

Religious Toleration in English Literature from Thomas More to John Milton

Dissertation

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By

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## Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how the idea of religious toleration was represented in early modern English polemical prose, poetry, and other literary genres. I argue that religious toleration extends from what is permissible in spiritual practice and belief, to what is permissible in print, and texts on religious toleration encouraged writers to contemplate the status of the discourse to which they contributed. Although the study begins and ends with analysis of two authors whose writings on toleration have received extensive critical attention, this dissertation also applies the latest theoretical framework for understanding religious toleration to writers whose contribution to the literature of toleration has previously been less well documented. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) outlines an ideal state with apparently progressive institutions and social practices, including property shared in common, abolition of the monetary system, and religious toleration. Contrary to the view of previous criticism, however, the image of a tolerant society in More's *Utopia* is unlike the modern ideal of toleration as a foundational principal of modern pluralism. Although More also argued against toleration of heresy in his later polemical works, he engaged with the concept of toleration to contemplate the efficacy of the dialogue as a persuasive tool.

Most importantly, More developed the ideal of polemical toleration, which held that participants in a debate should create a textual space characterized by moderately-toned language and the suspension of judgment for the time it takes to persuade and ultimately convert one's opponent. As this study shows, More's works reveal greater ambivalence towards polemical toleration than they do towards religious toleration of the heretical sects he so despised. This study also analyzes the role of religious toleration in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563-1583). Foxe's work has traditionally been received as a polarizing statement on the nature of the "true" and "false" churches, but in its condemnation of persecution Foxe develops a tolerant authorial *ethos* that furthers his polemical goals. A chapter focusing on The Jesuit polemicist Robert Parsons examines how this writer too used the concepts of religious and polemical toleration for complex rhetorical purposes. Parsons employs the idea of toleration as a flexible rhetorical trope, often veiling critiques of the Elizabethan religious establishment behind appeals for toleration of English Roman Catholics. The study concludes with a discussion of John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), which argued for a broad freedom of the press and for toleration of Protestant sects by the government and by the Church of England. The limits of toleration circumscribed in *Areopagitica* are replicated in *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674), which echoes the terms of the tolerationist debate in a way that tempts readers to view the rebel angels as a religious minority, only to reveal that some religious groups should not be tolerated. These chapters all show that toleration was a thoroughly vexed topic, and one that was closely tied to the art of persuasive language.

## Dedication

Dedicated to William R. Pepperney (1949-2003)

## Acknowledgments

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## Fields of Study

Major Field: English

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## Chapter 1: Religious Toleration and Early Modern English Literature

Writing against English Roman Catholic appeals for religious toleration in the wake of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, the Protestant controversialist Matthew Sutcliffe dismissed Catholic overtures for religious toleration by stating that "toleration of false religion is repugnant to rules of religion and holy scripture" (B2v). Sutcliffe's distaste for toleration of religious heterodoxy is only one example of the pervasive opinion in early modern England that those whose practices and beliefs deviated from the institutionally legitimated religious norm should not be tolerated. Another anti-tolerationist, Gabriel Powel, argues in similarly apocalyptic terms: "The two [Protestant and Roman Catholic religions] cannot possibly stand together; For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darknes? What concord hath Christ with Belial?" (B2r). Sutcliffe and Powel both use figures of speech to reinforce their anti-tolerationist message; alliteration and repetition here provide two examples of how writers used literary prose style to address the complex issue of religious toleration. Although they could use their art to address such a controverted topic, for the writers presently under study, toleration offered a possibility to develop and enhance literary aspects of their texts.

This link between literary method and religious toleration is strongest in writings on the concept of polemical toleration. Whereas religious toleration is a civil or

ecclesiastical policy of forbearing from acting against individuals or groups with disapproved spiritual practices or beliefs, polemical tolerance is the principal that persuasion and conversion most effectively take place when writers create a textual space bracketed from the judgment and derision that otherwise characterized controversial religious literature in print.<sup>1</sup> Because false religion inevitably had to be countered by a discursive saturation of printed books and arguments against it, it is best for disputants to embody a moderate discourse and to demonstrate an attitude that is, at least temporarily, accepting of competing and contrasting ideas. Because conversion requires persuasion, the opposing view should be tolerated for the time it takes to reveal it to be in error. Polemical toleration is thus an alternate tactic from what has been called “persecution of the tongue.”<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this study is to examine how religious toleration was described in English polemical prose, poetry, public speeches, and other literary genres; and how writing about religious toleration opened new possibilities for writers to envision the literary genres to which they contributed. It is the main argument of this dissertation that texts that many texts concerning what is tolerable in religious belief and practice also reflect on what is tolerable in writing and reading. Although there have been many recent historical and several literary studies of religious toleration in early modern England, this

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<sup>1</sup> Tolerance and Toleration can be distinguished by their context: tolerance is an attitude of individuals towards other individuals or ideas that are foreign and unsettling, while toleration is policy of a civil government, religious group, or other institutional body. For definition and discussion of toleration as a pragmatic strategy of societies to attain peaceful coexistence, see Michael Walzer, *On Toleration*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 13.

dissertation applies the latest theoretical framework for understanding religious toleration to writers whose contribution to the literature of toleration has heretofore gone undocumented. This study, however, begins and ends with analysis of two authors whose writings on toleration have received much critical attention. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) outlines an ideal state with apparently progressive institutions and social practices, including abolishment of private ownership of property, and the legislation of religious toleration. Contrary to previous criticism, the image of a tolerant society in More's *Utopia* is not what it at first appears; although More did not extend toleration to the heresy he so vigorously fought against in his later polemical works, he engaged with the concept of toleration to reflect on the efficacy of the dialogue as a literary genre. As for Milton, the limits of toleration circumscribed in *Areopagitica* are replicated in *Paradise Lost*, which echoes the terms of the tolerationist debate in a way that tempts readers to view the rebel angels as a religious minority, only to reveal that some groups should not be tolerated.

Presented within these bookend chapters on More and Milton is a reconsideration of other writers, who have not been previously linked to religious toleration, or whose views might even be described as anti-tolerationist. Chapter 3 analyzes John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (first edition, 1563). This work has traditionally been received as a polarizing statement on the "true" and "false" churches, but in its condemnation of persecution Foxe develops a tolerant authorial *ethos* that furthers his polemical goals. Chapter 4 turns to the Jesuit polemicist Robert Parsons, and shows how this writer similarly used toleration for complex rhetorical purposes. At times throughout his career

Parsons changed his relationship to toleration, stating at the outset that Roman Catholics should not look for toleration in England because it would enervate their cause, but later after it became clear that James would not be a tolerant king, arguing that toleration was a desirable goal. Although his works were politically charged and perceived by the government as highly incendiary, Parsons nevertheless developed the concept of polemical toleration as defined by Thomas More. He also used toleration as a flexible rhetorical trope, often veiling critiques of the Elizabethan religious establishment behind appeals for toleration of English Roman Catholics. These chapters all show that toleration was a thoroughly vexed topic, but one that was closely tied to the art of persuasive language.

In addition to the investment in religious toleration demonstrated by writers, the idea was of great interest to many readers. Opposition to religious toleration in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England presented obstacles to Roman Catholics and nonconforming Protestants alike, and the efforts of these groups to gain toleration were motivated by the hard-felt effects of persecution. Religious toleration, which might broadly be defined as a begrudging acceptance of disapproved religious faiths, deeply concerned early modern writers, and modern analysts of sixteenth and seventeenth-century religious discourse have likewise found little to agree on regarding the nature and structure of religious toleration in early modern English culture. The basic questions of religious toleration are which religious activity should be deemed criminal or lawful and to what extent the civil or ecclesiastical authority should punish religious difference and

enforce religious uniformity?<sup>3</sup> Toleration represented one answer to problems in the early modern period which arose from the intermingling of individuals and groups professing Roman Catholicism, Protestantism (including those conforming to the Protestant Church of England, nonconformist groups such as Quakers, Levelers, Diggers, Ranters, and a host of other separatist sects), and the Jewish and Islamic faiths. Becoming most concentrated in the seventeenth century, vigorous debates over tolerance swirled around the question of what the state and church ought to do to permit diverse beliefs and practices, or to achieve a unified national religion in the midst of proliferating religious identities. Writings on toleration also had a complex relationship to the tradition of persecution in England. Religious persecution was constitutionally legitimated in England by the *Oath Ex Officio* and statute *De Heretico Comburendo* (instituted in 1401 and repealed in 1559). While in the 1640s public debates on religious toleration were accompanied by a vast pamphlet literature, it was not until the 1689 Act of Toleration that the government put forth a set policy of toleration, albeit a limited toleration extended only to Protestant groups. While arguments for toleration grew from those against persecution, for some groups, aspects of their culture actually relied on persecution.

Religious toleration as an emergent concept spans many of the categories within which historians, scholars of religion, and literary critics categorize early modern existence; toleration depends on law, religious doctrine, theories of kingship and governance, community and social structure, geography, international and domestic

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<sup>3</sup> See J. W. Allen, *History of Political Thought* (London: Methuen, 1957), 74.

political dynamics, and even military science and espionage. While religious toleration was a phenomenon grounded in the civil and ecclesiastical contexts of early modern England, it was also articulated in printed public discourse, in texts both fictional and non-fictional. Toleration was as much a discursive construct as it was a social phenomenon, in that toleration was defined, delimited, codified, and enacted through writing. Literary genres offered writers and readers another way to situate interfaith attitudes through language, and this study therefore examines the complex ways in which writers across a range of literary and extra-literary genres conceived of the paradoxes between religious toleration and persecution.

Analyzing English literature for evidence of how early modern men and women envisioned religious toleration is an endeavor fraught with several problems. As the next few pages show, one encounters the problem of definition, that toleration in the early modern period was not the same thing as toleration in the modern age, that it was seen as counterintuitively negative, that evidence for it is hard to find, and that modern critics bring our own biases to the site of analysis. To begin with these issues, it must first be noted that religious toleration in the early modern period does not correspond precisely to the modern understanding of this principle. The disjunction is not just between sign and signified; toleration can refer to many phenomena, and many things can be construed as toleration. More problematically, what today's culture means by *toleration* is not the same idea early modern culture denoted by the term. Just as how the word *breakfast* in the United States and *frühstück* in Germany refer to substantively different meals, sharing in common only the time of day in which they are eaten, toleration is a signifier with

entirely distinct and separate diachronic referents. Toleration can be referenced by many signifiers, and the single term *tolerance* can apply to many referents. One constant throughout the sixteenth century was that toleration had a negative connotation, more closely linked to the Latin root verb *tolero/tolerare* (“to suffer or endure”). Another problem is that its qualities change across shifting historical contexts. Today toleration is flexibly applied to a range of racial, cultural, religious, and sexual identities, yet it is also a concept troubled by its theoretical configurations in the arena of identity politics.

Toleration, which presumes to the part of its grantor the discretion to tolerate at its whim, also deprives marginal identities of their political agency by eliding differences under the label of equality.<sup>4</sup> Some writers for the Roman Catholic minority in Elizabethan England likewise dismissed toleration as a worthwhile goal. As chapter 3 of this study discusses, in the environment of Elizabethan Roman Catholic polemical literature both militant Catholic controversialists and their Protestant disputants often agreed that English Catholics should not appeal for toleration by the government because persecution provokes resistance, which then galvanizes identity. Tolerance leads to spiritual laxity and complacency, and erases the line of difference that defines religious groups.

Also unlike today, in the early modern period toleration was not seen as an end in itself, nor was it envisioned as a principle of a pluralistic society, but rather as a temporary and begrudging precursor to conversion. Although the origin of western religious toleration has traditionally been traced to the seventeenth century, most notably

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<sup>4</sup> See Susan Mendus, *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1989); also see John Horton, ed., *Liberalism, Multiculturalism, and Toleration* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993).

memorialized in England's parliamentary debates of the 1640s and in Enlightenment-era texts such as John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), religious toleration was described in writing much earlier. Historians have uncovered forms of religious tolerance at the social and cultural levels in the classical and Patristic eras and in medieval and Renaissance Europe; but with the advent of the Protestant Reformation religious toleration took on new importance. The expansion of religious difference associated with the Reformation impacted both states and souls, and the academy of theologians and controversialists on both Protestant and Roman Catholic sides responded by increasing their level of literary production, arguing in print over an increasingly fractured religious "truth." These writers consistently questioned how to define toleration of others' religious differences. Nevertheless, in the midst of a culture prone to xenophobia, religious panics, and state-sponsored persecution, many Tudor and Stuart literary texts demonstrate a moderate approach to religious difference that today's readers can without anachronism identify as tolerationist.

Although some images of toleration resemble the modern notion, many instances reveal a more paradoxical relationship to persecution. Counterintuitively, persecution could be seen *as* tolerance, particularly when constructed as a "medicinal persecution" aimed at converting and thus demonstrating care and concern on the part of the persecutor for another's soul. Alexandra Walsham has shown that early modern English persecution was considered a form of "charitable hatred." To correct error in another, no matter how violently, was to palliate that individual's spiritual health (2006, 2). In



contrast to this position, to tolerate another's erroneous beliefs was to allow that individual to persist in a damnable heresy.

Another reason to call religious toleration "negative" in the early modern period was that moderation towards those with different views was also associated with indifference. In the words of John Milton, "I observe that feare and dull disposition, lukewarmnesse, & sloth are not seldomer wont to cloak themselves under the affected name of moderation, then true and lively zeale is customably disparag'd with the terms of indiscretion, bitterness, and choler."<sup>5</sup> It was for the sake of concord, however, that latitudinarian writers of the latter Seventeenth Century such as Joseph Hall invoked the idea of *adiaphoria*, or "things indifferent" to allow non-agreement over outward forms while still asserting agreement on core beliefs.<sup>6</sup> In spite of the popular opinion, there were some who saw positive aspects to toleration, which became a feature of Christian ideology. John Frith was one polemicist who upheld the view of Christianity as a tolerant religion: "To say that Christ would have his disciples compel men with prisonment, fetters, scourging, sword and fire," Frith argues, "is very false and far from the mildness of a Christian spirit."

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<sup>5</sup> References to Milton's prose are from *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. 8 vols. Ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), abbreviated as *YP*, 1.868-69.

<sup>6</sup> The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* notes that Hall recommended tolerance in matters of indifferent when it came to intra-Protestant debates, and recognized a permissible "latitude of doctrinal diversity within the church" (*Pax terris*, 1648, 28; *Susurrium cum Deo*, 1651, 61); see Hall, Joseph. *Christian Moderation* (London, 1640) and *The Peace-Maker* (London, 1647); see Richard A. McCabe, 'Hall, Joseph (1574–1656)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn., 21 May 2009 < <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/11976>>.

Another literary dimension to religious toleration is that most writers appealed to scripture and early Christian theology to support arguments both for and against the toleration of minority religious groups. English Christians saw themselves as responsible to divine justice, and Bible scholars as well as popular preachers saw their God as capable of both mercy and vengeance towards his chosen people. Citing “the toleration of God” (Romans, 3: 26) which the Christian dispensation acquired for humanity’s sinfulness, some tolerationists emphasized the God’s mercy. The Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matthew, 13: 24-30) implies that persecution of the wicked by a human system of justice was unnecessary because God would ultimately punish the false. An alternate tradition held that if they were to tolerate heresy, the English would compromise their religious uniformity, and in so doing displease God. Commentators could thus interpret instances of either persecution or toleration as manifestations of providence. Works of both imaginative and polemical literature abound with examples of wickedly persecutorial religious figures who suffer providential retribution. The intolerant puritan figure Angelo in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, for example, receives retribution for his hypocrisy through the agency of the government, but also through chance circumstances, a *deus ex machina* that may have suggested the hand of providence to audiences at the Globe Theater.<sup>7</sup> The Elizabethan martyrologist John Foxe populated his

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<sup>7</sup> References for Shakespeare are to *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: Norton, 1997).

famous work *Actes and Monuments* (first edition, 1563) with stories of Roman Catholic persecutors who suffer untimely deaths caused by a seemingly divine agency.<sup>8</sup>

Others saw toleration a positive virtue in the Aristotelian sense, so that a tolerant person will, although convinced of the truth of his own view, seek only to convince others of this truth by means of intellectual argument rather than by using persecution.<sup>9</sup> Based on the rhetorical ideal of argument *in utrumque partem*, and also arising from the Christian humanist's problematic affinity for the pluralistic religion and philosophy of Classical culture, the concept of toleration was imminently "Renaissance." Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) was the first to articulate the humanist defense of toleration, the origins of which he located within the rhetorical tradition, particularly in the rhetorical genre of *sermo*, or conversation, and *decorum*.<sup>10</sup> Toleration grows out of *sermo* because a speaker must reign in highly charged emotions in an effort not to offend a potentially hostile audience. Erasmus thus favors polemical toleration in the form of moderate speech and positive reception of different ideas. Parties who disagree with one another will reach accord through rational, persuasive conversation (Remer 8-9). According to Walsham's argument, English writers conceived of tolerance as sinful, but this is not to say that behind persecution lay an unassailable public consensus. Toleration did develop, but in dialectical conjunction with persecution. In other words, toleration and persecution

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the story of the escaped bull that gored a persecuting chancellor in the street at the conclusion of a woman's execution (Foxe 4.128).

<sup>9</sup> See Mandell Chreighton, "Persecution and Tolerance" in *Religious Pluralism in the West: An Anthology*. Ed. David George Mulan (Malden: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> See Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 7-8.

were not polar opposites. These ideas were not inversely related to early modern writers, but rather interwoven and symbiotic.

In the writings of many others, however, toleration is a barely locatable lacuna. The nature of toleration makes evidence for it difficult to obtain: “To tolerate is to permit or endure, to abstain from taking steps to restrain something and to refuse to make a fuss; it is a conscious act of omission, the only external trace of which is often the silence of our sources” (Walsham 2006, 269). Modern analysts find toleration such an elusive object of study because it lacks contiguity with our own models of plurality and coexistence. If an anachronistic simile from twentieth-century astronomy may be permitted, looking for toleration in the early modern period is something like the astronomical search for black holes, as sometimes a black hole is only perceptible through observation of its gravimetric impact on bodies within its proximity.

Measuring toleration by state legislation is also problematic. The toleration supposedly effected by the state through the passage of laws such as the Edict of Nantes (1598) in France or the Act of Toleration (1689) in England, did as much to encourage confessionalism and foster religious division as they did to create peace and concord in communities composed of adherents to plural religions. The English Reformation that so privileged religious uniformity and used persecutorial actions to ensure it also laid the groundwork for dissent, resistance, and plurality. The “rise of toleration” was thus cyclical and reversible, and depended as much on social conditions at the local level as it did on legislative pronouncements and governmental and church policy (Walsham 2006, 300). For example, while state policies persecuting certain religious adherents required

individual agents to carry out their directives, from justice of the peace to jail warden, local actors such as justices of the peace or jail wardens could mitigate the harshness of penal policy.

A final problem facing any literary, cultural, or historical study of religious toleration in the early modern period is the danger of imposing the modern perspective's own bias. The early twentieth-century view of religious toleration in the Reformation period held that tolerance grew from almost inevitable social circumstances: the growing power of dissident religious sects, and the promulgation of their ideas in print, the fracturing of religious uniformity, experiences with different religious cultures arising from trade and travel, and the growth of religious skepticism.<sup>11</sup> The flaw in such narratives is that of a teleological development from a supposedly persecutorial medieval culture to a predetermined modern culture of tolerance (Walsham 2006, 6-13). The revisionist and New Historicist model of early modern culture as profoundly alien and "other" to modern culture likewise would foreclose readings of toleration by pointing out that religious experience is a function of state ideology and that the appearance of individual agency is a false consciousness.<sup>12</sup> While certainly I agree that religious toleration in the early modern period is different from that of the modern, subsequent historical studies have shown that the opinion of individuals also had a role to play in

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<sup>11</sup> See W.K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England from the Beginning of the Reformation to the Death of Queen Elizabeth* (London: G. Allen, 1932).

<sup>12</sup> See Louis Montrose, "New Historicisms," in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*. Ed Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 392-418.

tolerating, but more importantly have shown that the very binaries of toleration and persecution on which the twentieth-century models were based were false.

Although drawing on revisionist and “post-revisionist” history, this study focuses on literary production, with the concept of the “literary” being extended from its traditional scope of imaginative, artistic writing, to include any text crafted according to the principles of rhetoric with the aim of informing, educating, and persuading, as well as delighting. From such historical and literary models, one may construct a study that links early modern literature with the extra-literary context of religious thought and religious toleration among the plural voices that shaped the contours of English Reformation and Counter-Reformation cultures. In historiography and prose polemical writing, authors frequently employed literary and rhetorical devices when writing about toleration. The martyrologist John Foxe, for example, presented readers with aspects of drama, first- and third-person narrative, and examples of integrated verbal and visual artistry across *Actes and Monuments*.<sup>13</sup> Foxe uses literary techniques to lodge a tolerationist condemnation of religious persecution through. Looking at Foxe through the lens of toleration allows a clearer view of this writer’s literary skill and, at the same time, forms a picture of how persecution and toleration were presented in artistic culture and received by readers. The same criticism can be applied to Catholic polemical writers like the Jesuit Father Robert

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<sup>13</sup> See Warren Wooden, *John Foxe* (Boston: Twayne, 1983); also see Aston, Margaret, and Elizabeth Ingram. “The Iconography of the *Acts and Monuments*.” *John Foxe and the English Reformation*. Ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997), 66-142; King, John N. *Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’ and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 3.

Parsons, whose one-time position as Lecturer in Rhetoric at Oxford gave him the expertise to craft his polemical tomes according to the techniques and principles of classical rhetoric. The new historicist technique of approaching these polemical texts through close reading in terms of their cultural milieu allows us better to appreciate their artistry, and similar benefits reward the reader who examines the treatment of religious toleration in literary genres such as drama or lyric poetry. A governing question of this study, then, is how does looking at toleration in literary and extra-literary texts enhance our appreciation of their authors' craft?

One thing looking at early modern literature in terms of toleration reveals is the logical nuances of the issue itself, because, most of all, literature allowed early modern writers and readers to understand and possibly to reconcile the inherent contradictions associated with the concept. The counterintuitive nature of early modern religious toleration is evident, for instance, in Francis Bacon's view that tolerance is an extreme rather than moderate position. Bacon locates toleration outside the limits or "bounds" which define permissible religious difference:

Concerning the *Bounds of Unity*, the true Placing of them, importeth exceedingly. There appeare to be two extremes. For to certaine *Zelants* all Speech of Pacification is odious.... Contrariwise, certain *Laodiceans*, and Luke-warme Persons, thinke they may accommodate Points of *Religion*, by Middle Waies, and taking part of both; and witty Reconcilements; As if

they would make an Arbitrement between God and Man. Both these  
Extremes are to be avoyded....<sup>14</sup>

Bacon conceives of tolerance and moderation in terms of the permissible limits of religious identity--to what extent individuals or groups might observe, believe, or express the range of possible religious identity positions and experiences. In Bacon's view, however, one may not well occupy a moderate position, because the ideal of religious truth allows for no compromise. Bacon's passage demonstrates the period's fascination with religious taxonomy, organizing religious identity according to the "English Breakfast Tea" scale—from cold, to lukewarm, to hot—reducing the tolerationist perspective to merely one more degree of erroneous opinion.<sup>15</sup> Bacon's characterizing of moderation and tolerance as extremist viewpoints demonstrates the basic conceptual gap separating early modern toleration from the modern. His construction of toleration as an intolerable idea is the first of several logical contradictions in Bacon's passage. Nevertheless, even as Bacon draws a link between unity and religious truth (both as a *theoretical* wholness and as a communal wholeness), he reveals an alternate perspective of toleration. Bacon chalks the lines on the literary playing field as a way of measuring what might be permissible in discourse and thought, but also to channel reception. He wants the reader's response to conform to his own interpretation of religious debate.

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<sup>14</sup> See Francis Bacon, "Of Unity in Religion." *The Oxford Francis Bacon*. Ed. Michael Kiernan. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> See Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 2.



Bacon ultimately limits of readers' possible responses to "Speech of Pacification" with either indignation or sympathy.

Tolerance, as measured according to a range of permissible limits, is another of the concept's many paradoxical aspects in the passage from Bacon. The human act of "placing" the boundaries of unity, for example, and Bacon's reliance on a spectrum of belief, potentially undermine the unity he wishes to assert. In describing what early modern English were permitted to believe or say regarding religion, Bacon redefines the religious norm while also hinting at forays into religious domains that lie clearly out-of-bounds. In all these movements, he uses language that represents the discursive, referencing speech, accommodation, and reconciliation. Those who wrote either for or (in the case of Bacon) against religious toleration, therefore, take part in a contemporary discourse that both constructs and problematizes its own literary status.

As literary and cultural scholars of the "persecuting society" have observed, early modern writers effectively roused passion and fortitude in their readers through rhetorical statements that justified or productively channeled the reality of religious violence.<sup>16</sup> Tertullian's maxim that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," for instance, rhetorically links personal suffering with purposeful community.<sup>17</sup> The characterization of Christianity as a religion of suffering martyrs also depends on the availability of persecution as a figurative vehicle, and More creates parallels between

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<sup>16</sup> See John Christian Laursen and Cary J. Nederman, eds. *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> See the *Apology*, ch. 50, in *The Fathers of the Church* Ludwig Schopp, Ed. New York: Cima Pub. Co., (1947-) Vol. 10.

heretics who were persecuted in the era of early Christianity, with the Protestants who threaten Catholicism in More's day:

The Arrianes that were heretikes ... when they hadde corrupted & gotten into theyr secte great prynces, vsed theyr authoryte agaynst the catholikes in bannishementes and prysonament, and much other cruell handelynge / all whych the good catholyque people suffred & vsed nonne other defence / sauynge the sworde of the word of god.<sup>18</sup>

The problem becomes, then, which is the true cause that validates a martyr? Tyndale notes that to suffer for the false Roman Catholic Church makes one a pseudo-martyr: "And when he [More] sayth that their Church hath many Martyrs, let hym shewe me one, that dyed for pardons, and Purgatory that the Pope hath fayned, and let him take the mastrie."

Another important and related concept is that of religious persecution. The rhetorical power of martyrdom was not the only function fulfilled by persecution. By vilifying religious difference, religious persecution was a way of defining the community. In terms of social history, the "coherent motives and objectives" informing religious persecution reinforced the structure of communities (Walsham 2006, 140). In a passage from the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, for instance, Thomas More describes an image of Lutheran towns falling into dissolution and decay, the result not of persecution but rather of its lack:

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<sup>18</sup> Quotations taken from *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 16 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973). Hereafter cited as *CW*, 8.2.954.

For the relygyous people monkys frerys and nonnis be clene drawen and dreuen  
out except suche as wolde agre to forsake theyre vowys of chastyte left be wedded  
and the placys not onely defaced all ornamentys sythdrawen the holy ymagys  
pulled downe and eyther broken or burned but also the holy sacrament cast out &  
the abhominable bestes (whych abhorreth me to thynke on) not abhorred in  
dyspyte to fyle in the pyxys and vse in many placys continually the chyrches for a  
comen sewage. (CW 6.1.370)

By persecuting heretics and by restricting the propagation of their ideas in print, More  
argues, the state can save the community and uphold the spiritual commitment of the  
clergy and the laity whom they serve. The antipodal image of modernity, it is  
persecution, not toleration, which strengthens a society.

Given the persuasive power of persecution and martyrdom, however, what place  
did religious toleration have in for early modern English culture? When religious identity  
was frequently constructed in apocalyptic terms of truth versus falsehood, did anyone  
speak for religious moderation? Who championed coexistence? This study proposes that  
the texts under analysis offer answers to these questions, but as with most answers, many  
more questions arise from the paradoxes of toleration.

Such a capacious category can imply an instability between signifier and referent,  
but, as this study argues, the flexibility of the concept in the early modern period lent to  
its rhetorical utility for writers. Another sense important to this study is its modern  
technical denotation of tolerance, as used in the material and engineering sciences, as a  
measure of *give*, or the range of acceptable variance before the breaking point in a

mechanism or unacceptable range of strength, durability, or other quality of material.

Although the current study acknowledges the danger of imposing the unquestioned set of assumptions implicitly packaged with modern science, much of interest is to be found through reading early modern English texts in terms of this technical sense of tolerance as *play* or *give*. By considering religious toleration as a function of limits, and always in terms of its dialectical conjunction with persecution, one might illuminate in part the early modern English culture's paradoxical complexity and richness in self-contradiction.

The plural meanings and contexts associated with religious toleration do not erase the existence of toleration as a state-mandated policy in early modern England.

Toleration, however, was as much a literary as a historical phenomenon. Literature, as a point of contact between the discursive construction and the lived experience of cultural realities, offers a unique vantage from which to examine such a fraught topic as religious toleration. This study thus examines how some of the most widely read writers across a range of literary genres articulated their culture's complex views on toleration, and how many used the idea to their rhetorical advantage.

If writings about religious toleration can illuminate the literary art of masterful persuasion, then why is so much negativity attached to the concept? It helps to return to the question of defining religious toleration. In addition to the definitions outlined above, one sense of toleration is "The action of allowing; permission granted by authority, license," the first sense offered is "the action of sustaining or enduring; endurance (of

evil, suffering, etc.).”<sup>19</sup> Toleration implied a grudging forbearance, a not-entirely-suspended sense of disapproval. The word *toleration* in the early modern period was bonded closely to its Latin root, the verb *tolero/tolerare* “to suffer or endure.” William Shakespeare puns on toleration’s Latinate, negative association in *Much Ado about Nothing*. With his usual malapropisms, Dogberry instructs the men of the watch “to meddle with none but the prince’s subjects. You shall also make no noise in the streets: for, for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable and not to be endured” (3.3.31-33). Taken within the political and religious context of Shakespeare’s England, however, Dogberry’s self-contradiction extends beyond mere pun. That Dogberry considers excessive speech both “tolerable” and “not to be endured” takes on greater significance when one considers how the real-world conflict over religious toleration in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England swirled around issues of limited free speech and the printed word. The *Book of Homilies* also uses this term to articulate the danger of speech against the state, a category which includes proscribed religious views:

... it is an *intolerable* ignorance, madness and wickedness, for subjects to make any murmuring, rebellion, or resistance, or withstanding commotion, or insurrection, against their modest dear and most dread sovereign lord and king, ordained and appointed of God’s goodness for their commodity, peace, and quietness.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Tolerate.” *The Oxford English Dictionary* Oxford University Press; online edn. [http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/, accessed 21 May 2009].

<sup>20</sup> “An Exhortation Concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates” in *Certain Sermons or Homilies, Appointed to be Read in Churches* (London, 1547).

As the *Book of Homilies* asserts, adherence to power from above in matters of public discourse and private belief permits the benefit of “commodity, peace, and quietness”—it is personal freedom, linked to mental illness and immorality, which should not be tolerated.

Despite their verbal and thematic affinity, one should not take Dogberry’s comical turn of phrase as necessarily a direct commentary on institutional pronouncements on religious and political uniformity. Shakespeare’s writings, however, certainly examine the bitter social and personal ramifications of toleration and persecution. To look only at his representation of Roman Catholic, not Protestant or Puritan characters and issues, some critics have argued that the “bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sing” of Sonnet 73 comment on the Old Faith in England, mourning the lost beauty of the despoiled English monasteries. Sonnet 124 possibly laments the fate of Catholic martyrs, “the fools of time, /which died for goodness who have lived for crime” (13-14).<sup>21</sup> Here Shakespeare is either showing covert Roman Catholic sympathies, which is unlikely, or more likely demonstrating the popular reception of the Elizabethan myth of the loyal Roman Catholic, an image that Protestant writers feared would result from a free Catholic press.<sup>22</sup> Throughout his plays, Shakespeare also sympathetically portrays the subject of exile, a condition experienced by many young Catholic intellectuals and priests of the

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<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare. See Eamon Duffy, “Bare Ruined Choirs: Remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare’s England.” in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare* Ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1-39.

<sup>22</sup> See Michael Questier, “Elizabeth and the Catholics” in *Catholics and the Protestant Nation: Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England*. Ed. Ethan Shagan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

Elizabethan period. The pastoral *As You Like It*, for instance, depicts a convivial community of English exiles (although whether the Duke Senior and his company are exiled within their own country, or in France where many Elizabethan Roman Catholics visited and studied, however, is indeterminate). In the Roman play *Cymbeline*, the banished noble Belarius exclaims “O Cymbeline, heaven and my conscience knows / Thou did unjustly banish me” (3.4.99-100). The term “conscience” here suggests another potential link between a Shakespearean character and the Elizabethan Roman Catholic exiles. Such encoded language perhaps reveals an author (and also an audience) who was highly concerned with the devastating personal effects of religious persecution. To Donna B. Hamilton, Shakespeare “presents in Belarius, unnecessarily exiled and angered as a result, a justification for a policy of toleration” (193). While it must be qualified that that Shakespeare rarely engaged explicitly with matters of religious controversy, the language of religious toleration—as both a social question and discursive restrictor—was diffused throughout into the linguistic culture of the London stage.<sup>23</sup>

Not all of Shakespeare’s work, however, demonstrates open sympathy with a religious minority, but rather recapitulates England’s political discourse of persecution and intolerance, and seemingly warns against the dangerous questions that toleration posed. In the light of both imagined and real Catholic plots to assassinate the queen, for instance, how could Elizabeth’s government tolerate a religious minority whose representatives avowed to destroy her? In *Henry V*, the king encapsulates the problem as

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<sup>23</sup> For one interpretation of how religious controversy might have been addressed in Shakespeare, see David Kaula, *Shakespeare and the Archpriest Controversy: A Study of Some New Sources* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

he vilifies the hypocritical motives of religious murderers, like those potential Catholic assassins who were proactively absolved of the sin of murdering Elizabeth by the 1570 papal bull *Regnans in Excelcis*:

Devils that suggest by treasons

Do botch and bungle up damnation

With patches, colours, and with forms, being fetched

From glist'ring semblances of piety (2.2.111-14)

Shakespeare's indictment of hypocrisy in the Catholic political designs on England extends to other issues important to the toleration debate, such as equivocation, the practice of deceptive language that captured Roman Catholic priests used as a strategy under interrogation. *Macbeth*'s Porter references the famous Jesuit priest and Gunpowder Treason conspirator Henry Garnet, the "equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven" (2.3.8-9). As these brief examples suggest, Shakespeare and other dramatists carefully responded to the problem of toleration in its complexity and, to some extent, they can represent to what degree religious ideas should be received or condemned by their audiences. Shakespeare is one English writer who was in many ways sympathetic to the personal and social losses caused by persecution, but intolerant of religious hypocrisy and political threats posed by marginalized religious groups, be they Roman Catholic or radical Protestant. While the writer avoided plain arguments that religious plurality should be tolerated, this study will suggest that Shakespeare is among many writers who demonstrate tolerance as a *give* or *play* of religious ideation in theme



and symbol. In this way Shakespeare differs from Bacon, who would allow no moderate position between poles. At the same time, Shakespeare's works reveal a cultural view of toleration that was always in tension with issues of loyalty, morality, and decorum.

Looking at tolerance in terms of literary genres supplements and extends the work on religious toleration done by historians—work in itself which redefines the status of the discourse. Modern analysts of early modern English religious culture frequently examine the violent rifts that fractured institutionalized spirituality in the period, but also have described an England of great religious continuity, social harmony, and traditionalized certainty in matters of the soul. To many critics, the roots of religious discord seemingly grew from anxious constructions of state power, as evidenced by politically-charged religious crises such as the Henrician break with Rome, the Pilgrimage of Grace, and the suppression and dissolution of the monasteries. Some historiographical models of the English Reformation, however, indicate the opposite, finding a high degree of uniformity in belief and practice on the local level, which would seem to derive as much from tradition and populism as it did from state-mandated doctrine. Socially, toleration was an idea discussed in popular society, in the ruling elite, and in the academic genres that served the latter. Regardless of the causal links hypothesized between religious ideation and political exigency, the ranging doctrinal and ceremonial approaches towards spirituality as experienced by early modern English men and women were represented in literature. What it meant for a person to be Roman Catholic or Protestant depended in large part on the political, polemical, and literary discourses that both reflected and constructed early modern religious identity.

As this study shows, writers in early modern England used literary and rhetorical strategies to engage with these cultural paradoxes of religious toleration and its dialectical twin, religious persecution. They used art to engage with their subject, and likewise used the subject engage with their art. As mentioned above, what is notable about writings on toleration is that whenever writers spoke concerning religious toleration, they seemed frequently to comment on the status of the discourse in which they engaged. This purpose of this study is to examine the meta-discursive spaces created in early modern literary texts dealing with religious toleration. The present study hopes to complement and extend to literary studies the recent the social histories of religious toleration undertaken by revisionist and post-revisionist scholars, importing some of their methods but focusing more closely on the literary culture of early modern England. In terms of chronology, the study begins with Thomas More, who described a society of religious tolerance in his Latin-language work *Utopia* (1516) and at the same time viciously attacked Protestant difference and defended persecution of heresy in his Latin- and English-language polemical works. Writing at the outset of the Protestant Reformation, More's works mark the shift from a monological medieval Roman Catholicism facing its first full-scale ideological challenge in the works of Luther, Tyndale, and other Reformers to a religious landscape defined by difference, multiplicity, and plurality. The study concludes with John Milton, whose *Areopagitica* (1644), is lauded as the highest literary achievement in defense and celebration of religious freedom. While Milton's toleration demonstrates some of the same limitations articulated by More, what More and Milton have in common is the move from a discussion of religious toleration to a self-

reflexive engagement with the nature and limits of the discourse in which these writers participate, a dynamic consistently replicated across the period. To demonstrate this idea, this introductory chapter offers a preliminary case study, an analysis of two documents by a group of Roman Catholic nobles who petition for repeal of the recusancy laws under Elizabeth I.

### **The Case of *The Petition of Loyal Catholic Subjects***

In 1585, three years before the calamitous Spanish Armada appeared to prove God's deliverance of the English Protestant state from aggressive Roman Catholic nations, several prominent members of the English Roman Catholic gentry, including Thomas Tresham and William Vaux, addressed a *Petition of Loyal Catholic Subjects to the Queen*.<sup>24</sup> The nobles' *Petition* beseeches for Elizabeth's "gracious Tolleration" of laypersons who require the access to the Roman Catholic Mass and the Sacraments, and who seek the spiritual benefit of priestly ministration. The *Petition* argues for the innocuous freedom of Catholics to practice the Roman faith, which should be construed as separate from any political or military threat from papal agents in the land and from hostile Catholic nations abroad. The *Petition* is one of many loyalist Elizabethan texts that represented English Catholicism as compatible with the Protestant state, and which argued for its toleration by those in power.

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<sup>24</sup> References are to "Petition of loyal catholic subjects to the Queen." In *Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections* (London, 1904), 3.37-42. This *Petition* was drafted by Thomas Tresham in 1583, and was also reproduced in Richard Broughton, *English Protestants Plea* (Saint-Omer, 1621).

The *Petition* also speaks to the unique position of Roman Catholics who experienced a form of “double consciousness,” seeing themselves as both citizens of the English nation and members of a minority religion.<sup>25</sup> English Catholics are forced to divide their spiritual faith from national loyalty, the *Petition* claims, “altogether upon meere conscience and feare to offend God” (3.38). Pulled in one direction by country, and in another by religion, its authors propose that for one to remain Roman Catholic is a spiritual imperative rather than political choice. Although framed as an attempt to mitigate the issues causing Catholics’ nonconformity, this was a dangerous argument when religious uniformity and state security were tightly linked. Although some partisan writers characterized the early Elizabethan reign as tolerant of Roman Catholics, both authors Tresham and Vaux experienced fines and imprisonment for their association with Jesuit priests and for their steadfast recusancy, or refusal to attend mandatory services of the Church of England.<sup>26</sup> Albeit deviant from the state-sponsored religion, the *Petition* continues, a religious faith grounded upon the individual conscience nevertheless allows

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<sup>25</sup> I use the term as it was coined in an essay by W.E.B. Dubois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, Avenel, NJ: Gramercy Books; 1994), 5. Religious minorities experienced a similar institutional persecution and as such participated in a trans-historical discourse of persecution and toleration that later extended to racial, sexual, and other minority groupings.

<sup>26</sup> Julian Lock, “Tresham, Sir Thomas (1543–1605),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. 20 May 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/27712>>; John J. LaRocca, “Vaux, William, third Baron Vaux (1535–1595),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. 20 May 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/28165>>.

Catholics to remain “loyal” to Elizabeth I. On this account freedom of conscience, an ideal very close to religious toleration, should be granted.<sup>27</sup>

The *Petition* represents a pacifist and submissive strain of English Catholic thought that has been described as “enthusiastic non-resistance,” and this overture for toleration is explicitly designed to avoid provoking a hostile reaction by exacerbating political tensions.<sup>28</sup> The *Petition*’s audience—the queen, Privy Council, and Parliament—would associate the vexed issue of Catholics in England with a complex of difficult cultural strains, events, and risks.

In the analysis of one critic, this document contains “veiled expressions of potentially subversive ideas.”<sup>29</sup> Certainly its author was writing under social constraint, and its silences acknowledge as much as its spoken content. More interesting are its calculated ambiguities. Annabel Patterson has identified how ambiguity for many early modern writers was not just a response to censorial control, but “a creative and necessary instrument” that contributed as much as plain language to discourses constrained by governmental authority.<sup>30</sup> With the purpose of alleviating the severity of future penalties against recusants and laypersons who support or are ministered to by Catholic priests, the *Petition*’s writers had to negotiate a complicated rhetorical context, and the document

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<sup>27</sup> Although the term “freedom of conscience,” sounds similar to modern toleration, it differs in that liberty of conscience was not seen as an inalienable human right; see Walsham (2006), 233.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), ch. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Sandeep Kaushik, “Resistance, Loyalty, and Recusant Politics: Sir Thomas Tresham and the Elizabethan State.” *Midland History* 21 (1996): 37-72.

<sup>30</sup> See Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.

demonstrates some of their careful choices of content. A first question in composing and situating their tolerationist appeal is how to address the topic of existing bad conditions. Its authors prefer not to “manifest particularlye all our calamities...the calamities of Catholiques” in favor of generically appealing to their untold “miseries.”

Evidence for these choices supports a reading of their discursive self-awareness. Although the petition was in fact written in 1583, and the manuscript copy surviving is accompanied by rhetorical *précis*, a paper outlining the purpose and occasion of the text, its audience, and strategies for its composition. Whereas the *Reasons for and against a Petition to the Queen* is identified by the editor of the Tresham Papers as a *pro* and *con* consideration of presenting the text to the Parliament, questioning whether presenting this text to Parliament would make matters better or worse for English Roman Catholics, it is more accurately described as an exercise in invention according to the principals of deliberative rhetoric.

As an exercise in rhetorical invention, this text reveals at work a heuristic for generating ideas and arguments. The document explores questions including “whether requisite to exhibite a supplication or no” and “if requisite, then what pointes necessary to be conteyned in the supplication” (3.34). It also considers questions of “what form,” “in whose names to be exhibited,” and “when to deliver” (3.35). In particular, the *Reasons* advise that the *Petition* must exceed the length of most supplications in court, “because the contents be sundrye, as our miseries, our patience...our obedience.” In addition, the *Petition* covers the Catholic nobles’ refusal to attend Protestant worship services and their need for priestly succor. The *Petition* handles these matters lightly in

the hope that the queen will witness and gain a differing understanding of the consequences of England's harmful policy against papists. "Oh that the mercyfull eyes of your clement pryncelye nature coulde but see the contynuall teares, the strayte Imprysonments, the reprochefull Arraignments," the *Petition* hopes, "beinge onelye and directly for matters of Conscience" (3.39). The fear of new penalties against Catholics, at the precarious moment in the third decade of Elizabeth's reign which occasioned the supplication's composition, is referenced also generically as "some heavy yokes which by common reporte we have just cause to feare are intended shortlye to be layd uppon our weakened and wearie necks." The writers of the *Petition* have reason to worry, as Elizabeth herself agreed with Cecil that "There cannot be two religions in one State."<sup>31</sup> Their anxiety proved to be well-justified. The Privy Council's passed an act suppressing "seditious books and libels" in 1584 and another against the seminary priests in 1591. These priests, this act charged, had penetrated into England "to worke great treasons vnder a false pretence of religion." Both acts responded to activities of Jesuit priests and their propaganda effort, while another 1593 act for "restraining Popish Recusants" further punished the nonconforming Catholic laity.<sup>32</sup> The *Petition* only briefly references the

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<sup>31</sup> See Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation* (New York: New York Association Press, 1960), 2.355, 378.

<sup>32</sup> *By the Queene. A proclamation for the suppressing of seditious bookes and libelles* (London, 1584). *By the Queene. A declaration of great troubles pretended against the realme by a number of seminarie priests and Iesuits, sent, and very secretly dispersed in the same, to worke great treasons vnder a false pretence of religion, with a prouision very necessary for remedy thereof Published by this her Maiesties proclamation.* (London, 1591); for the 1593 Act, see *Dodd's Church History of England*. Ed. M. A. Tierney (New York: AMS, 1971), 3.xxxix-xliv.

extant recusancy fines, lamenting the “Penaltie of *xx*<sup>li</sup> the month, whereof many good and worshipfull householders, their wives and children, are brought to extreame povertie, many stand outlawed, and numbers of poore soules remayne Prysoners for that cause” (39). Although the text eschews overly lamenting the woes of persecuted Catholics, the logical argument for toleration nevertheless depends on description of what persecutorial practices Catholics wished for the English government to suspend.

Containing several other well-chosen inclusions or elisions, the document addresses only a few of the many highly publicized events current in the Elizabethan religious environment in an attempt to create a perception that separates “loyal” Catholics from those few who actually would do harm to England. The authors condemn the scandalous Parry plot against the queen’s life, lamenting the “unnatural practice of Parry...his intended damnable sacriledge.” Parry’s “diabolycall dissimulation and traytorish thirst after hallowed blood” result in his “deserved doome of deep damnation” (39). In contrast to this lone malefactor, the Catholic priests residing in England and those to whom they minister should not be considered traitors; however neither Edmund Campion nor Robert Parsons, the notorious Jesuit missionaries, are explicitly named. The *Petition* does not follow a path of defense against the charges of treason for which Campion was executed, but seeks to indemnify those priests not yet identified as traitors to the state, and consequently, to pardon the laity whom they serve:

Yf nowe (most gracious Ladye) those Priestes who have not at any tyme bene detected, accused, or charged with any Acte or devise of Treason, should offer to



contynewe and live within this your Realme, and (for so doinge) shalbe adjudged Traytours, be yt for their coming hither or conynuance here, or for the practisinge and ministringe of the Blessed Sacramentes onelye, Then consequentelye we your faythfull loving Subjectes are like to be capitallye touched with the same Treason.

(3.41)

Lay Catholics should be safe to enjoy the spiritual reward of pious observance in this world and, while still living in it, also be safe to enjoy "the calme and safe haven of Indempnitye of conscience." It is notable that indemnity of conscience, an early term for religious toleration, appears for the first time in the English language in this text. In addition to commenting on the support of priests within the country, the *Petition's* authors assert that most lay Catholics in England refuse to subscribe to the 1570 papal bull *Regnans in Excelcis*, which pronounced Elizabeth I to be an illegitimate monarch and released Roman Catholics from loyalty to her. The explicit reference to this sensitive topic serves to support the argument for loyalty. Catholics can reject some church doctrines such as denying papal infallibility when such ideas conflict with national loyalty; however they will not go so far as to abnegate the essential need for the Mass and administration of the Sacraments by priests.

Tolerationist writings from the English Catholic community like the *Petition* are also relevant because many of their same strategies are used by nonconformists on the Protestant spectrum. The *Petition* does not lay out an explicit program for freedom of religion as many others would only a half-century later. It does not ask for an active Catholic Church to co-exist with the state-approved Protestant Church of England, just

for Catholics to be free to participate in the Mass. It does not make great political demands, other than hoping that further penalties will not be exacted on English Catholics by law. The *Petition* is, however, consistent with other loyalist Catholic pleas for toleration that set self-defined limits for what they seek. Toleration was always a function of permissible deviance within set limits, and so tolerationist pleas were often concerned with establishing their own boundaries. For instance, the Catholics who appealed to James I for toleration early in his reign, when it seemed as if there would be hope of such a policy, voluntarily circumscribe the scope of their argument. "Free use of this Religion wee request," one appeal beseeched, "if not in publike Churches, at least in private houses; if not with approbation, yet with toleration, without molestation" (Reprinted in Powel B5v). Religious toleration is frequently defined by what it is not, and the nobles' *Petition* shows to what degree those in a position to seek religious toleration thought they could possibly succeed.

Despite these rhetorical limitations, and indeed because of them, the 1585 *Petition* is an important document in the historical development of religious toleration. The *Petition* speaks to a cultural moment when the English Catholic gentry struggled with the incommensurable relationship between pleas for religious toleration and strategies of nonconformity and resistance. In addition to providing logistical and monetary support to the network of active priests in the Catholic underground, the nobles created a symbolic image through their recusancy, one that inspired and reinforced the entire Catholic community through examples of steadfast resistance. How can one ask for toleration while subverting the established government's authority? The way the gentry

represent themselves in this *Petition* presents an opportunity to re-evaluate the modern debate over the nature and origins of early modern English recusancy. Arguing that the Jesuit missionaries found “the breach through which an English Catholic community, distinct from the historic past, would ultimately emerge,” John Bossy sees the English Catholic community as a result of the efforts of the English Mission and the increasing constraints the Elizabethan government placed on its Catholic subjects in the 1570s (31). To revisionist historians like Christopher Haigh, the Jesuit Parsons’ political agenda for the re-conversion of England to Catholicism, set out in controversial works like *Memorial for the Reformation of England* (c. 1582) and *The Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of England* (1595), in which Parsons extends and projects the regimented, regular structure of the Jesuit order onto a reborn English society, was part of a “fairy story” that the Jesuits sold to contemporary audiences that emphasized their own importance in nurturing English Catholicism. Haigh argues that the version of Catholicism that the Jesuits offered, a religion of contemplative, interior spirituality, was really no new invention, and that the English Mission simply succored a pre-existing Catholicism in England (121). The document under study permits new reflection on this question in two ways. First, it shows that the recusant community saw both itself and the priesthood as important to Catholic identity, and that even in a discourse where identities are set in fixed opposition to one another that there is a middle ground opened by the hope of toleration. As mentioned above, if the Catholic nobles associate with priests whom the government has branded as traitors, then the laity will also be “capitally touched with the same Treason.” Likewise, if the gentry are to “receive them...it shall be

deemed Treason in us.” The spiritual domain complicates the political argument: “if we shutt our doors, and denye our temporall reliefe to our Catholique Pastors...then are we already judged most damnable Traytors to almightie God” (41). The point of this text is to deal with the problem of Roman Catholic attitudes towards toleration. Jesuits like Robert Parsons were in a unique rhetorical position, arguing both for and against religious toleration while worried about both the deleterious effects of persecution on the lives of Roman Catholic laypeople and priests. These writers also expressed anxiety over the identity-erasing potential of equality under a tolerant regime.

Next, in addition to recasting the terms in which we understand Catholic recusant community, the nobles’ *Petition* adds to our understanding of recusant literature and English Roman Catholic discursive practice. This politically charged document, crafted to reach its intended royal audience naturally demonstrates qualities of deliberative rhetoric, arranged according to the principles of argument and resonant with pathetic, logical, and ethical appeals. Figurative schemes such as repetition, litotes, antithesis, are more than ornamental, and are orchestrated to communicate and reinforce the argument. The *Petition* is rich with alliteration; the audience learns, for instance, of Parry’s “deserved doome of deepe damnation,” reinforcing the message that “loyal” Catholics are different from the insidious ones. There is also rich metaphorical imagery. Shut off from the spiritual benefit of the Mass and Sacraments, Catholics are described as “bodies without soules,” while those who are shut away in prison for religious crimes “lose the temporall use both of bodye and soule.”

The *Petition* presents the conflict between living in civil freedom while being unable to live one's spiritual life, and losing both civil and spiritual liberty. Neither outcome is desirable in an intolerant environment. The sustained metaphor of a Roman Catholic without the Mass being equivalent to a body without a soul works into two arguments, one allowing body and soul to be reunited as Catholics find access to priests, the Mass, and the sacraments, and another preserving their freedom and lifting imposition of stricter civil penalties. The queen is empowered, the *Petition* notes, to correct this disjunct, and the Catholic nobles beseech her to:

Unite the bodye and the Soule together, Suffere us not to be the onely outcastes and refuse of this worlde, Lett not us your Catholique native Englishe and obedient Subiects stand in more peril for frequenting the Blessed Sacramentes and excercysinge the Catholique Religion (and that most secretlye) then doe the perverse and blasphemous Jewes, haunting their Sinagoge under sundrey Crhistian kings openlye, and then do the Protestantes enjoying their publique Assemblies...Lett yt not be Treason for the sickman in bodye (even at the the last gaspe) to seeke ghostly counsel for the salvation of his Soule of a Catholique Pryest.<sup>33</sup>

The culminating image of the text, this passage shows the association of toleration with sufferance, and also with suffering. Here, referring to an allowance by the majority group, *suffering* is a term associated with the painful effects of persecution. Suffering is

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<sup>33</sup> This passage is also reproduced in Richard Broughton, *English protestants plea* (Saint-Omer, 1621), C5v-6r.

also applicable to the tolerating group, as in the painful condition of one suffering some offensive or otherwise unsettling religious group to exist.

As this discussion of suffering shows, the *Petition* participates in the genre of religious complaint literature. The text demonstrates some of the literary qualities of recusant poetics as identified by Louis Martz, Rosemond Tuve, and other literary critics, particularly linguistic and organizational dynamism.<sup>34</sup> The *Petition* develops a thematic movement from darkness and concealment to light and openness (“we do crye out and complayne that our afflicted hartes have conceived an unspeakable grief... Would God our hartes might be layd open to the perfect viewe of you Majestie and all the world.”) There is also a dynamic motion located in the person of the queen, who at the beginning of the document withholds clemency, but by the closing section is again seen allowing mildness and toleration to flow from the royal body to the Catholic population:

O (most mightie Queene) let your excellent and heavenlye vertues nowe take their chiefe effects. Lett your rare and incomparable wisdom enter into the consideracon of these Poyntes. And let that orient, pearles, and glorious worke of nature, which (in your Royall personne), hathe so many welfull years shyned among us, and ministered most bright and comfortable beames of grace to all menne...

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<sup>34</sup> See Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth Century Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

Hortatory language naturalizes toleration, and represents the queen's mercy as a flowing energy that must not be damned. The document demonstrates the literary qualities that became particularly useful for those who wrote for religious toleration before the concept had developed into the modern idea of tolerance.

Finally, the very argument for toleration depends on creating an understanding of discourse among its audience. The false representation of Roman Catholics is in need of answer, the *Petition* argues, because:

Upon the vile action or intent of every lewde personne we all must be condemned to beare trayterous myndes, And in books dayleye printed against us we are most odiouslye termed Bloodsuckers, and by uncharitable exclamations it is published that your Majestie is to feare so manye deaths as there be Papistes in the lande.”

(3.38)<sup>35</sup>

The invalid representation of Roman Catholics contrasts with the valid discourse about the queen. In particular, her reputation is accurate:

we are the more encouraged thus boldlye to intreate with your Majestie, because in former years it hath bene delivered in Pulpits, and published by books of late printed and otherwise divulged, that your Clemencie neither hath or will punishe any of your Catholique Subjectes (for their conscience in matter of religion) with death. (3.43)

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<sup>35</sup> The text apparently had its intended effect of associating anti-Catholic smear texts with the worst sort of religious controversial books. One reader of the manuscript left a marginal gloss naming at least two “bloodsuckers,” Anthony Monday, the Roman Catholic double agent and propagandist, and John Stubbs, author of the notorious *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf* (London, 1579).

The status of printed religious controversy is thus questioned in order to uphold the exemplary representation of Elizabeth. By suggesting that false representation in print is intolerable, the authors of the *Petition* find a way to compliment the queen and further their goal of religious toleration for Catholics. In moving from an appeal to religious toleration to a contemplation of the nature and efficacy of discourse, this text is consistent with other works that this dissertation analyzes.

## **Chapter Outline**

This study seeks to answer the question of what meanings and uses religious toleration had for writers of imaginative and polemical literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Its thesis is that the texts examined, by More, Parsons, Foxe, Milton, and others engage with the question of toleration in ways that reflected on their own literary art. In strategically constructing and deploying extant and new meanings for religious toleration, these writers defined their production in terms of their discursive context. In other words, the topic of religious toleration allowed certain writers to define and categorize their own texts and those of others. The chapters take the form of case studies, showing how each writer under study made different choices in appealing to religious toleration, based on shifting rhetorical and literary contexts.

This introductory chapter has presented current critical and historical trends in analyzing early modern religious toleration. It has focuses on a case study of a document drafted by prominent English Roman Catholic gentry of the mid-Elizabethan period as an



address to the queen and Parliament beseeching greater toleration for lay Catholics who are suffering penalties for recusancy and imprisonment for harboring outlaw priests. This *Petition of Loyal Catholic Subjects to the Queen* argues for the innocuous freedom of Catholics to practice the Roman faith, which should be construed as separate from any political or military threat from papist agents in the land and from hostile Catholic nations abroad. In addition to recasting the terms in which modern critics understand the early modern Roman Catholic recusant community, the Petition adds to our understanding of recusant literature and Roman Catholic literary practice. The text rhetorically situates the public discourse that has besmeared the Roman Catholic element against the correct approach that promulgates a positive image of Elizabeth I.

Chapter 2, “Religious Toleration and the Case of Thomas More,” develops the key concept of the study, arguing that that across his writings Thomas More demonstrated his belief that writers should embody polemical tolerance. The chapter also shows how More examined religious toleration in his imaginative and polemical works in ways that allowed him to re-evaluate the structure and efficacy of the genres in which he wrote. More’s writing on toleration demonstrates his sense that dialogue as a literary genre has its limits in persuading those whose religious difference represented too great a variance from the mean. They also show the paradoxes of early modern toleration; most curious is More’s claim that the most moderate, most unassumingly tolerable, are the most dangerous and are least to be tolerated. Finally, in *Utopia* (a work crafted prior to his polemical *oeuvre*) More’s toleration is consistent with the polemical works because through this idea More reflects on communication of religious ideas in general, and of

polemical tolerance in particular. Those who try to convert others in an irrational and illogical fashion surpass the permissible limits of religious tolerance. As the following chapters will demonstrate, More began a long tradition of literature in which the instance of considering toleration in print became an opportunity for re-evaluating the nature and limitations of writers' own art. This chapter thus employs sets More's ideas as an index or scale, according to which the development of toleration—its linear progress and cyclical emergence—may be measured.

Chapter 3, "Religious Toleration and the Case of John Foxe" elucidates how this historian, compiler, editor, and author, bolsters his ideological program of lodging a claim for the validity of Protestant Christianity by building a tolerant *ethos*, and by drawing upon contemporary cultural discourses of polemical, civil, and divine tolerance. The argument looks at the contradictions inherent in Foxe's vision of toleration, considering how religious persecution is necessary for martyrdom and for perceiving the persecuted, "true" church. The goal is not necessarily to argue for Foxe as a proponent of religious toleration in its modern sense, but rather to investigate how Foxe employed contemporary understandings of the concept to support his rhetorical goals. By considering Foxe's strategic appeals to toleration along with his positive and negative representations of persecution, this chapter argues that Foxe used the concept to his polemical advantage. Always concerned with establishing his own credibility as author, as historian, and as compiler and editor of documents, Foxe finds in toleration one more way to construct his own ethics and reliability, and to solicit his readers' goodwill. The chapter looks at how Foxe builds a tolerant *ethos* in *Actes and Monuments* (in the first

four editions of 1563, 1570, 1576, and 1583 overseen by Foxe during his lifetime), particularly in his engagement with his Roman Catholic critic Nicholas Harpsfield, and how Foxean tolerance is read, or perhaps misread, by the Jesuit controversialist Robert Parsons.

Chapter 4, “Religious Toleration and the case of Robert Parsons,” argues that, whether writing for or against religious toleration, English Roman Catholic controversialists of the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries used their most artfully rhetorical language. The Jesuit priest Robert Parsons was one who often employed verbal ambiguity and elaborate rhetorical devices to accommodate plural audiences and to express views on toleration that shifted according to polemical purpose and political exigency. English Roman Catholic writings reflected the cultural paradoxes of religious toleration, a concept that, in the early modern period, held deeply negative connotations. In the militant view of Parsons and the Jesuits, settling for mere toleration was a less-than-favorable option, but the idea nevertheless had many rhetorical uses. For instance, even the most obsequious of Roman Catholic appeals for toleration often contained veiled criticism of the English government. Although Parsons argued against toleration early in his career, his writings increasingly turn to the question of toleration for English Roman Catholics, especially in the closing years of the century, when it became clear that Rome could no longer hope for a military conquest of England by Roman Catholic Spain. Readers of Parsons encounter artfully rhetorical language, often employing calculated ambiguity. The chapter argues that religious toleration became a *topos* which competing factions of English Catholics could adapt to their specific needs. In particular, the anti-

Jesuit group of secular Catholic priests known as the “Appellant” group made toleration a central issue in their polemical attacks on Parsons and the English mission. In their overtures to the Elizabethan administration, the secular group insisted that they were truly loyal to the crown, and that the Jesuits merely suggested toleration as a ploy to hide their treasonous political goals. This chapter demonstrates the literary and rhetorical aspects of Catholic writings on toleration, and shows how writers could re-define the meaning of toleration to suit shifting political exigencies.

By looking at English Catholic polemical works through the lens of religious toleration, one can see how precisely these authors were writing to plural audiences and the flexible ways they manipulated language to engage with this vexed concept. Although their perceived sophistry lent to the negative stereotype of Jesuit duplicity, this essay seeks to appreciate English Roman Catholic writings on toleration as excellent examples of advanced polemical artistry. While conceding the point that Parsons was a master of rhetoric, this chapter attempts to recuperate the image of Parsons from the “Black Legend” that characterized the Jesuits as intolerable in England, by showing that rhetoric is not always to be equated with sophistry.

Chapter 5, “Religious Toleration and the Case of John Milton,” shows how Milton’s writings concerning religious toleration are connected to rhetorical circumstances and political necessity. Milton explicitly assures his readers that he does not promote a “tolerated Popery, and open superstition, which as it extirpates all religions and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpate, provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and regain the weak and the misled” (*YP* 2.270).

Toleration for Protestant sects still has to be oriented with regard to the shadow of the papal Antichrist, and practical steps to convert Roman Catholics must deal with the influence of the super-villain pope, who preys upon “the weak and misled.”

This is also not to say that Milton was ever the most radical of tolerationists—writers like Roger Williams, for instance, advocated religious freedom for all—but Milton used both his poetic vocation and the controversial prose writing which he distinguished as “of the left hand,” to articulate a tolerationist position.

Milton’s polemical and poetic texts reflect the logical structures inherent in the print controversy of the 1640s that debated, among other things, how minority groups such as Roman Catholics and nonconforming Protestants were to be positioned relative to institutional bodies of English state and church. Milton re-envisioned heresy as part of a positive dialectic between the “true” church on the one hand, and corruption and idolatry on the other. The challenge that heresy poses to the church is a necessary corrective for organized religion in a fallen world. Religious toleration, for Milton, facilitates this dialectic. This chapter examines how the language of “suffering,” linked to the Latin verb *tolero/tolerare*, represents both an active and passive verb, dialectically transcending the relationship between subject and object. A central theme of tolerationist works; suffering in both active and passive senses imparts a self-referential dynamic to many of Milton’s writings. In particular, the representation of Satan and the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost* as a religious minority allows Milton to evaluate the limits of religious toleration in his day. The language of suffering in *Paradise Lost* tempts readers to view

the rebel angels as a religious minority, a view that is countered as it becomes progressively more clear that Roman Catholic idolatry is simply intolerable.

By beginning with More and ending with Milton, this study does not seek to reproduce the teleological or progressive views of history as presented by scholars of the post-war period, for whom toleration represented a moral ideal vulnerable to the threat of Nazism and fascism, and therefore urgently in need of preservation. However, the idea of toleration did undergo development throughout the period, so any discussion has to explore how it grew diachronically. Although the period witnessed great religious conflict and persecution of religious difference, many writers of prose, drama, and poetry used their art to explore and resolve toleration's paradoxes. From Thomas More to John Milton, the work of literary authors frequently reflected cultural debates over the acceptable limits of religious diversity. Their works often reiterated their society's tension concerning religious toleration. The purpose of this study is to examine how toleration informs how these writers understood their own texts to function.

## Chapter 2: Religious Toleration and the Case of Thomas More

In their introductory discussion of early modern religious toleration in Thomas More's *Utopia*, the Yale editors of the *Complete Works of St. Thomas More* emphasize the text's historical importance to modern readers who encounter the seemingly paltry evidence for religious toleration in the period.

There were devoted Christians who, far less ambiguously than the author of *Utopia*, advocated religious toleration...By all but scholars, the words, indeed the very names of these men have been forgotten; and surely More's highly equivocal comment on the place of toleration in the Utopian commonwealth would have been forgotten too had he not dropped it in a book that has survived and continued to fascinate the generations for quite other reasons. (CW 4.cvii)

The editors' suggestion of More's complicated engagement with the topic of toleration reveals the distinct difference between the early modern sense and the modern concept of tolerance as a fundamental principle of pluralist, democratic societies; they also point out the writer's apparently conflicted attitude to toleration in both *Utopia* and his other texts. Although More's *Utopia* envisions a model kingdom where "each man might follow whatever religion he wished and might try to persuade others to join it amicably and temperately and without bitterness to others," the 1516 date of More's Latin-language *Utopia* came before Luther and the Protestant Reformation that More the

politician and devout Roman Catholic would so vigorously resist. This was the More who argued in the context of his later, post-Reformation polemical writings that “the clergye doth no wrong in leuing heretykes to the seculer hand...that prynces be bounded to punyshe heretykes,” and that “concerning the burnynge of heretykes...yt is...well done” (CW 6.1.19). In reminding readers of the rarity of literature concerning religious toleration in the early sixteenth century, the Yale editors highlight a classic interpretative conundrum for More studies. Although More’s *Utopia* has been long heralded as a seminal literary work on religious toleration, the persecutorial strains of More’s polemical writings and his repressive religious policies after the appearance in 1917 of Luther’s *95 Theses* have rendered studies of his apparent tolerationist ideas in *Utopia* problematic. How could More promote religious tolerance in *Utopia* and defend persecution in his polemical writing? This chapter will argue that even the description of toleration in *Utopia* is not what it first appears, as upon closer inspection the text aligns more closely with totalitarianism than with tolerance.<sup>36</sup> The correct question to ask is how does consideration of religious toleration—even when contemplation leads to negation—foster More’s reflexive consideration of what is tolerable in writing?

More’s texts present contradictory perspectives, especially when framed in the context of early modern humanist toleration. Based on the classical principles of *sermo*, *decorum*, and *ratio*, the sixteenth-century model of humanist toleration allows those who disagree with each other in matters of religion to suspend judgment while conducting

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<sup>36</sup> For one scholarly attempt to unify the “schizophrenic” personae of More, see John Guy, *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000); also see Guy’s *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).



discussion, so that persuasion can take place through moderately-toned, rational dialogue. More, whose dialogue-based literary forms are in agreement with the humanist principle of *sermo*, or conversation, is nevertheless at odds with the principle when it is applied to religious difference. He clearly defines the limits past which he is not willing to extend toleration to those deemed to be heretics. In the *Debellation of Salem and Bizance* (1533), for instance, More is unwilling to tolerate the coexistence of Roman Catholicism with heretical sects, even for the temporary period it would take to persuade heretics to convert through rational discourse: “He can...be none other rekened but a plaine heretike...whome to tolerate so long doth sometyme lyttle good” (CW vol. 10). More’s temporally measured limit “so long” indicates the brief duration of conditional toleration that the humanist would allow the heretic to persist. Curious in this passage is the adverbial modifier *sometyme* to mean “in a single instance” indicating that persuasion in the end fails to attain its desired goal of conversion. The text syntactically builds and then undercuts the ideological value of tolerance.

The humanist construction of religious toleration based on *sermo* requires dialogue between the differing parties, and this study argues that texts by More both agree with and depart from a reliance on dialogue. Although More at times denies the value of dialogue, in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More models a tolerant, rational conversation between the conservative Chancellor and the wayward Lutheran Messenger. While some heretics are beyond tolerance, namely those groups and individuals who publish and proselytize, some are still capable of being persuaded. As Lord Chancellor, More participated in forceful suppression of heresy; in the other public domain of print,

he expressed the wish that the deleterious effect of heresy on those under its influence might be mitigated: “As touching heretics, I hate that vice of theirs and not their persons, and very fain would I that the one were destroyed, and the other saved” (CW 9.167).

Exemplifying lifelong adherence to traditional religious principals in his life and writing, More rigorously policed the ideological bounds of Roman Catholicism, and through both his policies as magistrate and his published apologetics for the Roman Catholic Church against its Protestant detractors, criminalized and demonized religious difference. It is the “persecutorial More” who created the original epitaph over Thomas More’s grave, which reminded generations that the former Lord Chancellor was during his career particularly “grievous to thieves, murderers, and heretics.” This statement memorializes More the man in opposition to the unnamed community of dissenting religious believers. Regarding this epithet, More clarified in a 1533 letter to Erasmus that:

I wrote that with deep feeling. I find that breed of men absolutely loathsome, so much so that, unless they regain their senses, I want to be as hateful to them as anyone can possibly be; for my increasing experience with those men frightens me for what the world will suffer at their hands.<sup>37</sup>

More was never like Erasmus in holding a “conciliatory and irenic” attitude towards those who differed from the norm in matters of religion; also unlike Erasmus, More’s ideas extended beyond the intellectual to the domain of civil power. As statesman, More

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<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Frances Rogers, ed., *St Thomas More, Selected Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 180. The second edition of the *Selected Letters* emends the translation of the first clause of this passage, which originally was translated in the 1961 edition as “I wrote that just to be smart” (180).

participated in the inquisition and sentencing of reformers such as Thomas Hitton and John Frith, and harried the numerous printers, booksellers, and colporteurs who spread their works. In perceived matters of state security, More showed little toleration to men who would, as it happened, never “regain their senses.” In the letter to Erasmus, More worries over “what the world will suffer at their hands.” Here it is notable that his letter is translated with uses the word *suffer* as a synonym for “tolerate.” His depiction of innocent Christians suffering from the deleterious social and spiritual effects of a tolerated Protestant heresy shows the negative charge early modern thinkers associated with religious toleration, as well as the polysemous slippage of the term as it relates to the subjects and objects of governmental and religious authority. Although suffering can denote the experience of persecution, suffering is also an act of those in power, in the sense of freely permitting the minority to assert their beliefs publicly. Suffering in the sense of experiencing pain is also applicable to the majority group, who experiences, at the best, discomfort by allowing a distasteful belief or act to continue. More’s anxiety over “what the world will suffer at their [i.e. the Protestants’] hands” implies an outcome for the Roman Catholic Church surpassing mere discomfort. Toleration here, even in the English translation of this letter, is linked to the negative sense of the term as outlined in the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

Rather than attempting to reconcile Utopian tolerance with polemical persecution, this chapter asks two governing questions. First, how is toleration described or presented via literary techniques in More’s writings? Next, how can looking at the literary aspects of toleration tell us more about what toleration meant to More, and how did More’s

engagement with the central questions of toleration and persecution influence the attitudes and responses of later writers? The long-fought critical effort to recuperate More's image by reconciling his persecutorial actions with the tolerance described in *Utopia*, an effort that began with his earliest biographers, cannot reveal anything new. What one can ask, is what does toleration in More's texts indicate about how he envisioned the literary genres in which he worked? The argument of this chapter is that even when writing against toleration, More added to his culture's understanding of the idea by constructing the idea of polemical toleration, and, much as it did for later writers, this idea of toleration allowed More to comment on the nature and status of his own art. While More did not favor toleration of religious faiths he deemed heretical, he did engage with the idea that printed religious controversy should be conducted according to a standard of decorum. One might point out, however, that as many others did More often failed not meet this ideal in his own works; the debate between More and Luther in particular is characterized by scurrilous language and *ad hominem* attacks.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of his choices to use a low style, More attempts to hold his polemical opponents to a standard of interpretation, reading, and writing, which contributed to the idea of polemical tolerance. This study therefore examines More's answer to the practical question of how a government or church should permit freedom of belief and practice for those who deviated from social and religious norms, by building and then evaluating the very literary means by which Religious difference is understood. Religious toleration itself is about what may or may not be thought, felt, or practiced, and polemical toleration

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<sup>38</sup> For analysis of Luther's engagement with polemicists before More, see David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

regards how such ideas may be expressed or communicated. Although More's texts do not model co-existence and acceptance by church and state of plural religious groups and identities as we would define toleration today, they do put forth literary representations of proper and acceptable polemical models.

### ***Utopia* and the Limits of Toleration**

The genre More most thoroughly contemplated through polemical toleration is dialogue, and *Utopia* begins by constructing a dialogic occasion. Framed within the occasion of a conversation, and in the second book, an extended monologue, *Utopia* concerns the image of an ideal state allegedly visited by one Raphael Hythlodæus. The inhabitants of Utopia (literally “no place” in English) enjoy both property and food in common; permit divorce of spouses; punish crime with slavery into civil service, reserve the death penalty for the worst moral crime, adultery; and exchange children freely among family units that are quite porous even when compared to those in England of the early 1500s. A distinct difference between More's England and Utopia is the latter's apparent freedom of religion and legislated religious toleration. As the above-referenced introduction to the Yale edition of *Utopia* mentions, *Utopia* has historically presented an entrance for modern critics into studies of sixteenth-century religious toleration. Some selectively reference *Utopia* as a literary artifact that shows the progressive mindset of More, whose work apparently presaged the Enlightenment and later theories such as

Marxism, thus spawning important aspects of modern culture.<sup>39</sup> Rather than simply looking forward, however, *Utopia* is oriented towards a mythical past. As Raphael Hythlodæus relates to his audience, Utopians espouse religious toleration, counting it “among their most ancient principles that no one should ever suffer harm for his religion” (4.218). Such an important principle is worthy of an origin myth, and it is notable that Hythlodæus ties the story of religious toleration to the nation-building of King Utopus, one of only three times in Book 2 that the Utopian king is directly referenced as responsible for a feature or quality of Utopia and its people.<sup>40</sup> Before King Utopus had arrived and conquered the land, as Hythlodæus relates to his audience, the Abraxan’s reputation for “quarreling among themselves” had reached him. From this King Utopus “had made the observation that the universal dissensions between the individual sects who were fighting for their country had given him the opportunity of overcoming them all....” Upon his conquest, Utopus would prevent this weakness from developing again, by fostering toleration among those who held differing beliefs: “he especially ordained that it should be lawful for every man to follow the religion of his choice” (4.219-221).

At first glance a straightforward relation of Utopian tolerance, this passage enacts a complicated textual performance. With the arrival of the alien Utopus into the realm, the narrative is placed within the context of national difference. The discourse of religious toleration in the period early on engaged with international politics, as religious difference was related in England to foreign influence. In contrast to the threat of the

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<sup>39</sup> See for instance, Elton, referenced above.

<sup>40</sup> Utopus is identified as responsible for what might be described as the “terra-forming” of the Utopia, and for the design of the capitol city Amaurotum.

Muslim Turk harrying the eastern boundaries of Christendom, or the emergent heresy promoted by the European Reformation, here the invading force brings a civilizing tolerance to correct a society given to religious difference. Two generations later, the Jesuit writer Robert Parsons would continue this counterintuitive model of the non-Christian world, using the example of a tolerant Islaam to castigate the intolerance of the Elizabethan settlement in religion. Another important aspect of this passage is that the law constituting religious toleration is naturalized through rationality and logic, but also characterized as a result of the personal agency of King Utopus. The King's observation results in an "ordained" religious toleration, expressed in the subjunctive form of the Latin verb *liceat* ("it should be permitted"), and it also derives from his individual act of "especially" constituting toleration.

In its exposition of Utopian tolerance, More's narrative moves quickly from acceptable limits to the question of discourse and free speech (*CW* 4.216/7-222/14). In Utopia, "each man might follow whatever religion he wished and might try to persuade others to join it amicably and temperately and without bitterness to others." Those Utopians who would impose heterodox religious views on their neighbors are met with properly humanist persuasion and rhetorical argumentation; however, in the imaginary island nation of Utopia, toleration is practiced only so long as diverse forms of worship do not disrupt of the common peace. Believers may use persuasion, but not resort to excessive discourse if persuasion failed: "if a person contends too vehemently in expressing his views, he is punished with exile or enslavement" (4.221). So toleration can certainly be seen in Utopia as a function of state security. We can also evaluate

toleration in terms of More's vision for how a conversation about religion should be carried out in a public domain. Although religious difference can be mitigated by rational persuasion, this can only occur in a tolerant discourse characterized by listening and restraint.

None of this is to imply that Utopia is anything resembling a modern, democratic state encompassing a plurality and diversity of religious practices. Toleration in *Utopia* does not equate with modern views of plurality for its own sake, and under scrutiny the text reveals instead strictures on religious observance almost totalitarian in degree.

Although it is a "among their most ancient principals," the religious toleration institutionalized by King Utopus is not what it at first appears. The tolerance of the Utopians is strictly limited, and even the Christianity imported into the land is not troubled by heresy or internal ideological dissent: "toleration... presupposed the existence of single true religion; it did not admit the right of several religions, each held to be true by their followers, to exist side by side once the real truth of God's will had become known."<sup>41</sup> It is from this situation that one may see the difference between *Utopia* and More's polemical works when it comes to persecution of religious difference. So why is there a perceived gap between toleration and persecution in Utopia and in More's polemical works? Geoffrey Elton answers this question by pointing out that the perceived gap may be illusory:

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<sup>41</sup> See Geoffrey Elton. "Persecution and Toleration in the English Reformation." *Persecution and Toleration: Papers Read at the Twenty-Second Summer Meeting and the Twenty-Third Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*. Ed W. J. Shiels (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 167.



Such toleration as [More] permitted in Utopia could easily be converted into repression on grounds to be judged by the ruling magistrate alone and was so converted by himself from 1521 onwards. When he came to face the reality of the problem he not only himself assisted in the repression of heresy but in his writings proclaimed a consistent and relentless defense of persecution. (171)

Freedom of religion only exists in Utopia within prescribed limits, a sort of tolerance in the technical sense--as engineers commonly speak of tolerance as the degree to which a material may be subject to strain, *give*, or *play* before reaching its breaking point. The state of Utopia allows some give in its indeterminate forms of religious devotion, but strictly forbids gross heresy. Atheism for instance, is outside of Utopia's religious bounds, and Utopians are mandated to subscribe to one tenet, the immortality of the soul.

Anxieties over the threat that religious difference poses to the commonwealth run throughout More's English polemical works, and this worry emerges, albeit paradoxically, as a controlling idea in *Utopia*. In Utopia, the ultimate security of the state also appears to supersede individual freedom of conscience, and More's pragmatic subordinating of religious heterodoxy to peace in the commonwealth functions in Utopia as a foundational principle underlying tolerationist policy and also as a marker of its limits. In the words of one critic, "It remains so difficult for us moderns to begin to apprehend Thomas More because he belongs to a different world, a different ordering of perceived realities that believed in the...totality of a single Truth, any threat to whose

resonances or implications being a threat to the whole.”<sup>42</sup> What they can tell modern readers is that this writer contemplated how the rule of uniformity was to be developed, expressed, and enforced in society. Unlike his arguments elsewhere, in *Utopia* plurality, and not uniformity, is the condition that will ensure safety. Toleration in Utopia is not based on a valuing of religious plurality *per se*, but rather derives from the need for stability and peace in the state. The concern that the public peace might be compromised by religious dispute led into another line of attack More would use against Luther and Tyndale, that their works are disruptive to social order.

Another important difference between religious toleration as described in *Utopia* and More’s treatment of toleration and persecution in his polemical works is that there is not a certainty of assumptions that the dominant religion is the true one. In addition to concern for state security, the tolerance institutionalized by King Utopus developed from his own lack of a sanctioned form of worship, in that “He was uncertain whether God did not desire a varied and manifold worship.” In a debate arguing for a religious truth, when one of the assumptions of the argument is that the truth has not yet emerged a tolerant discourse can take place. Hythlodæus describes how King Utopus, although uncertain whether God has revealed the form his worship should take,

was certain in thinking it both insolence and folly to demand by violence and threats all should think to be true what you believe to be true... if the struggle were decided by arms and riots, since the worst men are always the most

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<sup>42</sup> See John M. Headley. “John Guy’s Thomas More: On the Dimensions of Political Biography.” *Moreana* 37.143-44 (2000): 81-96.

unyielding, the best and holiest religion would be overwhelmed because of the conflicting false religions, like grain choked by thorn and underbrush.

This sense of things indifferent in organized religious worship leads to Utopus' policy on uniformity and how it should be policed. In More's dream world of Utopia, plurality of religion contributes to the purity of devotion because "even if it should be the case that one single religion is true and all the rest are false, he foresaw that, provided the matter was handled reasonably and moderately, truth by its own natural force would finally emerge sooner or later and stand forth conspicuously" (CW 4.221). This is a way of thinking about religious difference that presages Milton's *Aereopagitica*, where religious truth is a "perfect shape most glorious to look on," but which must be reconstituted from its "thousand pieces" into which truth has been shattered by idolaters. Milton's view of toleration in 1640 derives from a different set of cultural circumstances, and Milton would never have described himself as agnostic, but his view of heresy as a dialectical process of moving from error towards truth has much in common with the view of a *productive* religious difference held by Utopus.

As above, one limit for More was the point where differences in religion threatened to interfere with the order and security of the commonwealth. In Utopia, the reader has learned, public preaching is forbidden, a curious feature in a state that espouses freedom of worship. Free to worship the deity "Mithra" in whatever manner they see as fit, the inhabitants of Utopia envision toleration as a foundational principle of religious freedom but also as a marker of freedom's limits. In Utopia, each subject could practice his (or her) own form of religious observance, "provided that he quietly and

modestly supported his own by reasons nor bitterly demolished all others if his persuasions were not successful nor used any violence and refrained from abuse.”

Uniformity can thus arise, somewhat counterintuitively, from an environment in which personal conscience has free sway within limits, and where conflicting ideas are debated rationally and with decorum. Thus the reader encounters the story of the Utopian convert to Christianity who was ultimately expelled when his zeal caused him to preach too fervently, passing the bounds of civil order. This newly baptized convert, Hythlodæus relates:

in spite of our advice to the contrary, spoke publicly of Christ’s religion with more zeal than discretion. He began to grow so warm in his preaching that not only did he prefer our worship to any other but he condemned their followers to be impious and sacrilegious and worthy of everlasting fire. When he had long been preaching in this style, they arrested him, tried him, and convicted him not for despising their religion but for stirring up a riot among the people.” (4.219)

The link between belief and expression, and the ideal of polemical tolerance, grows from the link between belief and expression in this political context:

Utopus laid down these regulations not merely from regard for peace, which he saw to be utterly destroyed by constant wrangling and implacable hatred, but because he thought that this method of settlement was in the interest of religion itself.

In describing the “wrangling” that divided the island, More created an image that would return in his later writings, as in the passage discussed below from Luther’s *Responsio*:

There is no danger whatever that any good man will be misled by a book of this sort which wrangles without reason and which lists rather than proves all the most impious doctrines and those most condemned by the common agreement of the Christian world (5.1.19)

In Utopia's complaint against "constant wrangling and implacable hatred," More is building on the ideal of humanist toleration and its manifestation in polemical tolerance. As the next section of this chapter will show, polemical toleration would in the end be reduced to the tactical, itself another weapon in More's rhetorical arsenal.

### **More and Polemical Toleration**

Toleration is important in controversial literature that seeks to persuade because in order for rational conversation and reasoning to take place, the act of discourse must itself be permitted. Paradoxically, in sixteenth-century England, the spread of polemicism resulted from a lack of toleration, in that proscribed books elicited the attention of readers and the authorities. Because books could not be prohibited completely, illegally circulated texts reached many audiences, and this necessitated in the eyes of the establishment publication of books countering the heretical position. Toleration was a hotly debated concept and one frequently negated for this reason; early modern polemical discourse demonstrate qualities far from what we might even in early modern context describe as tolerant. Early modern books of controversy thus exemplify

what successor cultures have with distaste condemned as an intolerant “disorder of books,” as the railing enmities of polemical texts employed the culture’s most harsh, belittling, and, indecorous language to further their frankly biased arguments.<sup>43</sup> The irony inherent in this perception is that one of the most effective arguments in any polemical work was to appeal to the rules of debate, and to demonstrate how one’s opponent fails to meet the established standard of decorum. Many polemical books of the era, including those by More, are rightly perceived to have a disorderly and carnivalesque quality to their language and content; after all, polemic itself is defined as “contentious, disputatious, combative.”<sup>44</sup> In actuality, polemical literature by the most adept writers asserts what the proper order is, thus building a genre whose rules become its substance.

To qualify the present analysis, the writers under study were not considering the idea of a state tolerating plural and sundry religions, nor were they arguing that it was preferable to have a national community composed of coexisting churches of different faiths. On the contrary, supporters of uniformity espoused a stance that religious diversity would detrimentally impact the fabric of society and potentially dissolve the

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<sup>43</sup> See Jesse Lander, *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Lander argues that the image of polemical books as disorderly was a strategic construction that in part marked and defined a developing “literary” consciousness towards the beginning of the Eighteenth Century; however the image is not merely an anachronistic imposition. As this chapter will point out, idea of religious toleration in the sense of polemical toleration reacted against the scurrilous and carnivalesque elements of some polemical works in More’s day.

<sup>44</sup> “Polemic.” *The Oxford English Dictionary* Oxford University Press; online edn. [http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/, accessed 21 May 2009].

bond between state and religion; in the words of Roger L'Estrange, "Uniformity is the Ciment of both Christian and Civil Societies. Take away that, and the parts drop from the body; one piece falls from another" (86). Among More's three wishes for religion reconstructed by William Roper in one of his *Life's* memorable Thames-side episodes, is his dream that "where the Church of Christ is at this present sore afflicted with many heresies and errors, it were well settled in an uniformity of religion."<sup>45</sup> In support of the goal of uniformity, persecution was seen as an important tool. Unity was tied to peace of the commonwealth, where diversity suggested instability. On the social level, the state viewed religious uniformity as a preserver of the common peace, and to allow religious difference to exist and spread threatened the commonwealth. In terms of divinity, a church free of error meant that the community would not experience God's vengeance for failure to worship or believe properly. Toleration could never be a priority to a mindset focused on uniformity.

For a culture grounded on the assumption of uniformity as the most desirable condition, what is left is to debate how and to what degree the expression of different views should or should not be permitted. When engaging with those differing from the religious norm, an important problem to solve was whether religious difference and the proliferation of heterodox ideas should be met with persecution or toleration, and to what degree their dissemination in print may be restricted or permitted. More's work refuting the proscribed heretical works on the Cuthbert Tunstall's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*,

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<sup>45</sup> See Richard Sylvester, ed. *Two Early Tudor Lives: The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey, by George Cavendish [and] the Life of Sir Thomas More, by William Roper* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

the list of illicit books established in 1526, led him to face the ideological and governmental threat of Protestantism. More intervened directly in this problem of how religious difference could be articulated in print, and as others did, he presented freedom of press as an explicit or implicit topic of discussion whenever polemical attempts were made to support or rebuke the tolerationist ideas of the minority religion. More engages most explicitly with these issues when he writes about the nature and limits of the discourse in which he participates, and it is this context that More most clearly demonstrates a concern with polemical toleration, a vision of how different views should be received, interpreted, and retransmitted by writers and readers of controversial religious books.<sup>46</sup>

Whereas More makes the qualification that it is the executive power of the civil governor and not the church or its polemical defenders that punishes heretics, William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536) points out that sermonistic and state pronouncements can reinforce persecution:

hee [More] sayth that the Clergie burneth no man. As though the pope had not first found ... [de heretic comburendo], & as though all his preachers babled not that in euery Sermon, burne these heretickes burne them for we haue no other argument to conuince them and as though they compelled not both Kyng & Emperour to sweare that they shall so do, yer they crowne them.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, polemical toleration is one of the contexts identified by the historian John Coffey, who locates early modern instances and ideas surrounding religious toleration within the contexts of civil, social, polemical, ecclesiastical, and divine tolerance.

<sup>47</sup> Tyndale, *An Answer Unto Syr Thomas Mores Dialogue*. Reprinted in *The Whole Workes of W. Tyndall, John Frith, and Doct. Barnes* (London, 1573).



Polemical toleration was based on the presumption that verbal violence could lead to physical violence, and for Tyndale, verbal and physical violence are intertwined. Some polemicists attempted to separate the two; for instance, in one of his many replies to the Elizabethan Protestant polemicist John Jewel, the Roman Catholic writer Thomas Harding mocks the rhetoric of his opponent John Jewel by playing on the idea of discursive violence:

Some in old time likened Logique to the hand closed together, Rhetorique to the hand stretched abroad. Thereof it may be conceived, how much we fear this Rhetorician. Wel may he swepe duste from of our coates with flap of hand: he cannot hurte our boanes with stroke of fiste.”<sup>48</sup>

Harding’s image of the rhetor clapping listeners’ dusty overcoats both minimizes the risk of listening to his arguments and builds an ethically positioned image of the speaker in contrast to the violent beatings of the tyrant.

Other writers showed appreciation for polemical tolerance while better muting the often-scurrilous tone of the religious debate in which they participated. The Protestant martyrologist John Foxe, in his narrative of the life of John Frith, extols the virtue of Frith’s “friendly and prudent moderation in uttering the truth”:

I cannot but chuse but must needes earnestly and hartily embrace the prudent and godly moderation which was in that man [John Frith], who maynteyning this quarrell of the Sacrament of the Lords supper, no lesse godly, then learnedly (and pithily) yet he did it so moderately, without any contention, that he would never

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<sup>48</sup> Harding, *A Reioindre to M. Jewel’s Reply* (London, 1566).

seeme to strive agaynst the papistes except he had bene driven to it even of necessitie, In al other matters, where necessitie did not move him to contend, he was ready to graunt all thinges for quietnes sake, as hys most modest reasons and aunsweres did declare. (Foxe 1583, 1034)

Frith's privileging of keeping debates moderate for "quietnes sake" as more important than personal argumentative victory shows that polemical toleration was (at least to a fellow-Protestant such as Foxe) a model to be imitated. More had also noticed the "quietness" espoused by Frith in the reformist writer's manuscript treatise on the Eucharist, but with a less amenable attitude that equates the subject-oriented Protestant interpretation of Christ's words "this is my body" with erroneous and unstable private opinion:

God forbede that any man sholde be the more prone and redy to beleue this yong man in thys great mater [the doctrine of transubstantiation], bycause he sayth in the begynnyng y<sup>t</sup> he wyll brynge all men to a concorde and a *quyetenesse* of conscyence. For he bryngeth men to the wurste kynde of quyetnesse that can be deuised, whā he telleth vs as he dothe, that euery man may in thys mater wythout parell byleue whych waye he lyst. (italics added)

Curiously, what one would think would be most tolerable, concord and agreement, is for More the polemicist least tolerable because the agreement in this case is based not on traditional doctrine but on individual interpretation. It is not the single doctrine that one can or cannot tolerate, but rather the belief system underlying it.

Although More impugned the “quietness” in Frith that Foxe so admired, he highly prized the ideal of decorum and civil debate. More’s civil and moderately-toned defense of the Eucharist in *A letter of syr Tho. More Knyght Impugnyng the Erronyouse Wrytyng of Iohn Fryth agaynst the Blessed Sacrament of the Aultare* (1533) is itself complex because moderately toned phrases in More’s work, such as “this young brother” seem outwardly decorous but belie condescension. For instance, even as More draws the limit of what should be tolerated in polemical discourse, More makes *ad hominem* attacks against Frith’s youth: “I wyll not for courtesye saye he is starke madde / but surely I wyll say that for his owne soule, the yong man playeth a very yonge wanton pageaunt” (CW 7). More uses Polemical toleration as ideal through which might attack his opponent while not necessarily embodying the ideal himself.

The earliest work in which one may observe More’s tendency to handle heretical views by making claims for polemical toleration is the *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523). More’s pseudonymous work responds to Luther’s critique of Henry VIII’s *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, the king’s defense of the Roman Catholic Sacraments that prompted Pope Leo X to honor the king as *Defensor Fidei*. More’s book focuses not so much on the question of to what extent church and state should tolerate or sanction plural churches as it does on the nature of the “true church.” The book touches on the key points of Reformation doctrine: the status of the Mass and the Eucharist, predestination, justification by faith alone, and other points of controversy. Nevertheless, this work is also about discourse, and what kinds of discourse should be tolerated by readers. More makes this statement through the literary aspects of the dialogue. This work

demonstrates that More brooked no tolerance for religious views contrary to the Roman faith. Although *religious* toleration is a lacuna in this debate, as in More's other early works against the continental reformers and also against his fellow Englishman William Tyndale, More strategically employs *polemical* toleration for rhetorical purposes.

More casts the work within an elaborate frame of layered authorial ambiguity, which he crafted explicitly to separate himself and the king from the subject matter and scurrilous tone of Luther's tract. The attempt at mitigating the reputation of Henry's persecutorial policies towards those perceived to be heretics was purposeful; in More's own description, the king "appears to be more antagonistic toward heretics than even the bishops are."<sup>49</sup> More's opening frame describes how he has to take the place of the king, who "would not defile his own person as to engage the fellow in a contest of abuse nor would he so waste his time and trouble on trifles as to deal moderately and reasonably with one who had declared war on all reason and moderation" ( 5.31). The manner in which the fictive frame sets the work apart from More's earlier polemical works, by making it closer to imaginative literature, encourages tolerant reception by appealing in exciting ways to different audiences.

More's *Responsio* suggests several ways in which the issue of toleration was being approached, handled, and crafted for delivery through the vehicle of humanist literature. They also reveal points where ideas associated with religious toleration erupt through the surface of the text. First, this work may be positioned against the tradition of humanist toleration as a classical ideal. Without drawing too stark a binary, toleration

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<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Frances Rogers, ed., *St. Thomas More: Selected Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 180.

was both a civil and episcopal policy with an impact on the conditions of life for religious dissenters, as well as a concept deriving from the tradition of humanist intellectualism. Based on the rhetorical ideal of argument *in utrumque partem*, the concept of toleration was one solution to the problem of Christian humanism's problematic affinity for the pluralist culture and secular philosophy of Classical culture; the concept of toleration was thus imminently "Renaissance." I discussed above some of the aspects of polemical toleration in *Utopia*. As Gary Remer has demonstrated, the ideal of humanist toleration espoused by thinkers like Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) emerged from humanism's privileging of rational discourse. Parties with differing opinions could reach the truth not through physical coercion but through rational persuasion, exemplified in the rhetorical genres of *sermo*, *conversatio*, and *decorum*.<sup>50</sup> Toleration, however begrudging and transitory, was an essential precondition of such dialogue in the humanist model. Erasmus was the first to articulate the humanist defense of toleration, the origins of which he located within the rhetorical tradition. Toleration grows out of *sermo* because in arguing, a speaker must contain charged, emotion-provoking ideas to avoid offending a potentially hostile audience. In the open conversation of the *sermo*, the speaker must construct a moderate and persuasive self image that embodies a principle of *decorum* and respect for all participants. Polemical tolerance also grew from the Christian style of *sermo humilis*, a way of discussing great matters with a voice characterized by a humility

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<sup>50</sup> See Remer, Chapter 1.

becoming of Christ.<sup>51</sup> Erasmus thus favors the practice of polemical toleration through moderate speech. The tolerationist views of Erasmus, however, were not absolute. Although at times Erasmus advocated tolerance and peace, he still wrote against heresy and against Judaism. In a 1516 letter, for instance, Erasmus notes that France is purest in its Christianity because it is “uninfested with heretics, Bohemian schismatics, with Jews and with half-Jewish marranos,” a position similar to Luther’s later work *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543).<sup>52</sup> Erasmus influenced More as well as the next generation of humanists, and scholars such as Jacobus Acontius (1492-1566?) and William Chillingworth (1602-1644) grounded their arguments for toleration on the Erasmian principles of *decorum* and *sermo*.

In the classical tradition, the spoken art is linked to qualities of moderation and ethical fairness on the part of the speaker. Isocrates, Plato, and Cicero all associate speech with ethical persuasion, as opposed to the use of brute force. Parties who disagree with one another will reach accord through moderate speech and rational, persuasive conversation (Remer, 8-9). Writing about toleration and persecution, More and Erasmus also demonstrate their affinity with classical culture by identifying solutions to the problem of heresy that take a literary form, particularly the dialogue. The humanist impulse towards discussion *in utramque partem* appears throughout More’s writing on

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<sup>51</sup> Erich Auerbach, "Sermo humilis," in *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Mannheim, with a new foreword by Jan M. Ziolkowski (New York: Bollingen, 1965).

<sup>52</sup> See Heiko Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Coffey, 38.

religious difference. More and Erasmus, like many early modern writers, availed themselves of classical rhetorical strategies in attempting to persuade, and the structure of their works follow and build on rhetorical categories, including new uses for invention. Cicero's *De Oratore* outlined invention as an analytical method, through which the most effective and copious argument explored reasons for and against each position. More used the humanist strain to take the occasion of writing to comment on its venue. For example, More's *Letter to Martin Dorp* (1515) defended his associate Erasmus from anti-humanist attacks. In attacking his opponent, More outlined his image of humanist ideals, particularly the interest in rhetoric and classical language and learning (CW vol 15). The epistolary framing device in More's *Responsio* serves as a forceful and allusive gesture to the canon of rhetoric, and this device presents the reader with an elaborate *pro* and *con*, rationalizing and justifying for the publication of the work. More's discovery of his topic in the opening frame of the *Responsio* is about the question of religious difference and its correction, toleration, or abnegation. The argument is all the more important because this is a device that demonstrates awareness of its own literary quality, and the subject of the work is tied to its own fictivity. *The Responsio* thus represents a literary response to a theological challenge. In the Platonic frame that opens More's book, he takes pain to justify the reprinting of Luther's heretical passages, and under the fictive pretext of layered authorship and surreptitious editions, More's work displaces the risk for potentially spreading Luther's ideas in his own text onto the weaknesses of imperfect readers: "But how many persons do you think will be so diligent in reading the work of Luther that they will detect his trickery...?" This discovery, much like the *pro* and *con*

exercise supplementing the manuscript of the Petition of the Catholic nobles discussed in the Introduction, is important in that it constructs a model of right reading and explores the limits of possible debate in print publication. The frame also calls attention to itself because of its multi-layered *parerga*, the fictive devices that present the work's setting. John Carcellius tells the reader of how he assisted with the editing and publication of a text ostensibly composed by one Ferdinand Baravellus, only to learn that it is actually the work of his friend William Ross. The framing device justifies the writing and publication of the book and creates a readership friendly to and tolerant of the work's message.

In the larger scope of polemical writing across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it is notable that, in later years, controversial literature to a great degree retained the epistolary framing device, as many if not most polemical works were framed with an epistle to the author's close friends, to fictional parties, to personages of importance, and to whole communities of unnamed readers. It is this last audience whom More appeals to and worries over the most, particular those who lack what the modern critic Jonathan Culler calls "literary competence," the training and experience adequate for readers to approach a text on the level its writer intends.<sup>53</sup> The discussion of Luther's works at the outset of the *Responsio* ostensibly provides arguments for and against the book's publication, and focuses on the question of readers and their potential reception of Luther's works if his they were to be left unanswered. When to tolerate means granting equal power to the dissenting voice, the argument for publication is based on the polemical strategy of textual saturation. It is known that many readers of polemic paid

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<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Culler, "Literary Competence." In *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Ed. Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 101-17.



attention to the event of a work's publication, and the assumption of both writers and the parties for whom they wrote was that canny readers would know whether one book appeared to answer another. For a work to remain unanswered could be read to mean that it was authoritative.<sup>54</sup> The anxiety was that even a single English Catholic would be lured to Reformist ideas by reading heretical works, particularly those not yet disproved in print by a Roman Catholic response. The speaker of More's work argues that the repetition and promulgation of unauthorized ideas through the channel of polemical counterpoint poses little risk of spread or contagion to readers who may be persuaded by them: "There is no danger whatever that any good man will be misled by a book of this sort which wrangles without reason and which lists rather than proves all the most impious doctrines and those most condemned by the common agreement of the Christian world." (CW 5.1.19)

Despite the ability of the hypothetical "good man," More's text is nevertheless concerned about the "unwary" who might approach the text without proper training and professional understanding of the discursive context. More's later, vernacular works defended Catholic dogma "on behalf of a wide reading public which included the 'simple and unlearned' who were not instructed in either the Church Fathers or in the subtleties of scholastic thought" (Gordon, 135). More's concern with readers and their response to persuasive works supports his intolerant stance on censorship, or more precisely, prohibition. One might qualify that More's ideas should not be evaluated according to an anachronistic criteria, or associated with the descriptor "intolerance"; if toleration was

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<sup>54</sup> See Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Ch. 2.

still only a developing idea in the modern sense, early modern Tudor ideas cannot be measured by this scale. Although his policies would seem unenlightened in today's social perspective, More offered well-reasoned rationales for quashing heretical religious difference and enforcing uniformity. In More's view the tactics of Luther's writings, his own intolerant and insubstantially referential content (Luther's book "wrangles without reason," and "lists rather than proves"), are to be considered ineffective against good readers; nevertheless they present a dangerously seductive risk for those less well-equipped to read and understand. On one level, this position is yet another rhetorical posture; the Latin language *Responsio* clearly targeted a Latin-literate audience, one who would likely be familiar with the international political context of More's engagement with Luther. Although he perhaps patronizes this group by appealing to their superiority over the "good man" of the *polis*, More substantiates the authority of his book by acknowledging the risk of Luther's book remaining unanswered and the greater danger posed by reproducing Luther's ideas in his own book.

The risk is apparently acceptable in the *Responsio*'s setting. Although the "common agreement" of Christendom that condemns Luther's views and books may in fact depend upon such vigorous apologies for its doctrines as More's, his appeal to a universal population of readers also reinforces the righteousness of Roman Catholicism by denigrating those who subvert the Church in print. At a more local level, if one plays along with the book's fictional frame, the argument of the individual "good man" who would spontaneously reject Luther's immoderate and crafty work implies that publication of More's book is not required. A reader who understands the discursive context and

who knows enough about the king's *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* to identify Luther's distortion of Henry's words, will of his (and sometimes her) own volition and learning reject Luther's outrageous claims and ideas. This construction of what textual qualities might be tolerable or proper, and which readers are equipped to read it, extends to consideration of the civil policies prohibiting or permitting certain books to be imported, printed, sold, or otherwise circulated. Because their radical content and indecorous tone would be rejected, More slyly implies that Luther's texts should be allowed to appear in print in order that all audiences may witness their foolishness: "indeed, this advantage [of allowing immoderate works to be printed and distributed] would result, that all of the worst men, whom no edict can restrain from reading the works of heretics, will stop imposing on the unwary, whom at present they cleverly persuade" (CW 5.119). Luther's scurrilous work may not require an answer, and to readers who know both sides of the argument it may be obvious that Luther's position is false; but what of those in the readership who only see Luther's text, who do not grasp the larger context? As the argument proceeds, it becomes clear that this discussion of the self-cancelling properties of Luther's works is in fact a ruse; Luther's book against the king and other texts such as the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) are indeed dangerous, necessitating immediate containment and erasure to preserve the religious uniformity they so threaten. That Luther would take advantage of ill-prepared readers allows More an ethical stance that supports his own argument and impugns the character and literary integrity of Luther.

The impulse towards containment of subversive ideas underlies an easily penetrable disguise of writers who wish to appear as if they were rationally exchanging opposing viewpoints. The speaker of More's *Responsio*, William Ross, is prodded into writing an ostensibly even-sided analysis by his fictional patron, to "answer at length, presenting from both sides the words of each one and subjoining your own" (5.1.11). Whatever the importance of open dialogue and debate, the risk of heresy infecting and spreading among the unlearned trumps concern for the humanist ideal of rational persuasion and open, logical exchange: "For this reason I am wholly in agreement," More's speaker proclaims, "in such a way as to forbid to the church completely the reading of those books which under the guise of holiness and moderation commend to good and simple men secretly implanted heresies" (5.1.19). In an abruptly counterintuitive turn, the speaker asserts that it is the most moderate or tolerant works which are the most intolerable. The *Responsio* argues not just against freedom of the press, but against the "guise" of "moderation"; tolerant works and tolerant readers can allow a space to operate for writers with insidious motives wishing divisive effects, and this concern justifies the need for the intolerant policy of prohibition.

More comments not only on readers and their ability to defend against manipulation by rhetorically skilled and untrustworthy writers, but also looks at writers *as* readers, when writers create readings of their own and others' works. More laments the current state of intellectual debate in terms of how writers respond to others ideas through listening rather than speaking:

Things are not what they were once, when Eck was disputing. For then, because the movement was still at the stage when men strongly favored their own sect and did not yet clearly realize what a bad cause they were fostering, they used to listen more quietly and eagerly. (5.1.45)

Now that Luther's apologists see what More describes as the failure of his cause and the flaws in his method, they are less likely to engage in moderate discourse. They no longer engage with others' arguments either with passive, docile comportment ("quietly") or with an actively receptive attitude ("eagerly"). As More rebukes the position of Protestant propagandists, he feels that "they despair of a victory of reason and place their triumph in unreason, unwilling to listen with unprejudiced ears to anything which contradicts their prejudiced minds." Polemical toleration means defining the limits of what is or is not acceptable in printed debates, and in More's construction polemical toleration is also about how one receives ideas counter to one's own position. Polemical toleration is not just a matter of being receptive to beliefs one shares, but rather it is a willingness to be receptive to religious ideas that would otherwise provoke aversion. The concept thus goes beyond decorum in speakers; polemical toleration is also a trait characterizing listeners. If toleration is aimed at conversion, then how can conversion take place when the audience will not listen? More thus condemns the faulty literary approach of his opponents, and shows that, as readers, they fail to embody polemical tolerance. I will discuss below the implication for More's broader audience.

The lack of polemical toleration in writers or readers was an argument often applied by those either side of the debate to the other. In criticizing Roman Catholic

divinity and the scholastic tradition, for instance, Luther laments those who will not listen or properly interpret: “Let the reader then see from this one argument how asinine is the ignorance of the Thomists, and how mentally puerile is their insolence, which does not allow them to understand their own words.” Luther’s complaint against the scholastic tradition allows a path of argument against his opponents that demeans the very fashion of argument to which they subscribe.

Toleration as an act of reception or listening appears elsewhere in More’s response to Luther. A key passage in the debate appears when Luther uses the word “tolerate” (*tolerare*) in his defense of the *sola scriptura* doctrine, to attack aspects of religious doctrine which he argues derive from human tradition rather than scriptural precedent:

I seek only that the divine scriptures should have sole rule, as is meet and just, but that human inventions and traditions should be abolished as most pernicious scandals, or with their poison cut out and their sting removed, that is with the power of forcing and commanding and ensnaring consciences taken away, they should be tolerated freely as things neither good nor bad, just as with any other plague or misfortune of the world. (CW 5.51)

The verb “tolerate” here holds significance for several reasons, particularly because Luther is contributing to a body of literature that constructed religious toleration in negative terms, as a function of what was impermissible rather than what was allowed. Luther demonstrates his period’s conception of religious toleration as a negatively charged word. Closely linked to its Latin root *tolerare* (“to suffer or endure”), toleration

in the early modern period provoked a host of negative associations. From an ecclesiastical perspective, in an age where religious belief was closely attached to an inflexible ideal of truth, to allow another to persist in heterodoxy was seen as sinful.<sup>55</sup> From a civil or governmental perspective, in an age where religious difference was perceived by those in power potentially to impact state security, to permit religious difference meant allowing the threat of violence within the realm and a symbolic affront to state power. Thus, when early modern thinkers discussed toleration, there always was the understanding that it was negative or undesirable. In the passage from Luther, the idea that tolerance always applies to something unpalatable or undesirable offers a commentary on the *status quo*. The institutional power of the Roman Catholic Church and its centuries of tradition give it not just the positive power of authority and legitimization, but the negative power to coerce, “the power of forcing and commanding and ensnaring consciences.” Luther’s subtle twist on toleration belies its open audacity, reinforced by the syntactical scheme of *polysyndeton*, repeating the conjunction *and*. Modifying the phrase “should be tolerated” with the adverb “freely” adds to Luther’s sense because the passive voice makes it unclear whether the tolerator or tolerated should experience this freedom.

Luther’s ambiguous emphasis on toleration in this passage is also meaningful because his own contribution to the discourse of toleration was mixed and often ambivalent. Although early in his career Luther wrote in favor of toleration, condemning persecution of heretics in his 1523 treatise *On Secular Authority, to Which Extent It*

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<sup>55</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

*Should Be Obeyed*, by the end of his career Luther shifted to the idea that the state should suppress religious dissent in the interest of political security. Luther shifted from the view that “heresy can never be prevented by force,” to a position he shared with Calvin the view that “powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1). Therefore, any group that challenged the established power committed an affront to God. The contradictions concerning toleration in Luther’s thought reveal the richness and complexity of early modern thought, nuances which seemingly widen the gap between early modern and modern religious cultures and which differentiate the value today’s culture places on toleration from the understanding of toleration articulated by early modern writers.

The present study, however, does not seek to trace a history of the development of toleration, but rather hopes to reveal the rhetorical efficacy of the concept and the way writers deployed it to their advantage in public discourse. Religious toleration was a flexible and adaptable rhetorical trope, as the above passage from Luther’s book *Contra Henricum* Luther shows. In its conventional usage, tolerance is a function of power relationships between dominant and marginal groups. In this traditional sense, toleration is extended from those in the power to the marginalized minority: toleration was traditionally “the slogan and creed of minorities who found themselves on the receiving end of judicial coercion and popular violence” (Walsham 2006, 236).<sup>56</sup> The tendency of some to relate tolerance to the reification and naturalization of power structures also makes it a problematic idea; for a marginal group to seek or accept tolerance implies acceptance and validation of its marginal status. Whereas one would normally envision

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<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that for many groups, toleration was an approach easily discarded when fortunes favored their own party.



toleration as impacting the marginal position, in the passage above Luther cannily turns the tables by implying that the institutionally sanctioned doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church should be tolerated: “that human inventions and traditions... they should be tolerated freely as things neither good nor bad.” Where tolerance can diminish rather than empower a marginal group, tolerance in Luther’s formulation undercuts the power of institutional dogma by reversing roles.

Consider how Thomas More’s careful and thorough response to Luther foregrounds this passage. In the *Responsio* More quotes this passage several times, repeating its premise for the reader. “...let us winnow his statement,” More exhorts his reader, “that whatever is written outside of holy scripture is free and indifferent and that he simply wishes whatever praiseworthy words and deeds have occurred apart from the testimony of scripture to be tolerated freely” (5.1.97). The *logos* of More’s reading depends on the “Catholic teaching that the Holy Spirit preserved and guided the church both through scripture and through tradition, and that, as a visible institution containing all Christians, the church operated by Spirit-guided consensus, not individual persuasion.”<sup>57</sup> More’s *Responsio* also engages here with the etymological dimension of the word “tolerate” by noting that the word as Luther uses the term, means “to bear, to suffer, or to endure”: “as a man endures with a pest” (CW 5.257). Although Luther marks the idea that it is the Roman Catholic tradition rather than the Protestant doctrine that should be tolerated through literary inversion, More fails to grasp the potential absurdity of Luther’s statement, and he refrains from commenting on Luther’s reversal of

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<sup>57</sup> Seymour Baker House, “More, Sir Thomas.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

the tolerationist power scheme. Instead, More uses the instance to return to his own rhetorical project, gesturing towards the metadiscursive in order to further his own argument. More dismisses Luther's proposition by attacking his discursive flaws. He responds to Luther's tweaking of the majority/minority relationship with a rhetorical question undermining Luther's interpretive and argumentative practices:

If this statement is true, Luther, why do you answer nothing to all the objections which the king brings up against you? We will present many of these objections in their proper places... if anyone, after reading them, then reads this general response of yours and sees that you have not touched on any one of these objections but have passed them over and concealed them by silence as though they were words spoken to a deaf man, he will not be able to ignore how great a fear of being unable to make a fitting response and how complete a lack of a true defense lead you to pass over these objections. (5.1.97)

The *amphibetesis*, the question at hand, is the question of reading; More disputes Luther's reading of king's book, but also his reading of history and reading of scripture. In this passage, however, More equates reading with writing, in the dialogic sense of the writer performing a reading of a text, and in this case the writer is not capable of listening to the text, "as though they were words spoken to a deaf man." Regardless of what is tolerable, what is intolerable is writing that fails to perform a proper reading, a proper reading being one that is fair, well reasoned, and properly attentive to both text and discursive context. The ideal of polemical toleration permits More a commentary on Luther's authorial persona by attacking his ability to read and interpret, that is, to listen.

The comparison of Luther to “a deaf man” also invokes an image of physical disability that naturalizes Luther’s discursive flaws.

Looking at More’s strategies for incorporating polemical toleration into his work reveals the persuasive art of the discourse itself. Even the most persuasive and one-sided text can be tolerant of multiple perspectives, and through appeals to polemical tolerance More can justify reproducing heretical viewpoints in the course of his argument. More also is wary of replicating intolerant discourse, but in even the tamest of his passages he falls into open name-calling: Luther is a “frenzied friarlet,” who “could not at all restrain himself from vomiting out such continuous, such senseless abuse against the bishops, the princes ... against the entire church...” (5.1.11). He uses the fictional status of his dialogue to rationalize his own lapses into scurrilous language and polemical intolerance.

Although More exemplifies his own polemical tolerance, he frequently diverges from this strategy in telling ways. For instance, when More addresses Luther’s claim that the king’s *Assertio* was not in fact written by the king (and, of course he knew that Luther was right), More does not lie or attempt otherwise to dissemble the matter, but instead turns the argument back around on Luther. In a darkly comic and richly descriptive passage, More suggests that Luther’s own material was either inspired by drink or lifted from other thinkers. At a lack for material, and when tippling does not inspire sufficient polemical *copia*, More imagines how Luther looks to his “pot-fellows” for contributions:

He urged them each to hurry to the place where they could hunt out the greatest possible matter of stupid brawls and scurrilous scoffs...They then go off in different directions...and the scatter among all the carts, carriages, boats, baths,

brothels, barber shops, taverns, whorehouses, mills, privies, and stews...finally all that they had collected...railings, brawling, scurrilous scoffs, wantonness, obscenities, dirt, filth, muck, shit, all this sewage they stuff into the most foul sewer of Luther's breast...all this he vomited up through that foul mouth into that railer's book of his, like devoured dung." (5.1.61)

This is a passage to rival Luther's most scatological prose. If by honestly and politely treating his material, More still holds to the ideal of polemical toleration, then even still he is pulled into the intolerant muck of mudslinging. If More at times attempts to model what style, subject, or tone should be allowed in writing, then at other times he was clearly guided by other principles. Although modern readers can identify aspects of polemical toleration in More's works, his books constantly self-correct towards the persecutorial side of the spectrum.

To my point that toleration afforded a special avenue for polemical writers to re-envision their art, one might point out that every polemical intervention is a commentary on the nature of the discourse. Enumerating the flaws in an opponent's argument as well as that author's purported literary incompetence was a common polemical tactic. The goal of the present thesis is to show how toleration indeed led many writers to reflect on and leverage the metadiscursive space opened by their art. Because toleration is a function of limits, writing about this subject lent itself to commentary on the limits discourse, and consideration of what messages or means of exchanging them were to be tolerated. By looking at religious toleration in early modern polemical writings, one can see how readers conceived of the genres in which they wrote.

### **Toleration, Persecution, and Dialogue – *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies***

I have mentioned that religious toleration in the early modern period was not the opposite of persecution, but rather that it dialectically emerged from conjunction with it. Moments of toleration contained the deconstructive seed of persecution, and *vice versa*. Even along a diachronic spectrum from persecution to toleration one can find sub-units characterized by dialectical interplay. For example, when Roman Catholics appealed to Elizabeth for toleration in 1680, it was within the relatively mild climate of unpunished recusancy and pre-Jesuit involvement. When they appealed to James I in 1603 for toleration and freedom of speech and worship, it was within the post-Armada context of the late-Elizabethan's regime's staunch persecution of Roman Catholic priests and recusants. On the Protestant side, complaints against persecution could be positioned within their own history of moving from a marginal to dominant position in the English religious environment. Although religious toleration became a pressing matter as English religious identities developed throughout the sixteenth century, this development relied on the same dialogic dynamic that is apparent in More's early debates with Luther and Tyndale. I say that toleration is dialogic because it is the product of conversational interaction between dialectically opposed religious ideas and identities. It is also dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense, where the minority constructs a discursive space through the

terms of the authoritative discourse established by the majority culture.<sup>58</sup> In the arena of public debate and publication, this dialogic interplay between toleration and persecution, between marginal and authoritative discourse, is most apparent in the genre of literary dialogue.

More had serious experience writing in this form dating to his collaboration with Erasmus on a translation of the *Dialogues* of Lucian.<sup>59</sup> The humanist link to Erasmus is important also because humanist toleration as espoused by More's associate is based on the idea that different ideas must be temporarily tolerated to allow time and opportunity for rational exchange and persuasion of their holders by logic, and the dialogue as a form of polemical literature would at first glance appear to be the most useful literary vehicle for this purpose. As a precondition for conversion, toleration is necessary in the debates that attempt to persuade and convert, and the dialogue, as "a fusion of dialectic and poetry," was uniquely positioned to model conversion. In the words of Virginia Cox, "The dialogue is unique among the familiar genres of argument and exposition, in that, at the same time as presenting a body of information or opinion, it also *represents* the process by which that information or opinion is transmitted to a particular audience" (1, 4-5). The dialogue's self-referential aspect of a fictional mirror constructed through its speakers and listeners, reflecting the interaction between text and reader, also lends to its readerly appeal. In dialogues concerning religious toleration and persecution, the self-

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<sup>58</sup> Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> McCutcheon, R.R., "Heresy and Dialogue: The Humanist Approaches of Erasmus and More." *Viator* 24(1993): 357-384. Quotation at p. 357.

referentiality is compounded because the topic of debate is about what is permissible in communication.

Although the distinctions between dramatic (“dialogical”) and didactic (“monological”) dialogue identified by Cox apply to More’s texts in the degree of participation each affords the reader, More’s didactic dialogue avails itself of poetic features of setting, character, irony, and other literary features to communicate its message. The ideological substance, however, is entirely monological. Recent analysis of More’s polemical writings, the dialogues in particular, has emphasized the degree to which the humanist literary dialogue actually forecloses toleration of different views. Despite its appearance as rational exchange of ideas, dialogue is not discussion; the dialogue form is merely a mechanism for articulating a one-sided perspective. However, dialogue as a generic device is by nature inhospitable to other points of view: “While it may have several speakers, a dialogue has one author with one position,” as in the Socratic tradition where the speaker fosters a dialogue to perform a spoken exposition of a single argument. Pace Plato, the philosophical dialogue devalues the sharing of contrasting ideas, but rather looks to the end of conversion of the reader.

The image of reception and listening is one-sided in More’s *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1530). More’s *Dialogue* stages a discussion between the author’s persona, a “Mayster chauncellour” who receives an embassy from a “ryght worshypfull friend” via an anonymous Messenger, his protégé from the university and “secrete sure frende” (CW 5.21). Such a familiar relationship ostensibly creates an environment for the exchange of ideas in good faith. The Chancellor is asked to listen to the Messenger’s report of

“perylouse and pernycyouse opynyons,” waxing Reformist ideas “wherof great speche and rumour runneth here [i.e. on the Continent] ... of late by lewde people put in question” (CW 5.21). Asked by his friend to provide arguments to reaffirm the Messenger’s adherence to Roman Catholic doctrine, the Chancellor is to gird the Messenger with conservative arguments to carry back to other Protestant students at the university. The Chancellor, after graciously listening to the Messenger’s own and reported opinions, conducts a two-day lecture formally preparing him to read and understand Protestant publications, which the Chancellor then systematically refutes.

If one of the assumptions underlying the debate is an uncompromising belief in unalterable scriptural fact, then the debate becomes an empty illusion at best, and disfunctional at worst. The work reveals a “fundamental logical flaw” in the thesis it proposes, that to engage with heresy on equal footing in discourse is to validate the assumptions underlying both sides.<sup>60</sup> When the challenge from heresy is an affront to what is perceived to be the truth of scripture revealed through the history of the Church, the heretical position is incommensurable with this governing assumption. The ability of the individual to interpret scripture in ways varying from the Church’s sanctioned interpretation of the Church means that only one perspective can be tolerated in rational discourse. In More’s words,

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<sup>60</sup> *A dyaloge of syr Thomas More knyghte*. (CW 6.1-3). McCutcheon, R.R., “The *Responsio Ad Lutherum*: Thomas More’s Inchoate Dialogue with Heresy.” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22.1(1991): 77-90; also see Craig W. D’Alton, “Charity or Fire? The Argument of Thomas More’s 1529 *Dyaloge*.” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33.1 (2002): 51-70; and Donald Gilman, “Dramatic Debate: Vividness and Verve in Thomas More’s *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*.” *Moreana* 40.153-154 (2003): 27-47.



For very sure are we that who so wolde contre any texte of holy scypture / in such wyse as he wolde make it seme contrary to any poynt of this catholyke faith which god hath taught his chyrch / he gyueth y<sup>e</sup> scripture a wronge sentence / and thereby techeth a wronge byleue. (6.1.419)

The *Dialogue* therefore builds the Reformist position into a straw man that is then dismantled not just through argument and counterargument. The *Dialogue* is an example of *protreptic* rhetoric for reasons beyond the customary goal of rhetoric in educating and converting or recruiting the reader; the Chancellor also discredits his opponents' discourse by dismissing its basic assumptions, while maintaining an appearance of open exchange. Polemical toleration is a mirage here, as More can cite the need for polemical tolerance but then discards the principal when not needed to reinforce his own credibility. Polemical literature is only limited in its use of toleration, and More demonstrates that polemical dialogue is not about the equal sharing of ideas and toleration of different views, but rather is an artificial environment for the articulation of an inflexible understanding. For thinkers like More, however, the danger of heresy foreclosed even dialogue's potential for rational conversion of his polemical opponents.

The illusion is at times convincing. One of the main arguments of the Messenger is that persecution is not appropriate for dealing with religious difference. He brings in patristic and scriptural references to support his stance: "For they say that the olde holy fathers vsed onely to dispute with heretyques / techynge them and conuycytyng them by scripture / and not by fagottes" (6.1.31). The Messenger here goes against what one historian has identified as the "Augustinian consensus" that persecution is the best action

against heresy.<sup>61</sup> The Augustinian rationale for persecution held that the civil magistrate had the secular authority to compel subjects' religious faith through executive power. Although Patristic interpretation of scripture seemed to favor persecution in the name of uniformity, Christ at times seemed to imply that persecution of the sinful is God's business not man's, as in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matthew, 13: 24-30), where the wicked and just are allowed to live together without molestation until God separates them in the final judgment. The Messenger draws on this strain of scriptural interpretation, the model of Christ as tolerator: "Cryst also they say wolde neuer haue any man compelled by force and violence to byleue vpon his fayth" (6.1.32). There were also political implications drawn from this line of scripture. After More's execution, George Joye, who interceded in the debate against *More's Letter against Frith* and attacked him in the *Supper of the Lord*, wrote that "where the head & gouerner professeth Chryst, there can be no persecution."<sup>62</sup> In the evaluation of Joye, More was a traitor for persecuting Protestants.

In contrast to the Messenger's idea of Christ as tolerator, the Parable of the Banquet (Luke, 14: 23), in which a man forcibly compels his guests to attend a feast, could be interpreted to mean that coercion for the sake of religious uniformity was a justifiable measure. In Augustine's reading of this parable, he reasoned that it was a Christian's responsibility to bring those who erred into the light of religious "truth," a

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<sup>61</sup> See Coffey.

<sup>62</sup> George Joye, *A Present Consolation for the Sufferers of Persecution for Righteousness* (Antwerp, 1544), A6r-v.

rationale cited repeatedly by polemical writers across the early modern period.<sup>63</sup>

Augustine felt that persecution was justified and even necessary “provided the ends were good.”<sup>64</sup> Persecution thus was aimed at correcting, and in this sense it was a “medicinal” persecution as opposed to the “exterminative” persecution favored by More. Heresy in More’s view was to be expunged, eradicated completely even to the point of killing the heretic.<sup>65</sup>

One of the radical changes that allowed for religious toleration to grow later in the seventeenth century was a new way of understanding heresy. John Milton, for instance, would eventually see the function of heresy as part of a dialectical, self-correcting process necessary to repair the entropic tendency of the Church to decay into idolatry and corruption. Heretical ideas challenged the church to cleanse itself of falsehood, and thus had a salutary effect. Milton inherited the ideals of humanist toleration, which would allow him to extend freedom of religion to the realm of free speech, as is seen in the limited freedom of the press and toleration of plural Protestant sects described in *Aereopagitica* (1642). Whereas in the early Tudor period, “intolerance and persecution...were seen not as evils but as necessary and salutary for the preservation of religious truth,” in the 1640s Milton and other tolerationists felt that religious difference, even when erroneous, promoted the truth (Zagorin, 16). More was not of a mindset to

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<sup>63</sup> Augustine, Letter to Vincentius, bishop of Mauretania (408) in David George Mullan, Ed. *Religious Pluralism in the West: An Anthology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 39-50. Also see P. R. L. Brown, “St Augustine’s Attitude to Religious Coercion.” *Journal of Roman Studies*. 54 (1964): 107-16.

<sup>64</sup> Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 32.

<sup>65</sup> See Coffey, 23.

envision heresy in this positive model. More wrote that heresy is “the wurst cryme that canne be”, and as for heretics, felt that “fayr handelyng helpeth lytell wyth many of them.” On the contrary, heretics should be treated with zero tolerance.

The turn in polemical engagement to a reflexive contemplation of discourse is a recurring dynamic in More’s *Dialogue*, particularly when More writes on persecution and toleration. When the Messenger argues for toleration, and against the persecution of Luther and his followers on the Continent, he invokes discursive representations:

And yet they say / the worst of all is this / that the clergye ceace not hereby / nor  
holde themselves content wyth the condempnyng of Luther / and forbyddyng of  
his bokys / but further abuse the hatered of his name. (CW 6.1.30)

The Chancellor, however, holds firm to the opinion that “in the condemnacyon of heretykes / y<sup>e</sup> clergye might lawfully do moch more sharply than they do” (CW 6.1.428). This “condemnacyon” as well refers to the spoken and printed word. If the Church or state were to persecute heresy all the less, then:

“the people sholde not fayle to fall in to many sore & intolerable troubles / yf  
suche sedycyouc sects of heretykes were not by greuous punysshment repressed  
in the begynnyng / and the sparcle well quenched ere it were suffred to growe to  
ouer grete a fyre.”

Here again, the Chancellor equates toleration with suffering, and in the negative sense. Persecution might “quence” the spark of heresy before it is allowed to consume the realm in a conflagration of heterodoxy. It is all the more important then, that Luther’s ideas are

contained; in the words of the Chancellor, “it were not well done to suffer Luthers bokes or any other heretykes / to go abrode and be redde amonge the people” (CW 6.1.30).

Narrative commentary on literary discourse when faced with the question of toleration is a repeated dynamic in the work, and the idea of literary competence is always at the forefront. The reader, too, complicates the two-speaker model, as do the other voices within the text, including the indirect voice of the author as he comments on the unfolding dialogue, the reinforcing chorus of the chapter headings, and scriptural quotations. For these speakers there are also listeners, making More’s text into “an act of reading as well as of listening” (McCutcheon 378). The most important listeners are introduced in the letters that open the work; the Chancellor’s friend and his publisher are listening, and they are among various readers listening to the dialogue. The Chancellor models reception by creating a parallel between the book’s readers and the Messenger who listens to the Chancellor’s views perhaps without awareness of his *protreptic* rhetoric, aimed at educating but particularly to recruit (Billingsley 5-22).

As a stand-in for More’s own audience, the Messenger represents the best and worst in readers. On the one hand, the Messenger presents the risk of those unprepared to read; however the Chancellor’s avuncular attitude mitigates potential offense to More’s audience. For example, the Chancellor gently mocks his ill regard for the seven liberal arts:

For he told me meryly / that Logycke he rekened but bablynge / Musyke to serue  
for syngers / Arythmetrycke mete for marchauntes / Geometry for masons /

Astronomy good for no man / And as for Phylosophy / the most vanyte of  
all...For man me sayd hathe no lyght but of holy scripture. (CW 6.1.33)

The book thus ends with the Chancellor training the Messenger in literary competence.

The Messenger represents the positive potential of a readership able to learn. The

Chancellor offers patriarchal texts from Augustine and Cyprian, alongside contemporary

heretical works by Luther and Tyndale, “But for that ye shall neyther nede to rede all /

nor leses tyme in sekyng for that ye sholde se / I haue layd you the placys redy with

ryshes bytwene the leuys / and notes marked in the margentys where the matter is

touched” (CW 6.1.430). This Roman Catholic tendency to control and constrain the

occasion and manner of reading extends to More’s own eagerness to control the

discursive context of his polemical debate with the Reformers. The fact remains that

even to read in order to understand and correct wrong ideas in the reader is dangerous

because some individuals simply lack the strength or wisdom to read without being

infected. Properly prepared by the Chancellors lessons, and with the true words of the

Church Fathers to supplement his engagement with the heretical texts, it might be safe for

the Messenger to read dangerous works in this controlled environment.

## **Religious Toleration and Freedom of the Press - *The Confutation of Tyndale's***

### ***Answer***

Freedom of the press is among the cluster of ideas commonly associated with religious toleration. As a supporting concept behind polemical tolerance, freedom of the press is one of the preconditions for the communication of ideas to wide audiences. In sixteenth-century England, the proliferation of heterodox books was deemed to pose a risk to the established Church, and was recognized as a problem to be addressed through censorship, prohibition, seizing of presses, symbolic book burnings, and other methods of state control. Although the period witnessed periods of rigorous control of books and printed materials containing subversive or deviant religious ideas, along with prohibition of vernacular translations or otherwise unauthorized editions of the Old and New Testaments, for some periods of time relative freedom of the press was permitted. The reign of Edward VI, for instance, was one example of a context in which especially Protestant books and works were permitted to circulate with impunity and without censorship. Aside from the suppression of Roman Catholic books, the only official state pronouncement on the publication of religious works was the appointment of state-sanctioned homilies and the *Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>66</sup> As the official religion of England shifted with different Tudor rulers, state-sponsored religious works such as the

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<sup>66</sup> See George Haven Putnam. *The Censorship of the Church of Rome and Its Influence on the Production and Distribution of Literature*. 2 vols. (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's and Sons, 1906), 90; also see "Introduction" in Gigliola Fragnito, Ed. *Church, Censorship, and Culture in Early Modern Italy*. Trans Adrian Belton. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Book of Common Prayer articulated ideas and doctrines that had previously been strictly outlawed.

In the Henrecian period, heretical publications were regulated by royal edict and by the authority of the bishops after the 1520s. Cardinal Wolsey had prohibited books by Luther's associates at Oxford, making their reading a matter of license. In 1526, copies of the English New Testament were secured and burned by the bishops, for that they were "full of heretical pravity." The first English index of Prohibited books was also published in 1526 and 1529. The reading of scripture in English was outlawed by royal proclamation and any printed books or handwritten works with content antagonistic to the Roman Catholic Church were made illegal to import, buy, sell, or possess (Putnam, 86). In Europe, the Roman Inquisition and Congregation of the Index did not have a draft of a codified index of prohibited works until 1546. However, the Edict of Worms established the partnership of clergy and civil government in the German Empire to repress Reformist works, the printing of which constituted an act of heresy against orthodox religion, and of treason against the state (Putnam 85). As mentioned above, More was among the group of scholars actively engaged with the debate who had special dispensation to read books by the Reformers. More himself participated in a raid of suspect booksellers in St. Paul's courtyard, who were apparently appealing to some readers' illegal tastes in religious literature. After the schism, Henry relaxed strictures on English-language scriptures; but all books imported or printed domestically came under the authority of royal examiners and had to bear the name of the printer and author, editor, or translator (Putnam 89). Writing in support of such restrictions on Protestant



books, by the end of his own career More's own writings fell afoul of Henry's regulation of the book trade. The printshop of William Rastell was raided in January 1534 in a search for a book by More that was purported to be critical of Henry's 1533 *Book of Nine Articles*.<sup>67</sup>

Strongly opposed to the spread of Protestant ideas throughout his polemical and political careers, Thomas More was an early contributor to the fraught discourse of freedom of the press. As mentioned above, William Tyndale had responded to More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* with his 1532 *Answer*, in which Tyndale defended the Protestant position from More's conservative attack. More responded to this work, and also to the 1531 *Supplication* of Robert Barnes (1495-1540), with a two-volume, English-language work entitled *The Confutatyon of Tyndale's Answer Made by Syr Thomas More Knight Lorde Chauncellour of Englonde* (1532-33).<sup>68</sup> This work engaged centrally with the question of freedom of the press, and More's answer to this question was a clear position against the printing and distribution of works contrary to Roman Catholicism. This work, then, represents another way in which writers considering aspects of religious toleration could appeal to their genre either to restrict or allow dissenting ideas. For More, pleas for toleration and the expression of heretical ideas were to be met with rigid strictures on printing.

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<sup>67</sup> Alvaro De Silva, ed. *The Last Letters of Thomas More*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans 2001) , 31.

<sup>68</sup> Originally appearing in separate publications, Tyndale and Barnes' works were reproduced by John Foxe in the 1572 John Day edition of *The Whole Workes of W. Tyndale, Iohn Frith, and Doct. Barnes* (London, 1572).

More's *Confutatyon* defends the episcopal, doctrinal, and ceremonial structure of the Roman Catholic Church from Tyndale's and Barnes' Protestant critiques.<sup>69</sup> The work has a diptych structure, and each part respectively handles these two English reformers. Although the core argument of both parts is that "the common knowen catholyke church is the verye true church of Christ" (8.2.993), the first part focuses on Tyndale and models of printing and reading, and the other defends Roman Catholic persecution of heresy from Barnes' attack.

Particularly in the sections responding to Tyndale, More's *Confutatyon* continues the theme of reading, interpretation, and censorship that were so important in the *Dialogue*. The debate between More and Tyndale hinged on issues of language and interpretation, particularly the notable words used in Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament, where Tyndale chose to use the word "love" for the traditional Roman Catholic term "charity," "senior" for "priest," "congregation" for "church," and "repentance" for "penance" among others. The debate between More and Tyndale over these terms makes the issue of reading as important as the scriptural referent itself, at least from the Roman Catholic perspective that vested authority in the officially sanctioned interpretations which had been codified over centuries of theological study. The question becomes which readings, which translations or interpretations are tolerable and which are not, and what system is in place to authorize printed interventions into the discourse of scriptural hermeneutics. Stephen Greenblatt has argued that *Utopia* is a self-cancelling work, in that it represents in More's culture the desire to have power over

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<sup>69</sup> William Tyndale, *An Answer*; Robert Barnes, *A Supplicatyon Made by Robert Barnes Doctoure in Diuinitie, vnto the Most Excellent and Redoubted Prince Kinge Henrye the Eyght* (Antwerp, 1531).

constructing one's own self-representation and the dream of a world free of the social pressures provoking such a response.<sup>70</sup> More's *Confutatyon* is likewise important for the development of the idea of religious toleration because, again, More takes the position that the very debate itself should not be happening, that Tyndale's ideas should not be articulated, and that their distribution in print should not be permitted. If one is singly against freedom of the press, then the debate should not even be enacted.

The commentary on polemic, which evaluates its scope and efficacy, also impacts More's awareness of the multiple audiences of his book. The author takes different attitudes towards the direct participants in the debate and his readership. On the one hand, Tyndale, Barnes, and other staunch Protestants are irredeemable, and therefore it is pointless to publish books against them in the hope of converting or persuading. On the other hand, some within More's wider readership may be reclaimed through reading his book. Does one attitude not reflect on the other? If More says polemic is useless, then there must be some element among the general readership who is likewise beyond hope. If the audience could potentially be converted, there is a chance that a participant may be persuaded. Thus the stark divisions drawn by More create positions that are mutually deconstructing. More can dismiss the discursive validity of the Protestant position via his underlying assumption that the right interpretation of scripture is only the one that is sanctioned by the Church. Not only is the *sola scriptura* doctrine fallacious, but also writers who espouse this view present a functional flaw that diminishes their arguments

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<sup>70</sup> See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), ch. 1.

against the authority and tradition of Church interpretation. Toleration has an impact on how the nature and function of the discourse operate.

The opening of More's *Confutacyon* is another important frame that positions the matter at hand in terms of print publication. At the outset of his work, More laments the proliferation of "Protestant books" spreading throughout the land much as a Old Testament plague. More acknowledges that just as a ripe harvest is granted by God, now the English are plagued by "plentouse of euyll bokes" (CW 8.1.3). This is not to say, however, that social tolerance was viewed by More as a feature that added value to the commonwealth. The "euyll bokes" or "ungracyouse bokes full of pestilent poysened heresy" that More laments are directly tied to the "other realms" in Europe where heresy has run its course. These communities, in More's view, have paid a grievous toll, where heresy has "already kyllled by scysmes and warre many thousand bodyes, and by synfull errorrs, & abominable heresy" many mo thousand soules" (12-13). With heretical ideas spread by print and spoken discourse, polemical toleration and social toleration show themselves to be deleterious.

In all cases, the spread of heresy is linked to printing and discourse. Commenting on Tyndale's *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1528), for instance, More notes that "neuer was there made a more folyshe frantyque boke" (CW vol. 7). The alliteration reinforces his claim, but as with the *Responsio*, More goes on to enumerate the contents of Tyndale's work and thus takes the risk of spreading Tyndale's ideas through the very mechanism he hopes will contain them. The tactic of ventriloquizing passages from the work under attack was a vestige of the scholastic tradition that remained current

throughout sixteenth- and seventeenth-century polemical works. Animadversions nevertheless served well into the period as another vehicle for the reproduction and transmission of the ideas they sought to negate. For example, Robert Parsons' *Memorial for the Reconstruction of England* (c. 1582) was circulated only in manuscript until its printing with animadversions after the accession of James II as a propaganda piece demonstrating the danger of a Roman Catholic England.

Even in impugning the validity of these works, More stipulates that although his own intervention into the printed debate takes such a risk it is worth the potential benefit:

Now as for me, y<sup>e</sup> cause is of my wrytynge, not so mych to debate and dispute these things wyth them, whyche (though I truste therin to gyue them no grete place) many men maye do much better yet then I / as to gyue men warnyng what myschyfe is in theyr books, bycause many good simple folke byleuyng that these men neyther saye nor meane so euyll as they be borne in hande / and longyng therefore to rede theyr bokes and se the thynges them selfe, be firste infecte with some heresydes that seme not at the fyrste intolerable, ere euer they come at the greatest / and then beyng before infecte wyth the lesse, they fall at laste to bere the greater, to which in the begynnynge they coude neuer haue abyden. (CW

8.1.27)

The language of More's passage supports the danger of reading illicit works, particularly those that make outward show of polemical moderation. Because some readers are exposed to ideas that "seme not at the fyrste intolerable" they are led onto a slippery slope that makes them receptive to the more fatal ideas. Although this argument is

perhaps based on a logical fallacy, the slippery slope that the reader is led down by More is relevant to his vision of toleration. That which might be considered moderate enough to be tolerated is the most dangerous. If toleration exists on a spectrum from persecution to permission, so do the ideas or actions being tolerated. Some beliefs are in bounds, while others are of bounds. For More, the religious ideas that his culture might place within the range of permissible deviance are themselves the most intolerable.

One might validly identify the charge carried by the idea of toleration as unbearable. In the passage above, the word “intolerable” is associated with its etymological partners connoting suffering and endurance: “borne,” “bear,” and “abyden.” The phrase “borne in hande” is an idiomatic expression meaning “to lead (one) to believe, to delude, abuse with false pretences.”<sup>71</sup> More’s concern for unprepared readers being misled comes simultaneously with a jab at the misleader. With this being More’s view of Tyndale’s works, he sets out to dismantle any mechanism that would allow freedom of the press and associates the free spread of heretical ideas in print with duplicity, falsehood, and abuse. Works ostensibly demonstrating polemical tolerance are the most dangerous because they seem innocuous to readers, and belie insidious motives on the part of their authors. Yet at the same time, More reproduces these works in his own books, with the effect that readers who may not have access to Tyndale’s proscribed publications can still obtain their content and message in More’s own officially sanctioned publication. More himself is thus somewhat tolerant, in allowing ideas to circulate within the text he uses to suppress them. Toleration and freedom of the press

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<sup>71</sup> “Bear.” *The Oxford English Dictionary* Oxford University Press; online edn. [http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/, accessed 21 May 2009].

are not easily demarcated, and the boundaries separating different contexts for religious toleration, the polemical, divine, civil, and social, also are revealed to be complex and multilayered.

In the context of humanist toleration, More uses the ideal of polemical toleration to build his own authorial *ethos* and to invalidate the argumentative strategies of his opponents. Across his texts, we can discern that More believed writers should embody polemical tolerance. His writings on toleration also demonstrate his sense that dialogue as a literary genre has its limits in persuading those whose religious difference is too great. They also show the paradoxes of early modern toleration; including More's claim that the most moderate, most unassumingly tolerable, are the most dangerous and to be least tolerated. In *Utopia* (a work crafted prior to his polemical *oeuvre*) More's construction of toleration is consistent with his polemical works because he uses the idea of polemical tolerance to consider the communication of religious ideas. Those who try to convert others in an irrational and illogical fashion surpass the permissible limits. As the following chapter will demonstrate, More began a long tradition of writers who wrote from unique religious positions, who turned consideration toleration in print into an opportunity for reevaluating the nature and limitations of their own art. More's works thus provide a scale according to which the development of toleration—its literary construction and rhetorical utility—may be measured.

### Chapter 3: Religious Toleration and the Case of John Foxe

As the previous chapters have outlined, the latest theoretical model for understanding religious toleration and religious persecution in the early modern period does not present these ideas as binary opposites, but rather sees them as dialectically constructed throughout various legal, social, and cultural contexts. The literary works of the martyrologist John Foxe, so important to the Elizabethan vision of Roman Catholic religious persecution, merit re-evaluation in such dialectical terms. Foxe's major publication, the iconic *Actes and Monuments of These latter and Perilous Dayes* (first edition, 1563), contributed to the identity of English and international Protestantism and depicted the cosmic drama of apocalyptic religious difference for generations of partisan and non-partisan readers. Along with Richard Hooker's *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (first published in 1593), Foxe's monumental work laid a foundation for mainstream religious identity in Elizabethan England and positioned English Protestantism within wider geographical, historical, and divine contexts. As Richard Helgerson has pointed out, however, deep ideological contradictions underlie Foxe's and Hooker's apocalyptic and apologetic treatments of the Elizabethan settlement in religion, and within the works of Foxe and Hooker one might perceive further, internal cleavages.



Among the dynamic ideological strains within *Actes and Monuments*, most prevalent is the tension between religious toleration and religious persecution. How can a work both require persecution to attain martyrdom and then attack the persecutor? Would not toleration erase the fact of martyrdom that substantiated a religion's truth claim?<sup>72</sup> Many readers, paying attention to the narratives of arrest, interrogation, trial, judgment, and execution, might look past the aspects of toleration that are also foregrounded in *Actes and Monuments*. John Foxe believed that it was "tyrannical to constrain by faggots" and that "the most effective master of teaching was love" (Dickens 438). Although persecution is the theme of Foxe's work, which claims to trace the historical continuity of the "true" church by way of its persecution through the ages, Foxe's indictment of religious persecution throughout its history explicitly and implicitly calls for some degree of religious toleration. "The entire *Book of Martyrs*, with its accounts of Marian persecution," Sharon Achinstein goes so far as to say, "can be seen as pleas for toleration" (Achinstein 2001, 90).

It is tempting to view religious toleration along a continuum or spectrum, with tolerance on one end and persecution at the other. Such a scheme, however, reinforces outdated views of British history which posit a teleological narrative of progress or from a culture of ignorance and persecution to one of enlightenment and toleration. To correct

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<sup>72</sup> See D. R. Woolf, "The Rhetoric of Martyrdom: Generic Contradiction and Narrative Strategy in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*." *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from Cassandra Fedele to Louis XIV*. Ed. Thomas F. Mayer and D.R. Woolf (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995). 243-82.; also see Jeffrey Matthew Wheeler, "Palpable Fictions: Religious Relics, Populist Rhetoric and the English Reformation." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1996.

for the ideological biases of the early twentieth century within which many historians of the past generation worked, the latest model instead considers toleration and persecution in the early modern period as “dialectically and symbiotically linked,” so that each one depends on the other.<sup>73</sup> Counterintuitive to the modern sense of toleration as a desired end in itself, and as a principle supporting a pluralistic society, toleration in the early modern period was always seen as a temporary condition, a precursor to conversion. Other factors militated against a privileged religious tolerance. Politically, the link between Roman Catholicism and the military threat of France and Spain made some degrees of religious difference, such as supporting the illicit activities of Roman Catholic priests in the land, into a treasonable offense. Spiritually, in a time when religious truth was held to be single and indivisible, to allow another to persist in religious heterodoxy contradicted the principle of Christian charity. Persecution, with its aim of correcting the error of its objects, is in Alexandra Walsham’s view, a form of “charitable hatred.” A necessary evil as justified in Augustinian thought, persecution was often constructed as a bitter medicine necessary to correct the wayward heretic or idolater. For early modern thinkers, to tolerate heretical beliefs was to allow heterodox believers to enter into damnation. “In short,” suggests Alexandra Walsham, “toleration is itself a form of intolerance” (2006, 5).

What, then, were Foxe’s views on religious toleration? It is known that Foxe railed against the institutional justification of persecution that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of mid-Tudor English Protestants. His characterization of persecution as an

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<sup>73</sup> See Walsham (2006), ch. 1

antiquated barbarity certainly appears to support the outdated historical model of toleration, as posited by modern readers including A.G. Dickens and W. C Jordan, who viewed toleration as a product of the enlightened deliverance from an age of persecution. For example, Foxe laments the “blind ignorance” that led Henry IV and Parliament to pass the 1401 statute *Ex Officio* which penalized unsanctioned public preaching with increasing degrees of punishment culminating with capital punishment.<sup>74</sup> Foxe associates acts of religious persecution with both cultural barbarity and the personal evil of individuals in the highest positions of power, as in his relation of the “tragicall story and cruel handling” of Anne Askew by the lord chancellor, Sir Thomas Wriothesley, and Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester (1576, p. 1205). Two other aspects of Foxe’s depiction of inter-confessional dynamics (as much as one can without anachronism invoke the term “confessionalism” as a descriptor in the Elizabethan era) support toleration as a positive ideal growing from the age of persecution. First, his apocalyptic view of Protestantism as the “true” Christian Church standing throughout history in opposition to the “false” and idolatrous Roman Catholic religion perhaps misleads readers to understand toleration as the stark opposite of persecution. Second, the Protestant religion Foxe defends and champions requires persecution; the *ethos* of victimhood depends on binaries of truth/falsehood, good/evil, light/darkness, all of which support a valorization of religious toleration as a positive ideal contrasting with a negatively primitive and barbarous persecution.

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<sup>74</sup> All references to Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* are from: John Foxe. Acts and Monuments [...] . The Variorum Edition. [online]. (hriOnline, Sheffield 2004). 10 April 2007  
< <http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/>>, 1570, p. 624 .

A more nuanced view, however, perceives toleration not as a teleological fulfillment or actualization of modern liberalism, but rather as a phenomenon existing in the space between polar opposites. This space opens when one considers toleration as a way of sharing and receiving ideas rather than a way of treating people. One might perceive this symbiosis of tolerance and persecution in the exemplary martyrdoms celebrated by Foxe. Those who died for religion's sake under the Marian Inquisition allowed commentators like Foxe to take a position that indemnified Elizabethan Protestantism and assigned blame or guilt of falsehood and idolatry to Roman Catholicism. In a sense, Foxean toleration--or at least his argument against persecution--would be impossible without the memories of martyrs still fresh in the minds of his readers during the early decades of Elizabeth's reign. Were the Marian government to have tolerated the Protestant evangelicals it persecuted, Foxe would have lost important evidence in his propagandistic case for the truth of Protestant religion. To complicate matters further, the persecuted in the Christian tradition must be submissive to their persecutors. Foxe reproduces the letter of one man who was excommunicated in 1530 after being delivered to the bishop by Thomas More. In this words of this individual, the persecuted must "be stedfast in the Lord's veryity, without fear...submit yourself and rejoyce: for the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment, to be punished" (1570, p. 1186).

While Foxe did not condone what he perceived to be idolatry, he hoped for the conversion of Roman Catholic individuals and in *Actes and Monuments* created a polemically tolerant text, which according to the model of humanist toleration allowed

for the free exchange of ideas in the hope of persuading, correcting, and ultimately converting his readers from error. This chapter therefore examines moments where Foxe engages with and reaches out to his Roman Catholic readers. I argue that Foxe's strategic appeals to tolerant attitudes in his readers, along with his positive and negative representations of persecution, allowed him to use the concept of religious toleration to his polemical advantage. Always concerned with establishing his own credibility as historian, writer, editor, and compiler of documents, Foxe finds in toleration one more way to construct his own ethical position and narrative reliability, and to solicit his readers' goodwill. Looking at Foxe's discursive representations of tolerance across these contexts allows greater insight into the history of ideas and into the relationships among social ideas and literary practice.

It is therefore the goal of this chapter to elucidate how Foxe's bolsters his ideological program of lodging a claim for the validity of Protestant Christianity by building a tolerant *ethos*, and by drawing upon contemporary cultural discourses of polemical, civil, and divine tolerance. The goal is not necessarily to argue for Foxe as a proponent of religious toleration in its modern sense, but rather to investigate how Foxe employed contemporary understandings of the concept to his support his rhetorical goals. In addition to asserting that Foxe favored the practice of toleration, this chapter looks at how Foxe builds a tolerant *ethos* in *Actes and Monuments* in his treatment of the Muslim world, demonstrates a recuperative attitude towards Roman Catholic readers, and constructs of the ideal reader who participates in the godly community of the "true" Church.

The reception of *Actes and Monuments* as a historical text with divisive effects on partisan readers challenges the reputation of John Foxe the man as a religious moderate. Foxe's generous attitudes towards religious difference have been established by generations of commentators, who have documented the moderate and clement attitudes of Foxe the man. Simeon Foxe, the martyrologist's son, asserted that his father was a tolerant person, and evidence confirms this beyond filial claims. Throughout his life, John Foxe was an active proponent of religious moderation and concord. The term "tolerance" might characterize his personal attitudes regarding religious difference, but during his career Foxe also was a proponent of toleration as a governmental policy. Early in his public life, Foxe pleaded against the death penalty for the only two individuals executed for religion under Edward VI. Some scholars have hypothesized that Foxe's report in *Actes and Monuments* of a citizen who petitioned against the execution of the first of these, Joan of Kent, referred to Foxe himself (Mozley 351; Olsen 204). During his exile under the reign of Mary I, Foxe worked for peace and tolerance within the Protestant exile community. Responding to the internal quarrels which had divided the English exiles, Foxe wrote to Peter Martyr that he would like "to bring healing to these wounds," asserting that "So far as I am concerned, I shall everywhere be a promoter of concord" (Olsen, 202). Rather than embittering Foxe, the conditions of exile had the effect of cultivating his moderate attitudes. While resident in Basle, Foxe was surrounded by Erasmian humanists who supported toleration, and who had decried the execution of Servetus for heresy in 1553 (Olsen, 201-02). In 1556 Foxe dedicated his apocalyptic comedy *Christus Triumphans* to a group of English merchants living in

Frankfurt who held diverse religious beliefs including the Roman Catholic faith.

Although Foxe's comedic character of Satan in this play is a stock comic devil, one might also read Foxe's character as an attempt to mitigate the stark polarity of apocalyptic Biblicism that would be provocative to a Roman Catholic audience.<sup>75</sup>

Tolerance towards those differing in religion may have been a pragmatic necessity among the Protestant exiles who had been harried into dangerous exile, but Foxe's tolerant views remained consistent even when fortune favored English Protestantism. From the experience of exile, Foxe knew to address his tolerant message to a range of communities and audiences. He had written from exile to the English nobility to decry the Marian persecution, asserting that "to compel with clubs is the mark of tyranny. Let reason and calm discussion return: and if men do not agree on small points, what is the harm?"<sup>76</sup> Returning to England after Elizabeth's accession, Foxe mildly chastised John Knox for the rancorous tone of his book against the Marian regime, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558). Foxe also interceded for the sake of moderation during the Vestarian controversy of the 1560s. Foxe's image as a unifying leader and his hesitation to support either side in this intra-faith debate over the ceremony and doctrine of the Church of England, did not prevent other writers from using his own works to their own polemical advantage. For instance, sparring bishops Thomas Cartwright and John Whitgift both praised Foxe's work in order

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<sup>75</sup> Wooden, 80; also see John Hazel Smith, Ed. and Trans., *Two Latin Comedies by John Foxe the Martyrologist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

<sup>76</sup> Translated in Mozley 54-55.

to affiliate themselves with the good reputation of the martyrologist.<sup>77</sup> It is perhaps in response to such co-opting that the 1583 edition of *Actes and Monuments* presents “Four considerations geven out to the Christian Protestants” (a mirror of the four questions proposed to Catholics), pleaded for unity and moderation among the English Protestants who had been divided by internal squabbles such as the Admonition controversy.

Foxe also addressed pleas for toleration to audiences which included those in the highest level of English government. Foxe appealed to the crown for the life of a group of Dutch Anabaptists in 1575. “I befriend the lives of men since I myself am a man,” Foxe writes in his plea to Queen Elizabeth, “and I speak for them, not that they may continue in error, but that they may come to their senses. Not for men only. Would that I might be able to help the very beasts!”<sup>78</sup> This is not to be confused with a universal toleration of all religious difference; even in his compassion for the Anabaptists, Foxe never condoned their radical views. Other evidence of Foxe’s moderation includes a Latin epistle, “An expostulatory letter to the puritans, upon occasion of their contentions in the church; and exhortatory to peace, and earnest application of themselves to preach the gospel. Written, as it seems, about the year 1587, by John Fox, or Laurence Humphrey, D.D.”<sup>79</sup> In this letter, Foxe laments that those who are responsible for the

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<sup>77</sup> See Damian Nussbaum, 'Whitgift's Book of Martyrs: Archbishop Whitgift, Timothy Bright, and the Elizabethan Struggle over John Foxe's legacy' in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective*. ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Blackwell, 1999).

<sup>78</sup> Olsen, 198. Cf. the animal imagery Foxe uses to scorn his Roman Catholic critics, discussed below.

<sup>79</sup> Reproduced in Strype, Johh. *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, in the Church of England* (London, 1738), 3.2.517-533.



word of God have fallen into bitter acrimony: “*linguas suas veluti arcus, ad mendacia, ad dolos... ad querelas tuendas, tendere*” (“As you see, they stretch their tongues as a bow, to offer lies, fights, and quarrels”). Similar themes appear in a Latin letter attacking the influence of the Puritan faction responsible for his son Samuel’s expulsion from Oxford.

As for Roman Catholics, Norskov Olsen notes the irony that Foxe, “who stirred up anti-Catholic feelings through the *Acts and Monuments* and who abhorred with his whole soul Roman Catholic doctrines, manifested a conciliatory attitude toward the Catholics” (212, n. 77). As mentioned above, although he spoke in support of radical Protestants who faced the death penalty, Foxe’s moderate views extended to postulation that the Roman faith and protestant had a commonality, “that stubborn conceit, whereby each of them, presuming itself to be the onely true Church, supposeth the other excluded.”<sup>80</sup> Glynn Parry notes how Foxe dedicated a personal copy of his tract on justification to a noted Roman Catholic lawyer, Edmund Plowden. Foxe’s gesture to Plowden seems all the more magnanimous when one considers that the lawyer had successfully defended Edmund Bonner, whose character Foxe had painted as most evil in his *Actes and Monuments*. Although Plowden was a noted recusant and also had refused to subscribe to the Act of Uniformity he enjoyed a successful law career and suffered few

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<sup>80</sup> See Glynn Parry “John Foxe, ‘Father of Lyes’, and the Papists.” in *John Foxe and the English Reformation*. Ed. David Loades. (Aldershot: Scholar, 1997), 299.

penalties for his faith.<sup>81</sup> Not so for the Jesuit priest Edmund Campion, on whose behalf Foxe wrote during the period of Campion's trial and execution in 1581. However, as with his views on the Anabaptists, Foxe's stance against the death penalty for Catholic priests does not indicate his desire for Roman Catholicism to be tolerated freely in England. Simeon Foxe wrote that his father begged the authorities "not to suffer Edmund Campion and his fellow conspirators to be put to death, nor to let that custom continue longer in the Kingdome, that death rather than some other punishment should be inflicted on the Papist offenders" (*Life of John Foxe*, B4v; Olsen, 212).

It has been shown that, in life, Foxe demonstrated tolerant attitudes towards those differing from him in matters of religion, but how does the picture become more complicated when we see his rhetorical use of toleration and the tension between persecution and toleration in his printed works? Foxe wrote from within a tradition that justified persecution of religious difference on the writings of Augustine. For example, in Thomas More's *Dialogue Concernyng Heresies*, the Chancellor employs Augustine's commentary on the heretical Donatist sect in fourth-century Egypt:

We rede that in the tyme of saynt Austyn the grete douctour of the chyrche / the heretykes of Affryke called the Donatystes fell to force and violence robberyng / betyng / roumentyng / and kyllyng / suche as they toke of the true crysten flocke / as the Lutheranes haue done in Almayne. For auoydyng wherof that holy man saynt Austyn / whiche longe had with grete pacyens borne and suffered

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<sup>81</sup> Christopher W. Brooks, 'Plowden, Edmund (c.1518–1585)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. 21 May 2009  
<<http://4.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/22389>>.

they malice / onlely wrytynge and prechyng in the reprofe of theyr errorrs ...  
dydde yet at the laste for the peace of good people both suffer and exhorte the  
counte Bonyface and other / to repressse them with force and fere them with bodily  
punishment.” (CW 6.1.409)

More conveniently omits the end of the story, that the persecution of the Donatists was unsuccessful and was eventually recalled by Constantine.<sup>82</sup> The argument could be made that toleration of the Donatists also helped their demise with the passing of time, but More is instead concerned to cite Augustine in order to justify contemporary church policy. In his response to More’s claim that that “The Clergie doth nothyng vnto the heretikes but as the holy Doctours dyd,” William Tyndale reveals a different reality behind the words, using second-person address to impugn both More and the Church he defends: “Yes ye put them in your prisons...and handle them after your fashion as temporall tyrauntes, and dispute with them secretly and will not come at light.”<sup>83</sup>

Persecution and toleration, however, are not easily separable in Foxe, and the two interrelate in early modern conceptions of the Christian Church. Glyn Parry notes that “While popish persecution reflected the violence and ‘wisdom’ of this world, toleration

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<sup>82</sup> “Donatism.” In F. L. Cross, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2005).

<sup>83</sup> William Tyndale, “An Answer.” in *The vvhole workes of W. Tyndall, Iohn Frith, and Doct. Barnes, three worthy martyrs, and principall teachers of this Churche of England collected and compiled in one tome together, beyng before scattered, [and] now in print here exhibited to the Church. To the prayse of God, and profite of all good Christian readers* (London, 1573).

distinguished the kingdom of Christ” (299). Although Foxe argues that “The nature of the Church is not to persecute with blood,” the martyrologist’s apocalyptic scheme rests on the premise that persecution by falsehood signifies the “true” church (1570, p. 2413). Considering that the Christian dispensation required Christ’s suffering at the hands of a persecuting state, it becomes apparent that persecution is a necessary requirement for a faith whose legitimacy in part derives from an *ethos* of victimhood.<sup>84</sup> In the apocalyptic scheme of the “two churches,” the true can be distinguished from the false because it is persecuted rather than tolerated by worldly powers:

Which persecuted Church though it hath bene of long season trodden vnder foote by enemies, neglected in the world, nor regarded in histories, & almost scarce visible or knowne to worldly eyes, yet hath it bene the true Church onely of God, wherein he hath mightely wrought hetherto in preseruing the same in all extreme distresses, continually stirring vp from time to time faithfull Ministers, by whome alwayes hath bene kept some sparkes of his true doctrine and Religion. (1570, p. 3.)

For Foxe, pleas for toleration are built upon a history of persecution. The paradox of tolerance thus emerges: how can truth coexist with falsehood—if coexistence is even the goal— and how can one argue that the true faith should be tolerated when its very status is defined by persecution? Such cruxes appear throughout Foxe’s work, and arguments regarding toleration and persecution create logical tensions that also appear when one considers the life of the martyrologist described above in relation to his works. Foxe was

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<sup>84</sup> See Herbert B. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

reputed to be accepting of religious difference, whereas his book was received in ways which polarized religious identity and often foreclosed the possibility or even desirability of coexistence of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. So the vagaries of adaptation and reception across generations, along with Foxe's polemical subtlety, have shaped critical response over the *longue durée*, at times defining the very terms by which readers come to interrogate the work itself. Foxe's self-constructed position as compiler and chronicler rather than mere author has further reinforced his work's acceptance. As one early twentieth-century commentator astutely observed, however, *Actes and Monuments* may be "the longest pamphlet ever composed by the hand of man."<sup>85</sup> This phrase warrants commentary. While seemingly subordinating Foxe's major work to the ephemeral status of "pamphlet," the descriptive phrase "composed by the hand of man" reinforces the role of Foxe as literary producer. By attending to Foxe's rhetorical purpose and art, we may read against Foxe's self-representation as compiler and think of him more as a composer. Such a reading does not diminish the agency of Foxe or the cultural status of *Actes and Monuments*, but instead repositions his authorial achievement within its cultural moment.

Awareness of the Foxe's polemical goals corrects for the effects of Foxe's subtle ideological sway over modern commentators. For example, Ryan Netzley has shown how the terms of critical discussion are defined by Foxe even for the most radically-oriented critics. As for its persuasive argumentation, Jesse Lander repositions Foxe's book, particularly the varying forms of its index and other paratextual elements, firmly

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<sup>85</sup> See Lander, ch. 1.

within the polemical contexts of its day. This chapter contributes to the critical project of delineating Foxe's role within the contours of early modern religious discourse by looking at how Foxe constructed his own authorial *ethos* via the emergent and malleable concept of religious toleration.

### **Foxe and Toleration**

The recently extinguished fires of Smithfield which immolated Protestant "heretics," and the scaffold at Tyburn upon which Roman Catholic "traitors" were hanged made persecution a vivid reality in Elizabethan England. Toleration, by contrast, seems elusive to the historical gaze. By examining how Foxe made use of the nascent discourse of religious toleration to suit his polemical and rhetorical goals, this chapter elucidates both the religious culture of the writer's day and the art which allowed his work to become such a notable success. Through the lens of toleration, one might perceive the persuasive skill with which Foxe bolstered English Protestantism's claim to religious truth.

Olsen notes that "Foxe was in advance of his time in advocating religious toleration; yet he was still a son of his own time in that full religious toleration as we see it today, not mentioning complete liberty for the exercise of all religions, did not enter his mind. This was probably too much to expect" (219). Geoffrey Elton perceives the difference between modern ideals of tolerance and the early modern model: "while there is no need to prove again that Foxe believed in toleration rather than persecution, it is still

necessary to establish what exactly toleration meant to him and where its limits lay” (173). Elton notes that Foxe’s culture allowed him to feel some degree of tolerance--or at least to restrain from labeling the Catholics as heretical (a term reserved internally for fellow Protestants whose nonconformity put them beyond the bounds of tolerance) and thus condemning them to the stake. Likewise, Elton argues, Foxe would have subscribed to the English policy of labeling those deserving Catholics as traitors, and subjecting the same to the extent of temporal law--even in the case of Campion, however, we find Foxe appealing for mercy. Foxe, however, “drew the line at Jews,” Elton informs his readers (174). In his *Sermon preached at the Baptism of a Certain Jew* (London, 1578), Foxe decried the murder of Christ, and impugned the lineage descended from those who crucified Jesus. In *Actes and Monuments*, Foxe laments, “yea, wythout grudging Christ suffred the cruel Iewes to crowne him with most sharpe thornes, & to strike him with a reede. And after, Christ suffred wicked Iewes to draw hym out vpon the crosse, and for to naile him thereupō hand and foote” (1570, p. 631). For Catholics, Jews, and finally, heretical Protestants such as Anabaptists, Foxe demanded conversion rather than coexistence, but would never condone persecution of these groups. In this sense, Elton correctly identifies a difference between modern toleration geared for acceptance and coexistence, and early modern toleration, which at most represented a temporary state prior to conversion.

Although Foxe espoused tolerant attitudes towards individual Catholics, he clearly drew a line as to what degree they should be allowed to practice their faith in Protestant England. Here, apparently, we perceive one of the set of limits which defined

religious toleration. While toleration might be understood according to a spectrum or range of permissible difference, with some ideas and practices are outside the limits, it must be emphasized that identities and even doctrines were not always so clearly defined in the period. The purported idolatry and even treason of “Papist offenders” marks one of religious toleration’s boundaries in Elizabethan England, yet Roman Catholics enjoyed a great degree of *de facto* toleration, especially in northern England. Another instance of how toleration understood as a function of limits or a range of acceptable diversity logically “breaks down” is the example of the Muslim world. Clearly antithetical to English Christendom, the Turk was a symbol of great anxiety for Christian nations of Europe, both spiritually and militarily. Although many of Foxe’s published writings on the non-Christian peoples exhibit some of the harsh language common in discourse of his day, we still see how his interest in conversion subverts a strict “either/or” logic. Foxe’s *Sermon preached at the Baptism of a Certain Jew*, thus celebrates the possibility of religious conversion of those outside Christendom’s bounds. The anti-Semitism we find in Foxe throughout texts like *A Sermon of Christ Crucified* (London, 1570) is always tempered by the hope of conversion.

This is not to say that Foxe’s printed works were not without their vitriol. Although Foxe applied his most severe language to papal abuses, we find the cultural biases of his age expressed through his writings on the Muslim and the Jew. Much of Foxe’s language regarding these peoples is negative in ways quite normal for early modern England, such as the phrases “barabaraous Turk” or “The bloudie cruelty of the turk against the Christian captiues” (1583, pp. 743, 749). Christian identity in many early



modern English works is constructed by operations of difference; English Protestantism often emerges from literary works vis-a-vis the Roman Catholic, Jew, or Muslim.<sup>86</sup> Sometimes, however, the invocation of the pagan world can be more complex, and distinctions are not always absolute. The “Other” always is contained within the “Self” in early modern constructions of religious identity. The presence of the other within is most apparent in the example of the “church papist” who outwardly conforms to Church of England ritual but privately adheres to Roman Catholic doctrine.<sup>87</sup>

Even the most antithetical example of religious difference, the Turk or Muslim, turns out to be a complex image as it is represented in writings on religious toleration and persecution. The Islamic world is often figured as a land that tolerates religious difference within its bounds, despite stories of forcible conversion of Christian soldiers and explorers. When they did deign to argue for toleration from the Elizabethan government, English Catholic polemicists frequently invoked the example of the “tolerant Turk” as an extreme example to embarrass the non-accepting English.<sup>88</sup> The image of the “tolerant” Muslim world allowed Catholic writers to argue that the English

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<sup>86</sup> See Raymond Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>87</sup> See Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism Conformity, and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993); Frances Dolan *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>88</sup> See chapter 4 of this study.

government in not tolerating Catholicism is more barbarous than the Turk. The trope turns up in Protestant writings as well. In Foxe, the Turk offers a useful analogy for obedience employed by both persecuting interrogators and their captives. The Marian examiners of John Philpot, archdeacon of Winchester, for instance, asked whether Philpot supported the idea of temporal obedience to the point that “in case a christian man were vnderneath a Turk, he muste eyther obey such lawes as he settes furth, or suffer hys power to punysh” (1563, p. 848). Elsewhere, In Foxe’s interpretation of the prophecy of Methodius on the coming of Antichrist, Foxe distinguishes between the evil of papistry and the threat of the Turk:

And heere is moreouer to be noted, that Methodius sayth, not that Antichrist shall be borne among the Saracens or Turkes, but among the people of God, and of the tribe of Israel. Whereby is to be collected, that Antichriste shal not come of the Saracens, nor Turkes, but shall spring vp among the Christians, and (sayeth Methodius) shall seeme to come out of the Temple, to deceiue many. &c.

Whereby the Pope may seeme rather then the Saracene or the Turk, to be described, for so much as the Pope, being elected norished, and rainging in the middest of Gods people, at Rome, sitteth in the temple, and very place of Christ: and (no doubt) deceiue many &c. (1583, p. 769)

The Islamic example was flexible symbol for either party; employed by Catholic polemicists such as William Allen, Foxe also availed himself of this trope. In his appeal to Roman Catholics disaffected by Elizabethan penalties for recusancy and other manifestations of non-conformance to the Protestant mainstream, for instance, Foxe uses

an an absurd comparison to show how the English authorities in actuality have been quite lenient:

If they [the Elizabethan government] were Jews, Turks, or infidels, or, in their doctrine, were any idolatrous impiety or detestable iniquity in their lives; if they went about any deadly destruction or privy conspiracies to oppress your lives, or by fraudulent dealing to circumvent you; then had you some cause to complain, and also to revenge. (1570, p. 13)

Here Foxe makes the absurd comparison that if the English government were as harshly persecuting as the Turk, then Catholics might have reason to resist or rebel. The metaphor can extend to the laity of the Church of England as well: “Turks are not more enemies to Christians, than Christians to Christians, papists to protestants, yea Protestants with Protestants do not agree, but fall out for trifles.”<sup>89</sup> The example of the Islamic world as invoked in tolerationist literature shows how even the most fixed category of religious identity thus can be seen as sometimes “fluid” and adaptable to the rhetorical context.

Such flexibility is an important component of toleration as a precondition for conversion. Foxe in many of his writings emphasizes the possibility of conversion, and in the humanist tradition, even a temporary toleration of difference is a necessary step towards conversion through rational persuasion. This view of Foxe indeed revises traditional historical models of religious identity and difference. As Sharon Achinstein has argued, when we look at how Foxe envisions conversion as a possibility, an historical narrative alternative to models of cultural “othering” emerges which shows early modern

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<sup>89</sup> See John Foxe, *A Sermon of Christ Crucified* (London, 1576), 92.

thinkers as concerned with positive social change.<sup>90</sup> The famous story of Sir Francis Drake reading from *Actes and Monuments* to captured Spanish sailors during his expedition to the Caribbean shows how one reader possibly saw the potential of Foxe to convert, although one may imagine that Drake's prisoners regarded such sermonizing as a form of torture.<sup>91</sup>

Foxe's treatment of the Muslim world lays the groundwork for his polemical engagement with Roman Catholic critics of *Actes and Monuments*. The few printed responses by Roman Catholic authors which virulently criticized *Actes and Monuments*, have received far less attention by modern critics than those Foxean descendants who abridged, republished, or otherwise authorized Foxe's cultural validity.<sup>92</sup> In a sense, our modern notion of Foxe as the premier writer to articulate Elizabethan religious identity, is in itself the result of a construction which has been somewhat disguised over the course of centuries. In his own day, Foxe received the sanction of the government despite instances in the *Book of Martyrs* that demonstrated a model of subversive resistance to the state. Even in the midst of enshrining Foxe's work in a modern-day print edition, Foxe's Victorian editors recognized Foxe as a singular voice within the cacophony of Elizabethan religious arguments. That Reverend George Townsend dedicated seventy-five pages of his "Life and Defence of John Foxe" to answering Foxe's "objectors"

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<sup>90</sup> See Sharon Achinstein, "John Foxe and the Jews." *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.1. (2001): 86-120.

<sup>91</sup> See Glyn Parry, 'Elect Church or Elect Nation: the reception of the Acts and Monuments', in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective*. Ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

<sup>92</sup> David Scott Kastan, "Little Foxes." *John Foxe and His World*. Ed. Christopher Highley and John N. King. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 117-29.

shows this editor's attention to the status of the martyrologist's work as a polemical text—and therefore provisional and vulnerable to attack. Answers to objectors allowed further channeling of readerly reception of Foxe in subsequent generations, but by championing Foxe's position Townsend also elevated the status of Foxe's discourse in a way which would eventually render some of Foxe's polemical aspects invisible. Some modern critics at times overlooked Foxe's polemicism, preferring to look at Foxe in terms of religious historiography or national myth-building. Although the reading of William Haller has been outdated as exceedingly insular, his view that Foxe gave voice to an English church as "a mystical communion of chosen spirits, a peculiar people set apart from the rest of mankind," threatens to blur the line between national propaganda and religious truth (245). Thus Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* is far from the univocal pronouncement on English religious identity that by the early twentieth century it had come to represent. The "monolithic" status of *Actes and Monuments* seems further paradoxical when one considers that the multiple editions of the work underwent significant revision during Foxe's lifetime, and this makes the work a dynamic, shifting, and even at times, self-contradictory text.

### **A Tolerant *Ethos***

No grand work printed in Elizabethan England appeared without its author downplaying personal agency in writing, or at least acknowledging the priority of a patron. Readers encounter the ubiquitous modesty trope throughout the prefatory matter of Foxe's *Actes*

*and Monuments*; Foxe cites his “infirm habilitie” in compiling a church history, “followyng the example of Eusebius this worthy Byshop, although I can not atcheue yt so perfectly as he hathe done” (1563, p. 8). The author stages self-effacement in describing his completion of the *Actes and Monuments*, for which he sacrificed “not only my pains, but also my health therin” (1570, p. 9). In first edition of 1563, Foxe appeals to the queen to defend his work, which he anticipates will be attacked by hostile readers:

I offer and present here vnto your Maiestie, humbly desyring, and nothing yet misdoubting, but that your highnes and singuler clemēcie, likewyse followyng the steppes of that noble Constantine, with no lesse propensitie of fauoure and furtheraunce, wil accept and also assiste these my laborious trauailes to the behoufe of the church, against the importunitie of the malignaunt: if perauenture any suche spurners against the truthe shall appeare, as I feare they wil, bending them selues to maligne and detracte the doinges hereof, as they do all other things, being contrary to their corrupt religion and defense me against the same. (1563, p. 8)

Foxe constructs his position as compiler in terms of victimology, framing attacks on his work as a continuation of the persecution against the martyrs of Christ’s church. In the introduction to his next edition of 1570 edition, Foxe reproduces the strategy of minimizing his own agency in compiling his work, the truth of which is only affirmed by attacks from Roman Catholic polemical writers: When I first presented these Acts and Monumentes vnto your maiesty (most deare soueraigne, Queene Elizabeth, our peaceable Salome) which your maiesties rare clemency receaued in such gentle part: I well hoped,

that these my trauailes in this kinde of writyng had bene well at an ende: wherby I might haue returned my studies agayne to other purposes, after myne owne desire, more fit then to write histories, especially in the English tounge. But certaine euill disposed persons, of intemperant tounes, aduersaries to good procedynges would not suffer me so to rest, fumyng and freatyng, and raising vp suche miserable exclamations at the first appearyng of the booke, as was wonderfull to heare. (1570. p. 7).

Here Foxe asserts the tolerationist argument of his work (or at the least, his complaint against persecution) in terms of what the second chapter of this study defines as “polemical toleration.” In the model of humanist toleration espoused by Erasmus, polemical toleration grows out of the need for civil, rational discussion of heated issues. Foxe’s argument for toleration thus emerges vis-à-vis religious polemicism, and the tension between toleration and persecution is heightened when one considers Foxe’s position within the discourse of religious polemic. My reading of Foxe assumes the writer’s goals to be as polemical as they were pastoral or theological. That Foxe was writing in order to persuade underpins the latest trends in Foxe criticism. The apocalyptic interpretation of history as the struggle between light and dark forces, as one critic suggests, depends on the polarities that are “perhaps the quintessence of polemic” (Lander, 56). Earlier readers likewise picked up on Foxe’s polemicism.

Polemical toleration had its rhetorical uses. Anthony Milton points out how “Most polemicists—even Puritan ones—recognized that there was a tactical advantage to be gained by appearing more moderate and irenical than one’s Roman Catholic

opponent”<sup>93</sup> While Foxe’s writings certainly exhibited strong language, he refrained from the backbiting and *ad hominem* attacks on opponents that largely characterized religious controversy in his day. As Chapter 2 discussed, Foxe extols the polemical tolerance of the martyr John Frith’s “friendly and prudent moderation in uttering the truth”:

I cannot but chuse but must needes earnestly and hartily embrace the prudent and godly moderation which was in that man, who maynteyning this quarrell of the Sacrament of the Lords supper, no lesse godly, then learnedly (and pithily) yet he did it so moderately, without any contention, that he would never seeme to strive agaynst the papistes except he had bene driven to it even of necessitie, In al other matters, where necessitie did not move him to contend, he was ready to graunt all thinges for quietnes sake, as hys most modest reasons and aunsweres did declare.

(1583, p. 1034)

By looking at how Foxe’s contemporaries responded in ways different from how we would read the martyrologist today, we might shed light on exactly what the concept of religious toleration meant in the context of Foxe’s day. The first of Foxe’s contemporary critics was the English Catholic controversialist Nicholas Harpsfield. *Dialogi Sex* (1566) was a Latin-language text written from imprisonment in the Tower of London but

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<sup>93</sup> Anthony Milton, “A Qualified Intolerance: The Limits and Ambiguities of Early Stuart Anti-Catholicism.” In *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*. Ed. Arthur F. Marotti. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. p. 88.



published under the *nom de plume* Alan Cope by Harpsfield's co-religionists in Antwerp.

<sup>94</sup> Harpsfield's book attacks the *Magdeburg Centuries* (first published in 1559), but the author reserves the last of his six dialogues to impugn John Foxe, whom Harpsfield perceived to be the greatest mouthpiece of the Tudor reformation. One of Harpsfield's strategies is to question the veracity of Foxe's narratives. Harpsfield's critique of Foxe focuses on the question of the pseudo-martyr. Harpsfield's strategy is to attack not the fact of a particular martyrdom but the worthiness of the martyr, and therefore to recast the question of persecution in a way that sidesteps the need for toleration.

In *Actes and Monuments*, Foxe translates this principal of polemical toleration into his attitude towards those who attacked his history:

Let us give no cause of offence to any, and if any be given to us, let us overcome it with patience, forgiving, and not revenging, the same. And let us not only keep our hands from shedding of blood, but our tongues also from hurting the fame of others. (1.xxvii)

The rhetorical power of Foxe's call for polemical toleration is reinforced by its grammatical constructions. The hortatory language of the opening phrase "let us" includes both author and reader within the first person plural--though by including his polemical enemies with this pronoun, Foxe's tone may blend into sarcasm. The passive voice construction of offense, however, "if any be given" takes away agency from the offender. The passive voice here avoids assigning blame to the offender while

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<sup>94</sup> Harpsfield, Nicholas. *Dialogi Sex contra Svmmi Pontificatvs, Monasticae Vitae, Sanctorum, Sacrarvm Imaginvm Oppvgnatores, et Psevdomartyres* (Antwerp, 1566).

associating the victim with one of the defining Christian virtues: *patientia*. Foxe next grammatically balances two opposing participles “forgiving” and “revenging.” The passage concludes with another exhortation not to persecute, through violent hand or violent tongue. The synecdochal reduction of the persecutor to single bodily parts, hands and tongues, further distances the act of persecution from its agent. Also one might consider that Foxe’s choice of the word “fame” means “reputation” but also contains the Latin meaning “rumor,” belittling the status of polemical discourse itself. The implication is quite subtle, and Foxe masterfully uses his otherwise moderate language to soften any potentially sharp edge or sarcasm.

As much as it elevates his own voice above the maelstrom of printed religious controversy, Foxe’s statement of principle shows a sincere concern with polemical tolerance. In this exhortation, on offer is a chance to repair a discussion fractured by ideological difference. Foxe also connects with his benevolent readers in this passage, who thoroughly familiar with--though probably thoroughly thrilled by-- the linguistic virulence of religious polemic, must certainly agree with such an eloquent articulation of polemical moderation. What else might Foxe gain with such language? Foxe takes a moral high ground, but this is a ground he is willing to share with his opponents. Foxe’s language surely confirms the honesty of his appeal. More important, however, is Foxe’s authorial *ethos*, which he is at pains to establish throughout the work. Polemical toleration affords the author another vehicle for rhetorical persuasion

The Catholics are not happy with the toleration they have received, how well they have been tolerated, or closer to the etymology of the Latin word *tolerare* (“to suffer or endure”), how they have been *suffered*:

Let us turn now to the peaceable government in this realm of England, under this our so mild and gracious queen now presently reigning. Under whom you see how gently you are *suffered*, what mercy is shown to you, how quietly you live. (1.xix)

Foxe asks of “you catholic professors of the pope’s sect who so deadly malign and persecute the Protestants professing the gospel of Christ”:

What just or reasonable cause have you to allege for this you extreme hatred ye bear unto them, that neither you yourselves can abide to live with them, nor yet will *suffer* the others to live amongst you?

Foxe in this passage attacks several of the main aspects of Elizabethan Roman Catholic identity, established in the Catholic literature of suffering; he notes how many Catholics enjoy high office, that those in prison are treated well, and that those Roman Catholics who choose exile are abroad due to their own free curiosity to travel. Despite Sharon Achinstein’s suggestion that “entire *Book of Martyrs* can be seen as pleas for toleration,” the question remains toleration for whom—and Foxe’s earliest critics clearly felt that they were excluded, left outside the scope of Foxe’s tolerationist program. Their own persecutorial nature leads to such inhospitable conditions:

And yet, all this notwithstanding, having no cause to complain, so many causes to give God thanks, ye are not yet content, ye fret and fume, ye grudge and mutter, and are not pleased with change. And to prevent your desired day, ye have

conspired, and risen up in open rebellion again your prince, whom the Lord hath set up to be your governor. (1. xxix)

In his reading of this passage, George Townsend notes that:

Though the doctrine of toleration was not understood, and the will of the prince was still too much considered to be the criterion of truth acceptable to God, yet neither papist nor puritan was pursued with the severity which had marked the former reign; and the very cessation of the relentlessness of the still existing laws, made the martyrologist justly call this period of the reign of Elizabeth the halcyon days of England. (1.107)

The energy and viciousness of Foxe's Catholic respondents gives the lie to this representation, however, and their tone as well as their message greatly worries Foxe. The polemical tolerance urged by the martyrologist was apparently not practiced by Roman Catholic critics of his work, and Foxe took this opportunity to inveigh against Catholic abuses. In the 1570 edition of *Actes and Monuments*, Foxe figures attacks on his book by his Roman Catholic polemical opponents as an extension of the persecution of living bodies, enmeshing the corporeal and discursive realms. Catholic polemicists of Elizabeth's reign continue the persecution of the Marian inquisition, Foxe argues, in that they "think now to dash out all good books, and amongst others also, these Monuments of Martyrs: which godly martyrs as they could not abide being alive, so neither can they now suffer their memories to live after their death" (1.vii). For Foxe, The Roman Catholic detractors of reformed religion recapitulate physical persecution through polemical violence--an evil persecutor is willing to "dash out" both lines and lives.

Foxe's prefatory epistles both foreground and downplay the polemical edge of his work, but within the main text of *Actes and Monuments* Foxe frequently slips into harsher language. In his 1570 defense of the history of Lord Cobham against attacks by Nicholas Harpsfield on this story's inclusion, Foxe reproduces some of the scurrilous tone of his Catholic opponent:

Like a spider-catcher, sucking out of everyone what is the worst, to make up your laystall, you heap up a dung-hill of dirty dialogues, containing nothing in them but malicious contumelies, and stinking blasphemies, able almost to corrupt and infect the air. (3.372)

Through the ubiquitous bestial trope of polemical literature, Foxe laments that Harpsfield's pen "beginneth to bark, before it hath learned well to write," and urges his detractor to exemplify the "Mildness and humanity...the grace of the Latin phrase" (3.372).<sup>95</sup>

Foxe invokes the standard of polemical toleration to build his own argument, and to diminish attacks on his works by others. Foxe explicitly labels the virulent language and crafty handling of his opponents as "intolerable":

Where true faultes be there to bay and barke is not amisse. But to carpe where no cause is, to spye in others strawes, and to leape ouer their owne blockes: to swallow camels, and to strayne gnattes: to oppresse truth with lyes, and to set vp lyes for truth, to: blaspheme the deare Martyres of Christ, and to canonize for

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<sup>95</sup> See Wooden, p. 70.

Saintes, whom Scripture would scarce allow for good subiectes, that is  
*intollerable*. (1570, p. 1, emphasis added)

Foxe characterizes such attacks as bestial, and notes that this tone of argumentation comes when one cannot logically defend a position. Foxe impugns the logical maneuvers of his Catholic detractors by comparing them to the sophists:

with tragicall voyces they exclaime and wonder vpon it, sparing no cost of hyperbolicall phrases, to make it appeare as ful of lyes as lines. &c. much after the like sort of impudēcie as sophisters vse somtymes in their sophismes to do (and some times is vsed also in Rhethoricke) that when an Argument commeth against thē which they can not well resolue in dede, they haue a rule to shift of the matter with stout words and tragicall admiration, wherby to dash the opponent out of countenance, bearing the hearers in hand, the same to be the weakest and slendrest argument that euer was heard, not worthy to be aunswered, but vtterly to be hissed out of the scholes. (1570, p. 8)

Foxe's call for polemical toleration here, however, degrades the status of polemical discourse itself: the only appropriate response to the bestial language of the polemicists is a serpentine hiss.

Foxe's condemnation of his opponents' abusive treatment leads to another aspect of polemical toleration which the author uses to build his credibility, hermeneutic responsibility. As will be discussed later, the twentieth-century German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer identifies hermeneutic responsibility as a code of fair play when interpreting and reproducing historical texts. On a practical level, the interpreter of a text

must not deceive in representing the words of another, and theoretically, one must consider the historical contingency of interpretation as one reconstructs a historical text. The current study perceives hermeneutic responsibility as an integral aspect of polemical toleration—the tolerant writer resorts to reason rather than vitriol in argument, and handles the views of an opponent with fairness and consideration of their context.

Hermeneutic responsibility had special importance for Foxe and for Catholic writers on the other side of the confessional divide in early modern England, as the battle for religious truth was in fact a battle over competing versions of history. Foxe had criticized the handling of English ecclesiastical history by Catholic authorities like Bede (especially Bede as edited by Stapleton), but Foxe's earliest attackers found his own readings of history to be open to attack. Foxe's critics found opportunities to undermine the martyrologist's historical acumen which theoretically intersect with the ideas of toleration and persecution. It has been noted how Nicholas Harpsfield attacked both the veracity of Foxe's martyrdoms but also the ideology which counted their deaths as persecution of religious truth. Even the criticism of Robert Parsons, in his *Treatise of the Three Conversions of England*, which most directly engaged with the theoretical aspects of martyrdom, appeared in the context of a competing history of Christian England.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Studies of Foxe's historiographical practice are numerous and well known. Some include Betteridge, Thomas. "Anne Askew, John Bale and Protestant History." *Journal of Medieval and Modern Studies* 27 (1997): 265-84; "From Prophetic to Apocalyptic: John Foxe and the Writing of History." *John Foxe and the English Reformation*. Ed. David Loades. Aldershot: Scolar, 1997. 210-32; Byrd, Rachel Helen. "Narrative, History and Theology in John Foxe's 'Actes and Monuments': A Problem in Definition." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland, 1996; Collinson, Patrick. "John Foxe as Historian." Section 1.4 in John

In Foxe's model, Hermeneutic responsibility extends beyond interpretation to selection of historical materials. Foxe frames his entire project in contrast to medieval chronicles, which commemorate war and rapine:

If men think it such a gay thing in a commonwealth to commit to history  
such old antiquities of things profane, and bestow all their ornaments of  
wit and eloquence in garnishing the same, how much more then is it meet  
for Christians to conserve in remembrance the lives, acts, and doings, not  
of *bloody warriors*, but of *mild and constant martyrs* of Christ.

Foxe ostensibly privileges narratives that emphasize Christian virtues of mildness and constancy, ideals related to moderation and tolerance. Foxe nevertheless uses these to polemical advantage, envisioning *Actes and Monuments* as a palliative for "partial" stories of previous historians:

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Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* [...]. *The Variorum Edition*. [online] (hriOnline, Sheffield 2004). 18 January 2007 < <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/foxe/>; "Truth and Legend: the Veracity of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*." *Clio's Mirror: Historiography in Britain and the Netherlands*. Ed. A.C. Duke and C.A. Tamse. (Zutphen: De Walberg, 1985), 31-54; "Truth, Lies, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century Protestant Historiography." *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500-1800*. Ed. Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37-68; Also see Roger A. Mason, "'Usable pasts': History and Identity in Reformation Scotland." *Scottish Historical Review* 76 (1997): 54-68; Anthony Martin, "The End of History: Thomas Norton's 'v periodos' and the Pattern of English Protestant Historiography." in *John Foxe and His World*. Ed. Christopher Highley and John N. King (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002). 37-53.; Annabel Patterson, "Sir John Oldcastle as Symbol of Reformation Historiography." in *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540-1688*. Ed. Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 6-26.



Considering the multitude of chronicles and story-writers, both in England and out of England, of whom the most part have either been monks, or clients to the see of Rome, it grieved me to behold how partially they handled their stories.

(1570, p. 2)<sup>97</sup>

The binaries of Foxe's apocalyptic history, for instance, allowed for Protestant writers of less moderate demeanor to martial his work as part of their partisan and anti-Catholic platforms. In the words of David Loades,

Foxe himself never explicitly embraced what would later be known as a 'jingoistic' attitude, but his eschatology made it possible for him to envisage a protestant military victory as part of God's plan for the Last Days, when Antichrist would finally be vanquished and Christ would come again in glory. The Acts and Monuments does not represent England as an Elect Nation, or a New Israel, but it does speak of special providences in ways which enabled those who wished to do so, to read in such a message.<sup>98</sup>

The critical response of both Foxe's Protestant and Roman Catholic readers came despite his concern with themes of polemical tolerance and hermeneutic responsibility. In his writings Foxe champions free speech and the power of print to spread religious truth and to expose falsehood, goals fostered by polemical tolerance.

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<sup>97</sup> See Parry, 296-97.

<sup>98</sup> See Loades, David. "The Early Reception of the *Acts and Monuments*." Section 1.4 in John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments [...]. The Variorum Edition*. [online] (hriOnline, Sheffield 2004). 23 April 2005 <<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/foxe/>>.

The most bitter of Foxe's contemporary critics was Robert Parsons. This Jesuit priest and prolific polemical writer called Foxe "an eggregious hypocrite and deceiver," and like Harpsfield, attacked the status of his martyrs. Parsons thus engaged with Foxean arguments not directly in terms of toleration or persecution, but as part of the larger pseudo-martyr debate. The righteousness of the martyr in a sense defines whether an execution counts as persecution or a legally justified penal act. Parsons replicates the traditional view that the question is not the veracity of the actual deaths, but the validity of the cause which justified them as martyrs.<sup>99</sup>

By invoking the *gravitas* of the Roman communion of saints and impugning the quality and motives, as well as the disparate forms of Protestantism which they espoused, Parsons undermined the community which populated Foxe's "Kalendar."<sup>100</sup> Parsons demeans the social status of Foxe's martyrs, noting that most were from the lower classes and that many were women. Parsons engages with Foxe on a theoretical level which highlights the crux of persecution or toleration; in Ceri Sullivan's view, it is precisely "Person's uninterest in the facts of the martyrs' deaths" which makes his criticism so important (155).

Finally, Foxe's engagement with his critics Stapleton and Harpsfield, whom he identifies as the literary descendents of Thomas More, his "book-disciples," is framed in

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<sup>99</sup> See Brad Gregory, *Salvation at State: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999)

<sup>100</sup> Robert Parsons, *A Treatise of Three Conuersions of England from Paganisme to Christian Religion* (St Omer, 1603), 362.

the terms of literary criticism. In their attack on the facts of Thomas Bilney's martyrdom, Stapleton and Harpsfield's appeal to Thomas More's role in Bilney's supposed recantation can be undermined because of More's literary activities:

But here nowe commeth in sir Thomas More trumping in our way, with hys paynted carde, & would needs take vp this Tho. Bilney from vs, and make hym a conuert after his secte. Thus these coated cardes, though they could not by playn scriptures conuince hym beyng alieue, yet now after hys death, by false play they will make hym theirs whither he will or no. This syr Thom. More in hys rayling preface before hys booke agaynst Tindall doth challenge Bilney to hys catholicke Church, and sayth that, not onely at the fyre, but many dayes before both in wordes and writing, reuoked, abhorred, and detested hys heresies before holden 4. Reasons of Syr Thomas More. And how is this proued? by 3. or 4. mighty argumentes, as big as milpostes, fetched out of Utopia, one of Mores phantasies. Utopia, from whence, thou must know reader, can come no fittons but all fine Poetrie. (1583, p. 1008)

The Roman Catholic position is weakened by its association with More's literary aesthetic.

The intersection between toleration and the history of Roman Catholics under Elizabeth I involves multiple reversals.<sup>101</sup> The outset of Elizabeth's reign largely was tolerant towards Roman Catholics, with of course, the exception of Catholic bishops and priests who were deprived). The harsh recusancy laws and legislation of penalties such

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<sup>101</sup> See chapter 2 of this study.

as banishment or corporal punishment for priests really came only after the militant uprising of the Pilgrimage of Grace and the Papal Bull *Regnans in Excelsis* in 1570. What is more, especially after the 1570s and 1580s, the “militant” strand of Catholics represented most by the Jesuit party saw toleration as a sell-out, and argued for Catholic resistance rather than coexistence. Of course there was much tolerance on the local level of Roman Catholics (at least as much as there were isolated outbreaks anti-Catholic panics in some small towns), but at least in the polemical literature, we do not see a whole lot of tolerance talked about or appealed for from the Catholic side until towards the close of Elizabeth’s reign and the accession of James I. So the fact that Catholic respondents to Foxe focused on readings of history rather than issues of persecution or toleration is in part because of the mindset of the time. It is notable, though, that Robert Parsons, who throughout his writings took the staunchest militant views and never asked for toleration, would in his response for the first time invoke of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. One of the most important scriptural referents for the early modern toleration debates, according to Augustine’s reading, this parable referred to heresy and the need for restraint in letting God “sort out” the heretical. Parsons in his *Treatise of Three Conversions* concedes that caution was necessary in rooting up the “tares” of heresy; it is notable that Parsons’ invocation of this tolerationist referent came within the context of his engagement with Foxe.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See Damian Nussbaum, “Reviling the Saints or Reforming the Calendar? John Foxe and his ‘Kalendar’ of Martyrs.” *Belief and Practice in Reformation England: A Tribute to Patrick Collinson from his Students*. Ed. Susan Wabuda and Caroline Litzenberger (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998). 113-36; also see Ceri Sullivan, “‘Oppressed by the Force of Truth’: Robert Parsons Edits John Foxe.” in *John Foxe: An Historical*

Foxe did not live to read and respond to Parsons' critique, which is perhaps why his biographer George Townsend was motivated to defend Foxe's martyrs from this attack. Townsend demonstrates both partisan interpretation but also awareness of the possibility for conversion. In commenting on Parsons, Townsend notes how:

Romanists are the most zealous in their hatred of the church of England, when they are most pious and most religious: and, that, in the same proportion as they are to be respected for their sincerity, they are to be dreaded, *till they change*, for their mistaken enmity to the true Christianity of the gospel and church of Christ ... the purer religion so successfully established in England.<sup>103</sup>

Here Townsend assumes the "truth" of the Protestant religion, but at the same time he acknowledges Roman Catholic dedication to their cause with the qualifier "till they change" showing that Townsend has perhaps heard Foxe's message of toleration as a precondition of conversion. Though disagreeing with his ideas, Townsend does not condemn the motives of Parsons the man "I believe, rather, that *he was sincerely convinced that he was doing God service by every act of treason which he committed*

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*Perspective*. Ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Glyn Parry "Elect Church of Elect Nation? The Reception of the *Acts and Monuments*." in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective*. Ed. David Loades. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 167-81; Glyn Parry, "John Foxe, 'Father of Lyes', and the Papists." In *John Foxe and the English Reformation*. Ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997). 295-305; Scott Pilarz, "'Campion dead bites with his friends' teeth': Representations of an Early Modern Catholic Martyr." In *John Foxe and His World*. Ed. Christopher Highley and John N. King (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 216-31.

<sup>103</sup> See George Townsend, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe: With a Life of the Martyrologist, and Vindication of the Work* (London: Seeley, 1843-49), 1.189 (emphasis in original).

*against his native country and against the church of England*" (1.201, emphasis in original).

Despite his partisan tendencies, Townsend may in fact embody Foxe's idea reader. What can be drawn from the discussion above, is that even within the apocalyptic framework, there is a space for toleration, particularly as a rhetorical goal in service to larger polemical goals.

### **Coda: John Foxe and Edmund Spenser**

In book one of *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser suggests an unsympathetic representation of Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary I. Staunchly Catholic, Mary encouraged Parliament to revive medieval laws that made heresy a capital offense, and during her five years on the throne, over 800 Protestants left the country; while over 300 were executed for heresy. Spenser invokes the memory of the Marian martyrs in a rousing passage:

And there, beside of marble stone was built  
An Altare, caru'd with cunning imagery.  
On which true Christians bloud was often spilt,  
And holy Martyres often doen to dye,  
With cruell malice and strong tyrrany:  
Whose blessed sprites from underneath the stone  
To God for vengeance cryde continually

And with great grieve were often heard to groan,

That hardest heart would bleede, to heare their piteous moane. (1.8.36)

Although Spenser here references both the Marian martyrs topically, and Christian martyrs generically, his imagery continues a militant strain in his poem, as the martyrs in Spenser's poem call not for religious toleration but for vengeance. Spenser's treatment might be topical as well as generic. As Richard Mallette has shown, apocalyptic literature in the 1590s differed from that of the previous generation in terms of its historical focus. John Bale and John Foxe saw apocalyptic history in terms of universal typology; for the late Elizabethans the signs of Revelation have a more localized referent.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, John Foxe, who treats the same martyrs but in support of his tolerationist argument that the false church can be distinguished by its persecution of truth. Spenser utilizes the same martyrs to critique the reticence of Elizabeth to offer military support the cause of Continental Protestantism.

Spenser's politicizes the victims of religious persecution in the midst of a culture imbued with persecutorial discourse. Richard Hooker asked, "Will any man deny that the Church doth need the rod of corporal punishment to keep her children in obedience?" (The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, VIII.iii.4). Other Protestant went further to defend the death penalty for heresy; Thomas Bilson, for instance, supported the early Christian emperors for executing Manichaeans for "monstrous blasphemies." But although some supported capital punishment for heresy it was rarely put into force. Under Elizabeth

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<sup>104</sup> See Richard Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

only 6 people were executed for heresy or blasphemy. In the period from 1535 to 1681, however, over 300 Roman Catholics were executed for treason, a policy defended by William Cecil's *The Execution of Justice in England* (1584).

Fashioning his poem to appeal to many audiences including that of the English royal court, Spenser would have been quite aware of the Privy Council's views on persecution and toleration. Elizabeth herself tended towards some leniency. Francis Bacon has famously reported Elizabeth as saying that she did not like "to make windows into men's souls." Unlike her sister, who imprisoned and executed reformist bishops like Latimer, Ridley, and Cranmer, Elizabeth quietly removed the remaining Marian ecclesiastical hierarchy. "Let us not follow our sister's example," Elizabeth reportedly said, "but rather shew that our reformation tendeth to peace, and not to cruelty."<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless toleration as a principle was anathema to the Council. As referenced in chapter 1, William Cecil stated that the "state could never be in safety where there was tolleration of two religions, and they that differ in the service of God can never agree in the service of their Contrie."<sup>106</sup> The 1559 Act of Uniformity enforced attendance at services of the Church of England and punished priests or those who celebrated the Roman Mass. Throughout the 1580s and 90s royal promulgations tightened measures against Catholics, but aspects of Elizabethan culture's ambivalent sympathies to the Roman Catholicism in some ways fostered the survival of the Old Faith.

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<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Coffey, 84.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England*. (Gloucester: P. Smith, 1965), 1.88.



Is Spenser true to the spirit of Foxe? In apocalyptic terms, yes he is; there may be only one “true” church, to which inclusion or exclusion are absolute, yet it is not a persecuting church, but Foxe argues that “The nature of the church is not to persecute with blood” (1576, p. 2004). The ideal reader, however, is one who can see and belong to the “invisible church”; the ideal reader of Foxe is of a community does not persecute, but is persecuted; and finally, Foxe’s ideal reader is polemically moderate. Persecution has polemical power, but what Spenser perhaps misses, is that tolerance does as well.

#### Chapter 4: Religious Toleration and the Case of Robert Parsons<sup>107</sup>

The previous chapters discussed how Thomas More, despite his consistent defense of persecution against heresy, used the debate over heresy and religious toleration to embody polemical toleration and to contemplate his own forms of writing; and how John Foxe enhanced his rhetorical goals by building a tolerant ethos. This chapter continues to analyze how writers used toleration persuasively, even when arguing against it. In the case of the English Jesuit Robert Parsons (also Persons, b. 1546, d. 1610), toleration was deployed for rhetorical purposes not so generically self-constructing as More, and not as calculated to demonstrate an anti-persecutorial ethos as Foxe. In the 1580s, exiled English Jesuits based in Rome and France conducted a mission into England to support the network of Roman Catholic priests (despite rivalries between the Jesuits and the “secular” priests who were not affiliated with a religious order such as the Society of Jesus) and to reinvigorate the Catholic laity. The English Mission stirred the Elizabethan government into further action against nonconforming, recusant laity and priests, and several famous Jesuit missionaries, including Edmund Campion and Robert Southwell, were captured and executed. After working to set up a secret press for the publication of Roman Catholic books, Parsons fled England to the Continent, where he spent the rest of his life writing controversial literature along with

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<sup>107</sup> A version of this chapter appeared as “The Elizabethan Jesuits and Religious Toleration” *Reformation* 12 (2007): 139-168.

publishing a devotional work popular among both Catholics and Protestants, *The First Booke of the Christian Exercise, Appertayning to Resolution*, also known as “The Book of Resolution” (Rouen, 1582).

Although at times he wrote to support the militant reconversion of Elizabethan England under a new Catholic sovereign, Parsons later in his career argued for greater toleration of Roman Catholics in England. His position became more mild as international political circumstances in the 1590s made it clear that England would remain under Protestant control. The debate over religious toleration also involved larger cultural questions about rhetoric and the nature of language. Although their tolerationist works were indeed deeply rhetorical in the ways that they used the formal features of language to appeal to disparate audiences, Catholic controversialists like Parsons came under attack as falsehood and sophistry. Parsons’ rhetorical artistry and support of recusance from Church of England services and equivocation, a strategy by which a Roman Catholic priest or layperson in custody of the state might evade the questions of interrogators, made him the model of the “Black Legend” that associated the Jesuits with duplicity and insidiousness.<sup>108</sup>

Parsons’ polemical opponents characterized him as a “supersubtle sophister.”

One Protestant writer highlights Parson’s mutability:

For as *Pasquin* taketh upon him divers persons, and speaketh now like an angel, now like a devil; now like a king, and presently like a beggar ...[he] abhorreth not to play the part of a poet, a courtesan, or a Jebusite; so our friend *Robert Parsons*

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<sup>108</sup> See Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

transformeth himself into all shapes, and playeth all parts, save the part of an honest man.”<sup>109</sup>

Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590) embodies a cultural reaction to this image of the Jesuits. The type of a Jesuit priest as an insidious and shape-changing deceiver appears in allegorical form as the character Archimago:

An aged Sire, in long blacke weekes yclad,  
His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie gray,  
And by his belt his booke he hanging had;  
Sober he seemde, and very sagely sad,  
And to the ground his eyes were lowly bent,  
Simple in shew, and voyde of malice bad,  
And all the way he prayed, as he went,  
And often knockt his brest, as one that did repent  
...

For that old man of pleasing wordes had store,  
And well could file his tongue as smooth as glas;  
He told of Saintes and Popes and euermore

He strowd an *Ave Mary* after and before. (1.1.29, 34)

John Jewel, in an ironic declamation of rhetoric, teased about its dangerous potential to undermine the state: The city of Athens, Jewel reminds us, “the epitome of all Greece,

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<sup>109</sup> See Victor Houlston, “The Fabrication of the Myth of Father Parsons.” in *Recusant History*. 22.2 (1994): 141-151.

was nevertheless completely leveled to the ground and almost completely uprooted and destroyed thanks to the eloquent tongue of Demosthenes...Eloquence is really the one responsible; this is the disaster, the plague, the destroyer of states”<sup>110</sup>

Whether writing for or against religious toleration, English Roman Catholic controversialists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries used their most artfully rhetorical language. The Jesuit priest Parsons, for instance, often employed verbal ambiguity and rhetorical devices to accommodate plural audiences and to express views on toleration that shifted according to polemical purpose and political exigency. English Roman Catholic writings reflected the cultural paradoxes of religious toleration, a concept that I have described as holding deeply negative connotations in the early modern period. In the militant view of Parsons and the Jesuits, settling for mere toleration was a less-than-favorable option, but the idea nevertheless had many rhetorical uses. Even the most obsequious Catholic appeals for toleration often contained veiled criticism of the English government. By looking at English Catholic polemical works through the lens of religious toleration, one can see how precisely these authors were writing to plural audiences and the flexible ways they manipulated language to engage with this vexed concept. Although their perceived sophistry lent to the negative stereotype of Jesuit duplicity, this essay seeks to appreciate English Roman Catholic writings on toleration as excellent examples of advanced polemical artistry.

This chapter seeks to increase critical appreciation of the literature of toleration by examining the strong prose and purposeful verbal ambiguity that Elizabethan Roman

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<sup>110</sup> See John Jewel, “Oration against Rhetoric” in Wayne A. Rebhorn, ed. *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 168-69.

Catholics employed in their writings on a topic that vexed them as much as it did More and Foxe. My reading focuses mainly on the Jesuit priest and controversialist Robert Parsons. This prolific Catholic writer used his most artful language to grapple with the religious, political, and cultural tensions that complicated his view of religious tolerance.

The man whom the Black Legend characterized as a Machiavellian turncoat nevertheless contributed to the literature of religious toleration in ways that show that toleration does not necessarily erase difference. Modern theories of toleration in this vein assert that toleration does not reinforce but rather enervates identity politics because it says that differences do not matter, that all are equal, and only when toleration results from indifference does it diminish the characteristics that make one group different from another (Mendus 2000, 5-18). Parsons shows that there can be a way of thinking about toleration that makes different identities or positions stronger and more distinct, and that this reading is based on rhetorical awareness. This essay analyzes Parsons' and other Catholic writers' literary and rhetorical treatments of religious toleration, particularly the way they invoked the image of the tolerant Islamic world. What emerges is that in tracts overtly petitioning the government for toleration, Catholic writers subversively used the available meanings attached to this commonplace blatantly to criticize the Protestant order. Despite the perceived sophistry which earned Parsons and his fellow English Jesuits a reputation as Machiavellian plotters and traitors to the Elizabethan state, verbal ambiguity and rhetorical devices allowed Parsons to accommodate his plural audiences and to articulate shifting constructions of religious toleration that were innovative for his age.

This chapter also argues that the idea of religious toleration became a flexible trope in the context of the intra-faith quarrel known as the Archpriest Controversy. As one of the central participants in this controversy, which debated in print, among other questions, which faction of Catholic priests the Elizabethan government could trust, Parsons' position shifted from pleas for toleration, to militant resistance, and finally back to the hope of tolerance for Roman Catholics in Elizabethan England. This chapter shows how nuanced the debate was, in that the secular "Appellant" group astutely revealed that the Jesuits' appeals for toleration were often mere diversions meant to distract the English government from the English mission's political goals; in their own books, however, the secular group of priests actually reproduced the logic of Jesuit writings. Despite the fluidity of religious toleration and its variable rhetorical utility, Jesuit writers and Parsons especially were innovative in defining, developing, and calling for polemical tolerance. Religious toleration was one of the most problematic issues of the day for Roman Catholics, and thus writers such as Parsons brought to bear their full rhetorical and polemical arsenal to use the topic for persuasive purposes. This chapter applies literary and rhetorical analysis to illumine the literary art through which they envisioned religious toleration.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Modern scholarly appreciation of "Elizabethan recusant prose" has a strong tradition that deserves continuation. An early study is A. C. Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose, 1559-1582* (Sands: London, 1950); recent rhetorical studies include Ceri Sullivan, *Dismembered Rhetoric: English Recusant Writing, 1580-1603* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, London: Associated University Presses, 1995); literary analysis of Elizabethan Catholic poetry and drama can be found in Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); historical studies of toleration among Elizabethan Catholic writers include Thomas H. Clancy, *Papist Pamphleteers: The Allen-Persons Party and the Political Thought of the Counter-*

## The Rhetoric of Toleration

As the previous chapters discussed, religious toleration provoked much consternation for both Roman Catholics and Protestants in Elizabethan England. In a culture that closely linked religious uniformity to national security, permission of religious diversity carried negative connotations. The etymology of the word “toleration,” derived from the Latin word *tolero/tolerare*, “to suffer or endure,” demonstrates the unpleasantness attached to early modern toleration. In its most positive sense, writers would invoke toleration as a freedom or ‘sufferance’ sought of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. As the most recent historical models have shown, however, for both Roman Catholics and Protestants the danger of allowing another to persist in heresy was to let that person enter into damnation; in this sense toleration was sinful.<sup>112</sup> Religious toleration thus represented a temporary and undesirable condition. Even the model of humanist toleration espoused by Erasmus held this to be merely a precursor to conversion.<sup>113</sup> As this study has shown, toleration in the period was quite unlike the modern ideal, where it is seen as a foundational principle of a pluralistic society.

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*Reformation in England, 1572-1615* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1994); Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Arnold Pritchard, *Catholic Loyalty in Elizabethan England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); and Michael Carrafiello, *Robert Parsons and English Catholicism, 1580-1610* (Selinsgrove PA: Susquehanna University Press, London: Associated University Presses, 1998).

<sup>112</sup> See Walsham (2006), 1-38.

<sup>113</sup> See Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (University Park: PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).



Because toleration leads to reflection on the moral conditions that can or cannot be permitted, it represents “part of a general philosophical debate about the very status of moral judgments” (Mendus 1989, 10). If the immoral is to be tolerated, one must be able to distinguish clearly between the moral and immoral. Robert Parsons’ writings demonstrate a concern for morality that is also enacted through polemical toleration. Frustrated by the harsh discourse of religious controversy, he also dedicated much energy to his devotional work, *The Book of Resolution*.<sup>114</sup> Among the most successful and popular devotional works in English, this book was known to have converted many. *The Book of Resolution* eschewed polemical bickering in favor of larger spiritual themes such as the vanity of the world. When it was republished in a Protestant formulation by the Protestant vicar Edmund Bunny, who sanitized the work of its Romanist content, however, Parsons was drawn once again into the polemical fray. He would spend the rest of his literary career writing books of controversy. At times choleric, however, his controversial books exemplify a concern with polemical toleration as the concept was outlined in the previous chapters. In the model of humanist toleration espoused by Erasmus, polemical toleration grows out of the need for civil, rational discussion of heated issues. Exemplified by the principle of *decorum*, polemical toleration means refraining from the violent language that prohibits the free exchange of ideas that will ultimately lead to truth.

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<sup>114</sup> See Victor Houlston, “Why Robert Persons Would Not Be Pacified: Edmund Bunny’s Theft of *The Book of Resolution*,” in *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits*. Ed. Thomas M. McCoog (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996), 159-78.

Pleas for a more moderate discourse unfortunately could take the form of intemperate accusations. For instance, Parsons criticizes one of his many polemical opponents by lamenting his use of malicious and deceitful language, which Parsons calls ‘skolding discourse’:

Who will not confesse, but that lying, forging, and falsifying, ignorant vaunting, odious scoffyng, malitious calumniations, seditious interpretations, bloodie exaggerations, Barbarous insinuations over them that alreedy are in affliction and calamitie, ought to be far from the nature, pen, and tongue of a knight or gentleman and yet these are the flowers or rather furies of this *skolding discourse*, as afterward you shall see by that which is to be treated. Wherin if the lyves, honors, states, and livinges, of home-borne subjectes, were only touched, and brought in question (as they be) it were more tolerable, though no way tolerable, being don unjustly, but the heat of this hastie knight resteth not here, but rusheth further, to the open assault of forayne monarches also, their honors, fame, and reputation, which is lesse tolerable, and consequently, hath need of some more sharpe and forcible rejection.<sup>115</sup>

When printed language harms individual people it is intolerable, but less tolerable are libelous attacks on a nation’s sovereign, in which the discursive realm threatens to impinge upon the very structure of a society.

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<sup>115</sup> Robert Parsons, “The Preface to the Reader.” in *A temperate ward-word, to the turbulent and seditious Wach-word of Sir Francis Hastings knight* (Antwerp, 1599).

Another difference is that there was at times a gap between the Roman Catholic laity's views—those who as a community suffered recusancy fines, imprisonment or other sanctions were in a position to benefit from toleration—and the view of those who labored in print and other public areas of discourse to represent that community—the Catholic priests who faced imprisonment, torture, and execution had a symbolic purpose linked to the energizing effect of their symbolic martyrdom. With few exceptions, including the 1583 *Petition of Loyal Catholic Subjects* delivered by Baron Lord Vaux and Thomas Tresham to Parliament discussed in the Introduction, it often appeared that those in position to seek toleration seemed hesitant to ask for it. The goal of the Jesuits in England was nothing less than a new, Roman Catholic sovereign to replace the Protestant Elizabeth, and a uniformly Catholic nation. Mere toleration by a Protestant government was an unacceptable alternative. For men like Edmund Campion and Robert Southwell, and William Allen, acts of Roman Catholics' suffering, persecution and martyrdom held more rhetorical power,<sup>116</sup> as persecution also made possible their inspiring and heroic martyrdoms.

Most importantly, persecution allows an argument of religious purity for the suffering group, and can function as a form of corrective absolution of the faith. Parsons writes in his *Memorial for the Reconstruction of England* (c. 1596), that the travail of English Catholicism will end in a religion of greater purity, as “gold is when it cometh out of the fiery Furnace,” or like “the State of a Garden, which being overgrown with

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<sup>116</sup> William Allen, *A Briefe Historie of the Glorious Martyrdom of XII Reverend Priests* (Rheims, 1582); for critical interpretation, also see Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community 1535-1603* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2002).

Weeds and Thistles, the Owner thereof putteth fire to the whole, and when all is consumed, then beginneth he to plant chosen and sweet Herbs at his pleasure.”<sup>117</sup> All of these reasons militated against proposing toleration as a course of action. What might be qualified as negatively charged attitudes of Roman Catholic leaders towards toleration are apparent in Robert Parsons’ *A Briefe Apologie or Defence of the Catholike Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (1601). In this work Parsons surveys the four decades of Roman Catholicism under Elizabeth and laments that the false hope of toleration has caused a spiritual decline among the Roman Catholic English:

The most Catholic Queene Marie being dead; her Majestie that now is began her raigne in the year 1558 and for the first ten yeares matters passed with such doubtfulnes touching Religion in England as Catholikes hoping stil of some change or toleration, litle industrie was used on their partes for preservation of religion for the time to come, nay rather the Protestants gayned more to their parte by gentle proceeding with Catholikes, then they have done in the other 34 yeares, that have insued by rigorous persecution, for then all (excepting very few) went to their Churches, sermons, and communions, whereby infinite were infected, who since upon better consideration styrred up by persecution have made some stay.<sup>118</sup>

In Parsons’ militant rhetoric, only increased persecution has truly sparked the recusant community into stronger resistance and defiant refusal of state-mandated attendance at

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<sup>117</sup> Robert Parsons, *The Jesuit’s memorial for the intended reconstruction of England* (London, 1690), B6v.

<sup>118</sup> “Epistle to the His Holiness.” in Robert Parsons, *A briefe Apologie, or Defence of the Catholike Ecclesiastical Hierarchie* (Antwerp, 1601).

Church of England services. The Catholic resistance movement has galvanized the recusant community and defined it in relation to state persecution.<sup>119</sup> Parsons' writings over the decades demonstrate a range of attitudes towards tolerance, but here Parsons sees toleration as at worst a sell-out, or at best a spiritual laxity. The Catholic identity under a tolerant government was in danger of simply fading away.

Writing with the purpose of igniting the spirit of his Catholic audience as well as to represent that audience to the Protestant establishment and defend Jesuits from their critics among the secular Catholic clergy, Parsons creates an image in which he has a vested interest. He depicts English Catholicism as moribund before the establishment of the English seminaries abroad and intervention of English Jesuits at home. Resistance revives a dying community. The way Parsons constructs the passage subtly furthers his point. He counters the parenthetical "very few" who uphold the recusant example with the "infinite" who "were infected" by Protestantism. His hyperbolic scope, alliterative language, and image of religious difference as contagion reinforce his message that English Catholics should resist rather than acquiesce.

In a book written both to strengthen Catholic resistance and to represent the English Catholic position to the Protestant government, He also utilizes a grammatical ambiguity seen in the unusual structure of the last sentence. Consider the final relative

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<sup>119</sup> The role of the English Mission of the 1580s in Elizabethan Catholicism has been debated, with the principle views established in John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1975) and in Christopher Haigh, "From Monopoly to Minority: Catholicism in Early Modern England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5<sup>th</sup> Ser. 31 (1981), and in printed debates thereafter. Also see Patrick McGrath, "Elizabethan Catholicism, a Reconsideration," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 35 (1984), 414-428.

clause, referring to Catholic individuals “who since upon better consideration styrred up by persecution have made some stay.” In this sentence the word “some” is either an adjective, indicating the reflexive restraint of those who have chosen to remove themselves from Church of England services, or an object pronoun of the transitive verb “made,” meaning that the recusants have inspired others to resistance by their example. Here staying is related to recusancy. Both internal and external pressures inspire some to recusancy. While still negating the value of toleration, Parsons slyly emphasizes and simultaneously downplays the agency of the recusants as an active or passive threat to the Protestant order.

This excerpt from Parsons exhibits the deeply rhetorical and audience-centered quality of Roman Catholic prose writing elucidated by scholars such as Ceri Sullivan and Alexandra Walsham.<sup>120</sup> Because Roman Catholic authors of devotional, polemical, and literary texts faced such great logistical, financial, and legal hurdles in getting their texts into the hands of their intended audiences, and because these printed books often took the place of human priests, their writers had to make sure that their books pleased their audience. Elaborate rhetoric played a more than ornamental role in this purpose, especially for authors writing to plural audiences. In any situation where one needs to persuade one’s audience, there is a relationship among writer, topic, and audience. Any of these change as a variable based on the context. Given that Roman Catholic dogma and the view of the author are theoretically immutable, Ceri Sullivan argues, the only

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<sup>120</sup> Ceri Sullivan, *Dismembered Rhetoric: English Recusant Writing, 1580 to 1603* (London, Associated University Presses, 1995); also see Alexandra Walsham, ““Domme Preachers’s”? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Culture of Print,” *Past and Present* 168 (2000): 72-123.

variable element in the rhetorical situation available for manipulation is the attitude of the reader (1995, pp. 13-25). Persuasive language could have this effect. In privileging the community in the above-referenced passage, Parsons' statement shows the rhetorical twist supporting his view on tolerance.

The concern for audience stands bare in the preceding passage. Although Parsons' epistle was ostensibly addressed to the Pope, this work was in fact designed to win favor among lay Catholics for the Jesuit presence in the country, and to defend attacks by the English secular priests who resented their authority. The text is a justification of the Jesuit *ethos*. He eschews pleas for tolerance as detrimental to religious identity. If the Catholic zeal resulting from persecution animates the recusant community, toleration would damp this energy (Pritchard 152). Another of Parsons' audiences owed its very existence to persecution of Roman Catholicism in England. Toleration at home meant lower numbers of exiled seminary priests, whose colleges in France and Italy would suffer great attrition if young Catholic intellectuals were allowed to study in England. Among his most important audiences however, are the Jesuits' critics among the secular Catholic priesthood in England. By presenting a narrative in which the vitality of English Catholicism depends on Jesuit initiatives, Parsons counters those Catholics who attacked the Jesuits in the "Appellant Controversy," discussed below. The personal dimension of Parsons' thought on toleration emerges here in his emphasis on the powerfully negative image of persecution by the English government. Parsons always had to make commensurable the possibility of religious toleration with his "single-minded devotion" to overthrowing the Protestant government of England (Carrafiello 13). How could he

simply write about toleration? His goals included appealing for better conditions for Roman Catholics, but also heartening the recusant community, maintaining the unified front of international Roman Catholicism, and upholding the militant stance of the Jesuit party. Parsons' role as leader of the English Mission and as both general and foot-soldier in the battle of the books also went against toleration; nevertheless, Parsons demonstrated a sustained engagement with the idea throughout his writings.

Equally rhetorical concerns are evident in the politically-charged, yet pacifist document known as "Campion's Brag." This statement by Parsons' fellow missionary Edmund Campion calls for a public disputation between Roman Catholic and Protestant divines on matters of religious doctrine and ceremony. Copies of a related text, the *Rationes Decem*, were released in an audacious public stunt, with copies surreptitiously placed on the benches of Saint Mary's at Oxford on the day of Convocation. It is perhaps in anticipation of this move that the language of the Brag attempts to soften its aggressive rhetorical position. Campion speaks for the loyalty of the English Catholic exiles residing at seminaries in France and Italy. Among the exile community of English seminarians, Campion writes,

many innocent hands are lifted up to heaven for you [Queen Elizabeth I] daily by those English students, whose posteritie shall never die, which beyond seas, gathering virtue and sufficient knowledge for the purpose, are determined never to give you over, but either to win you heaven, or to die upon your pikes.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Reprinted in Evelyn Waugh, *Two Lives: Edmund Campion, Ronald Knox* (London, New York: Continuum, 2001), 123 ff.



Campion's sentence delivers many images at once for a complicated effect. He describes the exile students as "innocent," playing on the meaning of the Latin root *nocere*, "to harm." He implies that Catholic exiles are innocent of treason and innocuous to the English state. The Jesuit conviction that education will bring people to the truth of the Catholic faith shows in the way Campion links the students' vocation and their innate virtue to the propaganda war to come, as Catholic scholars gather and disseminate knowledge. Finally, Campion frames the military imagery of Catholics dying on "your pikes" as a heroic sacrifice. Campion displaces this final phrase from its controlling verb "are determined" in a way that diminishes the exiles' agency, making the violence of a military onslaught into a passively accomplished martyrdom for which neither Elizabeth nor the Catholic exiles are to blame. The "Brag" thus carefully handles language and effect both to antagonize and mollify its intended readers at the highest level of government. Campion rhetorically invokes appeals for public debate (and therefore a degree of polemical toleration), while resorting to the political power of martyrdom and persecution. Toleration is nevertheless an essential aspect of the language of persecution, by which victims of a persecutorial force typically used highly emotive discourse to draw on deep religious currents. Such argumentative techniques adjust the context of a specific political or religious situation—a single sect or *cause célèbre* running afoul of the authorities could be tied to a larger context of universal struggle between good and evil.<sup>122</sup> This is one reason that tolerationist writing is so often bombastic and that tolerationists identify themselves with scriptural types.

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<sup>122</sup> See John McLoughlin, "The Language of Persecution: John of Salisbury and the Early Phase of the

Catholic writings about toleration are also open to double reading in ways less subtle than a quirky grammatical construction. Parsons offered thinly veiled arguments that baited the Elizabethan government even as he proclaimed a message of peace and loyalty. Consider Parsons' 1580 work *A brief discours contayning certayne reasons why Catholiques refuse to goe to church*.<sup>123</sup> His book has dual purposes: to publish the program for recusancy, and to appeal to the English government for better treatment of Catholics. The *Brief Discours* is addressed "To the Most Highe and Mightie Princesse Elizabeth by the grace of God, Quene of England France and Irland, &c.," and asserts the loyalty and obedience of English Catholics.<sup>124</sup> Parsons describes their population as:

many a thowsand of your graces most loving, faithful, and dutiful subjectes: who being now afflicted for their consciences, and brought to such extremitie, as never was hard of in England before, have no other meanes to redresse and ease their miseries, but onely as confident children to runne unto the mercy and clemency of your Highnes their Mother and borne soveraigne Princesse.<sup>125</sup>

Parsons' obsequiousness seems natural at a time when addresses to the queen took the form of relatively meaningless rhetorical gestures. His message to the government belongs to the phase of English Catholic political thought that Peter Holmes calls "enthusiastic nonresistance," an attitude demonstrated by extravagant claims of

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Becket Dispute (1163-66).” In Shiels, ed. *Persecution and Toleration*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984.

<sup>123</sup> Robert Parsons, *A brief discours contayning certayne reasons why Catholiques refuse to goe to church* (London, 1580), STC.

<sup>124</sup> Parsons (1580), +2v.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, +2v-3r.

obedience and loyalty.<sup>126</sup> Yet *A brief discourse* both asserts Catholic loyalty and openly counsels passive resistance.

Parsons therefore seeds his text with ambiguous constructions. Such tactics were common. Catholic effusions of loyalty often accompanied subversive theoretical constructions of sovereign authority. Indeed, he subtly undercuts his overtly loyalist arguments with veiled jabs. He hopes that the Catholic religion will “receave more favour than the rest, or at least wyse, equall tolleration with other religions disallowed by the State.” He asks for a parity with other minority groups and England. He says the government has allowed Protestant sects to multiply and “to advaunce them selves in common speech, to mount to pulpites...But the Catholique religion, hath bene soe beaten in, with the terror of lawes, and the rigorous execution of the same, as the verye suspition thereof, hath not escaped unpunished.” This passage places the Catholic Church within a hierarchy of religions in England, including ‘somewhat disengenuously,’ as Peter Holmes suggests, “The Catholickes, the Protestants, the Puritanes, and the howsholders of Love,” but argues that, because the Catholic religion is the oldest and the source of other religions, the government should give Catholics some favor.<sup>127</sup> Into this argument, however, Parsons inserts a veiled jab at the Protestants, using *reductio ad absurdum*. From a baseline of Roman Catholicism, religion shades into heresy as mainstream Protestantism blends into radical Puritanism, then into heretical sects like the outrageous Family of Love.

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<sup>126</sup> Holmes (1982).

<sup>127</sup> Parsons (1580), +3r-v; Holmes, p. 62.

At this early point in his polemical career, Parsons is still working from within the binary model of “true” and “false” churches, a limiting field that restricts the potential for toleration and coexistence. He suggests that in order to improve the lot of Roman Catholics in England the state would not only have to relax laws against Catholics, but must also tighten measures for “Heretickes.” His tolerationist logic works according to a sort of pulley system, by which toleration for Catholics is accompanied by persecution of dangerously radical Protestants:

The onely waye, which Catholickes have of remedye or easement in these their afflictions, is instant and fervent prayer to almightye God, and humble recourse unto the good nature mercye, and wisdom, of the Queenes most excellent majesty: confuting, and utterly condemning the custom of al Heretickes, and sectaries of our time, which in every countrie, where they are contraried, seeke to disturbe, and molest by rebellion, their Lordes and Princes....<sup>128</sup>

This passage potentially creates a space for coexistence if Parsons is only referring to radical Protestants as the “sectaries of our time.” If he includes state-sponsored Protestantism within this group, toleration is not an option because it still has the potential of subverting the government and the standard of uniformity still prevails.

Thus are the parameters of toleration in the Jesuit program *circa* 1580. In the same book, however, Parsons articulates a subject-oriented primacy of the individual conscience, a tolerationist argument nothing less than revolutionary by the standards of

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<sup>128</sup> Parsons (1580), I4v.

the Catholic Church.<sup>129</sup> Paradoxically, he warrants freedom of conscience not with the usual claim to *adiaphora* or non-essential religious ceremonies, but on the singularity and uniformity of religious truth. He writes that:

if everye man which hath anye religion, and is resolved therein, must needes presuppose this only truth, to be in his own religion.... he must likewyse persuade him selfe, that all other religions besides his owne, are false and erroneous, and consequently al assemblies, conventicles, and publike actes of the same, to be wicked, damnable, dishonorable to God, contumelious to Christ, and therfore to his conscience (which thinketh so) detestable.<sup>130</sup>

Alliterative language reinforces the intolerant point of view against “damnable, dishonorable” heresy (conventicles are contumelious to the conscience). Paradoxically, an argument for liberty of conscience also incorporates a justification of intolerance.

This author demonstrates some of the cultural tensions between persecution and tolerance. While Parsons’ conviction would necessarily lead some to persecute others in an attempt to shore up a universal truth in danger of slipping into anarchic plurality, it also means that to compel another person into believing against his or conscience is to pull that individual into a treason against God.<sup>131</sup> In a sense, he is avoiding the binary of true and false churches here because he says that what matters is not necessarily the truth that one believes in but the degree of conviction with which one holds it. Parsons shows how coercion perverts the relationship between the individual and God: “We see the

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<sup>129</sup> See Clancy (1964), p 157.

<sup>130</sup> Parsons (1580), G6v-7r.

<sup>131</sup> See Clancy, pp. 125-158.

sentence of their Doctours...whoe presse us so much to goe to their Churches, agaynst our consciences. If errorr finde such zeale, what zeale ought truthe to have?”<sup>132</sup> His radical notion of a subject-oriented spirituality would appear later in his career when political contexts forced him to consider toleration more positively, and when he would return to the subject-oriented allowance “that an erronious conscience also bindeth.”<sup>133</sup> Thomas Clancy and other critics have noted Parsons’ innovative and radical privileging of subjectivity, given the objective orientation of Roman Catholic dogma, as the writer balances individualistic and institutional spiritual epistemes.

In 1595, *A Conference about the next succession to the crown of England* took a more pessimistic view of religious toleration. This overtly political book returned the traditional Catholic attitude towards religious difference, describing in stark terms the possibility for religious co-existence in England. The author states that “ther is but one only religion that can be true among Christians,” and argues that ‘seing, that to me ther can be no other fayth or religion avaylable for my salvation,” any person who “beleeveth otherwise than I do, and standeth wilfully in the same, is an infidel.”<sup>134</sup>

Although here he seems ideologically inflexible, Parsons’ position was practical in an age where state-mandated religion was considered necessary. In *A Conference about the next succession*, he hopes that the next sovereign to rule after Elizabeth will be Catholic because he knows that the new ruler will determine religious policy and quash dissent: “for let the bargaines and agreements be what they will, and fayre promises &

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<sup>132</sup> Parsons (1580), G6r.

<sup>133</sup> Parsons (1599), K2r.

<sup>134</sup> William Allen, *A conference about the next succession to the crown of England* (Antwerp, 1595), P8v.

vayne hopes never so great, yet seing the prince once made and settled, must needes proceede according to the principles of his own religion.” Parsons’ negative view of minority existence comes from the frustration of Catholics hoping for toleration under a new king or queen in England. He argues that it “is very hard if not impossible for two of different religions to love sincerely,” and that the majority group would direct ‘so many jelosies, suspitions, accusations, calumniations, and other aversions” towards the minority that toleration and coexistence would be impossible to realize.<sup>135</sup>

Political exigency would later cause Parsons to accept the value of toleration, after the hope evaporated of a military conquest of England by Roman Catholic Spain and with the accession of new English monarch. His publications, however, demonstrate a mind concerned with the paradoxes of toleration, and his artistic language allowed him to hold contradictions in balance, and sometimes to occupy incommensurable positions. In *The judgement of a Catholicke English-man, living in banishment for his religion: written to his private friend in England* (1608), he presents his tolerationist argument in terms of emotional appeals:

But alas, is there no end of exprobration against the Innocent for the  
Nocent? No Compassion? No Commiseration? . . . How come so many  
searches of their houses, spoyle of their goodes, apprehensions of their  
persons, abdication of their tennants, servants, & friends, so many

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<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, Q2r-v.

citations, attachments, vexations, and molestations, that dayly do flow  
upon them, as if they were the only malefactours of the Land?<sup>136</sup>

Parsons mentions *innocence*, a term significant throughout literature of Catholic loyalty, but here as part of a binary that has become an absent antonym in the English language today, “innocent / nocent.” To support his appeal to *pathos*, he employs two common rhetorical figures usually related to emotion. *Adynaton*, the trope of inexpressibility, communicates the innumerable instances of persecution performed upon “so many” Catholic victims. *Descriptio*, vivid description of the consequences of an action or policy, reinforces the sense that Catholics receive unfair treatment. He develops the passage as grounded on a basic contradiction: that the natural relationship between the state and the people is perverted. Instead of nurturing the people, the government harms them through religious persecution. *Polysyndeton*, the accretion of conjunctions, organizes a list of nouns (“searches...apprehensions”) substantiating Catholic persecution. By using nouns instead of verbs, Parsons names not willful actions but only impartial phenomena. His incrimination of the government exculpates its actions.

So much for his public thoughts on toleration. In his estoteric *Memorial for the Reformation of England*, a utopian plan for re-institutionalizing national Roman Catholicism under a new sovereign, Parsons explicitly limits the role of toleration in England after re-Catholicization. He imagines that at its outset the new, Roman Catholic English state might not “press any Man’s Conscience at the beginning for matters of

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<sup>136</sup> Robert Parsons, *The Judgement of a Catholicke English-Man, Living in Banishment for his Religion: Written to His Private Friend in England* (St. Omer, 1608), A4r.



Religion for some few years.”<sup>137</sup> His utopian plan for England recalls Thomas More’s description of toleration in his *Utopia* (1516). What appears at first to be a tolerant society soon reveals totalitarian strictures. He echoes More’s favorite metaphor of heresy as contagion: “this Toleration be only with such as live quietly, and are desirous to be informed of the Truth, and do not teach, and preach, or seek to infect others.”<sup>138</sup> Unlike Parsons’ other writings on toleration, his writing is here unequivocal:

yet do I give you notice that my meaning is not any way to perswade hereby, that Liberty of Religion to live how a man will should be permitted to any Person in the any Christian Commonwealth...as I think no one thing to be so dangerous, dishonourable, or more offensive to Almighty God in the world, than that any Prince should permit the Ark of Israel and Dagon, God and Devil, to stand and be honored together. But that which I talk of, is a certain Connivence or Toleration of Magistrates only for a certain time....<sup>139</sup>

His views on toleration became less conservative with time, but in this early tract for a limited audience he demonstrates that he can address the issue unequivocally.

### **Outlandish Examples**

As this study has discussed, toleration of religious difference in the early modern period went against both religious and civic duty. More supports this view in his *Dialogue*, reminding the reader that:

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<sup>137</sup> Parsons (1690), C8v-D1r.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, D1r.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, D1r.

surely as the prynces be bounden y<sup>t</sup> they shall not suffer theyr people by infidels  
to be inuaded / so be they as depely bounden that they shall suffer theyr people to  
be seduced and corrupted by heretykes... ‘syth the parell shall in shorte whyle  
growe to as grete / bothe with mennes souls withdrawen from god / and theyr  
goodes lost / and theyr bodyes destroyed by comen sdycyon / insurreccyon / and  
open warre / within the bowelles of theyr own lande” (6.1.416).

More uses this argument in response to a common Lutheran claim that Christians should  
embody pacifism, even to the point of not defending state borders from hostile threats. In  
this view, it goes against God to resist Muslim invaders who are seen as a scourge on  
Christianity imposed by God.<sup>140</sup> defend state borders from hostile threats. The  
Messenger echoes this idea, saying that God’s “wyll and pleasure is / that we sholde not  
so moche as defende our selfe against heretyques and infidels / were they paganes/ turkes  
/or sarasyns’ (6.1.32). In response, the Chancellor states that it is:

not only excusable buy also commendable / that the comen warre which euery  
peple taketh in y<sup>e</sup> defence of him selfe of a pryuate affeccyon to hym self / but of  
a crysten charyte / for y<sup>e</sup> sauefard & preseruacyon of all other... Whych reson as  
it hath place in all batayle of by whych we defende the crysten countrees  
agaynste the Turks / in that we defended eche other fro farre the more parell and  
losse / bothe of worldly substance / bodily hurt / and perdycon of mennys soules’  
(6.1.415).

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<sup>140</sup> CW 6.32 and note.

The outer geographical border of Christendom is paralleled by its internal ideological frontier. If a people may be justified in defending against invading forces to preserve safety of their material and worldly lives, then they are all the more justified in defending against threats to their souls.

This is a passage that William Tyndale focused on in *An Asnwere unto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* (1531). Of More's intervention in print, Tyndale notes that:

the world captiuateth his wit, and about the law of God, maketh him wonder|full imaginations, vnto which he so fast clea|ueth that ten Iohn Baptistes were not able to dispute them out of his head. He beleueth that he loueth God, because he is ready to kill a Turke for his sake, that beleueth bet|ter in God then he whom God also com|maundeth vs to loue and to leaue nothyng vnsought to winne him vnto the knowledge of the truth.

It is interesting that Tyndale attacks not just More's argument, but also his polemical *ethos*. More is unwilling to listen, much as he himself attacked others' lack of polemical toleration by suggesting that they are not capable of rationally receiving and considering opposing arguments.<sup>141</sup> Tyndale's hyperbolic image of "ten Iohn Baptists'

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<sup>141</sup> Tyndale also focuses on the image of listening and inability to hear in this passage: "Iudge whether it be possible that any good should come out of their domme ceremonies & Sacramentes into thy soule. Iudge their penaunce, pilgrimages, pardons, purgatorie, praying to postes, domme blessinges, domme absolutions, their domme pateryng and howlyng, their domme straunge holy gestures with all their domme disguisinges, their satisfactions and iustifyinges. And because thou findest them false in so many thynges, trust them in nothyng but iudge them in all thinges."

being unable to persuade or convert More also puts into question the efficacy of polemic; all the arguments in the world could not turn More from his views, or “dispute them out of his head.” Tyndale also points to More as author of both polemical and imaginative literature, including the *Utopia*; Tyndale later in the *Answer* suggests that More’s claims are as “as true as his story of Utopia & all his other Poe|trie.” More’s fancy “captivateth his wit” and encourages “wonderfull imaginations.” Finally, Tyndale slyly references the “love” that was such a hotly debated linguistic term in the interchange between himself and More. Here linked to the ideal of tolerance, the term “love” is an attack on More’s harsh stance on the Muslim people, and by extension impugns More’s persecutorial attitudes toward his fellow Christians.

The case of Robert Parsons shows the complexity of one political thinker’s rhetorical constructions of toleration. Yet even those Catholics who did seek toleration by the government frequently followed Parsons’ model of undercutting appeals for clemency with veiled criticism. One of the most common examples invoked by Catholic writers in favor of religious toleration was that of foreign countries which practiced toleration. Tolerationist writers especially favored the example of the Islamic world, which at times sought to conquer Christian nations but was said to have tolerated Christianity within its bounds. In this way, Islam represented a reversed image of Roman Catholicism, which tolerated other faiths but rigorously enforced uniformity within the Church. Historically, European states most harshly persecuted internal dissent, rarely tolerating heresy. In the 1640s, the Quaker George Fox based his tolerationist arguments on the example of the non-Christian as a model of universal religious toleration: “...let

him be *Jew*, or *Papist*, or *Turk*, or *Heathen*, or *Protestant*, or what sort soever, or such as worship *Sun*, or *Moon*, or *Stocks*, or *Stones*, let them have liberty where every one may bring forth his strength, and have free liberty to speak forth his Mind and Judgement.”<sup>142</sup>

The mid-seventeenth century Protestant separatists, however, were not the first to compare toleration for English Christians to conditions for non-Christians, or to compare England to other countries that practiced toleration. As far back as the reign of Edward VI, the Protestant William Thomas noted how “The Turk” practices toleration of other religions within the Islamic world, and this is one of the reasons for its successful expansion, “by reason wherof he is the more able peaceably to enjoy so large an empire.”<sup>143</sup>

In 1604 the Roman Catholic priest John Colleton urged the king to follow “the example of Germanie, Fraunce, Poland, & other Countries, where diversitie of religion is licenced by supream authoritie, & the like found peace, wrought and established thereby.”<sup>144</sup> Colleton noted that Catholics should enjoy the benefit of the ‘stranger churches’ set up in London for Dutch and other nationals to observe the religious custom of their homeland. Allowing stranger churches, Colleton writes, is “a benefite that is not

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<sup>142</sup> George Fox, *Gospel-Ttruth Demonstrated, in a Collection of Doctrinal Books, Given Forth by ... George Fox: Containing Principles, Essential to Christianity and Salvation, Held Among the People Called Quakers* (London, 1706). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. [Accessed on 22 May, 2007 from <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>], 234.

<sup>143</sup> In John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials* (Oxford, 1822), II, 2mkn jk, 381.

<sup>144</sup> John Colleton, *A Supplication to the Kings Most Excellent Majestie* (England, 1604), B2r.

denyed by the Princes and State politique of other Countries, where diversitie of religion is tolerated, and infinite good found to arise thereof.”<sup>145</sup>

Even earlier, Catholic writers were using the example of other countries to beseech Elizabeth to grant some toleration for Roman Catholics. William Allen writes:

our greefe of hart is much increased, either when we looke into other States and Countries, as Germanie, Suitzerland, Suetia, Polonia, Boëmia, and the like, where though there have been great alterations in religion these late yeres, yet lightly non be forced so but if they can not have the exercise of their profession in one territorie, Canton, towne, Church, or Parish, yet they may have it neere them in an other, as also in al the Provinces and kingdoms subject either to the Persian or the Turke at this day, the old Christians be permitted to use freely their devotions.<sup>146</sup>

Allen frequently uses this argument:

If they [the exiled seminary priests] might have obtained anie peece of that libertie which Catholiques enjoy in *Germany*, *Zuicherland*, or other places among protestants; or half the freedome that the *Hugonots* have in *Fraunce* and other countries: yea, or but so much courtesie as the Christians find among the verie *Turks*; or very *Jewes* among Christians....our adversaries should never have been troubled nor put in jelousie of so manie mens malcontentment at home, nor stand

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<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, A3r.

<sup>146</sup> William Allen. *An Apologie and True Declaration* (Rheims, 1581), A8v.

in doubt of the departure & absence of so great a number of Nobilitie and principal gentlemen abroad.<sup>147</sup>

Such petitions appealed to their readers through language laden with rhetorical devices. For instance, Parsons writes to the Privy Council in support of freedom of conscience: “the same liberty and favour in Engalnd for their consciences, as Protestantes have in France and in other states of the Empire at this day under catholique kinges and Emperours, which petition seemeth so reasonable, so easie, and so profitable to the realme....”<sup>148</sup> Here the comparison is highlighted by *polysyndeton*, his triple repetition of the intensifier ‘so.’ Parsons’ use of this rhetorical scheme linguistically builds the benefit of toleration in the minds of his readers. He elsewhere utilizes hyperbolic language to make his point: “I wold not for ten thowsand worldes, compell a Jewe, to sweare that theire weare a blessed Trinity. For albeit the thing be never so trew, yet should he be damned for swearinge against his conscience, and I, for compelling him to commit so heynous and greevous a sinne.”<sup>149</sup> This example bolsters the ethical stance of the author, who would seem to follow the Biblical example of Jesus by not trading the riches of the world for damnation. But Parsons would surpass even Jesus, in forswearing “ten thowsand worldes.” I have identified this highly stylized and eloquent language in the *Petition of Loyal Catholic Subjects* discussed in the Introduction, the plea for Elizabeth to grant toleration for English Catholics begins in unequivocal terms, but by the

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<sup>147</sup> William Allen, *A true, Sincere and Modest Defence, of English Catholiques*, (Rouen, 1584), STC 373, O2r-3v.

<sup>148</sup> Parsons (1599), Q1v.

<sup>149</sup> Parsons (1580), A5v.

end of the passage his reference to the non-Christian world contains the hint of veiled criticism:

O most mighty Queene, let your excellent and heavenly vertues now take their chiefe effects, let your rare and incomparable wisdom enter into the consideration of these poynts, and let that Orient pearle and gracious worke of nature, which in your royall person hath so many wealthful yeares shined amongst us, and administred most bright and comfortable beames of grace to all men.... Knit the bodie and soule together; Let not us your catholike, native, english, and obedient subjects stand in more perill, for the frequenting the blessed Sacraments, and exercising the catholike religion, and that most secretly, then do the Catholikes subject to the Turke publickly: then do the perverse and blasphemous Jewes, haunting their Synagogues, under sundry Christian Kings openly: and then doe the Protestants enjoying their publike assemblies under diverse catholike Kings and Princes quietly.<sup>150</sup>

This passage dangerously equates the Protestants with the “blasphemous Jewes.” Though obeying “quietly,” they indulge in an almost sinful pleasure. Description of Protestants “enjoying their public assemblies” follows on the image of Jews “haunting their Synagogues.” The sensual stimulation of gathered bodies contrasts with the image of Catholics soberly “exercising” their religion, albeit ‘secretly.’

He also asserts a comparison to the Scythians, but more openly turns the focus on recent English history:

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<sup>150</sup> Richard Broughton, *English Protestants Plea* (Saint-Omer, 1621), STC 3895.5, C5v-6r.



Now (I praye yow) tell us yf yow can when was this practise used anie where before these dayes? In what barbarous Scythia was this asmuche as hearde of by anye report at any tyme, that freeborne men, of honest state & condition, lerned, of good education, well instructed and trayned upp in gentlemanlye maner, dedicated and vowed to the sacred function of priesthoode, should be for the testimonie onlie of an auncient religion, of long continuance left unto them by their auncestours, stauled up in cages to be racked on a payne banke (as bondslaves were wonte to be) and with dire and horrible paines, greeves, & afflictions, wrested and writhen owte of their joynts, unless thei will appeache & traiterously deliver up to the torture theyre owne companions in faithe and profession: whiche to doe they are forbidden by the lawe of nations, by the rule of nature, by civile duetie, by common honestie, & by everye religion? Ys this (think yowe) a verie just cause of torture? Ys this a reason effectuall enoughe to bringe men to their inquisition? ... dyd Catholiques in any aige practise this, even against the desperatest and perversest heretiques?<sup>151</sup>

He asks the English not only to look to the European countries, but also introduces the perspective of the international world watching (and judging) England. The legal persecution of Catholics, Parsons writes,

which being considered by forreine people doe make the state of English Catholickes under Protestant government to seeme unto them much more miserable and intolerable, then that of the Jewes under any sorte of Christian

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<sup>151</sup> Robert Parsons, *Epistle of the persecution of Catholickes in Englande* (Rouen, 1582), STC 19406, F2r-3r.

Princes, or that of the Grecians, or other Christians under the Turke, or Persian, or that of bond-subjectes under the Polonians, Swecians, Moscovians, and other such nations: so as all this tendeth as yow see (and as before we have noted) to more desperate disunion of mindes and exasperation of hartes.<sup>152</sup>

Other Catholic polemicists took the opposite direction, of foregrounding the intolerance and barbarity of the non-Christian world. In this example, Verstegan drops all veils covering his critique of the English persecution by equating English Protestants with barbarous non-Christians:

There never was Scythian, nor savage Tartar, that could use more inhumaine cruelty then to rip up the bodies of innocent men, being perfectly alive, to teare out their entrailes, to be consumed with fyre. There was never Turk, nor Barbarian, that imposed upon Christians so great and continuall a tribute, as twenty poundes, for every eight-and-twentie dayes absence, from their Moskeyes.<sup>153</sup>

In this rousing passage, Richard Verstegen uses a tactic of defamiliarization. By surreally blurring the line between the alien and the domestic, Verstegen makes persecution of Catholics in England seem even more outrageous than the most brutal persecution against Christians abroad. In the hands of these Catholic writers, the example of the non-Christian offered an unflattering comparison to Protestant England.

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<sup>152</sup> Parsons, *A treatise tending to mitigation* (Saint-Omer, 1607), STC 19407, B4r.

<sup>153</sup> Richard Verstegen, *A declaration of the true reasons of the great troubles* (Antwerp, 1592), STC 10005, C7r.

## Toleration and the Archpriest Controversy

“What greater glorie can betide the vale /

Then force the Mountain-top adowne to fall?”

So asks the Machiavellian character Revenge in Anthony Copley’s Spenserian allegory of the English counter-reformation *A Fig for Fortune* (1596).<sup>154</sup> Revenge implies that the Jesuits seek the destruction of England for their own power and glory. In *A Fig for Fortune* Copley echoes the militant Protestantism Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* by modulating the allegory into a plea for toleration of Roman Catholics.

Copley’s Cato is the stoic so important to the ethos of the recusants, but in this poem Cato represents despair, and his burden or resistance or withstanding of pain based on his denial of allegiance to “Eliza” shows that Copley is saying the recusants are wasting their time with disloyalty.

This text is a systematic critique of the kinds of discursive representation of different sorts of loyal and traitorous Catholics. After Cato as the stoic, the reader encounters the Machiavellian Revenge:

Vse Friend and Foe, and Neuter all alike,

Onlie as instrumentall implements

To thy designe; thy aymed stroke to strike:

And fee them but with ayery complements:

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<sup>154</sup> Anthony Copley, *A Fig for Fortune* (London, 1596), STC 5737, C4r.

That done, and thy affaire effected,

Destroy them all for feare thou be detected.

The term “neuter” locates this passage within a religious dimension. This sounds also like the Jesuits orders for the mission and other Catholic manuals on conversion. This particular gendered metaphor of “neuter” is quite like that of Questier’s “English Breakfast Tea Scale,” where individuals’ degree of religious fervor is graded as hot, warm, or lukewarm. Copley, a secular priest affiliated with the so-called Appellant group, exemplifies this group’s attacks on their fellow Catholics the Jesuits. The English secular priests resented the Jesuits’ haughtiness and their superior role in the English mission as treasurers of the funds that moved along hidden networks of Catholic priests. They resented the attention the society was given by the Pope in Rome and by the Catholic gentry in England. The seculars also resented Jesuit involvement in the major internal conflicts of Elizabethan Roman Catholicism, including the upset among the community of Catholic priests resident in the Wisbech castle prison, and earlier, student protests at the English College in Rome. The secular priests contested the shape and nature of the shadow government of the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy in England. Towards the end of Elizabeth’s reign these conflicts erupted in a print debate totaling some two dozen books. The secular group (also termed the “Appellants” because they appealed to Rome to revoke the appointment of the George Blackwell as “Archpriest” over all Catholic priests in England), complained of perceived Jesuit abuses. The secular priests, represented in print by Bagshaw, Bluet, Mush, Watson, and others, especially

tangled with Father Parsons, who almost single-handedly defended the Jesuit party in several weighty books.<sup>155</sup>

Toleration figured highly in these debates. Watson and the so-called Appellants felt it acceptable to petition for religious toleration. Their willingness to deal with the government contrasts with the more bellicose Jesuits, who frequently advocated a staunch resistance to the government and church that they categorized as heretical, and who often represented toleration as an unacceptable position only occupied by the defeated. Parsons and the Jesuits had avoided this stigma in their desire to uphold England as a staunch and shining example of steadfastness and constancy.<sup>156</sup>

In their polemical works, the secular group sought to defame the Jesuits by apparently exposing their treasonous practices and by claiming that the Jesuits were working towards Spanish invasion (and, of course, they were correct). By casting aspersions on the seminary priests and Jesuits, the secular group asserted its own loyalty to the crown in hopes of toleration for some Catholics. They argued for different kinds of Catholics--not all Catholics were treasonous and the government could trust the loyal kind. Between the seculars and Jesuits, some of the wildest and most vituperative polemic in the English language was written. Some contributors were mild and level-headed in their books such as the *Dialogue betwixt a Secular Priest and a Lay Gentleman*

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<sup>155</sup> For a summary of the Archpriest Controversy, see Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, *Good Newes from Fraunce: French Anti-League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1996).

<sup>156</sup> See Alexandra Walsham, "'Yielding to the Extremity of Time': Conformity, Orthodoxy, and the Post-Reformation Catholic Community," in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560-1660*. Ed. Peter Lake and Michael Questier (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 211-236.

by John Mush (London, 1601). Others, like the misfit priest and Bye Plot conspirator William Watson, produced volumes of eccentric and wildly dynamic prose. Watson's favorite slur was against "the Jesuiticall Hispanized faction of falshood, hypocrisie, sedition and treason."<sup>157</sup>

The Appellants claimed that they, unlike the Jesuits, had no ties to Spanish influence and that they, unlike the Jesuits, could be truly loyal. Watson said that the Jesuits only feigned tolerationist pleas in order to catch the government off guard. The Jesuits even used toleration as a sort of smokescreen in an attempt to bemuse the crown and also their fellow Catholics. In the midst of his own trial for the ill-fated "Bye" plot, William Watson was still concerned to implicate the Jesuits and smear their reputation. In his own confession written to the Privy Council, Watson says that the Jesuit priests are even duplicitous to the Catholic laity in making false promises that the king would grant toleration to Catholics (if not openly converting to Roman Catholicism himself):

to some they use most disgraceful and suspicious speeches of the king, to exasperate men's minds against his majesty: to others they make large promises of great rewards and honourable advancements, and to others a marvelous applause to his majesty, with such a liking, good conceit, and hope, nay rather assurance, that he will be catholic, or at least grant liberty of conscience, as a simple man, unacquainted with dissimulation and hypocrisy, would think it

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<sup>157</sup> "The Epistle General," Thomas Bluet, *Important considerations, which ought to move all true and sound Catholikes* (London, 1601), \*\*3.

impossible that ever they should attempt or intend any thing against his  
majesty....<sup>158</sup>

Lay Catholics as well as the Protestant authorities should mistrust the Jesuits: “The Jesuites are so ambitious,” writes the secular Catholic priest Christopher Bagshaw, “as not content with the bounds which their Fathers placed, in their unsatiable desire they have already swallowed up Kingdomes and Monarchies.”<sup>159</sup>

The Appellants were working with the idea that the Jesuit mission was politically motivated, and again, they were correct. The seminary priests had already attempted to downplay these charges in the early days of the English Mission. Cardinal William Allen frequently downplayed the political motives of his associates in the Jesuit order. As Allen argued in his *Apology*,

neither the Priests, either of the Seminaries or others, have any commission, direction, instruction, or insinuation, from his Holinesse, or any other their Superior, either in Religion or of the Colleges, to move sedition or to deale against the state or temporal government: but onely by their Priesthod and the functions therof, to do such dueties as be requisite for Christian mens soules, which consist in preaching, teaching, catechizing, ministring the Sacraments, and the like.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> “Watson to the Lords of the Council, Agust 9, 1603.” In *Dodd’s Church History of England*. Ed. M. A. Tierney (New York: AMS, 1971), IV, xxix-xxx.

<sup>159</sup> Christopher Bagshaw, *A True Relation of the Faction Begun at Wisbich* (London, 1601), L2v.

<sup>160</sup> Allen (1581), I7r-v.

In lodging their own tolerationist pleas, the secular group also defined itself in opposition to political positions defended by the Jesuits. The secular priests rejected the Jesuit arguments for papal supremacy and renounced violent means against the government. The benefits to the English state, they claimed, would include the gratitude of foreign Catholic nations, and a stronger, more spiritual England, whose faith would be supported by true reasons, not by law. They reproduced some aspects of Jesuit appeals for toleration, such as the separation of spirituality from national loyalty: “for what hath the word to do with the sword, the preacher with the pike, the afflicted Catholike Priest with the Prince his affaires,” asked Watson.<sup>161</sup>

Nevertheless, the Anti-Jesuits, who some historians have seen as unequivocally honest in their petitions of loyalty, used some of the same ambiguous styles of writing as we saw with Father Parsons. Many of these well-known priests were frequently under arrest in the Tower, an open channel to statesmen and ecclesiarchs. Their activities thus were not confined to the print debates, but included secret overtures to the Elizabethan government through Robert Bancroft, Bp. of London, and through Robert Devereaux, earl of Essex.

Take, for instance, a letter written by the secular priest William Watson, from his confinement in the Tower. He relates that around the time of his most recent arrest, Watson had been offering to write a book to counter Parsons’ naming in *Conference on the next succession* of the Spanish Infanta as the best candidate to succeed Elizabeth. Watson and his fellows had favored the Scottish succession, although the Scots king on

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<sup>161</sup> Bluet (1601), \*\*\*2r.



whom they had pinned their dreams would never come through with the hoped-for religious toleration. Watson suggests that toleration is such a radical concept that the Privy Council would censor the very word from works printed under its auspices, however covertly. In an autobiographical letter written from the Tower, Watson relates how the word “toleration” was censored after the council had perused manuscript copies of the introductory epistle of an anti-Jesuit text Watson was proposing to write and for which he was hoping to secure government backing:

The epistle to her majesty syr Robert Cicil [sic] saw in my L. of Essex hand and disliked only or rather doubted (as was tolde me) of this word *tolleration* that her majesty would not grant it. It was sent backe to alter it, I did soe & returned it again (the very day that I was taken on), my L. of Essex using these honorable speaches that he coulede wishe with all his hearte that we might have liberty of conscience....<sup>162</sup>

The passage reveals Watson playing to political faction at court. Watson was one of a group of secular priests who indeed had sought the support of Essex. The Jesuit wing took advantage of this relationship in 1595 by dedicating the *Conference about the Next Succession* to Essex as a frame-up of the secular group. The modern reader should regard with some skepticism Watson’s depiction of Essex’s whole-hearted and effusive support for Catholic freedom of conscience. But we do see Watson’s awareness of this audience in his presentation of Essex’s factional opponent, Robert Cecil. The ambiguity here is not verbal but again built into the structure of the sentence. Watson creates a chain of

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<sup>162</sup> “William Watson to the Attorney General, April 1599” in Thomas Graves Law, *The Archpriest Controversy* (Westminster, Printed for the Camden Society, 1896-98), I, 222-23.

increasingly indirect statements: Cecil's condemnation of toleration itself mediates for the mind of the queen, and then shifts from "disliked" to "or rather doubted" to the parenthetical displacement of "as was tolde." When in reality the seculars' hopes for toleration died with the fall of Essex, in this letter Watson hopes that even Cecil would support toleration for Catholics. Authorial concerns shape the narrative.

In Watson's version he hears reports of the queen, "that now she hoped both Sem[inary priests] & Jes[uits] wold in the end become more loyall subjects: she of her own mercifull benignitie not willing to afflict, but to conive at their religion & ceremonies thereunto pertaining."<sup>163</sup>

The queen was, however, apparently unimpressed with the books the secular priests had written to appeal for toleration, despite their differentiating themselves from the Jesuits and seminary priests that had so aggravated the government. A royal proclamation with the eerily prophetic date of 5 November, 1603 explicitly rejected Roman Catholic hopes for greater toleration. The Appellants, the group of secular priests who had tried to distinguish themselves from the Jesuits in part because earlier proclamations specifically referred to the Jesuits and seminary priests, now found themselves the object of one royal clause:

Furthermore, we cannot conjecture, but do wonder, upon what grounds they [the secular priests] proceed (except it be our sufferance and benignity, which is greatly neglected by them), in that they carry themselves with so great and insolent animosity, as they do almost insinuate thereby into the minds of all sorts

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<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*, I, 224.

of people, (as well the good that grieve at it, as the bad that thirst after it), that we have some purpose to grant a toleration of two religions within our realm, where God (we thank him for it, who seeth into the secret corners of all hearts) doth not only know our own innocency from such imagination, but how far it hath been from any about us once to offer to our ears the persuasion of such a course, as would not only disturb the peace of the church, but bring this our state into confusion.<sup>164</sup>

This document's literary features, particularly the parenthetical clauses, reinforce the finality of the pronouncement and naturalize the wickedness of Catholics. Those papists who are for toleration suffer from a carnal "thirst," while the Protestants regard it with a noble grief. God Himself disapproves of toleration, and marks the "innocency" of the queen's policy against what must be a morally incorrect toleration for Catholics. The queen's proclamation thus recasts the term "innocence" so prominent in Catholic tolerationist literature.

Elizabeth's pronouncement against the secular priests finalized sentiments broadcasted elsewhere in popular discourse. In a polemical poem written by Robert Pricket, "The Jesuit's Miracles, or new popish wonders," Pricket attacks the claims of the seculars that "The Popish Priest is like the Jesuit naught." Rather, the seculars pose a more pernicious threat, for:

Those Priests would worke like labourers in a mine,  
Unseene, and Jesuits they should beare the name,

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<sup>164</sup> Reproduced in Dodd and Tierney, III, clxxxiv-viii.

To be state traytors, the wounds of bleeding time,  
But Priests (poore soules) worke no such deedes of shame,  
And yet the Seminarie, or Priest secular,  
Are as the Jesuits traytors regular,  
One selfe same rule doth both their workes direct,  
And to like purpose their restlesse labors strive,  
for *Romes* availe they treasons must protect,  
And gainst their king each trayterous plot contrive <sup>165</sup>

Perhaps the political context inhibited the reception of their ideas, but the secular group failed to attain toleration by simply distinguishing itself from the Jesuits. Indeed toleration's discursive slipperiness may have helped to sink their cause.

Parsons continued the theme of polemical toleration in his final works. *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation towards Catholike-Subjectes in England* (1607), which echoes the title of Bunny's polemical *Treatise Tending to Pacification*, answered attacks by a Protestant writer, Thomas Morton, who wrote against Catholic equivocation and disloyalty.<sup>166</sup> On one level an attempt to recuperate the Catholic position in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, Parsons' text belongs to a group of Catholic publications that lodged arguments for religious toleration from a not-unfriendly new king early in his

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<sup>165</sup> Robert Pricket, *The Jesuits Miracles* (London, 1607), E3v-4r.

<sup>166</sup> Thomas Morton, *A Preamble unto an Incounter with P.R. the Author of the Deceitfull Treatise of Mitigation* (London, 1608).

reign. The book was written to counter claims that “Catholickes are not tolerable in a Protestant state.”<sup>167</sup>

Although the idea of religious toleration did not take hold for another half century, then finding its greatest expression in the free press of the civil war period, Parsons’ treatise shows a nuanced awareness of toleration’s aspects, particularly polemical toleration. Although the Jesuit Henry Garnet was implicated in the Plot, Parsons’ is one of the few moderate voices in the controversy that followed. Protestant and Catholic writers again engaged with divisive issues such as equivocation. Like Parsons’ other works, *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation* is problematically positioned as a tolerationist work, because it is part of a series of hostile arguments with the Protestant Dean of Gloucester, Thomas Morton. This polemical setting militated against the reception of Parsons’ tolerationist language.

Polemical toleration extends to principles of discursive fair play and hermeneutic integrity. In *A treatise tending to Mitigation*, Parsons attacks the fraudulent textual dealings that Morton and his peers conduct:

the Reader is to be advertised that wheras this man by a new devise of his owne, doth pretend to put downe the sayings of our Catholicke writers for his purpose, and that both in Latin and English, the one in the text, the other in the margent, pretending therby to make them speak contrary one to the other.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Parsons (1607), G3r.

<sup>168</sup> Parsons (1607), Aa4r.

Morton is guilty of introducing “willful corruptions” into his text, “perverting Scriptures,” and making other hermeneutic irregularities.<sup>169</sup>

As part of its rhetorical structure, Parsons’ *A treatise tending to mitigation towards Catholike-subjectes in England* shows the result of religious intolerance, and argues that the Protestants in England represent a greater threat to the crown than do Catholics. He makes an appeal to polemical toleration, arguing that inflammatory speech and writing will lead to physical violence and more persecution against Catholics, but he also argues for religious toleration as a civil policy. In this work, and in *A Quiet and Sober Reckoning with M. Thomas Morton* (1609), Parsons argues that two religions could coexist peacefully in one country. This position reflected a pragmatic shift from his earlier political writings, resigning the hope of a uniformly Catholic England. Parsons makes an appeal to polemical toleration, arguing that inflammatory speech and writing will lead to physical violence and more persecution against Catholics: This also acknowledges a gap between the polemical or discursive and the real world. Words have an effect in the real world:

I would aske, what he [i.e. Morton] will doe, or have to be done with so great a multitude of people, as in all his Majesties Kingdomes doe love and favour the Religioun, which this masked Minister impugneth, and would put them in despaire of any sufferance or tolerable condition under his Majesties government?<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*, Bb3v, Ii1r.

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*, E1r.

Another aspect of polemical toleration consistently upheld in Jesuit writings is the privileging of public debate.<sup>171</sup> In *A Defense of the Censure* (1582) Parsons forms an eloquent passage on free speech, complaining to the English authorities that:

You exclude us from speech, conference, writing, printing, disputing, or any other  
dew tryall of our cause. You watche, spye, searche, examine, and persecute  
everywhere. You attache, dryve away, putt in pryson, rent on racke, put to death  
those whiche speake or wryte, or stand in defence of trueth against you.<sup>172</sup>

This passage carefully interweaves grammatical structure and meaning. First and second person language makes more immediate list of the nouns which define the concept of free speech (“speech, conference, writing, printing, disputing”). The passage shifts to verbs in the second sentence, emphasizing the harsh and violent acts of the authorities (“watche, spye, search, examine, persecute”). The verbs take no object but are modified by prepositional phrases (“in pryson,” “on racke”) until the sentence arrives at the object of “those which speak or wryte,” an emphatic return to the ideas presented in the beginning of the passage.

Parsons final works demonstrate the link between polemical toleration as a principal of moderate discourse, and religious toleration as a social policy. Parsons confesses his own complicity in an intolerant discourse as he attacks his opponent’s rancor:

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<sup>171</sup> See Thomas M. McCoog, “‘Playing the Champion’: the Role of Disputation in the Jesuit Mission,” in *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits*. Ed. Thomas, M. McCoog (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996), pp. 119-140.

<sup>172</sup> Robert Parsons, *A Defence of the Censure* (Rouen, 1582), STC 19401, A3r.

Truly, if I should have suffered my selfe to be carryed away with the same passion, & with the like impatience have returned him an Answer in his owne veyne, & character of writing; you do easily see, wherunto this contention would have growne: but I have thought best to endeavour the pacification of *M. Mortons* choler, by a more moderate kynd of conference, if it may be, where heat of words layd asyde, the truth of matters may peaceably and more calmy be considered.<sup>173</sup>

Polemical tolerance is tied to arguing out of logic not emotion, but calm words help. The text emphasizes terms such as “moderate” and “pacification.” Parsons continues to hold the Protestant side to high textual scruple, and presents a more temperate persona. He accuses Morton of misunderstanding:

my affection in writing against you, as though it were malignant, contemptuous, despiteful, & full of hatred & aversion of mind: which Almighty God (I hope) knoweth to be far otherwise: and that I do love you in Christ Jesus with all my hart....<sup>174</sup>

William Cecil, Lord Burleigh had made the argument that Elizabethan strictures on Roman Catholic activities did not constitute persecution because Catholic priests were tried by the secular government for treason, not heresy. Cecil cited the Elizabethan statutes of 1571 and 1581, which made being a secular Roman Catholic priest or Jesuit working in England into a treasonable offense. Elton points out how this may have spurred Parsons’ proposal in his *Memorial for the Reformation of England* that the first

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<sup>173</sup> Parsons (1609), \*\*4v.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, \*\*\*3r.



law that should be passed were to constitute as treason any alteration of the Roman Catholic faith (180).

As this chapter has shown, Robert Parsons, though ambivalent towards the political efficacy of religious toleration, earnestly struggled with the nuances of the topic throughout his writings, and his skill with rhetoric and the fluidity of language allowed him at times to occupy conflicting positions.

Ambiguity constituted a defining category for Elizabethan Roman Catholics. Covertly practicing an interior sort of spirituality that ironically was perceived by its many of its reformed critics as a religion of externals, those Englishmen and women who firmly held the Old Faith in the teeth of state persecution eluded detection through tactics of secrecy, outward conformity, and equivocation. In their writings, Catholic controversialists such as Robert Parsons used verbal ambiguity and rhetorical devices not simply to evade the issue of toleration, but to engage with the paradoxes of toleration and persecution inherent in early modern culture. He envisioned a world where “notwithstanding the differences of religion...freely and confidently men might confer, and eche man shew his reason with out feare, and heare another mans argument without suspition of fraud or violence to be used.”<sup>175</sup> Despite the choler and passion of some of his writings, Parsons held dear the principle of polemical tolerance.

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<sup>175</sup> Parsons (1599), Q4v.

## Chapter 5: Religious Toleration and the Case of John Milton

In his *Declaration of Breda* of 4 April 1660, Charles II preceded his impending accession to the crown of England by promising allowances for those whose religious beliefs or observances differed from those of the Church of England. He frames the Restoration in terms of religious toleration, or what he calls “a liberty to tender consciences”:

And because the passion and uncharitableness of the times have produced several opinions in religion, by which men are engaged in parties and animosities against each other (which, when they shall hereafter unite in a freedom of conversation, will be composed or better understood), we do declare a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion in matter of religion, which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom; and that we shall be ready to consent to such an Act of Parliament, as, upon mature deliberation, shall be offered to us, for the full granting that indulgence.<sup>176</sup>

The *Declaration of Breda* shares in its principles many of the same attitudes espoused by one of the most famous seventeenth-century proponents of religious toleration, (and one

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<sup>176</sup> See Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution 1628-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889), 465-467.

of the most famous apologists for the regicide), John Milton. Like Milton, Charles is concerned with the proliferation of ‘several opinions in religion’; but unlike Milton he is, quite understandably, focused on their growth as a result of political events, the “uncharitableness of the times.” Milton instead sees religious discord in terms of biblical typology and the image of England as a new Israel, which he hopes in *Areopagitica* (1642) will become a “vast City; a City of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his [God's] protection.”<sup>177</sup> Also like Milton, Charles proposes a limit to toleration. Only those “tender consciences” who “do not disturb the peace of the kingdom” will enjoy religious liberty, much as only those whose activities during the Civil Wars did not extend to pillage, rapine, or direct responsibility for the regicide. The syntax of Charles’ general pardon is repetitively exclusive: “excepting only such persons as shall hereafter be excepted by Parliament, those only to be excepted.” Milton similarly excludes certain religious faiths from his proposals for toleration, namely “Popery, and open superstition” and more generally “that also which is impious or evil absolutely either against faith or manners (YP 2.565).” Although the broadly inclusive religious toleration proposed by Milton would appear radical in comparison to the conservative views of Thomas More with which this study opened, Milton’s did not go so far as to espouse the universal toleration that was proposed by his contemporary Roger Williams (1603-1683). Milton maintained that idolatry and atheism are wholly impermissible.

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<sup>177</sup> References to Milton’s prose are from *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. 8 vols. Ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82. (abbreviated YP), 2.553-4.

Finally, like Milton, Charles understands that although the hope of religious uniformity is futile, religious *unity* is nevertheless still desirable; and like Milton, Charles positions this unity within the domain of discourse, where despite the divisions of the Civil Wars, the English people may “unite in a freedom of conversation.” As this chapter will demonstrate, anti-tolerationist arguments in the 1640s still largely relied on the concept of religious uniformity. Staunch conservatives in particular chafed at the notion of toleration, which threatened their “vision of an ordered, unified, and godly national community”<sup>178</sup> As the press censor Roger L’Estrange would go on to state in print six years after the Restoration, “That which you call Persecution, I translate Uniformity.”<sup>179</sup> L’Estrange was sympathetic to the “Anti-Jacobite” strains of *Paradise Lost* as they appear in the first folio edition of 1688, but In contrast to this perspective, Milton disparages the “obedient unity” of dogmatic belief, replacing an untested uniformity with the productive interchange of debate and pursuit of the truth, in which the infelicities of disagreement can be forgiven, a type of “venial discourse unblam’d.”<sup>180</sup> Both Charles and Milton see toleration as a way for doctrinal and ceremonial difference to enhance

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<sup>178</sup> See Lowenstein, David, “Toleration and the Specter of Heresy in Milton’s England” in *Milton and Toleration*. Ed Sharon Achinstein and Elizabeth Sauer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>179</sup> In *Toleration Discuss’d*. (London, 1663), 100.

<sup>180</sup> (YP 2.455); References to the major poems are to The Oxford Authors Edition of *John Milton*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, PL 9.1-15; see also John N. King, *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

religious harmony, like counterpoint in a musical score, within which contrasting ideas are “composed or better understood.”

This chapter began by juxtaposing views on religious toleration of two ideologically opposed figures, Charles Stuart and John Milton, as a methodological statement. Throughout this study, I have presented the ways that writers have adapted the richly paradoxical concept of religious toleration for complex rhetorical purposes, and I have also shown how writers relied on literary means to resolve the intellectual contradictions of tolerance. For Thomas More, toleration offered a way to reconsider the genres in which he wrote, testing the efficacy of dialogue and developing the ideal of polemical toleration. For John Foxe, a tolerant authorial *ethos* furthered his critique of religious persecution and his championing of the Protestant faith as a downtrodden “true” church. For Robert Parsons, toleration offered a strategy for both asserting the loyalty of English Roman Catholics and lodging veiled criticisms of the Elizabethan religious establishment. Although each of these writers envisions toleration as having a reinforcing or diminishing effect on religious identity, it is the persuasive component of tolerance that is central to their literary efforts. Milton engaged with the interaction of toleration and identity more directly; he viewed toleration as more than a mere rhetorical appurtenance, and as this chapter will show, when compared with the writings of Thomas More, particularly in More’s debate with Robert Barnes, the case of John Milton provides an index for measuring the diachronic development of his culture’s idea of persecuting heresy. Although his prose tracts including *Of True Religion* and *Areopagitica*, works “of the left hand,” explicitly argue for a broad toleration of religious difference, the terms

of the printed debate over religious toleration in the 1640s also enter into the poetry of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, where they are transformed into a consideration of suffering (in the sense of tolerating, or allowing, and in the sense of experiencing pain) as a phenomenological category of experience that transcends ordinary subject/object relationship of tolerator to tolerated (YP 1.808).

What, precisely, were Milton's views of religious toleration? If one accepts Andrew Murphy's definition of religious toleration as "a governmental response to religious dissent or diversity in a society, a response that eschews coercion and extends legal protection to adherents of non-mainstream religious groups," certainly Milton supported such a policy.<sup>181</sup> He places the power of tolerating religious difference in the domain of civil authority: "Whether therefore it be fit or reasonable, to tolerate men thus principl'd in Religion towards the State, I submit it to the consideration of all Magistrates, who are best able to provide for their own and publick safety."<sup>182</sup>

When Milton criticizes the Ulster Presbyterians for impeding Parliament's ability to "establish by Law a universal tolleration of all [Protestant] Religions," he is arguing for civil toleration, a state policy permitting or refraining from otherwise punishing those who hold dissenting ideas concerning religion (YP 3.324). Basic questions of civil toleration including determining which religious activity should be deemed criminal and

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<sup>181</sup> Murphy, Andrew R. *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001, xiii.

<sup>182</sup> *Of True Religion*, YP vol 2.

how far the magistrate should go in enforcing religious uniformity.<sup>183</sup> Becoming most concentrated in the seventeenth century, vigorous debates over tolerance swirled around the question of what the state ought to do to achieve a unified national religion. In the 1640s a vast pamphlet literature debated such questions, but it was not until the 1689 Act of Toleration that the government put forth a set policy on the issue.

Civil toleration could appear across a range of positions, and could apply to diverse groups, including Roman Catholics and radical, non-conforming Protestants. Civil tolerance might mean that the authorities, on the one hand, would simply restrain from persecuting those who dissented from officially sanctioned church practice or doctrine. Although this represented a *de facto* permission for dissenting groups, it still left non-conforming Roman Catholics or radical Protestants on the margins of society. Radical tolerationists nevertheless began to argue in the mid-seventeenth century for a more encompassing toleration that recognized the rights of individuals or groups to religious freedom and “liberty of conscience,” and even urged a complete separation of church and state (Coffey 11-12).

Civil toleration also took a number of discursive forms. At the level of national government, royal promulgations enforced attendance at services of the Church of England, outlawed subscription to other forms of worship, and set penalties for nonconformity. Most polemicists saw church and state as inexorably bound together.

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<sup>183</sup> The purportedly borderline taboo acts of the “Family of Love,” and socially disruptive behaviors of Quakers and Ranters tested the limits of civil toleration; See Allen, J. W. *History of Political Thought*. (London: Methuen, 1957) , 74.

William Tyndale, for example, theorized a godly king whose temporal judgment derived from his spiritual wisdom and adherence to God's Word. English writers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic faiths contributed to a body of European literature on the relationship between church and state, and thus added to the literature of toleration

Some writers felt that there could be distinctions among what beliefs or practices were to be tolerated. In his 1644 book *M.S. to A.S. with a Plea for Libertie of Conscience in a Church Way*, John Goodwin writes:

If by a *toleration*, the argument means, either an approbation, or such a connivance which either takes no knowledge of, or however no wayes opposeth such Religions, Sects, or Schismes, as are unwarrantable, they are not to be tolerated... Secondly, if by a toleration, the argument means, a non-suppression of such Religions, Sects, and Schismes by a strong hand, as by fining, imprisoning, disfranchising, banishment, death, or the like, my Answer is, that they ought to be tolerated, only upon this supposition, that the Professors or maintainers of them, be otherwise peaceable in the State, and every waye subject to the Laws, and lawfull power of the Civill Magistrate”<sup>184</sup>

Goodwin here argues for civil toleration of groups who, as Charles described them, “do not disturb the peace of the kingdom”; he balks, however, at toleration within the church of groups who are “unwarrantable.” While it is not the jurisdiction of the state to search out the private consciences of individuals, the church has—and should exercise—such authority.

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<sup>184</sup> See John Goodwin, *M. S. to A. S. with a Plea for Libertie of Conscience* (London, 1644).



Milton did not agree. When he writes that “neither pope nor bishop nor anyone else has the right to impose so much as a single syllable of obligation upon a Christian man without his own consent,” Milton was arguing for ecclesiastical toleration, that the ecclesiastical authorities should permit individual freedom of conscience among the laity. Ecclesiastical toleration is concerned with the extent of difference or diversity of opinion that the church would tolerate within its community. Early modern writers distinguished between civil and ecclesiastical toleration as a matter of terminology. The term “indulgence” usually referred to civil tolerance and the term “comprehension” to ecclesiastical tolerance. In the seventeenth century, some, such as John Locke and other liberal dissenters, favored both civil and ecclesiastical tolerance. Others, namely the Laudians and High Anglicans, were completely opposed to both kinds of tolerance. A third position at the midpoint of this spectrum, that of the Anglican “Latitudinarians,” favored ecclesiastical tolerance but balked at tolerance by the state. The final group was composed of Puritan sectarians who argued that the state should permit a plurality of religious groups, but who also believed that churches should be internally *intolerant*, upholding each member to strict, godly standards of belief and observance.

Writing in the midst of the 1640s, a watershed decade for religious toleration in England, Milton developed an idea of toleration at the precise moment when the widely agreed upon perception of this concept shifted from that of a negative threat to uniformity, to a more modern sense of religious toleration of plurality as an end in itself. The shift in how early modern thinkers understood toleration developed throughout the controversies over Presbyterian uniformity in the 1640s, followed by the 1648 Whitehall

debates, the 1653 Humble Proposal, the reinvigorated “Good Old Cause” in 1659 and 1660, the Restoration, the Clarendon Code, James II instituting toleration in 1686-7, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The religious context for Milton’s writing on toleration was characterized by English Congregationalists or Independents, who were influenced by both the separatists and the New England colonists, and who were hostile to those Puritans who advocated Presbyterian-style church government. The “accommodation” desired by the Assembly Congregationalists involved inclusion under the rubric of the established church. Separatists, however, went a step further in asking for coexistence rather than assimilation, something closer to what we know today as toleration of plural religions. Milton’s age thus witnessed Congregationalists, separatists, Presbyterians, and of course Roman Catholics, all vying for degrees of accommodation with the Church of England, or for toleration outside of it.

Milton’s views on toleration were made possible by a more extensive religious toleration as practiced by the civil government. While hundreds of Protestants and Roman Catholics died at the hands of the government between 1535 and 1681 for heresy (or for treason, as many religious offenders were charged) only two were killed for religion under James I, and none under Charles I. The moderate Jacobean bishop Joseph Hall argued that “mere heresy” does not deserve capital punishment, but when compounded on sedition or “infectious divulcation,” then “it may well be worthy of a faggot.”<sup>185</sup> Bacon echoes this sentiment, writing against the use of “sanguinary

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<sup>185</sup> *The Works of Joseph Hall*, Ed. P. Wynter (Oxford, 1863). 6.649-50

persecutions to force consciences; except it be in cases of overt scandals, blasphemy, or intermixture of practice against the state.”<sup>186</sup>

### **Toleration and Heresy**

In chapter 2 of this study, I argued that one of the radical changes that allowed for religious toleration to grow later in the seventeenth century involved the idea of heresy and its persecution. The difference in approach between Thomas More and John Milton provides an index for measuring this development. More had written that heresy is “the wurst cryme that canne be” and that as for heretics, he felt that “fayr handelyng helpeth lytell wyth many of them.” In a book published the year of More’s execution, Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, emphasized uniformity not only in the civil terms of a peaceful and well ordered state, but in divine terms, as a sign of the true church. For Gardiner, the church “sygnifieth that onli multitude of people, which being united in the profession of Christe, is growen into one bodie.”<sup>187</sup> Organic metaphors for uniformity prevailed in More’s writing, supplying a medical lexicon which naturalizes the image of heresy as a virulent disease harmful to the body politic. More’s *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* had argued frankly against the toleration of heresy, which he sees as a disease that sickens and weakens society. From More’s career as a public officer, he imported

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<sup>186</sup> Francis Bacon. “Of Unity in Religion.” *Essays*. (London, 1992), 11.

<sup>187</sup> Stephen Gardiner, *De Vera Obediencia* (1535), xix

views on social order and health of the population into his beliefs regarding religious uniformity. More described heresy in this way, variously as “an incurable and contagious pestilence,” and an “incurable canker.” The heretic was to be exterminated from the communal organism “according to justice by sore painful death, both for example and for [avoiding] infection of others” (*CW* 8.1.3-40; 8.2.979).

More’s literary and rhetorical figuration of heresy as a thought crime reveals a culture inimical to toleration as an abstract theory or as a civil policy. More allows that heresy in itself implies no violence or crime against person or property, “yet were heresye well worthy to be as sore punyshed as any other faute syth ther is no faute that more offendeth god” (*CW* 6 416). For More, religious crime and civil crime are linked in a way that prevents any separation of church and state. The relevance for toleration, and for this analysis of toleration in early modern English literature, is that persecution is a more privileged policy for those articulating and writing in cooperation with the authoritative discourse. More does note the distinction that the civil government has the power to enforce capital punishment, unlike the clergy who at worst can only excommunicate those subject to its authority, but makes no apology: “and for heretics, as they be, the clergy doth denounce them; and, as they be well worthy, the temporality doth burn them; and after the fire of Smithfield hell doth receive them, where the wretches burn forever.”

The central argument that More counters is Barnes’ claim that “thys knowen [Roman Catholic] chyrche can in no wyse be the very chyrche of Cryste / because it persecuteth heretykes (*CW* 8.2.954). This is an argument based on binaries, determining

whether the church be visible/invisible, known/unknown, or pure/impure. The model of tolerance here is also positioned diametrically with persecution, and although tolerance grew from its conjunction with persecution not its opposition to it, the discourse tends to paint a picture in white and black. Given this, one might expect More to set forth a counterargument that the Roman Catholic Church is in fact tolerant not persecutorial, but such an expectation would be frustrated. On the contrary, More contends with Barnes' evaluation of Roman Catholic persecution by building on Barnes' own argument. Rather than denying that the Church is persecutorial, More asserts that persecution is fundamental to the Church. Agreeing with Barnes in the standard view that one criteria satisfied by the "true" Church is that it is persecuted, as were the primitive Christians; however, More asserts that the Roman Catholic Church in fact *is* persecuted in contemporary days, by the attacks of the heretical Protestants:

Yet sayth Barns that thys knowen catholyke chyrche can not be the very chyrch because it is not persecuted...For *the very chyrch* (sayth Barns) *in sufferynge oppressions and persecucyons, blasphemynge, and all other thynges that may be layed unto her / whych as saynte Austayne sayth she lerned of our mayster Cryste...* And yet beside all thys the chyrche doth in dede abyde & endure the shamefull contumelyes of these wreched heretykes."(CW 8.2.953)

More continues along this path, noting that another manner in which the Roman Catholic Church actually is persecuted, is that it has to endure the attacks of its Protestant detractors. Certainly, More suggest that the Church should not respond to this persecution with tolerance:

And as for persecucyon to be suffered by the catholike chyrche, it suffyseth that men be of the mynde gladly to suffer whan necessyte of sufferauce shall happen by paynymys & infydeles / & not that they cease to be Crystes chyrche, but yf they suffer heretykes aryse and remayne amonge them selfe, fyrste wyth false doctryne to contende and inquyete them / and after syth rebellion to bete, robbe, spoyle, and kyll them.” (CW 8.2.953)

This image is cast in spite of the biblical prophecies of a kingdom of peace, where swords would be turned into ploughshares and spears fashioned into pruning hooks (Matthew 5-7, Luke 6, Is 2:4).

Toleration evokes an apology for persecution that depends on cultural views of national identity and European and church history that follow a binary pattern. More uses this persecution/toleration and true/false dynamic to ridicule the beliefs of Protestants, and to dismiss the credibility of their Church. For instance, he wryly mocks the “church” which Barnes claims is being persecuted. in response that Barnes refers here not to just the Roman Catholic clergy, but to himself and his fellow Protestants: “he meneth that hym selfe and hys holy felowes be the chyrch because they be runne awaye for fere of perecucyon.” (CW 8.2.952).

Nowhere in here is Barnes saying a separate, Protestant Church should be tolerated, or that it should coexist rather than compete with the Roman Catholic faith. These debates were not about toleration in the sense that their participants were proposing competing visions for an exclusive, single church; nor were they arguing that plural churches should exist. This is more about the nature of a single church. So

therefore, the debate turned to whether expression of these ideas (or descriptions of a version of the church) should be permitted. In his work against Tyndale and Barnes, More builds two sides that reinforce each other. By justifying persecution he can legitimate censorship and a refusal to allow circulation of Protestant books, and the danger of Protestant ideas to the established Roman Catholic Church in England and abroad justifies his persecutorial mindset.

It has been discussed how toleration was a productively linked with its dialectical antithesis persecution, such that modern commentators can understand these concepts in a non-adversarial relationship to one another. Persecution in the early modern period, Walsham argues, represented an approach to religious difference that was perceived potentially to unsettle religious uniformity and state safety. Persecution also had a corrective effect, to the spiritual benefit of those subjected to it. In this context, Walsham suggests, “To allow men and women to persist in heterodox opinions was in effect to condemn them to eternal torment in hell. Cruelty was thus a form of kindness” (2006, 2). Such logic underpinned arguments like that of Richard Baxter, who in 1663 attempted to persuade readers that “the Religion of the Papists is Superstitious and Idolatrous, their Faith and Doctrine erroneous and hereticall, their Church in respect of both Apostaticall.” “To give them therefore a Toleration,” Baxter asserts, “or to consent that they may freely exercise their Religion, and professe their Faith and Doctrine is a grievous sin.”<sup>188</sup> Others

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<sup>188</sup> Baxter, Richard. *Fair-warning, or, XXV Reasons against Toleration and Indulgence of Popery* (London, 1663).

emphasized the Christian humanist tradition, which privileged toleration as a prerequisite for rational persuasion through open conversation.

Although Richard Baxter persists in the Augustinian view of “medicinal persecution” aimed at curing the heretic, other thinkers show how the idea of persecution had changed in the seventeenth century. Martin Clifford, for example, suggested that “there cannot certainly in the World be found out, so mild and so peaceable a Doctrine, as that which permits a difference in Beliefs; for what occasion can any man take to begin a quarrel, when both he himself is suffered quietly to enjoy his own Opinion, and his own opinion is this, that he ought to suffer others to do the same.”<sup>189</sup> Milton, too, demonstrated a view of persecution completely different from that of Thomas More. In line with John Foxe, persecution is necessary because it allows humans to perceive the “true” church, which is assailed by falsehood (*YP* 12.535-7). As the narrator of *Paradise Regained* asks God (and the reader) to witness: “Behold the kings of the earth how the oppress / Thy chosen, to what height their power unjust / They have exalted, and behind them cast / All fear of thee, arise and vindicate / Thy glory, free they people from their yoke. (*PR* 2.44-48)

In the *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), for instance, Milton creates a Foxean image of the “true” church persecuted throughout history: “through all storms and persecutions kept religion from extinguishing, and delivered it pure to us” (*YP* 3.251). Freedom of conscience thus emerges in opposition to the “tyrannous yoke” of Roman Catholic doctrine:

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<sup>189</sup> Martin Clifford, *A Treatise of Human Reason* (London, 1674).



whatsoever men have set up of their own inventions, to make articles of our faith, or to bind men's conscience by...the doctrines of the supremacy of the See of Rome, purgatory, the mass, transubstantiation...free will, justification by works, praying in an unknown tongue, to saints departed, for the dead; extolling of images, pardons, and pilgrimages... These, I say, with such alike, we abjure, renounce, and utterly condemn.<sup>190</sup>

As with John Foxe, Milton invokes martyrs for persuasive, polemical reasons, and the tension among images of martyrdom, as inspiring Christian militancy and resistance, and as inspiring passive suffering, appear throughout his works.<sup>191</sup> While decrying persecution and thereby taking the position that one's identity should be tolerated, the martyr also relies on persecution to enjoy the ideological status attached to martyrdom, when "heavy persecution shall arise / On all who in the worship persevere / Of spirit and truth" (*PL* 12.29-32). Persecution is also necessary for the model of Christian heroism developed in *Paradise Lost*, as the intolerant circumstances...the faithful who suffer in loneliness "for truth's sake" (*PL* 12.569) depend on "intolerant circumstances." Persecution combines with providential succor and faith to create the experience of a persecuted community of godly readers:

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<sup>190</sup> See Philip Caraman, *The Other Face; Catholic Life under Elizabeth I* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1960), 307, 270-71.

<sup>191</sup> See Knott, John. *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

He to his own a Comforter will send,  
The promise of the Father, who shall dwell  
His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith  
Working through love, upon their hearts shall write,  
To guide them in all truth, and also arme  
With spiritual Armour, able to resist  
*Satans* assaults, and quench his fierie darts,  
What man can do against them, not afraid,  
Though to the death, against such cruelties  
With inward consolations recompenc't,  
And oft supported so as shall amaze  
Their proudest persecutors. (*PL* 12.486-97)

Although suffering is a way of passively resisting the oppressor, in imitation of Christ passive suffering can confound the persecutor, and is a way of passively striking back. In this passage God offers his faithful a gift, the Pauline spiritual armor also described in the “Letter to Raleigh” accompanying Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. For Spenser, the weapon of faith (in the Orgoglio episode extended from Redcrosse Knight’s armor to the shield of Arthur), amazes or confounds the proud persecutor Orgoglio:

And eke the fruitfull-headed beast, amaz'd  
At flashing beames of that sunshiny shield,  
Became starke blind, and all his senses daz'd,  
That downe he tumbled on the durty field,

And seem'd himselfe as conquered to yield.

Looking forward in book 12 to the suffering of the Marian exiles, the amazement of the “proudest persecutors” in the lines from *Paradise Lost* is a prophecy whose fulfillment in the poem is already guaranteed, as the language echoes the already-fallen angels on the Lake of Fire: “Abject and lost lay these, covering the Flood, Under amazement of their hideous change.” (*PL* 1.312-13).

These passages are relevant to the literature of toleration because they complicate what toleration means and they create new definitions of the idea. For instance, B. J. Sokol defines tolerance not just the idea that different religions should be permitted, but in the sense of a person’s willed or chosen extension of goodwill or sympathy towards a person, practice, behavior, or belief that lies outside their usual experience – even toward someone or something shockingly or frighteningly strange.”<sup>192</sup> Sokol means that this idea of toleration is a quality of character, describing an individual subjectivity; I think this also means an openness to other conditions “outside their usual experience,” including the experience of persecution. In *Paradise Lost*, while toleration is maybe not explicitly argued it is enacted in the form of the minority tolerating the persecution of a repressive, dominant group.

Another link between changing attitudes towards heresy and persecution and the idea of religious toleration involves the dialogical and productive nature of plural religious identities. Early modern English culture articulated the idea that contact with even the most heretical of Protestant sects contributed to a dialectical process of

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<sup>192</sup> B. J. Sokol, *Shakespeare and Tolerance*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

uncovering religious truth, and toleration facilitates this dialectic. As Roger Williams argues, “A false religion out of the *Church* will not hurt the *Church* more than *weeds* in the *Wilderness* hurt the inclosed Garden, or *poyson* hurt the *body* when it is not touched or taken, yea and *antidotes* are received against it.”<sup>193</sup> To Milton, heresy poses a necessary corrective for organized religion in a fallen world, where even language holds the potential to mislead through ambiguity. The desire to restore this connection of signifier to referent manifests for Milton in his consideration of heresy in terms of its etymological roots also offered Milton a new and different perspective. In this vein, Janelle Mueller suggests that the term “heresy” contains both positive and negative connotations, tracing the early use of the term in the Pauline epistles to indicate religious uses outside of Christianity as well as those dissenters within the Christian Church.<sup>194</sup> Milton recuperates heresy as a concept by distinguishing it from the Pauline term “schism.” As he writes, schism implies irreconcilable difference, while heresy allows for the possibility of choice: “schism signifies division, and in the worst sense; heresie, choise only of one opinion before another, which bee without discord.” (*YP* 7.247). Heresy is, Milton argues, a necessary, corrective process for the church.

For Milton, heresy in itself could be basically indistinguishable from belief, “only the choise or following of any opinion good or bad in religion or any other learning” (*YP* 7.246). Milton calls heretical any belief not held with scrupulous conscientiousness. For

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<sup>193</sup> Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent, of Persecution, for cause of Conscience, discussed, in A Conference betweene Truth and Peace* (London, 1644), 243-7.

<sup>194</sup> Janelle Mueller, “Milton on Heresy,” in *Milton and Heresy*. Ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Milton, even blind piety might verge on heresy in that the unexamined heretic refrains from testing his own conscience. The label of “heretic” could thus apply positively to those who thoughtfully adhere to “traditions or opinions not probable by Scripture” or much worse, the corrupt “blind mouths” of *Lycidas*, who follow freely without challenging their own conscience. Someone who diverges from Church doctrine but does so in his or her heart is, contrarily, not a negative or pejorative heretic. What is more, the true heretic is one who “follows the church against his conscience and persuasion grounded on the Scripture.” In Milton’s poem “On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament,” the speaker asserts that because the once-rebellious Presbyterians have effectively imposed a new orthodoxy, so that “New *presbyter* is but old *priest* writ large,” non-pejorative heresy can emerge as part of a natural dialectic challenging authority and preventing the corrupt from further straying from the truth. Heresy represents one side of a positive dialectic between the “true” church on the one hand, and corruption and idolatry on the other. The question for Milton is whether true belief derives from the individual conscience of the Christians or from the unique power of the church to communicate spiritual truth.

John Milton came to see the function of heresy as part of a dialectical, self-correcting process necessary to repair the entropic tendency of the Church to decay into idolatry and corruption. The process of self-correction was enacted in print, and limited freedom of the press was linked to a positive model of heresy. This was another major shift from the perspective of Thomas More, who had hoped to prevent such ideological pandemic by prohibiting Lutheran books:

But the very cause why his bokes be not suffred to be red is bycause heis heresyas  
be so many and so abhomynable ... y<sup>t</sup> there can no good / but moche harme  
growe by the redyng ... that the contagion therof were likely to enfecte a feble  
soule as the sauoure of a syknes sore enfecteth an hole body.” (6.1.347)

One can see this dynamic in More’s *Confutacyon of Tyndale’s Answer*, in which More debates with William Tyndale over freedom of the press. More defends the Roman Catholic Church’s persecutorial stance against Protestants and publishers of their ideas, as well as defining what persecution (not toleration) means for the nature of the “true Church.” When More is faced with Barnes’ complaint that the Roman Catholic Church “doth threaten wyth banyshementes and presonmentes, and she compelleth men to byleue her whyche was exiled and caste in preson” (954), he has two responses. The first is to defend the view that the Church needs persecution, and the second is to reject the possibility of conversion for Protestants. Because rhetorical persuasion will never work to convert the staunchest heretics, he states that a tolerant discourse is unnecessary. Persuasion is not even worth the effort of writing. More supports this stance in his attack on the doctrine of election, where he states that, unlike the reprobate masses, the elect (and their polemical defenders) are in their own self-view disinclined towards repentance, and thus are not receptive to redemption (8.1.533). Persuasion, and the moment of toleration that allows for equal opportunity for debating issues in print, are useless to More.

Milton contradicts this idea in works such as *Of True Religion* (1672), where he asks that because “we suffer the Idolatrous books of the Papists, without this fear [that the

weak-minded might be converted] to be sold & read... why not much rather of Anabaptists, Arians, & Socinians?” Regarding ideas being exchanged in print controversies, “Why should it not at least be tolerable and free,” Milton asks, “in Logic they teach, that contraries laid together more evidently appear. It follows then that all controversies being permitted, falsehood will appear more false, and truth the more true” (YP 8.437-38).

Milton’s anti-royalist, anti-prelatical, and anti-censorship stances were most vividly set against this backdrop, a large body of printed works on the question of religious toleration. In what A. A. Seaton called in his 1911 analysis, a “stream of pamphlets” regarding religious toleration, the social conditions of religious difference both contributed to and were influenced by the discursive context of religious toleration. An associate of various independent groups, Milton engaged in public life at the very moment when tolerationist tracts by the Puritan agitator John Lilburne, Leveller pamphleteers Richard Overton and William Walwyn, and New England colonist Roger Williams.<sup>195</sup> Key publications of this period included, John Goodwin’s above-referenced *M.S. to A.S, with a Plea for Libertie of Conscience* (1644); Roger Williams’, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* (1644); Joshua Sprigge’s, *The Ancient Bounds, or Liberty of Conscience* (1645), William Prynne’s *Twelve Considerable Serious Questions* (1644), and Henry Burton’s, *A Vindication of Churches* (1644), and Katherine Chidley’s,

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<sup>195</sup> See A. A. Seaton, *The Theory of Toleration under the Later Stuarts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

*A New-Yeaes Gift for English Catholikes, or A Briefe and Cleare Explication of the new Oath of Allegiance* (1645).

Milton links freedom of the press and freedom of speech with religious liberty; and he links censorship with persecution and martyrdom. Censorship is “a persecution more undermining, and secretly decaying the Church, then the open cruelty of *Decius* or *Dioclesian* (2.509). Milton’s authorial notion of the book as a living being means that burning a book is like burning a martyr: “a kind of homicide... sometimes a martyrdom” (2.493). Here, Milton recalls Foxes’ attitudes towards the permanence of print and polemical toleration. Truth itself is martyred, although Milton adapts Egyptian mythology to speak of truth in christological terms. Truth can never really be killed, and it can always be resurrected. The “torn body of our martyr’d Saint” Truth, can be restored through the free exchange of ideas and the heretical dialectic (2.549-50).

The relationship to religious toleration here goes beyond the polemical toleration described earlier in this study to the policy of allowing otherwise illicit ideas to circulate freely in print. In *Areopagitica*, Sharon Achinstein argues, “the strategy of knowing truth by falsehood requires a phenomenological tolerance of such falsehood” (Achinstein 2007, 236). Milton proclaims that ‘a fugitive and cloister’d vertue’ is unmeritorious and ‘that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary’ (*Areop.*, YP 2.515). When Truth and Falsehood ‘grapple,’ he asks, “who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?” Milton defended freedom of the press throughout the Interregnum, permitting publication in 1650 of *The Racovian Catechism*, a work by the



Socinian group whose anti-Trinitarian views were associated with toleration by the 1630s, but were suppressed by the Presbyterian establishment in the 1640s.

Milton's early writings for toleration of the Presbyterianism, however, were countered by his later writings against Presbyterian intolerance of separatists. This is one crux for modern interpretation of Milton's political and religious theory, but the most challenging to modern critics is the Milton's apparent intolerance for Roman Catholicism. It is well known that although in *Areopagitica* Milton argues for freedom of the press and toleration of "brotherly dissimilitudes" among reformed believers, he draws the line at government sanction of Roman Catholicism. In arguing for toleration of all religions, Milton reserves a clause of exclusion for one category:

I mean not tolerated Popery, and open superstition, which as it extirpats all religions and civill supremacies, so itself should be extirpat, provided first that all charitable and compassionat means be us'd to win and regain the weak and the misled. (YP 2.565.)

To understand this passage, Robert Entzminger reminds readers that in the decades after the toleration debates of the 1640s, Milton's and other dissenters' strategy failed; where they had once compared the mainstream Presbyterians to Roman Catholics, after their defeat with the Restoration the dissenters themselves became associated with Catholicism.<sup>196</sup> The conflation may be perceived in the title of Robert Barclay's 1676

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<sup>196</sup> Robert Entzminger, "The Power and the Glory: *Paradise Regained* and the Toleration Controversy." in *Milton's Legacy*. Ed. Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005).

tract, *The Anarchy of the Ranters and Other Libertines, the Hierarchy of the Romanists, and Other Pretended Churches, Equally Refused and Refuted in a Two-Fold Apology for the Church and People of God Called in Derision Quakers* (1676). Such comparison between Separatism and Roman Catholicism is perhaps one explanation for why Milton seemed so rabidly anti-Catholic, as is evident in *Of True Religion*, where he writes that “His argument that “Popery, as being Idolatrous, is not to be tolerated either in Public or in Private” (YP 8.431). Entzminger points out, however, that Milton’s anti-Catholic views are consistent across his career, both before and after the establishment of Presbyterianism.

This view is shared by Arthur Marotti, who identifies the internal contradiction of Protestant arguments for liberty of conscience which exclude tolerance of Roman Catholicism as “one of the stress points” within the ideological climate of sixteenth- and seventeenth century England.<sup>197</sup> In his *Treatise of Civil Power* Milton justifies his stance against toleration for Roman Catholics “for just reason of state more than of religion” (YP 7.254). Other critics have likewise attempted to bridge the gap in Milton’s views by analyzing the rhetorical adaptability of his works to contingent situations. Barbara Lewalski, for example, resolves that Milton’s polemical methodology “was to accept necessary compromise in the practical sphere of government models, to present whatever plan seemed best in a given set of circumstances, and to engage in occasional disingenuousness in the manipulation of arguments, but not to the extent of employing

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<sup>197</sup> Arthur Marotti, *Religious Ideology & Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 200.

arguments irreconcilable with his basic principles.”<sup>198</sup> Another critic has explained that, in all likelihood, “Milton’s self-presentation varies from prose tract to prose tract because of the type of argument he makes and the type of persona he creates for the better persuasiveness of that argument.”<sup>199</sup> Such intellectual acrobatics must be necessary to explain the inconsistency of Milton’s tolerationist program with that of his peers, many of whom espoused a universal toleration inclusive of Roman Catholics. In the view of Christopher Hill, anti-Catholicism was one of a phalanx of ideological forces that propelled religious radicalism and revolution. Even tolerationists more radical than Milton, were unprepared to extend toleration to Roman Catholics.<sup>200</sup> For example, Henry Robinson’s *Liberty of Conscience* (1644) and *A Short Answer to A. S.* (1645) argue for the benefit of tolerating error; even “Jesuited Papists” deserve toleration because “Though a toleration of erroneous opinions may give some to Sathan, yet truth being therewith permitted to be published and improved, will ... gain so many to God.”

Even as persecuted martyrs, however, Roman Catholics are in Milton’s works again excluded: “Therefore the Romanists suffer not for the true and Catholike religion: and consequently are no Martyrs.” Nevertheless, other writers saw a parallel between the persecuted radical Protestants and Roman Catholics punished under the recusancy

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<sup>198</sup> Barbara Lewalski, “Milton: Political Beliefs and Polemical Methods, 1659-1660.” *PMLA* 74 (1959), 202.

<sup>199</sup> Rueben Sanchez, “From Polemic to Prophecy.” *Milton Studies* 30 (1993), 27.

<sup>200</sup> See Anon. *An Address to the Church of England: Evidencing her Obligations both of Interest and Conscience, to Concurr with his Gracious Majesty in the Repeal of the Penal Laws and Tests* (London, 1688).

laws. In *An address to the Church of England: Evidencing her Obligations both of Interest and Conscience, to Concurr with his Gracious Majesty in the Repeal of the Penal Laws and Tests*. (1688), one Roman Catholic writer laments that:

Nay, the Ferment has sometimes boil'd so high, that our Protestant Church has put her Zeal upon the stretch to find means to vent her Indignation, when some of those very Laws against Recusancy have been extended against the Protestant Dissenters, & the greatest part of their Sufferings received from the Lash of those Laws.”

Elizabeth Sauer has described how contemporary perspectives on imperial and colonized identity position in Cromwellian England, particularly those erupting over the readmission of the Jews in 1655, form a backdrop to “how toleration and exclusion operate side by side in the intersecting [religious] identities” that Milton portrays in *Samson Agonistes* (214). Others critics have shown how Milton’s complex tolerationist ontology derives from his culture’s paradoxical views on monism, Arianism, and divorce.<sup>201</sup> What these studies do is position Milton in relation to religious toleration...where religious toleration is finally like the modern idea of tolerating plural religious confessions.

The current study follows Walsham, Sauer, and Walker, but examines how Milton’s invocation of the dialectical relationship between toleration as “suffering,” as

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<sup>201</sup> See William Walker, “Milton’s Dualistic Theory of Religious Toleration in ‘A Treatise of Civil Power,’ ‘Of Christian Doctrine,’ and ‘Paradise Lost.’” *Modern Philology* 9.2 (2001), 201-230.

both an active and passive concept, develops out of the phenomenology of toleration as approach to religious difference. The representation of action growing from passivity appears throughout Milton's poetry, as in final line of Sonnet XIX, "they also serve who only stand and wait." Across his controversial prose texts, for instance, Milton embodies the tolerationist argument as both sufferer (on the side of the separatists) and as objectifier (against the Catholics). In the proleptic human history of book 11 of *Paradise Lost*, persecution is necessary so that men and women can imitate the patient suffering of Christ, and by contemplating suffering, then conceive of themselves as persecution's object. Milton enacts this dialectic in the pairing of suffering with action in his poetry and prose as a flexible subject-object relationship that provides possible avenues for his readers to follow when faced with interpretive quandaries. The issue of toleration as dialectically structured provides a backdrop to the problem of Satan's response to God in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>202</sup> By banishing the rebel angels to hell, the reader asks, is God persecuting or tolerating them?

### **Toleration and Milton's Epics**

Among the critics who have analyzed religious toleration in the literature of John Milton, the consensus is that the major epic poems are perhaps not the best texts to mine for direct representations of a state or church tolerating plural religious faiths. *Samson*

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<sup>202</sup> For extensive analysis of the character of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, see Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

*Agonistes*, it was mentioned above, does portray the interaction of opposed religious and ethnic communities. *Paradise Regained* laments the fate of the persecuted church.

*Paradise Lost*, although it does not imagine the interaction of discrete religious communities, does represent images and concepts related to toleration. There is the defense of free will and emphasis on the individual conscience, the gift of God's "umpire conscience" (*PL* 3.196). There are repeated complaints against repression, persecution, and idolatry, both generally and topically. The reader is reminded of the "grievous wolves" whose "spiritual laws by carnal power shall force / On every conscience..." The flexibility of this bestial image can apply to lived experience and national history, although the reader is also reminded that persecution's futility make it a self-cancelling idea: "What will they then / But force the spirit of grace itself" the archangel Michael asks (*PL* 12.508-25).

Another concept related to the debate over toleration is uniformity; in *Paradise Lost* uniformity is a product of God's order and a sign of man's obedience. For God, unity is a sign of true obedience. In describing God's anointment of the Son, the angels are instructed to:

Under his great vicegerent reign abide  
United as one individual Soul  
For ever happy: him who disobeys  
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day  
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls.

(*PL* 5.609–13)

Achinstein suggests that as events play out before Lucifer's transgression: "for the angelic society as a community at large, diversity can only be seen as rebellion."

Tolerance is related to harmony, but within the uniformity there is also harmony, such as the harmony of the celestial spheres:

Of Planets and of fixt in all her Wheelles  
Resembles nearest, mazes intricate,  
Eccentric, intervolved, yet regular  
Then most, when most irregular they seem,  
And in thir motions harmonie Divine  
So smooths her charming tones, that Gods own ear  
Listens delighted

Other representations of harmony include the productive uniformity seen in the marital harmony of Adam and Eve, the "unfeign'd Union of Mind, or in us both one Soule; / Harmonie to behold in wedded pair / More grateful then harmonious sound to the eare" (*PL* 8.605-08). As will be seen, this unity extends to the realm of language and discourse, and Milton's commentary is mixed. While the critiques of intolerant religious powers in *Paradise Lost* may not mean that he is articulating a commitment to religious toleration, the representation of tolerant dimensions shows that this poem enacts a "procedural principal of tolerance," a reader response construct in which the poem provokes the reader to work through the experience of falsehood and persecution:

“Milton again and again employs forms (of argument, imagery, justification) that are then discarded or repudiated or denounced; and he does this because it is precisely his contention that all forms--except the ever-receding form of truth--hold out the temptation to idolatry, a temptation he combats by never allowing any structure to gain control of his argument, indeed, by not allowing his argument to gain control of itself”<sup>203</sup>

In his epics, Milton achieves the effect of freedom of debate by his many representations of dialogue. In *Paradise Regained*, Jesus prefers words over force, verbal exchange considered both more ‘humane’ and more ‘heavenly’ than persecution (*PR* 1.221):

By winning words to conquer willing hearts,  
And make persuasion do the work of fear;  
At least to try, and teach the erring soul  
Not wilfully misdoing, but unaware  
Misled (*PR* 1.222–6)

The hope for an effectively persuasive form of language does not extend to the rebel angels in *Paradise Lost*. For Satan and the angels, the terms by which difference is negotiated are determined by God. There is no middle ground for tolerating the rebel

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<sup>203</sup> See Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in “Paradise Lost.”* London: Macmillan, 1967; also see William Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of Paradise Lost.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).



angels, and the soliloquies, dialogues, and other set pieces where Satan is engaged by God's angels are never examples of argument *in utremque partem*. Not to be included in the group of "tender consciences" envisioned by Charles, for the rebel angels there is only obedience or exile.

Some have observed how Satan of *Paradise Lost* and his associates embody features of the politicians who contributed to the failure of the Commonwealth.<sup>204</sup> Because the language of suffering and punishment at the hand of God, what might loosely be considered as persecution, is cast in terms of the tolerationist debate of Milton's age, this study extends considers Satan and his crew as a religious minority. The association was present in the polemical literature of toleration. Henry Robinson's *Liberty of Conscience* (1644) and *A Short Answer to A. S.* (1645) argue for the benefit of tolerating error: even "Jesuited Papists" deserve toleration because "Though a toleration of erroneous opinions may give some to Sathan, yet truth being therewith permitted to be published and improved, will ... gain so many to God."<sup>205</sup> The binary of obedience and disobedience has a impact on the way one might read toleration in *Paradise Lost*: "Religious toleration generally applies to *expressing* or *acting upon* theologically-related beliefs, although the mere *holding* of beliefs or the *persons* holding them have also been the objects of toleration and intolerance" (514). Although religious toleration as the

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<sup>204</sup> See Morris Freedman, "John Milton and the King of Poland." *Virginia Quarterly Review*. 67.4 (1991): 687-97.

<sup>205</sup> See William Haller, ed. *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 3.133.

focus of explicit poetic contemplation may not exist in *Paradise Lost*, one can read these questions in terms of the interplay between passive suffering and active “suffering,” which in Milton’s works is an extension of the dialectic logic of tolerationist literature.<sup>206</sup>

The term *toleration* is linked to suffering in several ways. The word *toleration* itself derives from the Latin *tolere* “to suffer or endure.” Rhetorically constructed depictions of suffering by a range of religious leaders, polemicists, martyrologists, and poets often accompanied pleas for religious toleration and complaints against persecution; the ecclesiasts and government agents in power to grant toleration often described their allowances as “sufferance.” Toleration, as the begrudging acceptance of something that is disapproved implies a kind of suffering. Milton invoked the link between suffering and toleration in lodging the radical arguments of his early divorce tracts. In *The Judgement of Martin Bucer* (1644), for instance, Milton sets parameters for his readers that he will avoid counseling against the Ten Commandments:

for what so ever plainly consents not with the commandment, cannot, I am certain, be permitted, or suffer’d in any Christian.... Let us therefore consider, and waigh the words of our Lord concerning marriage and divorce, which he pronounc’t both by himself and by his Apostle, and let us ....for whatsoever is contrary to these, I shall not persuade the least tolerating. (2.453)

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<sup>206</sup> By “dialectic,” this study references the philosophical method, dating to the Classical period but greatly important to modern Western philosophy, of countering theses with antitheses in order to arrive at a synthesis which combines rather than negates the previous propositions. Dialectic structure is important in the discourse of religious toleration because dialectics can be used as a hermeneutic for critical analysis of the discourse, while its participants also enacted dialectical methodology.

In Richard Baxter's *Fair-warning, or, XXV reasons against toleration and indulgence of popery* (1663), the paragraphs outlining his twenty-five reasons employ *synonymy*, repeating the words "toleration," "suffer," and "endure." As Baxter argues, "Nothing is to be Tolerated that is directly contrary to the word &c. For therefore indeed Kings are commanded to read the word of God that they may suffer nothing that is contrary to the word...."<sup>207</sup> Baxter uses this pattern to rhetorical effect, as the *chiasmus* within this quotation hinges on the terms "tolerate" and "suffer": ("Nothing is to be tolerated... "they may suffer nothing"). The various senses of the word *suffer* appear throughout tolerationist and anti-tolerationist writing. In the sense of "to endure, hold out, wait patiently" the Catholic secular Christopher Bagshaw wrote of "our long sufferance" in his appeal to the beleaguered state of English Catholics.<sup>208</sup>

Likewise, the verb *to suffer* contains an active meaning, "to tolerate, allow." We find this sense in the Milton's phrase from *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence* (1641): "and long persecuted Truth, could not be suffer'd speak" (YP 2.269). The word *suffer* also connotes a passive sense "To be the object of an action, be acted upon, be passive." This sense of suffering both in the capacity of action and passivity extends the term "tolerate" itself, which can mean "sanction, consent, or acquiescence, implied by non-intervention; permission, leave; toleration, indulgence."<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Baxter, Richard. *Fair-Warning, Or, XXV Reasons against Toleration and Indulgence of Popery*.

London, 1663.

<sup>208</sup> See Bagshaw (1601).

<sup>209</sup> OED, "Suffer," "Tolerate" (italics added).

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The contradictions and complexity of Satan are made apparent to the reader in his opening scene in hell. Responding to Satan's opening speech, his cohort Beelzebub ponders the fortune of the fallen angels, posing a rhetorical question to Satan about God's intentions for them, and questioning why God did not obliterate them entirely:

But what if he our Conquerour, (whom I now  
Of force believe Almighty, since no less  
Then such could hav orepow'rd such force as ours)  
Have left us this our spirit and strength intire  
Strongly to suffer and support our pains,  
That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,  
Or do him mightier service as his thralls. (*PL* 1.143-49)

In dramatic terms, Beelzebub's speech is merely a foil to prepare the way for Satan's speech, who cannily replies:

Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable,  
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure,  
To do aught good never will be our task,  
But to do ill our sole delight (*PL* 1.157-160)

Beelzebub's use of the verb *to suffer* in his hypothesis, however, has a more important function in the passage than simply providing an opening for Satan's brilliant rhetoric; the verb is evidence of how the discourse of religious toleration enters into the language of the poem.

To some of Milton's readers, Beelzebub's alliterative fantasy of the rebel angels surviving "Strongly to suffer and support our pains," connotes the active sense of suffering, the stoic demeanor of a persecuted religious minority. In the language of resistance Beelzebub's language models the ideal behavior of such an imagined community, foregrounding resolute action of holding fast to an identity position in the face of tyranny or perceived oppression. In the language of tolerance, suffering provides an ironic twist as a demonic character invokes this term, mirroring the wrongful demonization of religious minorities, but also implying the invidiousness of marginal groups. Beelzebub immediately shifts the perspective to the supposed motive of God, who requires the fallen angels to "suffice his vengeful ire." In moving from the disenfranchised to the empowered, Beelzebub's language also becomes less emphatic, modulating from active suffering and supporting, to a more passive sufficing.

Satan's response similarly articulates a link between suffering and action that plays into a series of dialectical pairs in the passage. Satan builds from the tautology of

“to be weak is miserable” to the dialectical opposition of moral terms (“good” and “ill”) and work and pleasure (“task” and “delight”). At the midpoint in this chain appears the curious conjunction between “doing or suffering.” In a formulation that builds on the play of opposites, Satan’s language rests at a middle ground, where the pairing is both like and dislike. Linguistically, suffering is a passive verb that is not quite completely passive. Doing and suffering are therefore verbal opposites if the word *suffering* is taken in the passive sense, but analogous if suffering denotes action. As part of the larger argument of Milton’s poem, the logical fluidity of Satan’s terms reveals the rhetorical hollowness of his position. The reader here begins to engage in the process of “procedural toleration,” beginning to doubt the only momentary potential for Satanic recapitulation. As the reader already knows, and as Satan will soon discover, he cannot escape the moral system built by God by merely choosing evil. Because of the dialectical interplay between good and evil, Satan’s desire to transcend the moral dialect by only choosing only one position is ultimately frustrated.<sup>210</sup>

The pairing of *doing* and *suffering* appears frequently across Milton’s writing, and its adaptability has special importance in *Paradise Lost*. In the very next scene of the Council in Hell, the arch-rhetor Belial, “who could make the worse appear / The better reason,” lodges his argument for despair and inaction in terms of “doing” and suffering: “Whatever *doing*, what can we suffer more / What can we suffer worse? is this then

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<sup>210</sup> See Thomas Martin, “On the Margin of God: Deconstruction and the Language of Satan in *Paradise Lost*.” *Milton Quarterly* 29.2 (1995): 41-47.

worst,/ Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in Arms?” (2.162-64).<sup>211</sup> Belial’s echoing of Satan’s terms both reinforces for the reader the seductive danger of language and the ironic futility of the fallen angels’ plight. The dialectic of doing/suffering, nevertheless, reveals the poem’s unique linguistic felicity. Examining Milton’s dialectically laden language of toleration as “suffering” offers a new opportunity for investigating how writers imagined the terms of tolerationist discourse, and also reveals how, through the dialectical quality of this literature, they used its very terms to circumvent the limitations of language.<sup>212</sup>

For example, the tolerationist writer Roger Williams, in *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1646), invokes suffering as an effect of persecution:

I acknowledge that to molest any person, Jew or Gentile, for either professing doctrine, or practising worship meerly religious or spirituall, it is to persecute him, and such a person (what ever his doctrine or practice be true or false) suffereth persecution for conscience.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Sharon Achinstein has demonstrated how Milton challenges the reader by modifying the allegorical resonance of the “Council in Hell” genre. See Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>212</sup> See Anthony Low “Action and Suffering: *Samson Agonistes* and the Irony of Alternatives.” *PMLA* 84.3 (1963): 514-19; Also see John R. Knott, ““Suffering for Truth’s Sake’: Milton and Matrydom.” in *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose*. Ed. David Lowenstein and James Grantham. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). 153-170.

<sup>213</sup> Williams, Roger. *The Bloudy Tenent, of Persecution* (London, 1644), 19.

In this passage grammatical complexity unsettles the terms of religious identity to be negotiated through toleratnce. By “such a person” Williams means the persecuted party, which is the noun of the verb “suffereth.” The verb “to molest,” however, takes no noun, so one could plausibly read “such a person” as the subject of “molest.” Therefore those who experience religious persecution suffer it, as do those who enact it. Both subjects and objects suffer.

In the phenomenological tradition, the dialectical relationship between subject and object, between actor and acted upon, is highly determinate in any empirical or ontological inquiry. The opening chapter “Of Sense” of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1660) casts doubt on the certainty inherent in the subject-object dynamic:

For if those colours and sounds were in the bodies or objects that cause them, they could not be severed from them, as by glasses and in echoes by reflection we see they are: where we know the thing we see is in one place; the appearance, in another. And though at some certain distance the real and very object seem invested with the fancy it begets in us; yet still the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another.

As Milton writes in *Of Reformation* (1641):

The very essence of Truth is plainnesse, and brightness; the darkness and crookednesse is our own. The Wisdome of God created understanding, fit and proportionable to Truth the object, and end of it, as the eye to the thing visible. If our understanding have a film of ignorance over it, or be blear with gazing on other false glisterings, what is that to Truth? (*YP* 2.566)



The idea of action emphasizing this relationship because action is the object of analysis, but that analysis is a transitive action in itself. Suffering complicates the phenomenological context because it is concept that can share agency and objectification.<sup>214</sup> Toleration itself raises a host of dialectical terms, including toleration/persecution and worship/idolatry, which define the concepts under discussion. For some writers, the topic of tolerance also imparts meaning onto those who argue for or against it. Indeed, if one considers toleration as “the enduring of something disagreeable” the emphasis shifts from the tolerated to the tolerator.<sup>215</sup> As the peroration of William Walwyn’s 1646 tract *Tolleration Justified, and Persecution Condemn’d* declares:

In this controversie concerning Tolleration, I make no question but the Parliament will judge justly between the two parties...That the one party pleads for toleration, for the comfort and tranquility of their lives, and the peaceable serving of God according to their consciences...That the other that plead against it, may (I would I could say onely probably) be swayed by interest and self-respects, their means and preheminance.<sup>216</sup>

Thus, one’s attitudes towards toleration reveal something about his or her own identity. To write about toleration risks invoking a set of subject-object relationships that problematizes the rhetorical situation. Consider, for example, further speeches from

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<sup>214</sup> See Margreta De Grazia et al, eds. *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>215</sup> Edward Langerak, “Theism and Toleration.” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 514.

<sup>216</sup> Walwyn, William. *Tolleration Justified, and Persecution Condemn'd*. (London, 1646).

Milton's infernal council in Book 2. Counseling passive acceptance of their lot in hell, the devil Belial argues what greater punishment might result from resuming forceful rebellion: "Shall we then live thus vile, the Race of Heav'n / Thus trampil'd, thus expell'd to suffer here / Chains and these Torments? better these then worse". Concerned most with his own ease, Belial worries that the penalty of God for further resistance would be more pain "to endure / Exile, or ignominy, or bonds, or pain, The sentence of their Conquerour." Here the poem draws an analogy with those imprisoned or tortured for religion, or perhaps Protestant or even Roman Catholic exiles. That Milton would expect his reader's sympathy for such a position is reinforced in *Of Reformation*, where he writes "I shall believe there cannot be a more illboding signe to a Nation (*God turne the Omen from us*) then when the Inhabitants, to avoid insufferable grievances at home, are inforc'd by heaps to forsake their native Country." (YP 1.585) In this passage, however, the only active verb in the section ("turne") is taken by God. While Belial would seek to improve their condition through non-action, the ultimate power to allow or disallow a persecuted minority to suffer exile is reserved for providence.

Book 2 of *Paradise Lost* continues with the rebel angels resorting to pastimes to avoid their suffering. Some engage in academic disputation, indulging in dialectical argument and controversy:

Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,  
In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high  
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,  
Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute,

And found no end, in wandering mazes lost. (*PL* 2.557-61)

Milton characterizes their actions as futile, with their only outcome to “excite / Fallacious hope.” Should we read this as commentary on Milton’s own activity in the maze of controversy, his writings of the left hand? The reading is supported by *Of True Religion*, where Milton begins with the referential move of “I will now enter into the labyrinth of Councils and Fathers, an intangl’d wood which the Papist loves to fight in, not with hope of Victory, but to obscure the shame of an open overthrow...” (8.418). Although Milton is referencing the mode of Scholastic disputation, the image perhaps reveals an affinity to Spenser’s Wood of Error, Milton’s phrase also takes place in the rarified heights of scholarly enterprise, in contrast to the “street wars of religion” described by Alexandra Walsham in her commentary on the “Fatal Vesper” at the Blackfriars in 1623.<sup>217</sup> The disconnect between social reality and print controversy implies a commentary on controversial discourse as a genre. The demons’ fruitless debate over points of religious doctrine shows how Milton is critical of the very discourse that frames consideration of religious toleration and which allows minority positions to articulate their identity.

The demonic commentary on state power continues in terms of suffering and action: “Yet ever plotting how the Conqueror least / May reap his conquest, and may least rejoyce / In doing what we most in suffering feel?” As God performs the act of persecuting the demons, “doing what we most in suffering feel,” the demons search for a way to diminish His victory. Read in terms of tolerationist literature, the demonic position rings hollow. As Roger Williams, asserts, God has the power to suffer, to

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<sup>217</sup> See Alexandra Walsham, “The Fatal Vesper”: Providentialism and Anti-Popery in Late Jacobean London.” *Past & Present* 144 (August 1994): 36-87.

sanction, or disallow: “Luther in his Booke of the Civill Magistrate saith; The Lawes of the Civill Magistrates government extends no further then over the body or goods, and to that which is externall: for over the soule God will not suffer any man to rule: onely he himselfe will rule there.” Reading God as king, allows us, however, to see how roles can shift, the king can suffer pain or ignomy. In one of his many arguments against tyranny, Milton quotes “the Heathen king” Demophoon from Euripides *Heraclidae* (c. 418-21) that even the king is subject to the law: “If I doe unjustly, to suffer justly” (YP 3.205). In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton invokes King David, who “indeed by suffering without just cause, learnt that meekness and that wisdom by adversity, which made him much the fitter man to reign” (YP 3.571). The demonic appeal to their own suffering, and their image of God as a merciless tormentor or sadist, falls apart when mapped over a Christian tradition that idealizes the suffering of God and king.

As referenced above, *Paradise Lost* enacts a “procedural toleration” by which the reader’s attitudes towards religious difference is tested. In Sokol’s idea of tolerance as “sense of a person’s willed or chosen extension of goodwill or sympathy towards a person, practice, behavior, or belief that lies outside their usual experience – even toward someone or something shockingly or frighteningly strange,” even Eve’s trust of the serpent might be characterized as tolerant, and clearly a tolerance that is not to be imitated by the reader.<sup>218</sup> Another way that the urge towards tolerance is cancelled is in the link between the suffering of the devils and general immorality. As Satan realizes his

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<sup>218</sup> See Sokol.

fallen state, he experiences suffering not as outward action, but as an inward, psychological flaw:

Now rowling, boiles in his tumultuous brest,  
And like a devillish Engine back recoiles  
Upon himself; horror and doubt distract  
His troubl'd thoughts, and from the bottom stirr  
The Hell within him, for within him Hell  
He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell  
One step no more then from himself can fly  
By change of place: Now conscience wakes despair  
That slumberd, wakes the bitter memorie  
Of what he was, what is, and what must be  
Worse; of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue. (*PL* 4.16-26)

Satan now echoes Belial's language; he is despairing, his position shifting, his resolution weakening. Satan's suffering here is essential, not tied to external political conditions or religious persecution. The image invokes another aspect of the tolerationist debate, tied to control of the vices. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), Milton writes:

The political law, since it cannot regulate vice, is to restraine it, by using all means to root it out: but if it suffer the weed to grow up to any pleasurable or contented height upon what pretext soever, it fastens the root, it prunes and dresses vice, as if it were a good plant ... lesse faults tolerated for fear of greater.... (*YP* 2.323)

In the mock heroic poem *Cataplus, or, Æneas, his descent to hell a mock poem in imitation of the sixth book of Virgil's Æneis, in English burlesque*, Maurice Atkins links religious toleration with the “self-toleration” of vice:

Such also as out of Zeal fell on  
Their King and Countrey in Rebellion,  
And for a liberty of Conscience  
Breed schismes by loud noise and nonsense,  
(And Hypocrites (as old wives tell)  
Shall have the hottest place in Hell)  
...  
Here Phlegyas that was a bad stick  
Of heresy, and a fanatick,  
Cries, O friends of self-toleration  
Let my hap be to you a caution;  
By Orthodox Laws be advis'd,  
The gods ought not to be despis'd.<sup>219</sup>

The suffering of the demons is shown, therefore, not to be a true martyrdom, a suffering for faith, but the penalty for their uncontrolled vice. As practiced and sought after by the demonic rabble, toleration is wholly negative: “Though every true Christian will be a

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<sup>219</sup> Atkins, Maurice. *Cataplus, or, Æneas, His Descent to Hell a Mock Poem in Imitation of the Sixth Book of Virgil's Æneis, in English Burlesque* (London, 1672).

*Martyr* when he is called to it; not presently does it follow that every one suffering for Religion, is without exception” (YP 1.533). Suffering thus loses its rhetorical power.

But what do we suffer mis-shapen and enormous *Prelatisme*, as we do, thus to blanch and varnish her deformities with the faire colours, as before of *Martyrdome*, so now of *Episcopacie*? They are not *Bishops*, God and all *good men* know they are not, that have fill’d this Land with late confusion and violence; but a Tyrannicall crew and Corporation of Impostors, that have blinded and abus’d the World so long under that Name. (YP 1.537)

The reader finally learns to reject toleration of the rebel angels through their association with “gay religions full of pomp and gold” (YP 1.372); such comparisons reflect Milton’s view that:

As for tolerating the exercise of their [Roman Catholic] religion, supposing their State activities not to be dangerous, I answer, that Toleration is either public or private; and the exercise of their Religion, as far as it is Idolatrous, can be tolerated neither way.” (YP 8.430)

If the suffering of the devils is not a true form of suffering, then what purpose might it serve for Milton to color the experience of the Satanic crew in there terms of the tolerationist debate? One answer appears by looking at other sufferers in the poem, namely Adam and Eve. The Archangel Michael relates to Adam the penalty for their lapse: “Obedience to the Law of God, impos’d / On penaltie of death, and suffering death, / The penaltie to thy transgression due” (PL 12.397-99). The punishment of God, in the end, is not persecution; the *felix culpa* permits the modeling of true religion and proper

reception of the Christian dispensation: “suffering for Truths sake /Is fortitude to highest victorie, / And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life” (*PL* 569-71). If one follows my argument that toleration is painful for the tolerator, then religious toleration has a more important place in *Paradise Lost* than has previously been identified.



## Afterword

On 27 March 2009, the Guardian newspaper reported that English Prime Minister Gordon Brown had renewed talks with Buckingham Palace to repeal the 1701 Act of Settlement. This act prohibits a Roman Catholic from becoming an English regent, and likewise stipulates that an English king or queen may not wed a Roman Catholic spouse. Ostensibly codifying the rules of English succession, the Act primarily was primarily intended at the outset of the Glorious Revolution to avoid another Roman Catholic king. Stipulating that the king “shall join in communion with the Church of England,” ... this act shows how religious intolerance was constitutionally legitimated.<sup>220</sup> Despite the development of modern religious toleration since More and Milton, institutionalized intolerance still exists today.

This study has argued that several writers of early modern English literature employed the complex figurative potential of religious toleration to create a self-referential dimension in their texts. When writers wrote about religious toleration, they both intervened in the act of defining and positioning this troubled concept, and used it as

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<sup>220</sup> “Gordon Brown Committed to Ending Anomaly of Royal Ban on Catholics.” Nicholas Watt, et al. Guardian.co.uk, [Accessed Friday 27 March 2009].

another descriptive category for evaluating their own literary work and that of their ideological opponents. For the writers under analysis, toleration had the curious effect of drawing texts towards a deeply self-aware reflection on their own art. By considering what was tolerable in matters of religion, in other words, the writers under study also contemplated what was tolerable to appear in print.

Problematic, challenged, eschewed by many of those whom the modern perspective would assume are most motivated to seek it, religious toleration is not a simple category. In the minds of some writers, however, toleration emerges as a different way of looking at things, as a middle road that reconfigures the position at either pole. When George Herbert wrote of ceremonial identity, that in religious observance, “A fine aspect in fit array, / Neither too mean, nor yet too gay, / Shows who is best,” he was reifying the Church of England, but he was also referencing how religion is to be represented. The significance of the word *mean* as in both senses of “poor” or “abject” and also as a middle point, is amplified by the syntax of the line. In the sense of a poor or simple form of worship (as in Genevan Protestantism), “neither” and “too” both grammatically modify the word *mean*, as “yet” and “too” describe *gay*, (as in Roman Catholicism), meaning an overly ornamented extreme. Interestingly, taken separately “neither” and “too” both negate and intensify the “aspect” in which the “best” religion appears. A moderate view of religion, in contrast to the negative description posited by Francis Bacon, is for Herbert the correct view.

To conclude this study, one might ask what rhetorical purpose does Brown’s initiative to repeal the Act of Settlement serve? Is it truly a gesture of tolerance, or

merely an anti-monarchical statement? If the ideas developed in this study hold true today, one should look for ulterior motives behind any appeal for toleration.

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