

Martyrological Themes and the Revival of Catholic Identity in Robert Persons' *De Persecutione Anglicana*

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This article supplements a previous article, 'Towards a Critical Edition and Modern Translation of Robert Persons' *De Persecutione Anglicana*' (published in vol. 28 of the journal) with a discussion of the significance of its treatment of martyrdom. Another major role player in publicizing the persecution of Catholics in England, Richard Verstegan, is introduced. He was the originator of a series of illustrations included in one of the early editions of Persons' text, namely the one printed in Rome by Georgio Ferrari in 1582. The premise of my analysis of the text and the engraved plates is that their value is not limited to the (inside) information it provides about the fate of Catholic priests in England during the sixteenth century, but the particular features of the presentation of martyrdom. The aim is to identify these typical martyrological tropes that had originated during the earliest years of Christian persecution and to highlight the specific emphasis placed on Catholic practices and symbolism in the selected passages from the text as well as in the Verstegan illustrations. A close reading of the texts will reveal and unravel the clues that encourage a predetermined interpretation of the text.

This article is a by-product of a project aiming to provide new authoritative English editions of important (but neglected) documents originating from the Reformation. The first of these works to be translated is Robert Persons' *De persecutione Anglicana libellus* (1582),¹ a text which was freely translated into English at the

¹ *De persecutione Anglicana libellus. Quo explicantur afflictiones, calamitates, cruciatus et acerbissima martyria, quae Angli catholici nunc ob fidem patiuntur* (Rome: Francesco Zanetti, 1582), *De persecutione Anglicana libellus ... Quae omnia in hac postrema*

time. In the previous article, it was argued that there is a need for a more accurate, modern translation. The analysis which follows takes a closer look at the martyrological features of the work that make it such an important witness to Elizabethan Catholic culture. Scenes from *De Persecutione* were illustrated in a series of copperplate engravings derived from a broadsheet prepared by Richard Verstegan, *Praesentis Ecclesiae Anglicanae typus*, published in Rheims in the same year, 1582. No copies of the broadsheet itself appear to have survived, but six plates were included in the Ferrari edition of *De Persecutione* (Rome, 1582). Richard Verstegan, born Richard Rowlands (1548), was forced to leave Oxford because of his Catholicism. He became a printer abroad after leaving England and edited and printed the works of Catholics in Paris. In order to reach a wider audience, he also started creating broadsheets consisting of narrative strips such as those included in Persons' text. The order of events as set out in the plates corresponds closely to the descriptions Persons gives of the fate of individual martyrs in *De Persecutione*. The case of Edmund Campion provides a typical example: he was apprehended, publicly exposed, imprisoned, placed on trial, found guilty of treason, sentenced and executed. Verstegan was an eyewitness to these scenes and especially to Campion's procession to London. Although the plates are self-explanatory, the text, in verse, below each plate provides the context. Each of the plates illustrates a stage in the narrative, but it is the detail within each of these illustrations that provides significant context and meaning. Anne Dillon, who provides a detailed description of the broadsheet, regards the images of martyrdom produced by Verstegan as the most influential of the era.²

Persons would have been familiar with the vast literary production

editione aeneis typis ad vivum expressa sunt (Rome: Giorgio Ferrari, 1582), *An epistle of the persecution of the Catholickes in England, Translated owt of frenche into Englishe and conferred with the Latyn copie. By G.T. To whiche there is added an epistle by the translator to the Preevie Councell* (Rouen, 1582). All quotations and references to the Latin text, unless otherwise indicated, relate to Zanetti's edition, to be referred to as *De Persecutione*. For fuller bibliographical details, see the list of Works Cited in 'Towards a Critical Edition', and A. F. Allison and D. M. Rogers, *The Contemporary Printed Literature of the English Counter-Reformation between 1558 and 1640*, 2 vols (Aldershot, 1989–1994), I, 120–21 (entries 874–884).

² Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535–1603* (2002; rpt New York, 2016), pp. 121–44, reproduces and discusses the Verstegan illustrations.

of the early Christian (pre-Reformation) centuries, namely the *Passiones* and the *Acta Martyrum*,³ and *De Persecutione* takes on the whole the literary physiognomy of hagiographic incidents, built up according to a widely used scheme in the martyrological literature of Christendom. The following topics are characteristic features of the very first martyrological biographies and can be found in the portrayal of almost all the Catholic martyrs in *De Persecutione*: (1) the Christ-like image of the martyr, (2) the high social standing and excellent education of the martyr, (3) the ordeal of the martyr at the hands of his persecutors, (4) the jeering of the crowd and (5) the fortitude with which he steadfastly rejects the 'false' religion, followed by his eventual heroic death. Although the narratives found in *De Persecutione* and in the Verstegan broadsheets are built up around original martyrological tropes which typify the experiences of martyrs of the early church,⁴ these expressions of martyrdom are also markedly Catholic in their presentation. The primary aim of both documents was to encourage and maintain the English recusant community who had been marginalized in England and were experiencing persecution at the hands of the Elizabethan authorities.⁵ The recusants would recognize and identify with potent and significant symbols of Catholicism, such as the consecrated caste of the priesthood and the sacred rites, especially the saying or hearing of mass. The prominence of these

³ For further insights into the literary genres of *Passiones* and *Acta Martyrum*, see H. Delehay, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels, 1966), M. Simonetti, 'Qualche osservazione sui luoghi comuni negli Atti dei martiri', *Giornale italiano di filologia* 10 (1957): 147–55, and H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972).

⁴ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 170–71, explains how the opening of the catacomb of St Priscilla in 1578 and the public display of relics 'challenged Protestant assertions while, at the same time, allowing the Catholic Church to establish its own kinship with this heroic early Church'. Catholic men training at the English College in Rome saw themselves as 'the potential successors of the early martyrs ...'.

⁵ For a detailed account of the treason laws and the execution of Catholics on account of treasonable activities see A. L. Rowse, *Eminent Elizabethans* (London and Basingstoke, 1983), p. 50, J. Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow, Essex, 2000); Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 86–88, and Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2001), pp. 274–75. For the controversy over Persons' motives in publishing *De Persecutione*, see 'Towards a Critical Edition', p. 31 n. 25.

symbols in both the passages and illustrations, becomes evident in the analysis, below, of the two passages translated in the previous article and the associated engravings. The portrayal is reinforced by rhetorical devices which are employed masterfully to evoke sympathy for the Catholic cause and indignation at the brutality of the persecutors.

Typical themes from martyrdom infused in the Campion and Dymoke passages⁶ and the Verstegan broadsheets

The martyr is portrayed as both Christ-like and similar to the saints of the early Church. Thomas Freeman notes that the portrayal of martyrs as Christ-like is a 'root paradigm' of martyrology and that the power of the parallel between Christ and the martyrs was increased by the centrality of Christ's passion in late-medieval popular devotion. 'When martyrs and martyrologists compared the victims of early-modern religious persecution to Christ, they were tapping into the basic religious experiences of generations of Christians.' Freeman names Abraham Lincoln (as portrayed in Herman Melville's poem), Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela as examples of Christ-like political martyrs that persist into the twentieth century. Their political triumphs can be attributed to their sufferings for a cause but also because they conform closely to the idea of the pacific, suffering, Christ-like martyr.⁷ While the Protestant martyrs are portrayed (e.g. by Foxe) as bearing witness to Christ, the Catholic portrayal makes the similarity to Christ explicit.⁸

In the preface to *De persecutione* Persons refers to the example that Christ set to martyrs:

Non sunt discipuli supra magistrum: qui cum iniustitiam non fecisset, cum iniquis tamen deputatus est et multo his atrociora nostri causa pertulit. Neque tamen os suum ceram tondentibus,

⁶ Reproduced, translated and analyzed in 'Towards a Critical Edition'.

⁷ Thomas S. Freeman, 'Imitatio Christi with a Vengeance: The Politicization of Martyrdom in Early Modern England', in T. S. Freeman and T. S. Mayer (eds), *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England c. 1400–1700* (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY, 2007), 35–69 (pp. 61, 69).

⁸ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 138; see also A. M. Myers, 'Father John Gerard's Object Lessons', in R. Corthell, F. E. Dolan, C. Highley and A. F. Marotti (eds), *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN, 2009), 216–35, who sets out Gerard's connection of Walpole's suffering with that of Christ (p. 231).

immo nec tudentibus quidem, aperuit. Retineamus ergo nos hanc tam sanctae tollerantiae avitam possessionem, commendatam nobis a Salvatore nostro et ab optimis maioribus integerrime conservatam

The pupils are not above their master who, although he had not committed any injustice, was reckoned with the sinners, and suffered much harsher atrocities than these on our behalf. *And yet he did not speak to those who were depriving him,*⁹ indeed he did not. Let us then retain this ancient quality of holy tolerance, commended to us by our saviour and maintained completely untouched by our forefathers.¹⁰

The title of the work, *De persecutione Anglicana libellus*, also brings to mind the typical Christian significance of the term “persecution” with which the reader would have been familiar. The term is used numerous times in the New Testament in connection with the persecutions suffered by Christ and his early followers.

The insults and degradation of the martyr in the first plate recall the ordeals that Christ was subjected to on the way to his crucifixion.¹¹ The scene in the next engraving also portrays the parading of Edmund Campion through the streets. The inscription on the hat reads ED CA (Edmund Campion) and SO JE (Society of Jesus) below, reiterating the identification with Christ.¹² The whipping of the priest in the next engraving again strongly recalls Jesus’ flagellation.¹³ Later in the series, the Roman centurion who is a spectator to the right of the gallows recalls the presence of such an official at the crucifixion of Christ.¹⁴

In ‘Edmund Campion and his company escorted to London’ (Text 1 in ‘Towards a Critical Edition’), Persons directly compares

⁹ The italicized text refers to Biblical verses encouraging believers to love their enemies. The biblical references (e.g. Luc 6; 1 Petr 2) are given in the margin of the Latin text. The Latin word *tondeo* (literally = shave) is here used in the rare sense of ‘deprive, plunder’.

¹⁰ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 78, points out that in his letters William Allen equates the constancy of Catholics during torture to that of the ancient martyrs.

¹¹ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 127.

¹² Ibid., p. 128.

¹³ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

the way that Edmund Campion bore a cross with an inflammatory inscription with the suffering of Christ: *Quod non aliter tulisse dicitur, quam Christus suae crucis inscriptionem pertulit*. Campion's capture had propaganda value, since he was a priest, prominent among the Catholic community and outspoken in his support of the Catholic cause.¹⁵ The tribulations of the martyr will remind the reader of the unfair suffering of Christ¹⁶ since the martyr's Christ-like innocence is made apparent: Campion was 'most innocent' ('*innocentissimo*') and Sir Robert Dymoke (Text 2) was merely keeping the faith of his forefathers and did his best to excuse himself from the hearing by writing a letter to explain his debilitating condition. Persons also dwells on some physical characteristics to emphasize the cruelty of the persecutors and the innocence of the martyr: Sir Robert is paralyzed. To evoke the reader's sympathy emphasis is often placed on the fact that the prisoner is sickly. The verbs used in connection with the martyr, e.g. '*laborasset*' ('suffered') and '*accusatur*' ('accused'),¹⁷ recall the *Passiones* and the bravery of the saints of the early church who bore all adversity and unfair accusations with extreme dignity.¹⁸ The perceived innocence of these figures, and the undeserved nature of

¹⁵ 'The events surrounding his death generated more text than did any other martyr, either Catholic or Protestant' (Ibid., pp. 89–90 n. 81).

¹⁶ Cf. Freeman, *Imitatio Christi with a Vengeance*, 40: '... with any execution in early-modern Europe, there was always the possibility that any criminal could subvert the symbolism of his or her punishment by invoking, consciously or unconsciously, the similarity of their fate to the passion of Christ', and Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 286: 'Ironically, the exaltation of martyrdom as the highest form of the imitation of Christ and the most perfect realization of Christian virtues helped prevent zeal for it from spinning out of control. Because the martyrs were greater in heaven than even doctors of the Church and virgins, and because not everybody was called to such a glorious death, the virtue of humility militated against a presumption of holiness condign to such a vocation.'

¹⁷ Cf. the use of the same word in Matt. 27:12.

¹⁸ Elsewhere in *De Persecutione* (pp. 148–50), Persons complains that Catholics were made scapegoats for any disaster that occurred. When St Paul's spire caught fire a number of spells were found buried nearby and the blame was put on Catholics with an interest in witchcraft, just as the early Christians were blamed for the fire in Rome. It was found later that the man who had been responsible for starting the fire was the strongly Protestant minister of Newington. When at Oxford the judge and jury who had sentenced a Catholic bookbinder to lose his ears all fell ill and died, it was blamed on the sorcery of the Catholics.

their sufferings, won admiration and sympathy.¹⁹ Catholic writers 'shared with their Protestant and Anabaptist counterparts the same dichotomous conception of innocent suffering and tyrannical oppression ...'.²⁰

The martyr is from a respected and affluent family and is well educated²¹

Although Persons does not provide the name of each martyr, almost all are pious, of honest parentage and good learning. Emphasis is placed on the fact that the martyrs belong to respected families, often of noble origin. The theme of noble birth is also found in the other examples from the text: The young man whose fate is described on page 39, John Cooper, is '*loco bono prognatus et litterarum in studiis non leviter versatus*' ('of honest parentage, steeped in the study of letters'); William Tyrwhit was a young man of great and honorable family (p. 44);²² Lady Thimelby was a noblewoman (p. 46); a youth who had been trained in the pope's seminary and who was apprehended and brought before a judge on a religious charge (p. 65) was '*perhonestis et divitibus genitus parentibus, litteris imbutis humanioribus*' ('honourable and born of honest and well to do parents, imbued with schooling in the humanities'); another prisoner who asked for the services of a priest on his deathbed was '*generosus ... vitae splendidae et fortuna non infirma*' ('magnanimous ... his life was dazzling and his fortune sound', p. 70). This might seem at odds with traditional religious convictions, but the anomaly must be seen in context. A martyr of lowly status and learning would not have been able to understand the doctrine for which he was prepared to suffer. Gregory refers to the criterion of social status and learning as a 'would-be means to discern true martyrs'.²³ Persons himself is accused of academic elitism,²⁴ since

¹⁹ Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 60–61.

²⁰ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 295.

²¹ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 93, notes: 'The Catholic martyr, irrespective of his background, was therefore always presented as a scholar, even if a certain amount of embellishment was needed.'

²² Cooper and Tyrwhit, lay Catholics who died in prison in 1580–1581, are listed in *The Catholic Martyrs of England and Wales* (London, 1985), p. 47.

²³ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 326.

²⁴ Victor Houlston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons's Jesuit*

he implied in one of his other works that the lowly standing of and/or meagre education of Foxe's witnesses made them false martyrs.²⁵ According to Michael Carrafiello, '[T]he priests did not attend to middling and poorer catholics because these catholics had nothing to offer to the larger purpose of the forcible conversion of the country ... The success of any such coup depended upon winning the support of the gentry.' He connects this snobbery of the Jesuits to what he sees as the political agenda of the 1580–1581 mission.²⁶

The fact that the inscriptions given in the Verstegan engravings are in Latin is also deliberate: the learned and wealthy people who understood Latin were most likely to contribute to the Catholic cause.²⁷ The clothing of the men and women in the plates also typifies them as upper class citizens.²⁸ In Text I Campion himself is, '*viro doctissimo*' and his companions were either priests or '*conditionis bonae et fortunae*'. Dymoke is also suitably illustrious and magnanimous, esteemed for his special coat of arms and his kinship with the Earl of Lincoln.²⁹ The character and social standing of a defendant is fundamental to the rhetorical tradition.

The dire conditions in the prisons, torture and cruelty of executioners

There are several references in *De Persecutione* to the fact that Catholic prisoners had to contend with fetters, hunger, bitter cold, solitary confinement, attacks from other prisoners and filthy conditions. The Verstegan broadsheet illustrates various forms of torture inflicted on the Catholics in an attempt to elicit information from them. The

Polemic, 1580–1610 (Aldershot and Rome, 2007), p. 188.

²⁵ Robert Persons, *A Treatise of Three Conversions of England from Paganisme to Christian Religion*, 3 vols (Saint-Omer: F. Bellet, 1603–04), II, 172, 177.

²⁶ Michael L. Carrafiello, 'English Catholicism and the Jesuit Mission of 1580–1581', *Historical Journal* 37 (1994): 761–74 (p. 771).

²⁷ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 139.

²⁸ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 134, remarks that 'the historical narrative begins to slip into an alternative reading'.

²⁹ The two different Roman editions of 1582 have two different readings here, Ferrari: *gener* (= son in law), Zanetti: *genere* (= family). Either would indicate close familial ties with the earl. On Dymoke, see 'Towards a Critical Edition', pp. 42–43 nn. 49, 65, and Rowse, *Eminent Elizabethans*, 49.

prisoners are tied to a cart before being whipped and they are burnt through the ears with a hot iron, a common form of 'marking' the vagabond's body during the early modern period.³⁰ Text 1 notes that Campion was subjected to the cruellest torture ('*cruciatus et tormenta crudelissima subiecerunt*'). The word *cruciatus* most likely here refers to racking as illustrated in Verstegan's fourth engraving. This image, portraying the torment inflicted by the rack, perhaps refers to the case of Campion, but Persons mentions this method of torture throughout *De Persecutione*. While Campion was imprisoned in the Tower he was racked on three occasions and the broken hands witnessed by Alfield at his execution bore testimony to this form of torture.³¹ Torture was used to extract information and apart from being stretched on the rack, priests were also compressed in an iron ring known as 'The Scavenger's Daughter', forced to wear iron fetters on their feet and tormented by sharp spikes driven under their fingernails. Torture was a mere precursor to execution.³² The fifth engraving illustrates the first stage of the execution. The priests are dragged on a wicker contraption over rough terrain. Campion, Sherwin and Briant were all dragged to the place of their execution on this makeshift sleigh.³³ The Bible in the Protestant minister's hands indicates a final attempt to evangelize the Catholics. The scaffold awaits in the background. The noose being prepared, the horses and cart are ready to take off once the noose has been placed around the priest's neck. The smoke from the cauldron indicates that it is hot and ready while the butcher's block can be seen on the right. The next engraving portrays the final stage of execution. The head of the martyr who has just met his death is visible on a spear.³⁴ After hanging from the gallows for a while, martyrs are

³⁰ W.C. Carrol, *Fat King, Lean Beggar: Representatives of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), p. 44; see also *De Persecutione*, 65.

³¹ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 126, 130; see *De Persecutione*, p. 38: '*Bis nuper Campianus Iesuita tortus est equuleo*' ('Recently Campion the Jesuit was twice tortured on the rack') and p. 59; but cf. pp. 35, 58, 73, 79 for other instances of racking.

³² Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 295.

³³ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 132. In *De Persecutione*, p. 86, the hurdle is described as '*carri humile genus sine rotis, supra terram equis trahentis lapsans*' ('a primitive sort of cart without wheels which bounced as it was dragged along by horses').

³⁴ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 133.

dismembered, gutted and beheaded. Their intestines are thrown into the fire, but their limbs and heads are fixed to the city gates and walls.

In the case of Sir Robert Dymoke, the executioners are likewise cruel and sadistic and are not deterred by the man's paralysis.³⁵ The 1582 translator intensifies the cruelty of the commissioner by translating '*non movetur*' (literally, 'he is not moved') as 'no motion of compassion entereth in to this superintendent's breest'. Persons uses a carefully studied arrangement of material to emphasize the cruelty of the persecutors. Each consequential description of Dymoke's tribulations is accentuated by the anaphoric repetition of *adsunt*, drawing the reader's attention to the suffocating presence of the executioners, culminating in the final, dramatic moment of death. The balanced parallelism of the verb *adsunt* with the datives *aegrotanti*, *confligenti*, *agenti*, and *efflaturo* contributes to the rising urgency.

*adsunt enim aegrotanti, adsunt confligenti cum mortis doloribus,
adsunt animam agenti, adsunt iam iam spiritum efflaturo ...*

There they were, when he was sick; there they were when he was wrestling with the sorrows of death, present while he was departing life, present just as he was about to give up the ghost—then, yes, even then, there they were.

For they come when he is extreme sick, they come whiles he is wrestling with the pangs of deathe, they come as he is passing oute of this lyfe, they come whiles he is yeelding vp the Ghoost: then they trouble hym. (G.T's translation, 1582)

The short simple sentences and lack of conjunctions is a rhetorical technique (parataxis) very common to the period which brings about a growing intensity of meaning and an ever-increasing emotional impact.

At the conclusion of the account the author employs *anthyphophora*, another common rhetorical device, by which an interrogative ('*quid*

³⁵ Other martyrs are also portrayed as sickly in *De Persecutione*: When Cooper was kept in the Beauchamp Tower (p. 40) he was 'weak because of his young age' ('*aetate non robustus*'); while Lady Thimelby was in custody (p. 47) 'she was seized by a most dangerous illness' ('*occupatur ... gravissimo morbo*'); Tyrwhit 'fell into a serious fever' ('*in gravem febrim incidit*') and was '*languidus et afflictus aegritudine*' ('drooping and shattered by illness', p. 45); another wealthy man was also sick ('*aegrotare*', p. 70).

hoc immitius ac crudelius fingi potest?’) is employed to emphasize the gravity of the facts.

The jeering of the crowd

The taunting of bystanders was a well-known feature of Christ’s passion and both Persons and Verstegan employed this typical theme of martyrdom. Text 1 relates how the townsfolk were informed beforehand that the “papists” were on their way. “Church papist” was a pejorative phrase coined in an era of unprecedented disorder and dislocation, a stinging insult,³⁶ and even worse, ‘a term of abuse and opprobrium’;³⁷ if that holds true when used of Catholic conformists, how much more opprobrious when applied to Campion and his entourage? As the procession passed through towns and cities they were subjected to ‘insults’ (*contumeliis*), and the procession was clearly ‘set up for the purpose of taunting and every kind of derision’ (*ad opprobrium et omne genus ludibri composita*). In the second Verstegan plate, a priest (probably Campion) who has been betrayed by an acquaintance, is taken into custody. The jeering and taunting of the crowd can also be deduced from the fact that small boys are hurling stones at the captive and a man is sticking out his tongue. The jailer is pointing at the fetters, the symbol of Campion’s subjugation. The mock genuflecting of the jailer ridicules this Catholic rite while the fool’s hat on Campion’s head signifies the humiliation the prisoners were subjected to.³⁸ The barking dog appearing in almost every plate symbolizes Calvinism and depicts the constant harassment and badgering which the Catholic martyrs had to endure.³⁹

The fortitude of the martyr

That Persons himself set a high priority on virtue is evidenced by a phrase Thomas Freeman quotes from the *Philopater*: ‘*Cum virtus mater sit, et nutrix, et conseruatrix omnis verae nobilitatis*’ (‘since virtue

³⁶ Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1993), p. 2; see also Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: A History of the English Reformation* (New Haven and London, 2017), pp. 59–60.

³⁷ Walsham, *Church Papists*, 6.

³⁸ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 128, 134.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

is the mother, nurturer and guardian of all true nobility').⁴⁰ Freeman explains: 'The behaviour of the martyr was essential corroboration of his or her status as a servant of God. When the martyrs succeeded in displaying the required stoicism they created potent propaganda for their own cause.' The executions of martyrs were scanned keenly by their confessional opponents for any indication, no matter how slight, of inconstancy or weakness.⁴¹ The proselytizing effect must also not be underestimated: 'Yet dying well remained important to both martyrs and martyrological writers. Without it fellow believers would not have been edified nor potential converts moved. Moreover, to have ignored the martyrs' extraordinary courage would have slighted their witness.'⁴²

Elsewhere in *De Persecutione* Persons again attests to Campion's fortitude when he reports that he bore his torments '*pacate, modestissime, et animo laeto, vultuque sereno*' ('peacefully, discreetly, with a happy disposition and a serene expression'). After the sentencing he praised God '*hilari vultu et clara voce pro tanto beneficio eo gratias agens, cantat*' ('he sang with cheerful facial expression and clear voice while thanking God for such great beneficence').⁴³ True to the model of martyrdom, Dymoke likewise shows consistency in faith. Once again the syntactic parallels and *gradatio* convey the content, accentuating the repeated rejection by the martyr:

*quas ille sanus contemnebat, egrotus clamore respuebat,
iam mutus et semimortuus vultu, signis corporisque gestu
detestabatur*

he detested them [the prayers of the Protestant ministers] in health, in sickness he spurned them with a shout; already dumb and half dead he abominated them with his countenance, by signs and bodily gesture

The verbs *contemnebat* (despised), *respuebat* (rejected), and *destestabatur* (called a curse on) with their increasing emotional

⁴⁰ Andreas Philopater, *pseud.* [vere Robert Persons], *Elizabethae Angliae Regeinae haeresim Calvinianam propugnantis, saevissimum in Catholicos sui regni edictum ... Cum responsione* (Antwerp, Lyon, Rome, etc., 1592).

⁴¹ Freeman, 'Imitatio Christi with a Vengeance', 37, 39.

⁴² Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 322.

⁴³ *De Persecutione*, 82.

impact and intensity portray Sir Dimmock's increased determination and detestation, while the adjectives *sanus* (healthy), *egrotus* (sick), and *mutus* (without voice) conversely indicate his weakening physical state.⁴⁴

The steadfastness in the face of persecution reminds us strongly of the humanist philosophy of stoicism. The return *ad fontes* of the Renaissance 'was a key element in the renewal of Christianity in the sixteenth century'.⁴⁵ The celebration of *apatheia* (the superiority of reason to pain and fear) illustrates the influence of the classical tradition on Christianity and on Christian martyrology.⁴⁶ Erasmus' booklet of some 140 pages, the *Adagiorum Collectanea*, a selection of classical adages and proverbs printed in 1500, became the harbinger of a literature which was to change the nature of European discourse. 'It offered for most contemporaries their first general and accessible view of the classical past. It was part of Erasmus' aim to restore the meaning of that past by emphasising the presence and permanence of the truths that Greek and Latin authors had adumbrated.'⁴⁷ The *Adages* also sought to prove that classical wisdom and scriptural revelation were not incompatible.

Emblems of Catholicism

Persons' motivation for the writing of *De Persecutione* and Verstegan's for the creation of the images of martyrdom in the plates were the same: the confirmation of the Catholic identity and encouragement of the recusants abroad and in England. The description of the fate of the martyrs had to be distinct from Foxe's heroes and for that purpose

⁴⁴ Cf. *De Persecutione*, 84, 87: Alexander Briant likewise showed 'contempt for torture' (*'tam fortiter contempsisse tormenta'*) and Ralph Sherwin was 'fearless' (*'non terretur'*) and even 'seemed joyous' (*'caperent laetitiam'*). He turned to his executioner *'laeto, hilari vultu'* ('with happy and joyful expression').

⁴⁵ Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: Early Modern Europe 1450–1700* (New Haven, CT, 2016), p. 664.

⁴⁶ In *The City of God* 14.9, Augustine seems to endorse the idea that unhappy passions such as longing, pain, guilt, fear and mourning, have enormous value for us, for 'so long as we are clothed with the infirmities of this life, we are not living a proper human life if we are entirely devoid of these emotions': *The City of God, Books VIII–XVI*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan, Fathers of the Church 14 (Washington, DC, 1952), p. 370.

⁴⁷ Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (London, 1999), p. 84.

Catholic symbols and rites are confirmed. The English Catholics identified with the martyrs who clearly symbolised their church and faith.⁴⁸

Three of the *topoi* discussed above were especially characteristic of Catholic martyrdom: the image of the martyr as an imitator of Christ, the characterization of the martyr as an educated man who understood only too well what was at stake,⁴⁹ and the portrayal of the martyrs as brave and fearless heroes rather than the performers of miracles.⁵⁰ These typically Catholic elements found in both the textual extracts and the illustrations confirm that, as martyrs, these men openly bore witness to the Catholic faith for which they were prepared to die. In Text 2 the Catholic identity of the martyr, Sir Robert Dymoke is highlighted. He was first 'suspected' ('*suspectus*') of being 'of the faith of his ancestors' ('*avitae fidei*') but when brought before the superintendent he 'openly' ('*manifeste*') admitted to being of the Catholic faith. The reader is subtly reminded of the credentials of the Catholic church. Established by common forefathers ('*avitae fidei*'), it is the 'universal church of Christ' ('*universalis ecclesiae christianae*'). The Latin word *manifeste* is the adverbial form of the adjective *manifestus* which can also mean 'convicted', or 'detected', a connotation well suited to the circumstances; *manifestus* is in turn derived from two Latin words, *manus* and *fendo* and literally means 'struck by hand'. The implied suggestive sense of this word would not have been lost on the well-educated target audience. The ailing Robert Dymoke was unperturbed and steadfast in his convictions and adamantly rejected the Protestant ministers and their prayers, just as he had done when he was healthy. He sets an encouraging and inspiring example to faithful Catholics.

The sacramental powers vested in the priesthood and the sacred Catholic rites are key elements of Catholic martyrdom in *De Persecutione* and Verstegan's portrayal. Of the twelve men in Text 1,

⁴⁸ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 5; 8.

⁴⁹ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, 92, describes this aspect of Catholic martyrology of the period: 'The writers stressed that the priests ... were intellectually able men ... One of the key criticisms against many Protestant martyrs had been that they were ignorant artisans, incapable of understanding the cause for which they died'.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 87.

five were priests and the crux of the accusation against these men was that they had been found in prayer, 'attending Catholic Mass' ('*sacra Catholica facientes*'). Robert Dymoke (Text 2) wanted to die according to the custom of the universal Christian church, implying that he was requesting the presence of a priest in his dying hours. In one of Verstegan's engravings a priest is shown clad in his vestments and two female figures are carrying rosary beads.⁵¹ The Catholic element in the descriptive texts and the depictions of martyrological scenes in the plates unifies these documents and provides them with their unique character.

Conclusion

The analysis above confirms that Persons' *De persecutione* constitutes a valuable original source from the early modern era. The account of sixteenth-century treason laws, combined with a detailed account of the suffering of several individual priests who were found convicted, tortured and executed, provides valuable insights and lessons from the era of the Reformation for the construction of an enduring theory of human rights, democratic government, rule of law and federalist order in place of upended monarchy. However, the analysis has revealed that there is more to this work than historical and theological information or lessons from the past. A closer look at the content of two extracts from *De Persecutione* revealed several familiar martyrological themes that had been established over many centuries. These themes are reinforced by Verstegan's images and inscriptions. *De Persecutione* is all the more important since the Catholics lacked martyrological propaganda equivalent to that of Foxe or Crespin.⁵² Persons wrote at a time when Catholics were targeted by the treason laws and since the morale was low he purposefully portrayed the martyrs of *De Persecutione* as 'triumphant emblems of Catholicism'⁵³ in an effort to re-establish and reinforce the Catholic identity.

This short (and by no means exhaustive) analysis reinforces the conclusion of the earlier article, that an accurate translation of *De Persecutione* into modern English will make an essential source more accessible and intelligible to students and researchers of martyrdom,

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 128.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 82–83.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 8.

sixteenth-century church history, theology, justice, politics and civil rights. For those with an interest in the development of the Latin language, the text provides some excellent examples of Neo-Latin vocabulary and grammar. Most importantly this many-layered text confirms that the humanistic education of the sixteenth century contained a good measure of classical rhetoric and that it resulted in texts such as *De Persecutione* which present rich opportunities for analysis and discovery.

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