Christ's death changed the nature of martyrdom, so that martyrdom was a sacrifice which imitated Christ's sacrifice, and martyrs' blood imitated Christ's blood.⁴⁴ This was intrinsically linked with the Eucharistic theology of the real presence: it was believed that Christians receive and become part of the body and blood of Christ through consuming

⁴¹ Robert Southwell, 'Christ's bloody sweat', in James H. McDonald (ed.), *The poems of Robert Southwell S.J.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 18-19. For further discussion, see Mary Lowe-Evans, 'Christ's bloody sweat', *Explicator*, 54:4 (1996), 199-202.

⁴² In Protestantism, martyrs' blood draws God's wrath upon their persecutors; in Catholicism, it pacifies Him and draws his mercy: 'I beseech God to accept the innocent blood of his virtuous priests, for some part of pacification of his wrath towards us, and towards our persecutors, that they having the mist of error taken from their eyes, may see the truth of Christ's Catholic religion...' Robert Parsons, *An epistle of the persecution of Catholickes in England* (Douai, 1582), RSTC 19406, M4^r-M4^v.

⁴³ Bynum, *Wonderful blood*, 189-90.

⁴⁴ Leyerle, 'Blood is seed'; Klawiter, 'Living water'.

his body and blood in the Eucharist, and thus when they are martyred it is the body of Christ which bleeds.⁴⁵ In medieval England, this theology was encapsulated in the cult of the martyr Thomas Becket's blood, deliberately represented in a manner evocative of the Eucharist, and drunk by medieval Catholics as – like the Eucharist – it was believed to have healing powers.⁴⁶ The patristic notion of the expiatory sacrifice of martyrs' blood was further supported by two key developments in medieval Catholic theology. First, the strong emphasis in medieval theology on all humanity being subsumed into Christ in His death on the cross (and in its echo in each Mass) and offered up to God. Secondly, medieval writers stressed the notion of synecdoche; thus, a martyr could shed their blood to expiate and sanctify not only themselves but the whole community.⁴⁷ Therefore, depictions of expiatory sacrificial martyrs' blood in early-modern Catholic martyrologies draw upon a web of Eucharistic and martyrological theology which developed through the patristic and medieval periods.

This theology came under assault in the Reformation, as a consequence of Protestant Eucharist theologies, leading to very different confessionalised understandings of the nature and function of martyrdom and martyrs' blood. If the real presence was rejected, together with the idea that Christ's sacrifice could be continued or repeated on any later occasion (such as in each Mass, or indeed in each martyr's death), dying martyrs could not be subsumed into Christ's death, and their blood could not possess the expiatory salvific powers of his blood. Protestant writers explicitly condemned the notion that martyrs' blood possessed any salvific value, often framed within a wider attack on the Catholic concept of the treasury of merit. Bale and Foxe attacked the cult of Thomas

⁴⁵ Robert J.H. Mayes, 'The Lord's Supper in the theology of Cyprian of Carthage', *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 74:3-4 (2010), 307-324, especially 310-313 on the real presence and 321-322 on martyrdom.

⁴⁶ Rachel Koopmans, 'Water mixed with the blood of Thomas': contact relic manufacture pictured in Canterbury Cathedral's stained glass', *Journal of Medieval History*, 42:5 (2016), 535-558, especially 537-8, 541-2, 545, 553.

⁴⁷ Bynum, *Wonderful blood*, 202.

Becket, Bale complaining that Catholics had ‘made his blood equal with Christ’s blood and desired to climb to heaven thereby’.⁴⁸ Similarly, Hugh Latimer attacked the cult of the martyrs in general, stating ‘the blood of martyrs hath nothing to do by way of redemption: the blood of Christ is enough for a thousand worlds’.⁴⁹ The Scottish reformer John Borthwick lays out the most explicit renunciation of martyrs’ blood’s salvific power. After explaining the traditional Catholic belief, he presents the Protestant position, which centres around blood witnessing (the word is repeated twice, followed by the synonym ‘confirm’):

the reason that the blood of the martyrs is not shed in vain... [is] that the profit & fruit thereof is abundant to glorify God by their death, to subscribe and bear witness unto the truth, by their blood, and by the contempt of this present life to witness that he doth seek after a better life, by his constancy and stedfastness to confirm and establish the faith of the church.⁵⁰

This Protestant divergence from the medieval heritage, unlike the continuities between Catholic medieval and early-modern conceptions of martyrdom and martyrs’ blood, calls into question the proposition that there was a cross-confessional early-modern construction of martyrdom which stood in contrast to the medieval conceptions of martyrdom which had preceded it. Rather, Protestants broke decisively with medieval precedent, and diverged sharply from the Catholic position, Protestant martyrological writings rejecting the concept of martyrs’ blood possessing supernatural power.⁵¹ As well as attacking the notion of the salvific power of martyrs’ blood, they

⁴⁸ Askew and Bale, *Lattre examinacyon*, 80. *A&M* (1563), 100.

⁴⁹ *A&M* (1563), 1381. Protestantism was also opposed to the idea that martyrs’ blood had salvific value because this would have undermined *sola fide*, being a form of salvation through works.

⁵⁰ *A&M* (1563), 634.

⁵¹ Calvinism was cessationist, maintaining that miracles ceased with the end of the apostolic age. This has not always been sufficiently noted in recent scholarship, some of which has presented Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*

also attacked the idea that it possessed miraculous powers. This was often achieved through silence, omitting such depictions, or replacing them with wonderous natural occurrences. The latter tactic was favoured particularly by Foxe, who filled his *Acts and Monuments* with *mirabilia*. Medieval theologians, above all Thomas Aquinas, had developed Patristic notions of the miraculous, and while there were divergences over how to categories miracles, how they functioned, and by whom they could be worked, there was unanimity that miracles were supernatural events, intrinsically outside of what could occur naturally without any divine (or demonic) intervention.⁵² To take Michael Goodich's definition, a miracle was understood to be 'a phenomenon which confounds or even appears to contradict the normal rules governing nature or society'.⁵³ Highly rare or extraordinary phenomena, which nonetheless are explicable in natural terms, were not seen as miracles; following the tradition of encyclopaedists and natural philosophers, these were termed by the thirteen-century theologian Albertus Magnus 'mirabilia'.⁵⁴

Foxe evidently concurred with the official cessationist Calvinist stance, disavowing belief in the contemporary existence of the miraculous throughout his *Acts and Monuments*. He writes scathing of Thomas Becket, 'If God in these latter days giveth no miracles to glorify the name of his own son: much less will he give miracles to glorify T. Becket'; instead, he deployed *mirabilia* in his martyrological accounts as acts of divine confirmation that the Protestant martyrs were true

as containing miracles (Alice Dailey, 'Typology and history in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*', *Prose Studies*, 25:3 (2002), 1-29), or has elided miracles and wonders (Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and literature*, 53-75), thereby creating a false premise of similarity between the confessions.

⁵² See Michael Goodich, *Miracles and wonders: the development of the concept of miracle, 1150-1350* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 8-28. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* (1259-1265), 3.99.9-3.102.3, in Richard Swinburne (ed.), *Miracles* (New York; London: Macmillan, 1989), 19-22.

⁵³ See Goodich, *Miracles and wonders*, 8. Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, 8.

⁵⁴ See Goodich, *Miracles and wonders*, 21.

martyrs.⁵⁵ The *Acts and Monuments* replaces supernatural signifiers with natural signifiers. God communicates and operates exclusively through the natural: this communication is divine providence operating through the laws of nature. These providential natural wonders occur at points where Foxe's narrative, had it been Catholic, might have utilised a miracle; they perform many of the same narrative roles, but reveal a very different view of materiality and of God's interaction with his creation. Bishop Hugh Latimer had prayed that he would shed his heart's blood for Christ; at his burning his prayer was answered very literally, most of his blood gushing out of his heart in astonishing abundance, making the godly onlookers marvel.⁵⁶ This is an unexpected occurrence, yet there is nothing clearly supernatural about the event, as Foxe recounts it:

'the which blood ran out of his heart in such abundance, that all those that were present, being godly, did marvel to see the most part of the blood in his body so to be gathered to his heart, and with such violence to gush out, his body being opened by the force of the fire, by the which thing god most graciously granted his request, which was that he might shed his heart blood in the defense of the gospel.'⁵⁷

The gushing of the blood out of Latimer's body is, Foxe states, due to the force of the fire opening up his body, and is an unusual, but not intrinsically unnatural, event which signifies that God heard Latimer's prayers and 'graciously granted his request'. This in turn infers that Latimer is a true child of God and a true martyr belonging to the true Church.⁵⁸ However, while Protestant martyrs' blood can occasionally behave in spectacularly wondrous ways, akin to miraculous Catholic martyrs' blood,

⁵⁵ *A&M* (1563), 100. See, in contrast, Foxe's acceptance of the possibility that St Paul bled milk instead of blood, *A&M* (1570), 68-9.

⁵⁶ *A&M* (1563), 1424.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* This account is repeated verbatim in *A&M* (1570), 1498-1499.

⁵⁸ *A&M* (1570), 1949.

it cannot heal, it cannot mediate grace to objects or to people, and is not expiatory: its functions are limited to the natural.

Thus, again we see the absence of a shared cross-confessional language of martyrdom. While early-modern Catholics upheld the dual functions of martyrs' blood as witnessing and possessing supernatural powers, in line with orthodox medieval precedent, Protestants departed radically from this mould in eschewing the supernatural.

Martyrological writings also differed in other confessionally-specific ways. Protestant accounts devoted far more space to depictions of 'bloody persecutors' and the persecutors' fates.⁵⁹ Catholic texts concentrated heavily on the martyrs and their expiating blood, rarely featuring frequent depictions of 'bloody' enemies. Catholicism thus continued the medieval trend, since medieval martyrologies and hagiographies were primarily intended as mirrors of holiness for readers to imitate, focusing intensely on the holy person, as seen in the titles of compilations like the *Speculum sacerdotale*. Medieval Catholic martyrological accounts generally included a lengthy *vita*, depicting the martyrs' holy life, as well as a *passio*, depicting the martyr suffering at the hands of their wicked enemies: although the martyrs' persecutors often did meet unpleasant ends if they did not repent, the primary focus of the work was on the martyr rather than their enemies.⁶⁰ Protestant martyrologies broke with this trend, often focusing as much (sometimes even more) on the martyrs'

⁵⁹ Indeed, the rhetoric of 'bloody enemies' proliferated in English Protestant writings well before English Protestant depictions of bleeding martyrs appeared. See, for example, such language in: Roy & Barlowe, *Rede me*, 20, 60, 97; Fish, *A supplicacyon*, 5-6, 9; William Tyndale, *The obedience of a Christian man* (CrossReach Publications: 2015), 28, 83, 93-4, 127, 161.

⁶⁰ These features can be clearly seen in the martyrological accounts in Voragine's *The golden legend*, the anonymous *Speculum sacerdotale*, and the late fourteenth century *Festial* by John Mirk (John Mirk, *Festial*, Susan Powell (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009-2011)).

enemies. They often omitted or significantly abbreviated the traditional *vita*, so that the *passio* was the main constituent. Additionally, the traditional medieval cautionary depiction of the unrepentant persecutor's fate was sometimes intensified and given extensive treatment.

The *Acts and Monuments* demonstrate compellingly this Protestant shift wherein the persecutors constitute at least as significant a focus as the martyrs. Sir Thomas More and Bishop Bonner are present more frequently, and in more vivid and memorable detail, than any of the Protestants they persecute. This is the culmination of earlier features of English Protestant martyrological writings, by Bale and others. The language of martyrs' blood serves primarily to identify and attack the individuals responsible for their deaths. For example, Bale identifies the red horse of Revelation with the Roman Catholic clergy, the red colour indicating the martyrs' blood they have shed.⁶¹ Similarly, Foxe depicts the clergy who persecuted the Lollards as 'bloud thirsty ravenours', the Marian clergy as 'blood guilty homicides', and his Roman Catholic contemporaries as 'bloody children of the murdering mother Church of Rome'.⁶² The Marian martyr John Philpot exclaims at his final trial before Bishop Bonner, 'Let all men beware of your bloody church!'⁶³ Echoing the Marian martyrs' writings, the weight of Foxe's derogatory polemic is heaped on Bishop Bonner, who was responsible for about a third of the executions. The martyr Browne tells Bonner, 'ye be a bloodsucker, and I would I had as much blood, as is water in the sea, for you to suck'.⁶⁴

Protestant martyrological writings depict the martyrs' innocent blood crying out to God for vengeance, drawing on Biblical depictions of innocent blood crying out to the Lord to be avenged,

⁶¹ Bale, *Image*, 73.

⁶² *A&M* (1563), 314; (1570), 685; (1563), 1092; (1576), 2031.

⁶³ *A&M* (1570, 2039). Yet, the very fact that this is Philpot's fourteenth examination before Bonner reminds the historian that the character 'bloody Bonner' is a reflection of Protestant perceptions of the Catholic clergy rather than an accurate representation of Bonner.

⁶⁴ *A&M* (1570), 2068.

e.g. Revelation 6:9-10 where the martyrs cry, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' Foxe's *Acts and monuments* presents the fullest depiction; he records meticulously the terrible fates of those responsible for the bloodshed. In the Protestant mentality, God's punishment upon those who have shed martyrs' blood is not reserved for the Last Judgement and damnation in the next life; it begins in this life.⁶⁵ Foxe's account of the executions of John Fisher and Thomas More, both depicted as responsible for numerous Protestant martyrs' deaths, is summarised in the marginalia with 'Blood revenged with blood'.⁶⁶ Foxe sees this retributory justice as sometimes involving a literal 'eye for an eye': several key figures guilty of Protestant bloodshed are punished by literally bleeding to death. For example, Charles IX of France, whom Foxe considered partially responsible for the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, expired with 'his blood gushing out by divers parts of his body'.⁶⁷ Foxe clearly does not see as unusual the fate of Charles IX, or other persecutors who bleed to death; rather, it illustrates perfectly his 'blood for blood' principle. In his Preface addressed to his Catholic readers ('To the persecutors of God's truth, commonly called papists, another preface of the author. '), he warns that, unless they repent, God will punish them in this life for their complicity in the persecution of Protestants: 'Think you blood will not require blood again? Did you ever see any murder, which came not out, and was at length repayed? Let the example of the French Guise work in your English hearts, and mark you well his end.'⁶⁸ On a factual level, Foxe's assertions of the fates of these persecutors are, of course,

⁶⁵ This functions within the broader Protestant providential worldview, see: Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in early modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially, 65-115; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's lewd hat: Protestants, papists, and players in post-Reformation England* (New Haven; London: Yale University press, 2002), 29-40.

⁶⁶ *A&M* (1583), 1093.

⁶⁷ *A&M* (1583), 1231. See also Foxe's descriptions of the persecuting French official Minerius' death e.g. *A&M*, (1570), 1125.

⁶⁸ *A&M* (1563), 12.

questionable; we should read them as a vivid reflection of the Protestant belief that their martyrs' blood would be avenged by God in this life and in that to come.

Catholic martyrologies, in contrast, focused, perhaps even more than medieval Catholic martyrologies, on the victims rather than the perpetrators. While Protestant martyrologies primarily attacked the brutal and wicked nature of the Roman Catholic authorities, Catholic martyrologies primarily offered a mirror of holiness and a promise that the martyrs' supernatural blood would re-convert England. Direct attacks on the character of the Protestant authorities were usually only a secondary concern. Whereas Bale and Foxe referred incessantly to the blood-thirsty or blood-stained nature of their enemies, such references are rare even in the most polemic Catholic martyrological writings, as are *ad hominem* attacks on individuals as 'bloody' persecutors, which Catholic martyrological texts reserve for exceptionally unjust and/or enthusiastic persecutors.⁶⁹ Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon and President in the North, is the only individual regularly described as bloodthirsty, due to his passionate campaign to wipe out Catholicism in the North and his use of the most stringent penalties available.⁷⁰ Less vitriolic than Protestant texts in their condemnation of persecutors, Catholic texts emphasise more strongly the possibility of cleansing by repentance. Like Protestant martyrs' blood, Catholic martyrs' blood is occasionally described as calling for God's vengeance, but more commonly cries for God's mercy, as in Allen's *An apologie*, where 'blood voluntarily yielded, crieth forcibly for mercy towards our country'.⁷¹

⁶⁹ As demonstrated by Alfield's *True report*, Parson's *Epistle*, 'Holtby on persecution', Mush's *True report*, Anon. 'A Yorkshire recusant's relation' in Morris (ed.), *Troubles*, 61-102.

⁷⁰ For example, see 'Yorkshire recusant's relation', 65-66, 76-77, 'Holtby on persecution', 132, 139-40. On Henry Hastings, see Claire Cross, *The Puritan earl, the life of Henry Hastings, third earl of Huntingdon, 1563-1595* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 159-195.

⁷¹ William Allen, *An apologie and true declaration of the institution and endeouours of the two English colleges* (Mounts in Henault, 1581), RSTC 369, 86.

The differences between Protestant and Catholic treatments of the martyrs' persecutors reflects distinctive features of Catholic and Calvinist theologies. While Calvinist theology recognised the possibility of conversion and redemption of individuals among confessional opponents, it was nonetheless by nature more 'othering' than Catholic theology, in that it pitted a godly minority against a reprobate majority, created deliberately by God as vessels of destruction. Thus, Calvinism's worldview lent itself to narratives of a tiny, beleaguered and bleeding true Church, persecuted by a large, powerful and blood-thirsty false Church, whose reprobate murderous members come to horrific earthly ends in providential anticipation of their fate at the Last Judgement.⁷² In contrast, Catholicism saw salvation as potentially open to every individual, as it understood God to call and will every individual to be saved, thus their salvation hinged upon their free choice to accept or reject that call. God's grace was nonetheless essential in the salvatory process, as Catholicism shared Calvinism's Augustinian perspective of human nature as deeply fallen and depraved. In Catholicism, grace frequently operated through the material world, as in the sacraments and in miracle-working people, objects and places. Thus, Catholicism lent itself to narratives of the holy martyrs' blood mediating God's grace to the martyrs' confessional opponents, so they might choose to turn to the true faith.

This difference between Protestant and Catholic treatments of their martyrs' persecutors also reflects the different foci of each confessions' martyrologies. Protestant martyrologies are more outward-looking, turning the spotlight onto their confessional enemies to criticise and undermine Catholic individuals and the Catholic Church as an institution; Protestant martyrs are primarily used as tools in this polemic. Protestant martyrological writings thus break with the medieval use of the martyrological tradition as a mirror, and instead utilise it as a weapon. Catholic martyrologies stand

⁷² On Calvinist theology in execution narratives, see Lake and Questier, *Antichrist's lewd hat*, especially 3-53.

somewhere between the medieval and the Protestant positions. There are some references to bloody enemies and bleeding martyrs, creating an image of English Protestantism as cruel and unjust; however, the spotlight remains on the Catholic martyrs themselves, and the medieval focus on the *vita* (to be imitated by the reader) is retained.⁷³

The dialogue between Protestant and Catholic martyrologies can be seen as reflecting traditional legal disputes, with Protestantism as the accuser and Catholicism as the defendant. Both sides focus primarily on the nature and role of Catholicism. Protestantism accuses Catholicism of corruption and murder and is certain that a damning sentence will soon be passed against Catholicism. Catholicism protests innocence, alleges persecution by Protestantism, and is confident that Protestantism's case will in time be shown to be nonsensical, and Catholicism will regain her freedom. Considering these points, we see why Protestant martyrologies were more polemic, and presented a more pessimistic narrative of present and future events in this world (though, nonetheless, ultimately optimistic, in awaiting the justice of the Last Judgement and joy of heaven). They believed that their martyrs suffered and witnessed in a world populated by an irredeemable Catholic majority; the only power for change the Protestant martyrs' blood possessed was to call down the apocalypse and divine judgement. In contrast, Catholic martyrologies were more defensive, inward-looking, and optimistic (concerning present and future events in this world). They focused on the supernatural, expiatory bloodshedding of their martyrs, which had the power to witness to and change the hearts of the martyrs' opponents, and was the means by which the persecution of Catholics would cease and England would return to Catholicism.

This difference in tone and outlook between Protestant and Catholic martyrologies is exemplified by their gendered language, reflecting the fact that 'vocabularies of gender were a crucial resource for describing and redressing other forms of difference and disorder in the early

⁷³ E.g. the lengthy *vita* in Mush, *True report*, 368-409.

modern period'.⁷⁴ These works combined themes of femininity, martyrdom, and blood to produce opposing images, which reflect the essential dissonance between Protestant and Catholic notions of martyrdom and martyrology, even in the very language and imagery underpinning their constructions of martyrdom.

The place accorded to femininity in both Protestant and Catholic rhetorics of martyrs' blood converge on the depictions of Catholicism; yet, two very different constructions of early-modern Catholicism emerge. Protestantism used a language of martyrs' blood and femininity almost exclusively to describe the Whore of Babylon, seen as synonymous with the Roman Catholic Church.⁷⁵ In the context of a rhetoric of blood in Protestant texts, femininity signifies grave disorder, and femininity combined with power equals extreme unnatural malevolence: 'Upon this beast [of the apocalypse] sitteth a woman. For what else avanceth or beareth out this malignant muster.'⁷⁶ The natural hierarchical order is turned upside down: '[She] sit upon this bloody beast as to be stayed quieted and settled by them [the Catholic clergy].'⁷⁷ It is a woman, not a male warrior, who sits on a bloody beast, as though riding into battle (a male sphere). The men's role is to pacify and appease her, suggesting that her naturally volatile female emotions dominate the scene. The

⁷⁴ Francis Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, gender, and seventeenth-century print culture* (first edition Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1999; this edition Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), xi. While Dolan's ground-breaking *Whores of Babylon* offers an important analysis of the gendered dimensions of Protestant depictions of Catholicism, a similar full-length study remains to be done on the importance of gender in the construction of Catholic self-identity and Catholic constructions of Protestantism.

⁷⁵ This is, somewhat paradoxically, exemplified by John Foxe's play *Christus triumphans* which features the Church (Ecclesia) as a persecuted mother. However, there is no rhetoric of martyrs' blood in reference to Ecclesia, although the work uses a rhetoric of martyrs' blood elsewhere, such as A5^v, E7^r, F5^r: John Foxe, *Christus triumphans* (first. ed. Basel, 1556; this ed. London, 1672).

⁷⁶ Bale, *Image*, 125^r.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Catholic clergy are emasculated and feminized by occupying the place that properly belongs to women: a position of 'subordination' and 'dependence'.⁷⁸ In contrast, the overbearing female figure is masculinised through her violence: the Catholic clergy are 'bloody children of the murdering mother [signifying the Catholic Church]'.⁷⁹ Female agency here equates to violence and an inversion of the natural gender order.⁸⁰

Protestant texts use imagery combining femininity, blood, and martyrdom to associate Catholicism with scandalous sins. We see Catholic bishops, who have taken a vow of chastity, having sexual intercourse with a whore [the Whore of Babylon], who occupies the subversive 'on top' position: 'Mark what labours and pains that crafty and wily Winchester taketh with Bonner, Tunstall, and other of his fashion... to hold up this glorious whore in her old estate of Romish religion. Oh he grunteth and groaneth, he sweateth and swelleth, he fretteth and belleth, he bloweth and panteth.'⁸¹ Catholicism, cast as a woman, appears drunk senseless on the liquor of martyrs' blood: 'Besides all Godly wisdom is she and forgetful of herself through this same bloody drunkenness so great excess hath she taken.'⁸² Additionally, she so gorges herself on blood that spontaneous human combustion from overeating results: 'And she shall not have her fill / Of blood until she bursts.'⁸³

These types of polemic imagery are not found in Catholic martyrologists' attacks on Protestantism. Catholic texts make few lengthy metaphorical attacks on their opponent, and not through a language of femininity. The focus is on the nature of Catholicism, rather than that of her opponent. While Protestant martyrological writings seek to prove Protestantism true by proving

⁷⁸ Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 75.

⁷⁹ Bale, *Image*, 125^r.

⁸⁰ For the association between female agency and violence, see Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 110.

⁸¹ Bale, *Image*, i. 125^v.

⁸² *Image*, i. 127^v.

⁸³ From the martyr Robert Smith's poem to his brother, printed in *A&M* (1563), 1334.

Catholicism false, Catholic martyrological writings prove Protestantism of necessity false by proving Catholicism true. Thus, Catholic martyrologies' use of gendered language focuses on the Catholic Church and her martyrs. In short, the two confessions' imagery of femininity, martyrdom and blood is diametrically opposed, and encapsulates their wider differences in tone and foci.

This is exemplified by John Mush's martyrology of Margaret Clitherow, in which Clitherow, a self-sacrificial martyred mother, parallels the self-sacrificial maternal Catholic Church.⁸⁴ It is notable that Foxe never takes this angle, despite featuring pregnant and nursing martyrs in his *Acts and Monuments*; he focuses exclusively on arguing that only brutal persecutors would put a pregnant or nursing woman to death. Because Mush, unlike Foxe, sees martyrs' blood as life-giving (due to its expiatory, salvific, and supernatural powers), he aligns Clitherow's maternity, and especially her breast milk (in early-modern medicine thought to be the product of blood) with the blood she sheds in martyrdom: 'I mind by God's assistance to spend my blood in this faith, as willingly as I ever put my paps to my children's mouths.'⁸⁵ Although the two most famous Protestant martyrologies featured female martyrs (Foxe's *Acts and monuments* and Bale's *Examinations of Anne Askew*), they did not use a language of maternity, blood and martyrdom to depict their martyrs as images of the Mother Church. In contrast, Mush's depiction of the Church at the outset of his martyrology parallels Clitherow's maternal identity:

'In the primitive Church they persecuted her that she should remain barren... now they labour also to the same effect, but principally to subvert and destroy her already born children; and as she then cast her seed of blood to the generation of many, so now she fighteth with blood to save those that she hath born, that the lily roots being watered with

⁸⁴ See Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Margaret Clitherow, Catholic nonconformity, martyrology and the politics of religious change in Elizabethan England', *Past & Present*, 185 (2004), 43-90, for analysis of the local and national socio-political contexts of Clitherow's life and death and Mush's martyrology.

⁸⁵ Mush, *True report*, 427.

the fruitful liquor of blood, may keep still and yield new branches hereafter with so much more plentiful increase by how much more abundantly such sacred streams flow among them.⁸⁶

This contrasts with the Protestant imagery of female agency in combination with blood and martyrdom. The Catholic depiction of the Church here invests a female with considerable agency, but within the gender prescriptions for suitable female behaviour. The Church fights not through violence but self-sacrifice; the blood she sheds is her own. Her natural maternal and female instincts are emphasised: she is fertile and protects her children. It is her Protestant enemies who want what is unnatural, attempting to suppress and destroy her maternity and fecundity, but she confounds them. Whereas Protestant martyrologies combine themes of femininity, martyrdom and blood to produce an image of what is unnatural, disdainful, and evil, Catholic martyrologies combine the same themes to promote what is natural, admirable, and holy. Again, the apparent thematic similarity dissolves into fundamental differences.

The essentially dissimilarity between the confessions' understandings of martyrdom is also evident in their understandings of the temporal meaning of early-modern martyrdoms. Protestant martyrological writings depict martyrs' blood calling for and signalling the apocalypse; Catholic martyrological writings, in contrast, almost always understand contemporary persecution as a brief intermission in the golden age of Catholic Christendom, since the blood of Catholic martyrs will expiate and purify the country and convert confessional opponents.

Much research has been devoted to the development of Protestant apocalypticism, especially the works of Bale and Foxe, including classifying their apocalyptic beliefs and exploring

⁸⁶ Mush, *True report*, 362-363.

their use of the medieval heritage.⁸⁷ English Catholic apocalypticism has received far less attention, and the scholarship has not yet engaged with the historiography on martyrdom. Comparing Protestant and Catholic martyrologies' apocalyptic perspectives casts further doubt on the thesis that Protestant and Catholic martyrologies are essentially similar and both contrast with the medieval precedent.

English Protestant martyrological writings are located within a medieval precedent in their use of bloody apocalyptic language, but it is primarily heretical rather than orthodox. As early as the Cathars in the thirteenth century, Western medieval heresies identified the Pope and the Catholic Church with the forces of evil in Revelation.⁸⁸ For example, Monta of Cremona's *Summa* (c. 1241) states that the Cathars identify the apocalyptic beast and whore ('drunk with the blood of the saints') as the Catholic Church and the pope, and the saints as Cathar martyrs.⁸⁹ Similarly Bernard Gui, in the early fourteenth century reports that the heretical Beguins and Franciscans see the Catholic Church as the whore, drunk on 'the blood...of those four Friars Minor who were condemned and burned at Marseille as heretics, [and] the blood of the Beguins of the third order who in years

⁸⁷ On the former, see Tom Betteridge, 'From prophetic to apocalyptic: John Foxe and the writing of history', in David Loades (ed.), *John Foxe and the English Reformation* (Aldershot: Scolar: Ashgate), 1997, 210-232, and Palle J. Olsen, 'Was John Foxe a Millenarian?', *JEH*, 45:4 (1994), 600-624. On the latter, see Richard Bauckham, *Tudor apocalypse: sixteenth century apocalypticism, millenarianism and the English Reformation: from John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman* (Appleford, Abingdon: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978), and Thomas Fudge, 'Jan Hus as the apocalyptic witness in John Foxe's history', *Communio Viatorum*, 56:2 (2014), 136-168.

⁸⁸ Lázló Hubbes, 'Apocalyptic as a new mental paradigm of the middle ages', 144-176, and Robert Boenig, 'The apocalypse in medieval England', 297-330, in Michael A. Ryan (ed.) *A companion to the premodern apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). .

⁸⁹ Wakefield and Evans (eds.), *Heresies of the high middle ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 328.

past were condemned as heretics in the province of Narbonne.⁹⁰ Protestant writers depicted such medieval heretics' martyrdoms as signposts upon the road to the apocalypse, often associating them with Satan's release from his one-thousand-year-long bondage and the commencement of the sixth age of the world.⁹¹ Protestant writers portray Reformation martyrs and medieval heretics as united in their persecution by an antichristian Roman Church; they shed their blood in witness to the true faith, and – once martyred – cry out to God to avenge their blood. This paradigm began in English Protestant writings, with Fish's *Supplicacyon* depicting England, from the medieval period, standing 'tributary' 'unto a cruel develish bloodsupper drunken in the blood of the saints and martyrs of christ.'⁹² It was most fully developed by Bale and Foxe. Both wrote commentaries on just one Biblical book - Revelation. For both, Revelation, was 'the hermeneutical key to all ecclesiastical history'; as Bale wrote, 'The very complete sum and whole-knitting up is this heavenly book [Revelation] of the universal verities of the Bible.'⁹³

A strong apocalyptic framework underlay their constructions of martyrdom. They did not converge on all details: Bale saw the witnesses referred to in Revelation 6:11 as Wycliffe and his contemporaries, while Foxe saw them as Hus and Jerome of Prague; Bale refused to date the apocalypse, beyond it being imminent, while Foxe stated that it would occur in 1594, unless God shortened the time frame for the elect's sake (Matthew 24:22).⁹⁴ However, the apocalyptic commentaries of both vividly depicted the blood of the martyrs, medieval heretics and Protestants alike, crying out for God's avenging apocalypse and signalling its advent: 'their innocent death

⁹⁰ Wakefield and Evans (eds.), *Heresies*, 432.

⁹¹ Fudge, 'Jan Hus', 150; Gretchen Minton (ed.), *John Bale, the image of both churches* (New York: Springer, 2013), 13.

⁹² Fish, *Supplicacyon*, 5, referencing Rev 17:6.

⁹³ Fudge, 'Jan Hus', 150; Minton (ed.), *John Bale*, 1-2, 36-7.

⁹⁴ Fudge, 'Jan Hus', 155.

fiercely asketh and requireth the great indignation, vengeance, and terrible judgement of God, upon those tyrants... And this is their [the martyrs'] daily cry... How long time will it be ere thou judge them to damnation? What years will thou take ere thou revenge our blood'.⁹⁵ The apocalyptic plagues and punishments of Revelation are the consequence of the martyrs' blood crying out to God to be avenged. This perspective was mirrored in Bale's martyrology of Anne Askew and Foxe's *Acts and monuments*.⁹⁶

In contrast, Catholic writings did not associate their martyrs' blood with the apocalypse. The figure of the bloody Antichrist is absent, as are suggestions that blood-guilt will bring down apocalyptic plagues and punishments. Catholic martyrological writings usually do not depict their age as the Last Times; rather, they expectantly await a future time when England will be Catholic again, and often see the powerful martyrs' blood as the agent of this change. Allen writes confidently in *An apologie* that 'Truth prevaieth in time... specially the truth of Christ's religion, which riseth when it is oppressed, and flourisheth when it is most impugned' since 'God never suffereth it to cease or fail in any Country: though it stand with travail and blood.' He sees martyrdom as a 'grace' given by God which 'is a joyful sign of mercy' that He 'will not forsake the place nor people', and a sign that God will send 'a calm, or the conversion of the whole'. Allen states unequivocally that the Catholics await this calm (lifting of persecution) or the reconversion of the whole of England, and see present tribulations as period of God's chastisement for their sins.⁹⁷

This difference in apocalyptic thought reveals two very different constructions of the meaning of martyrdom and martyrs' bloodshed. But a further critical difference between Protestant

⁹⁵ Bale, *Image*, L3^r. For a similar sentiment, see John Foxe, *Eicasmī*, 55-6.

⁹⁶ E.g. Askew and Bale, *Lattre examinacyon*, 94, 138. *A&M*: (1570) 152, 508, 595, 929; (1576) 488, 765-6, 2031-2; (1583) 415, 506, 790.

⁹⁷ Allen, *Apologie*, 112. For further discussion of the Catholic belief that the martyrdoms would be followed by England's return to the Catholic fold, see Gregory, *Salvation at stake*, 271, 284, 348.

and Catholic martyrologies can be uncovered from these differing perspectives: they have substantially different notions of how God works within time. This should, perhaps, immediately be obvious, considering the frequent Protestant protests in martyrologies such as the *Examinations of Anne Askew* and the *Acts and monuments* that Christ cannot be present in the Eucharist because He is present in heaven, and cannot be in two places at once, or the Protestant belief that all Catholic miracles are false since the age of Christian miracles ceased with the last apostle's death. Yet, scholars have shown surprisingly little interest in the differences in confessional perspectives on time.

Roland Betancourt argues that by the medieval period there was a different understanding of time in the Eastern versus Western Churches: 'the Latin Church's future-driven Last Judgment operates on an event-based history that is to come, whereas the Byzantine Church conceives of history as a fulfilment that is in a perpetual present-orientated state of manifestation.'⁹⁸ The point is intriguing, but Betancourt overstates his case. Two different notions of time, and especially of apocalyptic time, were present in the medieval West, one more favoured among heretical groups, and one by the orthodox Western Church. Early-modern Protestantism and Catholicism each tended towards a different notion. Overall, medieval Catholicism's understanding of the apocalypse focused 'more on moral issues, ones that speak to the present... especially the moral dilemma of the individual',⁹⁹ 'the medieval consensus [was] that apocalyptic texts are to be read as moral allegories'.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, medieval heretical groups were already interpreting the apocalypse in a

⁹⁸ Roland Betancourt, 'Prolepsis and anticipation: the apocalyptic futurity of the now, East and West', in Ryan (ed.), *A companion*, 177-205, 18.

⁹⁹ Boenig, 'Apocalypse in medieval England', 326-7.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Lond, 'Revising the revelation: early modern appropriations of medieval apocalypticism', Ryan (ed.), *A companion*, 378-425, 390. Late-medieval Catholicism was, of course, highly diverse, and, thus, while this continuity between the mainstreams of medieval and early-modern Catholicism should be noted, it should

more literal, historical fashion.¹⁰¹ This calls into question the sharp divide depicted by historians such as Thomas Lond between ‘the medieval consensus’ and ‘Protestant historicising tendencies’.¹⁰²

These differing medieval schools of thought had their heirs in the early-modern confessionalisation of apocalyptic standpoints. Common medieval heretical perspectives were reflected in a Protestant apocalypse which was historical, precise, and imminent - reflected in unmistakable historical signposts (including martyrs’ blood-shedding), and which could be mapped out with reasonable precision onto the medieval and recent past, and even into the future, as in Foxe’s *Eicasmī* and the multitude of complex commentaries, tables and diagrams produced by the Protestant printing presses.¹⁰³ Common medieval Catholic perspectives were reflected in an early-modern Catholic apocalypse which was both a mysterious, more distant future event and a moral allegory applied to an individual’s present circumstances. But the disconnection between these notions of time was far wider, and underlies many of the issues for which believers were martyred (e.g. was Christ’s sacrificial death present in each Mass?) and the way their martyrdoms were understood and represented (e.g. could they have any salvific value, and could martyrs’ sanctity and orthodoxy be

not be forgotten that there were some medieval Catholic apocalyptic perspectives that were more future than present orientated. Moreover, Protestantism did, undoubtedly, evolve from and draw upon medieval orthodoxies as well as heresies. The intention of this article is not to suggest a simplistic binary equation between Protestantism and medieval heresies and Catholicism and medieval orthodoxies, but rather to point to the overall continuities and discontinuities in trends of emphasis and perception.

¹⁰¹ Wakefield and Evans (eds.), *Heresies*, 328, 423-5.

¹⁰² Lond, ‘Revising the revelation’, 390.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 407. As Gregory has noted, this Protestant ‘apocalyptic horizon’ stands in striking contrast to the calendar of the Catholic Church. ‘By contrast, it would be difficult to find a less apocalyptic indicator in the period than the liturgical calendar of the *Roman Martyrology* (1584). It duly calculates the movable feasts to beyond the year 4000 – confidence indeed that the gates of hell would not prevail against Christ’s church’: Gregory, *Salvation at stake*, 254.

confirmed by miracles?). Martyrological narratives were at the heart of a confessional battle over rival ways of living in time and conceiving of the connection between past, present, and future. Considering these differing understandings of time and of apocalypticism, and the continuities in each between a medieval precedent and an early-modern confessional stance, it is unhelpfully reductive to depict an early-modern cross-confessional conception of martyrdom which stands in significant contrast to medieval conceptions of martyrdom.

Finally, let us turn briefly from a macrocosmic view of the fault lines between the confessions' constructions of martyrdom to a microcosmic examination of how these elements functioned within martyrological texts, to depict in detail the discrepancy-within-resemblance.¹⁰⁴ In 1546-7, John Bale published Anne Askew's account of her examinations, supplemented with his own extensive commentary and account of her martyrdom; it was the first Protestant martyrology of a contemporary English martyr. Over thirty years later, in 1582, Thomas Alfield assembled a disparate set of brief martyrological writings (both prose and poetry) concerning the death of Edmund Campion, Ralph Sherwin, and Alexander Bryan, supplemented with his own comments. This was one of the first Catholic martyrologies to feature a frequent rhetoric of martyrs' blood. Both Bale and Alfield were, therefore, writing pioneering sixteenth-century English martyrologies. Of course, there are commonalities – many of them traits which one would expect to find in any Christian martyrology of any time and place – but beneath these largely predictable similarities lie important differences, notably the areas of confessional division discussed in this article.

First, we should note that they are not using this language of martyrs' blood contemporaneously. In the 1540s, martyrs' blood rarely featured in English Catholic martyrological texts, so we must look to the early 1580s to find a rhetoric of martyrs' blood which is comparably frequent to Bale's, by which point Reformation English Protestant martyrological writing is already

¹⁰⁴ I am indebted to a reviewer of this article for the suggested phraseology 'discrepancy-within-resemblance'.

beginning to decline.¹⁰⁵ While Alfield's compilation of texts are among the first Catholic martyrological texts to employ a frequent rhetoric of martyrs' blood, they acknowledge no English Protestant influence, nor do they engage directly with the English Protestant rhetoric of martyrs' blood, bypassing completely the opportunity to criticise or correct it.

Bale's text is more overtly polemic. He repeated attacks the institution of the Catholic Church, the 'bloody Synagogue of Satan' and 'bloodthirsty church' which has 'procured' the deaths of the martyrs of 'all ages'.¹⁰⁶ Alfield's texts, in contrast, spends little time attacking institutional Protestantism, and does not attack the English Protestant Church as an entity, instead focusing almost exclusively on defending Catholicism.¹⁰⁷ Bale also engages in more frequent and protracted *ad hominem* attacks, for example depicting Wrisleye and Rich, two of Askew's examiners, as worse than Pilate, as Pilate did not wish to shed 'innocent blood', whereas they have 'insatiably thirsted' for the 'innocent blood' of many men and women, and racked Askew with 'their own polluted bloody tormentors' hands, 'til the vains and sinews burst'.¹⁰⁸ In *A True Report*, although the jury are described as 'bloody' this is embedded within a direct appeal to the martyrs' persecutors to repent in order to be saved.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Although Foxe produced a fourth edition of his *Acts and Monuments* in 1583, there were very few significant changes from the 1576 edition. He was writing his commentary on *Revelation* in the 1580s, which did discuss martyrdom, but the work was left unfinished upon his death in 1587. Between the *Acts and Monuments* and the English Civil War, production of 'new' mainstream English Protestant martyrological texts largely consisted of abbreviated editions of the *Acts and Monuments*.

¹⁰⁶ Bale, *Lattre examinacyon*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ See Alfield, *True report*, D^r for a passing criticism of Protestantism.

¹⁰⁸ Bale, *Lattre examinacyon*, 152-3.

¹⁰⁹ Alfield, *True report*, E3^v-E4^r. Bale does not appeal to Askew's persecutors to repent, but rather assures them that 'great vengeance' will fall upon them 'for the shedding of innocent blood.' Bale, *Lattre examinacyon*, 94.

Bale's text explicitly and implicitly rejects the traditional notion that martyrs' blood has supernatural powers. He mocks the cult of Thomas Becket's blood and rejects the notion that martyrs' blood possesses any salvific value, scorning those who 'made his [Becket's] blood equal with Christ's blood and desired to climb to heaven thereby'; he also attributes apparent miracles related to Becket's cult to medieval monastics learning and practising necromancy and trickery from their books, and claims these fake miracles have now ceased due to the closure of the monasteries and their libraries.¹¹⁰ Alfield does not deny that salvation comes through the blood of Christ; indeed, he hotly rejects a Protestant rumour that Sherwin died a Protestant because he cried out Christ's name and 'reposed himself wholly upon Christ and his passion.' Alfield protests that, contrary to Protestant propaganda, Catholics 'do acknowledge all our sufficiency' in 'the shedding of Christ's most precious blood', which is the 'sole foundation spring and cause of all merit'.¹¹¹ At the same time, Alfield describes the martyrdom of the three men as a 'bloody spectacle, no doubt a lively sacrifice unto God and a sweet savour unto his Angels', and the functions of their blood includes cleansing.¹¹² There is no contradiction between these beliefs for the Catholics, since, as we have discussed, the martyr is subsumed into Christ's Passion during their martyrdom, and their blood is united with Christ's blood. It is due to Christ's 'most precious blood' being the '**foundation** spring and **cause** of all merit' that the martyrs' blood can have sacrificial and cleansing power.

Bale's text is strongly apocalyptic, and also aligns itself with medieval heresies, depicting continuity between the medieval heretical martyrs and the early-modern Protestant martyrs, both persecuted by the bloody antichristian Catholic Church.¹¹³ Alfield's text opens with a quotation from Revelation: 'These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their stoles and

¹¹⁰ Bale, *Lattre examinacyon*, 79-80.

¹¹¹ Alfield, *True report*, C4^v-D^r.

¹¹² *Ibid*, A4^v.

¹¹³ Bale, *First examinacyon*, 5, *Lattre examinacyon*, 79, 138.

made them white in the blood of the Lamb.¹¹⁴ Yet, this is a perfect example of discrepancy-within-resemblance. Alfield's use of Revelation functions as moral allegory rather than a literal historical timeline of past, present and future. These Catholic texts do not foresee the Apocalypse as imminent. They do not mention the Antichrist. And, far from seeing the martyrs' blood and deaths as heralding the Last Times, they believe that 'It is the blood by martyrs shed' 'that must convert the land'; soon the English Protestants will run out of hands 'to shed such guiltless blood' while still the 'wise and virtuous' Catholics will be coming into England to reconvert it.¹¹⁵ For these authors, the martyrs' blood is a cause and herald of the reconversion of England, rather than the apocalypse.

A comparison of Bale's martyrology of Askew with Alfield's martyrology of Campion, Sherwin and Bryan exemplifies how several layers of confessional theology combined to produce two separate, yet related, martyrological traditions that were historically contemporary but exhibited largely opposing worldviews and temporalities. Martyrs' blood, a lynchpin of confessional theologies, functions as a witness to these surface-level commonalities and deeper divisions.

In conclusion, focusing on martyrs' blood to examine the theologies underpinning Protestant and Catholic constructions of martyrdom suggests that recent historiography requires some re-evaluation. English Protestant and Catholic martyrologies did evolve more in dialogue than isolation; however, this was perhaps less a close conversation than a sequence of monologues, with frequent silences in response to many of each-other's salient points. There was no common conception of martyrdom across the confessions: constructions of martyrdom voiced largely opposing theological perspectives on the supernatural, the apocalypse, and the nature of time, as well as often having different polemic strategies and primary foci. The notion that early-modern martyrologies were significantly different from medieval conceptions of martyrdom also requires considerable qualification. Evidently, early-modern Catholic and Protestant martyrologies did not reproduce

¹¹⁴ Alfield, *True report*, A^f.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, G^v.

statically medieval models; they adapted them to suit new circumstances, as seen in their more frequent use of a rhetoric of martyrs' blood. Nonetheless, early-modern Catholic martyrologies were more of a continuation of than a departure from medieval Catholic understandings of martyrdom and of the Catholic faith more widely.¹¹⁶ Even the claim that Protestant martyrologies break away from medieval conceptions of martyrdom becomes meaningless when one asks *which* medieval conceptions of martyrdom. Protestant martyrologies as much as Catholic martyrologies were a development of medieval trends in constructing martyrdom and the Christian faith; each drew primarily upon a rival trend. As early-modern Catholic martyrologies took up many trajectories in medieval orthodoxy, so Protestant martyrologies often looked to those in late medieval heresies: divergences over the degree of focus on 'bloody' enemies, the contemporary existence of the supernatural, the apocalypse, and perceptions of time, were already present in medieval heretical versus orthodox martyrological writings. In the medieval period these constructions emerged in opposition and contest; this polarity continued into the Reformations, ensuring that there was no common conception of martyrdom.
