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## Article

# Catholic Martyrs and Canon Law: Reassessing the Meaning of Hagiographic Texts in Philip II's Spain

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**Abstract:** This essay is about the uses of martyrdom works in Spain and among Elizabethan English Catholics with special reference to their beatification cause by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. There are two related points in this essay. First, Spanish martyrdom was more about fighting the Turks than fighting the Protestant English; secondly, hagiographic texts were more about submitting evidence to Rome for classification as a martyr than overthrowing the English government. We need to consider these two issues together if we are to better understand that the story of Spanish Catholic martyrs is really not about a larger narrative of Catholics v. Protestants, especially English Protestants. I argue, first, that late sixteenth-century European works about martyrdom reflected competing definitions of the experience. This diversity cannot be summarised in Protestant vs. Catholic definitions of martyrdom, as has been argued so far. I will show that, within Catholicism, there were two main definitions of martyrdom: first, that which focused on Christian martyrs in relation to other faiths, especially Islam; and, secondly, that which focused on Catholic martyrs in relation to Protestant heretics. I will use Spanish evidence about the former and English and Italian evidence about the latter. Further, I will demonstrate that, within Counterreformation Catholicism, Canon law definitions and beatification procedures impacted the production and uses of martyrdom works both in Spain as well as among English Catholics who were implicated in the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* during Philip II's reign. Secondly, I argue that the historiographical debate about whether Elizabethan English Catholics who were tried for treason died for their faith or, indeed, for treason, has been missing the point. I will show, first, that it is reasonable to state they died as martyrs according to Canon law and for treason according to common law; secondly, that most Catholic works about their martyrdom have been wrongly regarded as either hagiographical or aimed at keeping the old faith alive among exiles. New research about the Elizabethan Catholic martyrs conducted in previously ignored Roman archives reveals the importance of martyrdom literature for legal reasons. This essay begins to fill the gap about some of the legal uses of martyrdom literature which the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints needs in order to instruct and rule on beatification causes.



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**Keywords:** martyrdom; Spain; Elizabethan England; saints; hagiography

## 1. Introduction

This essay<sup>1</sup> is about the uses of martyrdom works in Spain and among Elizabethan English Catholics, with special reference to their beatification cause by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.<sup>2</sup> It argues, first, that late-sixteenth century European works about martyrdom reflected competing definitions of the experience. This diversity cannot be summarised in Protestant vs. Catholic definitions of martyrdom, as has been argued so far.

I will show that, within Catholicism, there were two main definitions of martyrdom, one which focused on Christian martyrs in relation to other faiths, especially Islam, and another one which focused on Catholic martyrs in relation to Protestant heretics, as it stemmed from Canon law. I will use Spanish evidence about the former and English and Italian evidence about the latter. Further, I will demonstrate that, within Counterreformation Catholicism, Canon law definitions and beatification procedures impacted on the production and uses of martyrdom works both in Spain as well as in among English Catholics who were implicated in the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* during Philip II's reign. Secondly, this essay argues that the historiographical debate about whether Elizabethan English Catholics who were tried for treason died for their faith or, indeed, for treason, has been missing the point. I will show, first, that it is reasonable to state they died as martyrs according to Canon law and for treason according to common law; secondly, that most Catholic works about their martyrdom have been wrongly regarded as either hagiographical or aimed at keeping the old faith alive among exiles. This is because historians have failed to appreciate some of the legal uses of martyrdom literature which the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints needs in order to instruct and rule on beatification causes. The Catholic legal mindset has been misunderstood for lack of research about Elizabethan Catholic martyrs' cause in Roman archives. This essay begins to fill this gap.

It is divided into two parts. In the first one I consider a number of works about martyrdom during Philip II's reign. They reflect Spain's main preoccupation with its primary role as a defender of Christianity, while showing both the popular and the legal definitions of martyrdom stemming from Canon law.<sup>3</sup> In the second part, I develop the latter point with reference to Elizabethan Catholic martyrs. Using a range of little studied sources from Roman and Spanish archives, including that of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, I show that treason and martyrdom should be regarded as two equally valid ways of describing the cause of their deaths as each one of them reflects a particular legal system. I conclude by arguing that more needs to be done for the contextualisation of martyrdom works if we are to get to grips with a part of early modern hagiographical literature that was in fact produced for legal reasons rather than for edification.

## 2. Martyrdom in Spanish Context: Christianity Before Catholicism

### A. *El Greco's reason vs. victims of Turkish odium fidei.*

In 1580 a Venetian subject from Candía called Domínikos Theotokópoulos (1541–1614) obtained his first commission from King Philip II of Spain. He was to paint an altar piece about Saint Mauritius' martyrdom for the new El Escorial palace. It was the Greek artist's opportunity to enter royal service, thereby securing patronage in what was going to be his last elective country of residence after a stint of a few years in Venice. There he had learned to paint in the Italian Renaissance manner, dropping his former Byzantine style. Yet, El Greco, as he would become universally known, never stopped thinking like a Greek.

In 1582, rather satisfied with his opus, the painter showed a magnificent altar piece to the Spanish King. There stood a group of Greek-speaking legionaries from Tebe, calmly talking with one another. Their armour is simple, yet it strikes the viewer with its typically Italian Renaissance colours. The legionary on the right is wearing a dagger which El Greco depicted in its finest details, making it look like a photo to our modern eye. The composure of the legionaries gives them gravity and dignity. Here is a group of men making an informed choice in a rational way. They are talking about the decision to die for their faith, choosing martyrdom as free men in charge of their destiny. In the far-left corner of the painting one can spot Saint Mauritius having been beheaded; there is no blood anywhere to be seen. The beheading image is far smaller than that of the legionaries' conversation. To El Greco's Greek mind, the point which he clearly and powerfully wished to get across to his

viewers was that martyrdom was a rational choice which showed man's inherent rational nature. As Aristotle widely repeated throughout his works, such as in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, man is a rational animal through his ability to speak, through his logos (Keil and Krefl 2019). In St. John's Gospel, which reads like the most Greek of the Gospels, it is stated 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. To El Greco, martyrdom could only be a rational choice which underlined and magnified man's rational nature.

Philip rejected his work and ordered it be put away in a side alley. There ended El Greco's dream of a courtly career. He settled in Toledo for good, where he proceeded to paint the many masterpieces for which he is still remembered today. We do not know whether Philip had refrained from spelling out exactly what he wanted to his potentially new court painter, or whether El Greco did not understand Philip's request because, as a foreigner, he had yet to grasp the Spanish way of being Catholic. Either way, their misunderstanding stemmed from El Greco and Philip II's different definitions of martyrdom, which, in turn, impacted on the prospective uses of the painting in point. We must reconstruct the context. El Escorial was still being built. In 1580, the Spanish King had commissioned the painting about Saint Mauritius's martyrdom to honour his ally, the Duke of Savoy, who had died that year. The Duke of Savoy had successfully led the Spanish fleet in their common fight against the Turks at the battle of Lepanto (1571) (Marías Franco, pp. 32–35). Philip was after a work about martyrdom which foreign dignitaries coming to El Escorial one day would immediately recognise as a celebration of Philip's foreign policy against the worst enemies of both Spain as well as of Christianity, namely, the Turks. To that end, for that use, martyrdom had to be painted as a bloodshed, because Christian martyrs such as Saint Mauritius had died in *odium fidei*, for their faith. The emphasis had to be, first, on Christianity's enemies and, secondly, on Christian martyrs' way of dying, because it highlighted the evil nature of Islam. This is why Philip had commissioned a painting that would honour a hero from the Lepanto victory against the Turks. For all its beauty and grace, El Greco's artwork was completely missing the point. Philip wanted his visitors at El Escorial to be visually reminded of the importance of the existential fight of Christianity against Islam and of the heroic role of the Catholic powers in the struggle, along with Philip's own leading role as supreme commander of the Christian alliance.

Instead of El Greco's *Martyrdom of Saint Mauritius*, Philip II eventually got Romolo Cincinnato's eponymous painting. The scene is crammed with soldiers and martyred corpses, with a distant Christ judging from above (Fernando Marías Franco 2024). It is situated in one of the several like-decorated chapels in El Escorial. Today's viewers pass by without paying too much attention as it does not elicit the same powerfully emotional response that it must have provoked at the time, when the Mediterranean saw daily raids of Turkish-sponsored ships, killing, raping, and enslaving Christians from Cadiz in Spain to Ischia in the Spanish Vice kingdom of Naples. While Cincinnato's artistic merit may not be as great as that of El Greco's other painting, the former's helps us to define Philip II's ideas about Christianity through martyrdom and the ways in which he considered his own role in relation to contemporary religious affairs.

First, Philip wished to have an altar piece magnifying the notion of martyrdom as violent death in *odium fidei*. According to Canon law, this happens when the martyr dies for not rejecting the True Faith. Cincinnato's painting met the specification perfectly, with its abundant bloodshed and pathos. Clearly, the Spanish King was expecting a work that would stress the martyr's bodily painful sacrifice of life on earth for the True Faith to gain life in paradise. Secondly, and directly depending on it, Philip regarded himself as the protector of contemporary Christian martyrs. By and large, by Christian martyrs we must understand those Christians who were captured and slaughtered by Ottoman

Turks. Philip II considered Muslim Ottomans as the main enemies of Christianity, and always regarded the fight against them as of paramount importance for his dominions as well as for Europe at large. Philip's understanding of Christianity was the True Faith as opposed to its archenemy, Islam. In this sense, Philip II embodied Carl Schmitt's theory of the "Freund-Feind Denken" (Voigt 2011).<sup>4</sup>

The recent works of Alessandro Vanoli and Gennaro Varriale have highlighted the importance of the Ottoman Empire as the alter ego of the Spanish Monarchy. They have convincingly argued that one should consider Spanish history since the time of the Reconquista in the long run until at least Philip III's expulsion of the moriscos in 1616 after the war of the Alpujarras in order to gain an accurate perspective on the role of the Turks in Spanish foreign affairs.<sup>5</sup> If we adopt their perspective, as I believe one should, then the uses of martyrdom works under Philip II will become more intelligible. In his archaeological analysis of Al-Mansur's pavilion in Marrakech, Antonio Almagro has pointed out that Philip II's library in El Escorial included a section about martyrdom works, within which one finds those relating to Christians who were martyred by the Turks in the 1580s.<sup>6</sup> Javier Marcos Rivas, Lucía de Medrano, as well as Carlos Carnicer have unearthed a wealth of intelligence sources about Philip II's foreign policy, which clearly show the centrality of the Turkish danger in the sovereign's mind.<sup>7</sup> Philip's ideas about martyrdom were shaped by the Muslim threat embodied in the Ottoman Empire and its pirates across the Mediterranean. When he thought about martyrs, he conjured up images of Christians being ripped apart by Muslims.

Philip II differed from his father, the emperor Charles V, who had regarded himself primarily as a defender of the Catholic faith against Protestants. Indeed, it was Charles who dug up and enacted medieval legislation about treason in the Low Countries, turning his Flemish Protestant subjects into traitors because they refused to follow their sovereign's faith policy Duke (1982). Philip, on the other hand, always considered himself first and foremost as the King of Castile. As Henry Kamen perceptively wrote, Philip was culturally far more Spanish than his Flemish-educated father Henry Kamen (1997), and for an early modern Spaniard, the defence of Christianity against Islam was fundamental, more so than the protection of Roman Catholicism from heresy. Besides, Roman Catholicism was embodied in Popes whose political claims of papal supremacy kept clashing with Philip's ecclesiastical policies (not to mention the fact that the sack of Rome in 1527 was carried out by Protestant soldiers on behalf of the so-called Catholic Charles V).<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, English-language historiography has downplayed the importance of the Ottomans in Spanish foreign policy under Philip II in order to artificially overemphasize the centrality of Anglo-Spanish relations. Geoffrey Parker's works on Philip II may be spot on as far as the sly sovereign's personality is concerned, but by insisting on his fixation with heresy, it somewhat artificially conflates the fight for Christianity against Islam with the cause of Counterreformation Catholicism. Thus, Philip's own order of priorities gets turned upside down.<sup>9</sup> Robert Tombs' *The English & their History* has likewise Philip II with an unrecorded number of Popes and French leaders among the Catholic powers preying on Elizabeth I's throne. His underlying assumption is that their political alliance was cemented by their shared Catholic faith. This kind of oversimplification is good for the general reader but detrimental to scholarship, because, by omitting Philip's main worry about Christianity's fight against the Turks, it leaves one with a partial impression of his worldview.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Robert Goodwin's *Spain*, while remaining one of the most compelling tales about its Golden Age, devotes one whole chapter to the Armada episode and only a few pages to Lepanto.<sup>11</sup> Military historians would usually have it the other way round (Hess 1972; Grant 1999; MacDougall 2017). By contrast, Goodwin insists on the religious reasons for Sir Francis Drake's colonial incursions against Spanish dominions in America, namely,

to root out ‘the poisonous infection of Popery’, whereas he has little to no consideration for the thousands of Christians being slaughtered and enslaved by the Turks around the Mediterranean, for whom Philip’s Spain was the biggest hope of survival (Goodwin 2015, p. 216; Grant 2024; Loades 2009). Those were the martyrs that Philip had in mind when commissioning a painting about Saint Mauritius’ martyrdom, through which he meant to project an image of himself as the protector of Christians against their persecutors.

In fact, works of art and literature about martyrdom which were produced in Spain during Philip’s reign bear unequivocal testimony to the Spaniards’ fear of the Turks and their massive disinterest, for example, for the fate of English Catholics in Protestant England, and this, despite the active lobbying of English Catholic exiles residing in Spain, some of whom were even active at Philip’s court. If we are to get to grips with notions and uses of martyrdom works in Philip II’s Spain, therefore, we ought to turn to books and manuscripts about martyrdom which circulated in Philip II’s Spain.

*B. Spanish manuscript and printed works about martyrdom: dying for Christianity and Spain.*

Philip II’s Spain had a very low literacy rate, so when one considers manuscript and printed works from the Golden Age one really should bear in mind that they reflected the views of a minority of Spanish people and probably influenced even fewer ones. By the end of the eighteenth century only 20% of the Spanish population could read and write. Statistics about Philip II’s reign give us an even lower rough estimate. By contrast, literacy rates in Elizabethan England were at least twice as high as in Spain and they kept rising throughout the early modern period (Serafín de Tapia 1993–1994; Tyrel C. Eskelson 2021). These low Spanish literacy rates force us to understand martyrdom as a scholarly topic of a quintessentially elite nature when it comes to Spain. This is in stark contrast with the wide reach among Christopher Hill’s ‘middling sorts’ of John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* in Elizabethan England, where most people had the opportunity to read about Protestants who were burnt at the stake under “Bloody Mary”, or knew somebody who could read it out for them (Loades 1999; Evenden and Freeman 2004; Freeman 2000). There is no Spanish equivalent to Foxe’s martyrdom work; there was no Spanish bestseller in martyrdom literature of any kind.

Yet, Philip II’s Spain was the heir of the long Reconquista process, during which the idea of dying for one’s Christian faith against Muslims had come to pervade society. In her autobiography, published in Spanish at the end of the sixteenth century, Saint Teresa de Ávila recalled her favourite game from when she was a child and used to play with her elder brother, Rodrigo: the two would escape into the land of the Moors in order to die as martyrs.<sup>12</sup> One wonders how many little Spaniards shared the same childhood memory with Saint Teresa. The likelihood is that many did. Martyrdom, in early modern Spain, retained above all the Reconquista meaning of dying for Christianity against Islam. Even if Spanish written works about martyrdom could be read by fewer people, proportionally speaking, than those who could read martyrdom literature in English, I believe that martyrdom was just as widely felt a topic in Spain as in England. The difference, though, was in the perspective. Martyrdom in Spain retained its Reconquista emphasis on the fight for Christianity, whereas martyrdom in England acquired two different meanings depending on whether one was Protestant or Catholic. Spain remained overall rather sheltered from reformed ideas.<sup>13</sup> Martyrdom, therefore, kept focusing on the main enemy from outside Christianity and not on the enemies within it.

The *Verdadera relació sobre vn martyrio que dieron los Turcos enemigos de nuestra sancta fee catholica en Cōstantinopla a vn deuoto Frayle de la orden de sant Francisco* was published anonymously in Cordoba in 1577.<sup>14</sup> While non-specialists of Spanish history tend to entertain romantic, little realistic views about Moorish Al Ándalus, it might be useful to remember that Cordoba returned to Christian rule as early as in 1236 after King Ferdinand

III of Castile's successful siege.<sup>15</sup> Since then, and particularly since the much later fall of Granada in 1492, the city was progressively repopulated by Castilian and Extremaduran families in order to demographically strengthen the Christian population. Orders such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans gained power. Archives in Cordoba and Granada contain large collections of tracts reflecting their dynamic social presence and influence.<sup>16</sup> We should see this publication about the martyrdom of a Franciscan friar at the hands of the Turks in this context. The work reflects Spanish fears of the Turks, who are seen as those who put Christians through martyrdom.

Indeed, the same theme was so pervasive that it trickled through an Easter play, the *Obra nuevamente compuesta por Fráncisco Gonçalez de Figueroa, . . . sacada de vna verdadera relacion, dandose cuenta la vida, y el martyrio de vna santa muger española, y fue, que la quemaron viua en la ciudad de Hierusalē, en el monte Caluario, donde fue crucificado nuestro Señor Iesu Christo, y esto hizieron los Turcos* (Valencia?: Juan Navarro?, 1580, [Figueroa 1580](#)). Here, the martyr is a Spanish woman who was burnt at the stake by the Turks in Jerusalem on Mount Calvary on a Palm Sunday. It claims to be based on a true, contemporary story. Since the presence of contemporary issues in theatre plays is usually an indication of their wide importance in society, then Spanish preoccupation with martyrdom at the hands of the Turks was clearly strong. It continued to be so well into the second decade of the seventeenth century, when the moriscos staged their last major armed rebellion before their expulsion in 1616 after their defeat at the battle of the Alpujarras, the mountain range outside Granada. New Spanish martyrs met their death at the hands of the Turkish-sponsored moriscos, as reflected in a manuscript by António de Gouveia, *Discurso glorioso de tres martires españoles. Discurso sobre el martirio de los padres fray Nicolás Melo y fray Guillermo de San Agustín*. This is an epic poem about martyrdom; it is set during the Alpujarras rebellion and it contains several learned references to classical martyrdom authors, such as Tertullian and Cyprian.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, one of the main martyrdom themes in the Spanish publication market of the second half of the sixteenth century was that of the Cordoba martyrs, a group of ninth-century Christians who chose to die for their faith because they rejected Islam. *The Traslado del proceso de la invención y hallazgo de los huesos, mármol y sepulcro de los Santos Mártires Fausto, Januario, Marcial, Zoislo, Aciselo y los demás que están en la Iglesia de San Pedro de Córdoba. . .* is a manuscript, dated 1599, kept today in the National Library, Madrid.<sup>18</sup> It reflects the ongoing importance of fighting for Christianity as a token of Spanish national identity and national unity. This kind of argument from antiquity was, of course, not proper to Spanish rhetorics; rather, it was a feature of antiquarian works all over Western Europe. Arguments from antiquity used the rhetorical ploy of the uninterrupted presence of a particular trait in order to demonstrate that, since time immemorial, that very trait helped to define one's national identity.<sup>19</sup> Ambrosio de Morales's *Carta sobre los santos mártires*, another manuscript kept in Madrid, dated 5 November 1578, made the same point, albeit with reference to the recent discovery (which will be shown to be a hoax in modern times) in Granada of a set of relics of a Christian martyr from the time of Al Ándalus.<sup>20</sup> The same de Morales, together with Pedro Ponce de León, had published in Alcalá de Henares, in 1574, the *Diui Eulogii Cordubensis martyris. . . Opera*.<sup>21</sup>

Patriotic antiquaries like de Morales and prelates alike scrambled to use the genre of martyrdom literature to rhetorically argue in favour of the uninterrupted presence of Christianity as far deep into former Moorish lands as Granada. The Emirate of Granada had been the last bit of Muslim land on Spanish soil to resist against the Christian conquistadores, so those martyrs' relics were regarded as powerful evidence of the unabated Christian soul of each inch of Spanish soil throughout its Christian history. Only, this time, the so-called books from the Sacromonte (from the name of the monastery in which those relics were found) were made up by moriscos. They were meant to demonstrate that San

Cecilio, an Arab who had converted to Christianity and had died as a martyr in Granada, should be taken as living proof that even moriscos can become trustworthy Christians, as reflected in their having their own martyr.<sup>22</sup> The importance of the Christian faith as a marker of Spanish national identity was so strong that martyrs featured prominently in the *Historia eclesiastica* published in Cuenca by the Dominican friar Juan de Marieta in 1596.<sup>23</sup> The author had a special abridged edition to present Philip II with.<sup>24</sup>

The link between Christianity and Spanish national identity became synonymous with the relationship between dying as a martyr for Christ and dying for Spain. While this usually meant dying against the Turks, the religious-politic-chivalric story *Verísima relación del riguroso y acervo martirio que la Reina Inglesa dio a los soldados de nuestra nación española del ejército del Príncipe Cardenal, y de como la serenísima Virgen les manifesto el martirio que habían de pasar juntamente con el con el convertimiento de seis judíos que recibieron el mismo martirio muriendo en palados: en 17 de Mayo de 1596 años: con un Romance al cabo* had an entirely different story to tell: Spanish martyrs dying for Christ and Spain against Elizabeth I of England.<sup>25</sup> This is the only Spanish work that I have been able to locate in Spain which explicitly assimilates Spaniards fighting against Protestants as martyrs. However, it would be wrong to stress the Protestant adjective of Elizabethan England. The whole patriotic vein of the *Verísima relación* emphasises the foreignness of England against Spain, not Protestantism vs. Catholicism. Indeed, Spanish-language historians have stressed the importance of the Spanish defeat at the siege of Cadiz far more than the much-acclaimed English victory over the Armada. Cadiz is in Spain. The Armada lost far from Spain. It was invisible more than invincible. Cadiz represented a sort of 9/11 for Philip II's Spain, a wakeup call of Spanish fragility on Spanish soil. In a manuscript memoir by Bernardino de Escalante, a Jesuit and self-declared advisor of Philip II, for whom it was written in 1586, eleven folios are dedicated to the heroism of the Spaniards during the siege of Cadiz and more follow about the need for Spain to fortify its borders. Escalante insists on the need to fortify Barcelona, Navarra, Aragon, Valencia, and Guipuzcoa. His message was that, since Drake's raid, Philip must realise that Spanish coasts were under the double threat of the Turks and of the English. Moreover, Escalante insinuates that Castilian sovereignty over the Spanish territories was partial, hence the need to send many more Castilian troops all over the kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

The only other instances in which we find works about martyrdom in relation to England and, in general to a country other than Spain, are those which were originally produced by Elizabethan English Catholics, and were aimed at either the English Catholic community living in Spain or at some potential Spanish patron from the Anglo-Spanish nobility, like the Dukes of Feria, for the cause of restoring Catholicism in England, as Freddy Cristóbal Domínguez has magisterially shown in his monograph.<sup>27</sup> There is no such work written by a Spanish author or meant specifically for Spanish readers. This is because the Spanish reading public was interested in those works about martyrdom that showed its link, first, with Spain's century-old fight against Islam and, secondly, with Spanish identity. In a country which was very little touched by the spread of the Reformation in comparison with neighbouring France and, above all, with Northern Europeans such as England, the Empire, or the Low Countries, Spain remained Catholic. Its main enemy, therefore, remained the Turk. Consequently, readers were after martyrdom works detailing the martyrdom of Spanish people for Christianity over Islam rather than for Catholicism over heresies. In the next section we are going to consider the uses of martyrdom works among those Elizabethan England Catholics who were engaged in both the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* and the English Mission during Philip II's reign. Thus, this article will complement Domínguez' analysis with the help of unedited sources from the Archive of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in the Vatican.

### 3. The Uses of Martyrdom Works Among Elizabethan English Catholics

#### A. *Treason vs. martyrdom in the Impresa d’Inghilterra and the English Mission during the reign of Philip II.*

In the same year as El Greco’s Martyrdom of Saint Mauritius was discarded in favour of Romolo Cincinnato’s bloody ominous painting for the Spanish court, another martyrdom scene saw the light in the Jesuit-run English College, Rome. Niccolò Circignani, also known as il Pomarancio, executed an intriguing variation on a quintessentially English theme. His Saint George slaying the dragon represented George Gilbert (1555–83), an English Catholic who had recently been executed for treason in London (Gangale 2020, pp. 85–151). In the painting, therefore, an Elizabethan English Catholic martyr thus came to embody the most patriotic of English saints. Yet, Gilbert was hanged, drawn and quartered for treason against the queen. How patriotic could a traitor be? Before we answer the question, let us note the importance of national identity in relation to martyrdom. The painter made the point that truly patriotic English people were Catholic martyrs and, by extension, Catholics. This was a clear response to the rising patriotic discourse in Elizabethan England which was linking Protestantism to Englishness.

Circignani placed his painting together with a series of frescoes whose theme was, indeed, Elizabethan Catholic martyrdom. Two years later, engravings of the whole series of frescoes were printed in Rome and copies were sent abroad, specifically for circulation in Philip II’s Spain.<sup>28</sup> Within Spain, a rare edition saw the light about the plight of Elizabethan English Catholics who were being martyred in London, being falsely accused of treason. The *Relacion de algunos martyrios que de nuevo han hecho los hereges en Inglaterra y de otras cosas tocantes a nuestra santa y catolica religion* was originally written in English by the Jesuit Joseph Creswell and translated into Spanish by his fellow Jesuit Robert Person in 1590 (Creswell 1590). It represents the tiny minority of martyrdom works about Elizabethan English Catholics which were printed in Philip II’s Spain.

Circignani’s painting about the martyrdom of Saint George and Person’s Spanish translation of Creswell’s relation about Elizabethan Catholic martyrs were propaganda means of the same two-branch enterprise, namely, the Impresa d’Inghilterra and the English Mission. First, I will recall the immediate historical context for both martyrdom works; next, I will discuss the historiographical debate about whether Elizabethan English Catholics who were caught and executed, actually died for treason, as Protestant historians have been arguing, or in odium fidei, as more and more Catholic historians would have it. I will show that this is a case of question mal posée through the analysis of evidence about English martyrs’ beatification causes.

Let me start from Person’s translation. The historical context was that of the beginning of peace talks between Spain and England after the defeat of 1588. The radical fringe of the Company of Jesus that was based in the English Colleges in Rome, Rheims, Douai, and Valladolid did not look forward to peace talks, because they would inevitably mean the acceptance of the status quo, namely, the fact that England was and would remain Protestant. In the words of Sir William Cecil to diplomat Châteaumartin, who was about to meet with Philip II to negotiate a peace treaty in December 1590: ‘And if you find that they [Philip II and his council] let you speak your mind freely, without danger for yourself, you might say that the world believes that Almighty God showed His power against the King’s designs in the route of such his mighty fleet as it had not yet been seen in history by granting victory to the English, who did not lose one single ship and not a single Englishman has been captured’.<sup>29</sup> Given the circumstances, Spain should give up on the Impresa d’Inghilterra.

While Philip considered the Turks as the main enemies of the Christian faith, he also grew into his role of protector of English Catholics. Indeed, as he pointed out in his secret instructions to don Guerau de Espés, his new ambassador to London, in June 1568, the latter was supposed to help the remaining English Catholic nobility, particularly those who gravitated around the English relatives of the Duchess of Feria. Furthermore, de Espés should watch out and protect one father David, a Jesuit, who had lived in Rome for a few years before moving back to London on the business of helping English Catholics. Of course, de Espés was to act in such a way as to not let Queen Elizabeth rightly complain about it. Moreover, Philip insisted that the new Spanish ambassador should act as the intermediary between the English and the Papal courts.<sup>30</sup> In other words, Philip had been trying to cut out for himself the role of protector of English Catholics since the 1560s and, perhaps more importantly, official voice of the Papal interests in England.

The detailed and evolving plan for the restoration of Catholicism in England, called *Impresa d'Inghilterra* (in Italian, usually, because it was conceived in Rome and English Jesuits there wrote about it in Italian) is contained in a manuscript volume which is kept today in the Archive of the Society of Jesus, Rome.<sup>31</sup> It contains a sixteenth-century copy of the speech of Francis Yaxley to Philip II, dated October 1565, as well as evidence of Philip's secretary, Juan de Idiáquez, writing to various English Jesuits in Rome with instructions about the aims and methods of the *Impresa*.

At first, the *Impresa* was understood by Philip II as a means to influence English affairs through assistance to the Catholic nobility. Regime change was not an immediate goal for Philip soon after Elizabeth's accession to the throne. After all, the Spanish King had saved the English Princess's life when Mary's Council condemned her to death. As Luís Cabrera de Córdoba put it: "El Consejo condenó a muerte a Isabel, mas el rey no quiso se executase [. . .] Los franceses burlados, decían la guardaba don Filipe [sic] por razón política en contra dellos, por que en María Estuard no se juntasen tantos reinos para el peligro de los estados de Flandes".<sup>32</sup> Philip was already in Spain when that happened, and from Madrid he clearly regarded France as Spain's most dangerous enemy in Europe. Philip did not wish to have a relative of the French Crown—Mary Stuart—on both the Scottish and the English thrones; at least, he did not well into the 1570s.

The *Impresa d'Inghilterra*, however, was never Philip's own and sole brainchild. A radical, warmongering, minority group of English Jesuits hatched it, presented it to Philip, and enacted it in ways that it is not always possible to say for certain whether Philip agreed with them or not. The famous plots to kill Elizabeth in the 1570s—Ridolfi, Babington, and Parry—were certainly connected with Philip.<sup>33</sup> However, there does not seem to be any evidence that single Jesuits who went to England on purpose to kill their queen acted on Philip's behalf. On the contrary, there is evidence that the Anglo-Spanish Duchess of Feria, who was an ardent supporter of Jesuits' plots, complained about Philip's unwillingness to support the *Impresa d'Inghilterra*, which she clearly meant as a papal-Jesuit plan.<sup>34</sup>

The *Impresa d'Inghilterra* and the English Mission were not the same projects. The official purpose of the English Mission was to provide priests for Catholics in England and to convert Protestants back to Catholicism. The unofficial one was to pursue the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* by killing Elizabeth, hoping for popular support from within as well as for a military intervention from Spain via Flanders. There is no clear evidence that all those young seminarists who were sent over to England as missionaries were tasked with killing the queen or, if they did, whether they agreed to do so. Here is the problem with the historiographical debate about whether those Catholics charged with treason died as traitors or martyrs.

Gerard Kilroy's *Edmund Campion. A scholarly Life*, is, as the title states, a properly academic work about the most famous of the Elizabethan martyrs, the Jesuit and former Oxford don, Edmund Campion (Kilroy 2015). Here we have a well-argued book about the first Jesuit who secretly entered England to evangelize and provide religious services to the Catholic minority there. Campion was the first on the English Mission, that is, not on the Impresa. Campion was captured, tortured, and sentenced to death for treason despite insisting on his loyalty to Queen Elizabeth. Kilroy states: 'If the Queen herself were ready not only to release Campion but to make him an Archbishop [...] if he conformed, the trial for treason was a charade' (Kilroy 2015, p. 328).

Except, that for all his loyalty, Campion never recanted his acceptance of papal supremacy. That in itself constituted treason according to English law, because it clearly meant that if the Pope had ordered armed war against the Queen, or simply, as he had indeed ordered, to kill her at the first occasion, Campion would have followed the Pope's orders, thereby forgetting about his professed loyalty. If not Campion himself, then one of the two other Jesuits would, who died for treason with him in 1581. Or one of the four more English priests would, who had illegally entered England in June 1580 and had explicitly asked Pope Gregory XIII, in a letter dated 12 December 1580 from London, about whether killing Elizabeth would imply hell for their souls: the Pope had clearly answered that, on the contrary, murdering the English Queen would take their souls to heaven.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Pope's opinion was well known at the Spanish court, too, because the Papal Nuncio to Madrid, Cardinal Filippo Sega, had brought with him a paper from Rome to inform Philip II about it.<sup>36</sup>

It is very hard to understand on what grounds Kilroy, as well as all the other Catholic historians who have published about Campion–Sherwin–Briant and the Cottam's treason execution, or martyrdoms, should insist on denying that they had anything to do with the Impresa d'Inghilterra, that is, the armed branch of the English Mission. In the ARSI there is a letter from Edmund Campion to Robert Person in which the former aggressively states that "the Impresa is from God and may not be stopped" and that he was there in London "to root out heretical errors".<sup>37</sup> It does not sound consistent with loyalty to Queen Elizabeth. Furthermore, Kilroy has stated 'Alexander Briant's execution, like his prolonged and degrading torture, was an affront to English common law and all civilized values' (Kilroy 2015, p. 342). Kilroy goes on to say that Briant's deposition did not contain any lies. Yet, the Jesuit swore never to have been in the English Colleges in Rome and Rheims, whereas in fact he had studied in both (Kilroy 2015, p. 342). Lying under oath would be regarded badly even according to today's far more lenient standards. Additionally, more to the point, how can it be that a 400-page scholarly work, with an impressive bibliography of both primary as well as secondary sources, should not mention any manuscripts in the Roman Jesuit Archive or any papers pertaining to Gregory XIII's English foreign policy? John Vidmar's protestation that 'The injustice of the omission of Catholic authors from the Reformation debate becomes evident when one studies the Catholic histories themselves' really does not seem justified so far (Vidmar 2005). Since Alexandra Walsham's works have put Catholicism's English firmly back onto the scholarly map, we do know that it is possible to write about it without hagiographical overtones.

Since Lord Burghley's publication of his pamphlet justifying the executions of Catholics on treason charges until today's Peter Marshall's *Heretics and Believers*, there has been a wide consensus: they died as traitors. On the other hand, English Catholics have responded by adopting a variety of rhetorical strategies that scholars have analysed in fine detail.<sup>38</sup> At first sight, the historiography of English Catholic martyrdom in the years 1558–1598 is plagued by a number of ideological as well as methodological flaws which characterise works that are best described as hagiographical. While it is not at

all surprising that martyrdom, which is first and foremost a religious notion, should be the object of hagiographical studies, it does strike that so many works about Elizabethan Catholic martyrs should still be based on partial evidence, often on editions of original texts in modern translations, and with little to no regard for basic quantitative analysis of hard data. For example, let us consider Giuseppe Gangale's *George Gilbert (1555–1583). L'angelo dei martiri inglesi* (Gangale 2020).

He visited the English College and has reproduced and commented on a number of paintings about the Elizabethan English martyrs which adorn, so to speak, its walls. Yet, he does not even attempt at drawing comparisons between the iconography of martyrdom in the English College, Rome and, say, that in El Escorial. Yet, they are perfectly contemporary, as we have already established. When one devotes almost half of one's book to the iconography of martyrdom, as Gangale does through the paintings about Gilbert and other English martyrs in the English College, readers will expect some context about contemporary art about martyrdom, as, indeed, Eamon Duffy has provided about the very same paintings in his *Saints, Sacrilege and Seditious* (Duffy 2012). Instead, not a word. Lack of contextualisation is not a sign of deficient scholarship; rather, it is a conscious feature of militant martyrdom literature. By focussing almost entirely on biographical details, these kind of martyrdom works are supposed to increase reader's pathos while reading about the martyr's unwavering faith in death.

Let us now consider Giuliana Vittoria Fantuz's *Inghilterra di sangue. I Quaranta martiri Ingresi e Gallesi da Enrico VIII a Carlo II* (Fantuz 2022). Here we stand on firmer ground when arguing that this book may indeed represent one of, if not the Roman Curia's official views on the matter today. Mons. Robert Byrne, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, and Mons. Francesco Moraglia, the Patriarch of Venice, have written its prefaces. Maurizio Giammusso, from the Pontifical Foundation "Help to the Suffering Church", and Philip Whitmore, then Rector of the Venerable English College, have written its concluding remarks. *Inghilterra di sangue* does not even bother with footnotes, even though it places the biographies of the forty English and Welsh martyrs firmly within the story of the English Reformation. Except that it does so on the basis of a bibliography made up of seven books, the only recent, English-language one of them about English martyrs being Malcolm Pullan's entirely hagiographical *Lives and Times of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales*, and not, for example, R. Malcolm Smuts' *Political Culture, the State, and the Problem of Religious War*, with its argument about the English Mission as a threat for its perceived potential capacity to mobilise more moderate, loyal English Catholic subjects (Malcolm Smuts 2023). Yet, the value of Fantuz's work does not lie in what scholars can easily find in other scholarly works; rather, it stems from what it tells us about today's Church's position with regards to the persecutions of Catholics worldwide. In Fantuz's book, the story of the forty martyrs of England and Wales serves the purpose of alerting contemporary readers about the continuous presence of Catholic martyrs, for instance in countries where radicals from other religions commit atrocities against Christians. Much in the same way as their early modern forebearers, the point here is to remind Catholics to keep the memory alive of those who have died in odium fidei.

There is a methodological problem that needs to be tackled here, namely, Catholic historians' habit of using hagiographical martyrdom works in an unqualified way to make points about matters of facts. To avoid Catholic martyrdom sources altogether, on the other hand, may not be the right answer either. Instead, one needs to assess the context of its production and intended uses. As far as works about Catholic martyrs are concerned, what has been missing from the picture is a clear understanding of the beatification and canonization process in the Vatican because most works about Elizabethan English Catholic martyrs were produced soon after the person's death in order to produce evidence for their

future beatification cause. Protestants do not have a central authority with the power to officially recognise whether one died as a martyr or not. When Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* came out, as with today's scholarship, no-one questions whether those people died a horrific death at the stake for their own religious beliefs. In common parlance, among Christians of all denominations, a martyr, in general, is someone like those sixteenth-century people who died on the stake for their faith. When it comes to the Catholic Church, however, one needs to define a martyr legally. This is when things become more complicated. The Catholic Church's definitions of martyrdom are legal and normative, stemming as they do from Canon law. In order for somebody to be recognised as a martyr, there must be a cause, an evaluation process, and a judgement. The whole process may take centuries. Let us look at it more closely before considering the very cause of the Elizabethan martyrs.

*B. The Roman beatification cause of the English martyrs.*

Cincinnati's Saint Mauritius and Circignani's Saint George (Gilbert) reflect the same notion of the value of martyrdom as the supreme exemplary gesture for a true Catholic. In contemporary theological terms, which continue to stand today as far as Canon law is concerned, martyrdom displays Catholics' heroic virtue and charity. For someone's death to be considered as martyrdom, two elements are necessary. First, the martyr must die for faith, thereby showing supreme charity. Secondly, the person who is responsible for his death must do it in odium fidei, that is to say, out of hate for the Catholic faith. According to Pope Gregory XIII's new rules about martyrdom assessment, the kind of death per se was not sufficient to declare one a martyr; rather, the above-mentioned two elements must be both present in evidence which the Congregation of Rites will check on request from an ecclesiastical authority, such as a bishop. If evidence that is prepared and submitted to the Congregation of Rites met all the criteria, then the person or the persons in the martyrdom cause would be recognised as martyrs. To be a martyr is not the same as to be a saint. In order for a martyr to be further recognised as a saint, evidence of one miracle must be brought to the Congregation of Rites, whose physicians would assess it to the best of their ability. From the point of view of the Catholic Church, therefore, martyrs are not made by the Church; rather, the Church recognises martyrdom after a Church authority has put together a martyrdom cause and the Congregation of Rites has vetted it. Sainthood may come about as the step after martyrdom. A second causa, or trial, is necessary for a martyr to be recognised as saint through the canonization process. Canonization, therefore, has more to do with the relation of 'science' to faith, because the Roman Catholic Church, since the second half of the sixteenth century, has been relying on medical experts in order to assess whether occurrences which postulants for canonization wish to be considered as miracles, usually healings, can indeed be called thus because expert physicians cannot explain them according to the best medical knowledge of their time.<sup>39</sup>

Bearing the Roman Church legal framework about martyrdom in mind, we can now see Circignani's frescoes for what they were: evidence of a martyrs' cult and memory in view of the beginning of their martyrdom status recognition process. Officially, for the Catholic Church, as of 1582, the Elizabethan Catholics who had been executed for treason were not martyrs yet. Outside of an extremely tiny circle of English people, nobody had ever heard of them and certainly did not pray to them for intercession. They were officially recognised as martyrs and saints between 1929 and 1970. The story of their canonization as martyrs and, for some of them, as saints needs to be told on the basis of the Vatican papers before we move on to the historiographical issue of their status as traitors or martyrs.

Most evidence about the Elizabethan martyrs can be seen in the Vatican Archive of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. What cannot be seen has to do with the latest canonizations, such as the physician's report about the miracle whereby the renowned Jesuit Edmund Campion (1540–81) was recognised as a saint in 1970: since people may

still be alive today who have known the physician in point, as is customary with recent archival material, it is not possible to consult it yet.<sup>40</sup> That kind of evidence has to do with Champion's canonization, though not with his recognition as a martyr (hence as venerable, beatus) for which I have been able to see most of the available papers in the Vatican.

Evidence about Elizabethan alleged martyrs is kept together with that about other individuals who, since Thomas More and John Fisher, were executed for treason—according to English law—or in odium fidei, according to the argument for their declaration as martyrs. Pope Gregory XIII himself confirmed the existence of the cult of said English martyrs as early as 1579 through a *Decretum Westmonasterien. Confirmationis Cultus Beatorum Martyrum Ioannis Cardinalis Fisher, Thomae More et sociorum in odium fidei ab anno 1535 ad 1583 in Anglia interemptorum*. “*Anglia Sanctorum insula ac Deiparae Virginis dos olim appellata, quemadmodum a primis usque Ecclesiae saeculis plurimorum Martyrum passionibus illustrata fuerat, ita etiam cum diro schismate a Romanae Sedis obedientia et communione saeculo XVI avulsa est, eorum testimonio non earuit, qui pro huius Sedis dignitate et orthodoxae Fidei veritate vitas suas cum sanguine ponere non dubitarunt* (Gregorius XIII Constit. Quoniam divinae bonitati, Kalendis Maii 1579).<sup>41</sup> This huge volume actually contains evidence of about roughly 600 people between 1535 and 1689.

In 1640, the Head of the Benedictines in England began collecting and collating all the documents he could lay his hands on about English Catholic (alleged) martyrs. The name of this Benedictine is not reported in the papers, so one can only speculate about his identity at this stage. In 1642, a Flemish Benedictine, Jan van Bruch, sought and obtained permission from Pope Urban VIII to initiate the causa. In 1644, van Bruch died. The Civil Wars were in full swing, so the cause remained dormant until, in 1880, the English Jesuits asked to reopen it. By then Catholic emancipation had come about and the newly-restored Diocese of Westminster took it upon itself to prepare the dossier to send to Rome.

The dossier which I have seen contains printed documents because it is the Dicastero's practice to have Vatican typographers print the handwritten material which Archdioceses sent over to Rome in order to instruct a cause. It means that the papers which were originally written in whatever form in England are not the ones in this folder; rather, they bear a Roman imprint. I do not have the original manuscripts because the folders in the Dicastery Archive contain their Roman reprints. I have asked where the originals might be but the Archivist, Dr Simona Durante, did not know. Moreover, quite a lot of material has been translated into Italian. Some documents were badly translated, others were badly transcribed. For instance, the infamous Elizabethan torturer Topcliffe has been consistently transcribed as Jopcliffe. This suggests that the transcriptions took place in Rome, where Vatican officials were unfamiliar with Elizabethan names.<sup>42</sup>

One significant problem with the documents which Vatican officials used to assess whether those men and women were true martyrs is the evidence they have trusted: each piece is hagiographical in style. No evidence contrary to the cause of martyrdom appears in this folder. Nowadays, the Dicastero has a policy of expressly asking to supply evidence for and against causae. Back in 1880, this does not seem to have been the case.

What is striking is the lack of theology in the arguments about martyrdom. The only feature that the compilers—and translators/transcribers—cared about was papal supremacy, nothing else. For example, ‘they died for the one and only reason of recusing to recognise Henry [VIII] as Head of the Church’.<sup>43</sup> Sentences like this recur throughout the thousands of pages constituting the cause file.

More important still is the flat denial of the alleged martyrs having ever had anything to do with plots against English sovereigns: “‘These Acts of the time of Henry VIII were abolished when he died and it was not until the 27th year of Elizabeth's reign that an Act of Parliament established the death penalty for being a Catholic priest and for having

sheltered one. Before this Act was passed, her lawyers [Elizabeth I's] made up plots in Rome and Rheims against the person of the Queen and against the State which served as pretexts to send many glorious martyrs to death. Besides it was well known that those were only pretexts. Camden the Protestant historian of Elizabeth's reign assures us that the Queen herself did not believe that most priests who were being sent to death were guilty of treason. His words are: 'Plerosque tamen ex misellis illis Sacerdotibus exitii in patriam conflandi conscios fuisse non credidit Camden Annali 327. Edizione del 1615)''.<sup>44</sup> Further, with reference to Edmund Campion's trial: "On folio 179 verso of the interrogation number 15 [unspecified subject] answered that nobody believed that Campion was involved in a plot against Elizabeth".<sup>45</sup> Rather than showing evidence, the whole dossier is full of repetitions, such as 'they were martyrs for their religion and the Holy See'.<sup>46</sup> Even when commenting the notorious Guy Fawkes' trial, the compiler hypocritically states: "These Servants of God were accused of plots organised in Rome and Rheims. But all trustworthy historians have defined these plots as false. I believe that no priest or any of these Servants of God were in any way implicated in the powder plot. All the Catholic historians absolve them from any connivance in that plot".<sup>47</sup> Despite the fact that the Jesuit Henry Garnett admitted to know of Guy Fawkes' plans to blow up Parliament but decided not to alert anybody on the grounds that he had learnt about it in confession, 'he could not tell civil authorities', the implication being that his religious beliefs trumped his allegiance to civil authorities. This is a good example of treason; yet, the English martyrdom dossier compilers presented as evidence of death in odium fidei, specifically denying that it could be characterised as treason.<sup>48</sup> Titus Oates' plot, which scholars today agree was indeed a Protestant fabrication, gets treated in the same way as Elizabethan plots to kill Elizabeth, which, instead, did take place for sure. Oates' plot is dismissed as nonsense: "Oates' plot is generally regarded as sheer fabrication and commonly it is believed that it was Lord Shaftesbury's idea, one of the Crown's ministers, in order to prevent the Catholic Duke of York, later King James II, from succeeding to the throne. I believe that these Servants of God suffered for the cause of the Catholic religion".<sup>49</sup>

These quotes sound like they have been taken from hagiographical works. They are, however, the very statements which sufficed for Vatican officials to recognise 40 people out of the proposed 600 as martyrs, that is, beati, venerable people. Clearly, the English (and Welsh) martyrs' dossier did not need to be persuasive in the same way as we would expect it. Instead, it needed to contain an accumulation of works about martyrdom in which the cause of the alleged martyrs was spelt out. The sources cited are all hagiographical works on martyrdom that were based on hearsay. There is no scholarly argument, no demonstration. *Repetita juvant*; it seems as though repeating that English Catholics who died for treason actually died in odium fidei was enough for the Church to elevate 40 people to the official status of martyrs.

#### 4. Conclusions

The Duke of Alba saw the pointlessness of the *Impresa* clearly and spoke his mind freely in a letter to Philip II, dated as early as 23 February 1570: 'even though English Catholics ask for help, I have heard that they do not want it as much as would reduce them as subjects of a foreign prince'.<sup>50</sup> The implication was that even if a Catholic entity intervened, their patriotism would turn into loyalty for the Protestant Elizabeth, because their sense of national identity mattered to them more than the Catholic faith and certainly vastly more than loyalty to the Pope, who was indeed a foreign prince. Philip II was the other foreign prince under whom no Englishman would have wished to become subject. The Spanish King had committed 20,000 escudos to the overturn of Elizabeth in 1578, as we can read in a letter from the *Secretaría de Estado* for the Nuncio Filippo Sega and, therefore,

for Gregory XIII, dated 23 April 1578.<sup>51</sup> Yet, after the 1588 defeat, Philip was more than willing to talk peace with Elizabeth. The cause of the English Catholics was politically dead as far as Spain was concerned. Philip had learnt the hard way that he should have trusted the judgment of a military man who was active on the military ground rather than believing Catholic propaganda, such as Escalante's vague statement "Se saue por muy cierto que de secreto Todos son Catholicos" with reference to Elizabethan English Catholics: "it is known that everybody is Catholic".<sup>52</sup> In fact, if one should single out one conclusion to draw from the messy evidence surrounding the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* and its forty recognised Catholic martyrs, it is its minuscule size. We are dealing with the history of a tiny minority that tried to subvert the English State through high-profile financed terror plots.

There are two related points in this essay. First, Spanish martyrdom was more about fighting the Turks than fighting the Protestant English; secondly, hagiographic texts were more about submitting evidence to Rome for classification as a martyr than overthrowing the English government. We need to consider these two issues together if we are to better understand that the story of Spanish Catholic martyrs is really not about a larger narrative of Catholics v. Protestants, especially English Protestants. The evidence that has been reassessed shows that, while the English martyrs were justly tried for treason according to the letter of the English Common Law, this does not have any bearing on their martyr status according to Canon Law. We ought to keep our judgements separate according to the legal framework in point. This article, therefore, is a reminder that some of the uses of martyrdom literature have to do with Canon Law procedures, so when we chose to use certain sources, we should bear that in mind.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I thank my anonymous referee for their helpful comments, as well as for their encouragement and suggestions. I likewise thank Simona Durante for her invaluable help in locating and understanding the sources about the beatification of the forty English and Welsh martyrs. Research for this article has benefited from a grant from the Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Geografiche e dell'Antichità, University of Padua.
- <sup>2</sup> When an individual is beatified, the Catholic Church declares him or her venerable. The individual is not a saint but people can venerate him or her and ask for his or her intercession through prayers. Only one miracle is needed for a person to be recognised as such. Instead, two miracles are needed for someone to be recognised as a saint. [https://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/documentazione/documents/avvenimenti/canonizzazioni-beatificazioni\\_nota-procedura\\_it.html](https://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/documentazione/documents/avvenimenti/canonizzazioni-beatificazioni_nota-procedura_it.html) as viewed on 20 November 2024.
- <sup>3</sup> I say "primarily" because Philip II's Spain was also the defender of the Catholic faith against Protestant heresies. Yet, he always ranked the Turk as his number one enemy. Sixteenth-century Spain stemmed from the long Reconquista process, during which Spain as a State did not exist. The Reconquista started soon after the arrival of the first of four different waves of Muslim peoples who invaded the originally Visigothic and Christian kingdoms that had replaced the Roman province of Hispania. Muslims toppled the Christian King Roderick at Guadalete in 710. The Reconquista ended in 1492 with the fall of the Muslim Emirate of Granada. During those centuries Christian and Muslim lords engaged in constant wars against one another; sometimes Muslims became allied of Christians and vice versa. Yet, Christianity became a unifying force, if only for rhetorical justification in some cases, thus providing the backbone of the budding sense of Spanish national identity which came to permeate the newly formed State of Spain that came out of the dynastic union of Aragon and Castile in 1469. Indeed, even in common parlance today, to do things the Spanish or the regular, normal way, is *hacerlo cristiano*, to do it in a Christian way. While it would be beside the scope of this article to delve deep into the thorny issue of the historiographical debate about the Reconquista, this brief summary is to stress the centrality of Christianity in Spanish national identity since before Philip II came to the throne. Spanish-language historiography, no matter what side one takes in the debate, is unanimous in ascribing Christianity, and the fight for its survival against Islam, a far higher place than the defence of Roman Catholicism in Philip II's priorities. See, for instance, Henry Kamen,

- “La política religiosa de Felipe II”, *AHIg* 7 (1998), pp. 1–33; M.J. Rodríguez Salgado, *Felipe II, el paladín de la cristiandad y la paz con el turco* (Valladolid: Colección “Síntesis”, XI Cátedra Felipe II Universidad de Valladolid, 2004) and its bibliographies. For a balanced historiographical approach to the Reconquista, see footnote 6 and the historiography cited by Cesare Vanoli and Gennaro Varriale.
- <sup>4</sup> Fulco Lanchester, “Le costanti culturali della presenza di Carl Schmitt in Italia. Note sulle ragioni di un’intervista”, *Carl-Schmitt-Studien*, 1. Jg. 2017, H. 1, S. 224–233. Lanchester’s bibliography about Carl Schmitt’s Freund-Feind Denken is vast, and leads to further reading about this classic of modern constitutional and political thought.
- <sup>5</sup> Gennaro Varriale’s *Arrivano li turchi. Guerra navale e spionaggio nel Mediterraneo (1532–1582)*, (Genoa: Città del Silenzio: 2014) remains the best work detailing Spain’s actual struggle against the Ottomans whereas Alessandro Vanoli’s *La Reconquista* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2022), especially chapters 3 and 11, is a useful guide about the centrality of the Turks in Spanish foreign policy since well before the accession of Philip II to the throne until well into the seventeenth century. Their bibliographies are essential research tools about the Turco-Hispano special relation.
- <sup>6</sup> <https://arqarqt.revistas.csic.es/index.php/arqarqt/article/view/161/173>, as viewed on 14 November 2024.
- <sup>7</sup> *Espías. Servicios secretos y escritura cifrada en la Monarquía Hispánica*. Textos: Javier Marcos Rivas, Lucía de Medrano, anonymous investigador Departamento de Difusión del AGS, Simancas: Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 2018, pp. 30–95; Javier Marcos, Carlos Carnicer, *Felipe II Rey de espías. Los servicios secretos del imperio español* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2005), chapter 5: the ebook version can only be read on the Tagus e-reader and has no page or image numbers.
- <sup>8</sup> We can get a sense of Philip’s tense relations with the Papacy thanks to the documents edited by José Ignacio Tallechea Idígoras, *El Papado y Felipe II*, 2 vols (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2004–2006) and specifically his bad relationship with Gregory XIII thanks to Ángel Fernandez Collado, *Gregorio XIII y Felipe II en la nunciatura de Felipe Segá (1577–1581). Aspectos políticos, jurisdiccional y de reforma* (Toledo: Estudio Teológico de San Ildefonso, 1991). On Charles V’s difficult relationship with the Papacy, see, for instance, Levin (2005, pp. 43–66). JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv2n7gvc.6>. Accessed 15 November 2024.
- <sup>9</sup> Emblematic of this tendency is G. Parker (2014).
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Tombs (2023). For instance, Tombs nonchalantly states: ‘The Pope duly urged Philip of Spain to invade England’, p. 183, letting the reader believe that Philip just obliged. While the Pope’s ask is true, there is also far more evidence about Philip’s resistance to the Pope’s call for almost twenty years, as reflected in Philip’s correspondence about English affairs now fully available through <https://bibliotecavirtual.defensa.gob.es/BVMDefensa/i18n/consulta/registro.cmd?id=59626> as viewed on 15 November 2024.
- <sup>11</sup> Robert Goodwin (2015), the chapter on the Armada is on pp. 233–49; the passages about Lepanto are on pp. 192–96, and it is told in the context of a long section on Miguel de Cervantes’ service as a soldier and spy.
- <sup>12</sup> This episode of Saint Teresa’s life is so well known that several paintings exist about it, such as <https://carmelitasalba.org/portfolio-items/santa-teresa-en-tierra-de-moros/> as viewed on 14 November 2024.
- <sup>13</sup> As Werner Thomas has demonstrated in his definitive study of the subject, Protestantism in Spain appeared in Valladolid and Seville in 1558, only to be crushed by the 1560s. Sixteenth-century Spain focused on the internal enemies (Jews and Moriscos) as well as the external ones, the Turks and their North-African Muslim allies. Werner Thomas, *La represión del protestantismo en España 1517–1648*, and, *ibid.*, *La Inquisición en España en tiempos de Reforma y Contrarreforma* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001). Moreover, in her the latest work on the Spanish Inquisition, Mercedes Tamboury Redondo has shown that the Spanish Inquisition was run as a hub of spies working for the safety of the realms, whose enemies were overwhelmingly Moriscos and politically-driven people whereas Lutherans rarely preoccupied la Suprema, as the Tribunal was called then: Mercedes Tamboury Redondo (2024).
- <sup>14</sup> Verdadera relación sobre vn martyrio que dieron los Turcos enemigos de nuestra sancta fee catholica en Cōstantinopla a vn deuoto Frayle de la orden de sant Francisco llamado Fray Gonçalo Lobo: con vn milagro que nuestra señora de Monserrate hizo con vn clérigo de missa, natural de Caçalla que es en el Andaluzia: el qual yendo a Oran a rescatar a vn hermano suyo que estaua captiuo en Buxia, fue captiuo y vendido a vn renegado, llamado Alycaysi (Cordoba: Juan Bautista, 1577).
- <sup>15</sup> An example of pseudo-scholarship about the groundless claim that Al Ándalus was a kind of eldorado for toleration see [https://news.yale.edu/sites/default/files/d6\\_files/imce/Culture in the Time of Tolerance\\_ Al-Andalus as a Model for Our T.pdf](https://news.yale.edu/sites/default/files/d6_files/imce/Culture%20in%20the%20Time%20of%20Tolerance_%20Al-Andalus%20as%20a%20Model%20for%20Our%20T.pdf), as viewed on 15 November 2024. For an empirically-ground, less politicised and more balanced approach to the rule of Islam by the sword in southern Spain I refer to Vanoli, *La Reconquista*, passim, and its extensive bibliography on the topic.
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.cultura.gob.es/cultura/archivos/recursos-profesionales/guias.html> as viewed on 20 December 2024.
- <sup>17</sup> Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España (hereafter referred to as BNE), António de Gouveia, *Discurso glorioso de tres martires españoles. Discurso sobre el martirio de los padres fray Nicolás Melo y fray Guillermo de San Agustín*. It is available online: <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000008319&page=1> (accessed 23 November 2024).
- <sup>18</sup> BNE, MS.941, available online at <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000174299&page=1> (accessed 23 November 2024). On the Cordoba martyrs, Christian Baxter Wolf (1988).

- 19 I have analysed this phenomenon in Vittoria Feola, *Elias Ashmole and the Uses of Antiquity* (Paris: Blanchard, 2012), especially chapters 2 and 5.
- 20 BNE, MS.2526, available online at <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=000048802&page=1> (accessed 23 November 2024).
- 21 *Diui Eulogii Cordubensis martyris . . . Opera/studio et diligentia . . . Petri Pocii Leonis a Corduba Episcopi Placentini . . . ; eiusdem Sanctissimi martyris vita per Aluarum Cordubensem scripta; cum aliis nonnullis sanctorum martyrum Cordubensium monumentis; Omnia Ambrosii Moralis . . . scholiis illustrata, eiusque cura & diligentia excussa . . .* (Alcalá de Henares, 1574). The fortune of the Cordoba martyrs story continued into the seventeenth century, as well; *Sentencia con que se calificaron las Reliquias de doze Martyres, que fueron quemados vivos en el Monte Santo de Granada, por la Predicacion y Defensa de Nuestra Santa Fe Catolica: precedieron antes quatro Años de averiguaciones juridicas, cuyp Processo fuè el mas solemne, y mas riguroso que se ha hecho jamàs* (s.l., 1600?); *Arzobispo Pedro de Castro, De los libros y Sanctos Martyres que se hallaron en el Monte Sacro Illipulitano cerca de la Ciudad de Granada, y en la Torre Turpiana* (Sevilla, no date but it has to be between 1610 and 1623 when de Castro held the archbishopric).
- 22 Miguel José Hagerty, *Los libros plumbeos del Sacromonte* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2007). Not everyone was ready to believe this moriscos' hoax, however, as reflected in the sixteenth-century BNE MS.12975/15, *Memorial sobre la prudencia con que se ha de proceder en el reconocimiento de las reliquias de mártires halladas en Granada*.
- 23 *Historia eclesiastica de todos los santos, de España primera, segunda, tercera y quarta parte . . . : donde se cuenta[n] muy particularmente todas las vidas, martyrios y milagros de los santos y santas propios que en esta nuestra España ha auido, assi de martires, pontifices confesores como no pontifices, y religiosos de todas ordenes, y los concilios que ha auido desde el tiempo de los Apostoles hasta agora . . ./compuesto por . . . fray Juan de Marieta de la Orden de santo Domingo . . .* (En Cuenca: en casa de Pedro del valley. . . : a costa de Christiano Bernabe, 1596).
- 24 *Relacion que Fray Juan de Marieta de la orden de Santo Domingo, natural de la Ciudad de Victoria, da a su Magestad el Rey don Philippe segundo deste nombre: de todos los santos y santas, Martyres, Confesores y virgines, que ha auido en España desde el apostol Santiago, hasta estos tiempos presentes* (Cuenca, no date but most likely 1596).
- 25 Anonymous, *Verísima relación del riguroso y acervo martirio que la Reina Inglesa dio a los soldados de nuestra nación española del ejército del Principe Cardenal, y de como la serenísima Virgen les manifesto el martirio que habían de pasar juntamente con el con el convertimiento de seis judios que recibieron el mismo martirio muriendo en palados: en 17 de Mayo de 1596 años: con un Romance al cabo* (Impresso en Alcalá: a la puerta de los martires, 1596?).
- 26 BNE, MS.20526, *Discurso De Bernardino descálante [sic] De Cossas Tocantes a Inglaterra y a los estados de flandes. 1586*. The arguments about fortifications after the shock of Cadiz are on ff. 79r-90v; on imperfect sovereignty, on ff. 91r-109r.
- 27 Freddy Cristóbal Domínguez, *Radicals in Exile: English Catholic Books during the Reign of Philip II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- 28 *Ecclesiae Anglicanae trophaea siue Sanctor[um] martyrum qui pro Christo Catholicaeq[ue] fidei veritate asserenda antiquo recentioriq[ue] persecutionum tempore mortem in Anglia subierunt passiones Romae in Collegio Anglico per Nicolaum Circinianum depictae/nuper autem per Io. Bap. de Cauallerijs aeneis typis repraesentatae* (Romae: ex officina Bartholomaei Grassi, 1584). The editor was Giovan Battista de' Cavalieri. A digital copy is available here: Digit: <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000167692&page=1> (accessed 23 November 2024).
- 29 Kew, National Archives, hereafter referred to as NA, S.P. 78, vol. 22, ff. 201–202. The original is in French: 'Et si uous trouuez qu'on uous permette de parler franchement, sans péril à vous-mesme, uous pourrez dire que le monde estime que Dieu tout Puissant mostroit son puissance contre les desseings du Roy en la route de telle puissante Armée nauale qu'on n'aye veue semblable en cet âge et par l'heureux succès de l'armée angloyse, laquelle au combat avec la sienne ne perditt aucune Nauire, ny n'eust aucune Ame pris prisonnier.' This and all subsequent translations in the article are mine.
- 30 Archivo General de Simancas, hereafter referred to as AGS, E-Inglatera, Leg. 820, ff. 17–21.
- 31 Rome, Archive of the Society of Jesus (hereafter referred to as ARSI), MS. Anglia 30, ff. 79r-101r. In the same volume there is a sixteenth-century copy of the speech by Francis Yaxley to Philip II, October 1565, ff. 70r-72v, and evidence that Philip's main secretary, Juan de Idiáquez, entertained epistolary relations with the earliest Jesuits heading for London as early as 1565. The first Jesuit to arrive, and the beginning of the Impresa, therefore, must be antedated to 1565. The Jesuit Edmund Campion was not the first Jesuit to enter the kingdom in 1580. An updated bibliography on the Impresa d'Inghilterra can be found in footnote 40.
- 32 José Martínez Millán (1988). This episode, so often looked over in English-language historiography keen on portraying Philip II as Elizabeth's archenemy, has been fully analysed in M. J. Rodríguez Salgado, "Paz ruidosa, guerra sorda. Las relaciones de Felipe II e Inglaterra", in Luis A. Ribot García (1999).
- 33 *La batalla del Mar Océano: corpus documental de las hostilidades entre España e Inglaterra (1568–1604)*, Jorge Calvar Gross, José Ignacio González-Aller Hierro, Marcelino de Dueñas Fontán, M<sup>a</sup> del Campo Mérida Valverde, 5 vols. (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa Secretaría General Técnica, Turner, 1988–2015).
- 34 ARSI, MS. Anglia 30, 2 vols., I vol., f. 141r-v, letter from the Duchess of Feria to the Pope Gregory XIII dated from Madrid, 25 September 1595.

- 35 Archivio Segreto Vaticano (hereafter referred to as ASV), Nunciatura di Spagna 25, f. 431. It was Humphrey Ely, former President of St John's College, Oxford, then a seminary priest at the English Colleges of DouaisDouai and Rheims, to ask the question to the Pope. In June 1580 he illegally entered England with three priests, Edward Rishton, Thomas Cottam, and John Hart. Cottam is among the forty English and Welsh martyrs. If not Campion himself, or Briant, one cannot help but wonder whether Cottam might have been the (only?) English priest ready to kill Elizabeth, as he, too, was found guilty of treason, and executed accordingly.
- 36 ASV, Nunciatura di Spagna, 27, f. 131.
- 37 ARSI, MS. Anglia 30, f. 124r-v.
- 38 I refer to the discussion and bibliography in: (eds) (2019). 10 Traitors Respond: English Catholic Polemical Strategies against Accusations of Treason at the End of the Sixteenth Century 250. In *Treason*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. Available From: Brill [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004400696\\_012](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004400696_012) [Accessed 18 November 2024]. Moreover I refer to Alice Dailey, *The English Martyr from Reformation to Revolution* (Notre Dame: Notre dame University Press, 2012); John F. Drabble (1982); Gabriel Glickmann's review "Early Modern England: Persecution, Martyrdom: And Toleration?", *The Historical Journal* (2008) 51/1, pp. 251–67.
- 39 Simona Durante (2023). This precious essay contains much valuable information and bibliography about the matter in point. I am extremely grateful to Dr Durante for her generous assistance and clear explanations about martyrdom and canonization procedures from Gregory XIII until the present day, as well as for her help in interpreting evidence about the Elizabethan martyrs which is kept in the Archive of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints (hereafter referred to as ACS).
- 40 <https://www.causesanti.va/it/documenti.html> as viewed on 12 October 2024.
- 41 ACS, Fondo A-J, fascicolo b4/0 a.
- 42 Ibid., see for example p. 135, 139, 141, and so on.
- 43 Ibid., p. 236.
- 44 Ibid., p. 236. "Questi atti 'Enrico ottavo furono aboliti allorché egli morì e non fu che nel 27. di Elisabetta che un atto del Parlamento diede il potere d'infliggere la morte per causa di Sacerdozio, e per aver ricettato un prete. Prima che fosse passato ques'atto, i di Lei giureconsulti inventarono cospirazioni a Roma e Reims contro la persona della Regina, e contro lo stato che servirono come pretesto per mettere a morte molti gloriosi martiri. Era peraltro ben inteso che questi non erano che pretesti. Camden lo storico protestante del regno d'Elisabetta ci assicura che la Regina stessa non credea che la maggior parte dei preti ch'erano messi a morte fossero rei di tradimento. Le parole di Lui sono queste: Plerosque tamen ex misellis illis Sacerdotibus exitii in patriam conflandi conscios fuisse non credit Camden Annali 327. Edizione del 1615)".
- 45 Ibid., p. 242. "Ad 15 interrog.fol. 179 terg. Respondit" che nessuno credeva che Campion fosse coinvolto in una congiura contro Elisabetta".
- 46 Ibid., pp. 244–45.
- 47 Ibid., p. 248. "Questi Servi di Dio erano accusati di congiure tramate a Roma od a Rheims. Ma tutti gli storici degni di fede hanno caratterizzato queste congiure come false. Io sono d'avviso che nessuno sacerdote; né alcuni di questi Servi di Dio siano stati in alcuna guisa involti nella congiura della polveriera. Tutti gli storici cattolici li assolvono da ogni complicità in questa congiura".
- 48 Ibid., p. 175.
- 49 Ibid., p. 248. "Il complotto di Oates è generalmente riguardato come pura invenzione e comunemente si crede che fosse un trovato di Lord Shaftesbury uno de' ministri della corona, onde impedire la successione del cattolico Duca di York poscia Giacomo secondo. Io credo che questi servi di Dio soffrirono per la causa della Religione cattolica".
- 50 AGS, E-Flandes, Leg. s. I. The Duke of Alba's letter is dated 'De Bruselas á veinte y tres de hebrero, mil quinientos setenta'. The passage translated above reads in the original Spanish: 'si bine los católicos de Inglaterra piden socorro, yo he entendido que ellos no lo querrian tan grande que se pusieren en peligro de ser reducidos a sujecion de príncipe extranjero'.
- 51 AGS, Secretaría de Estado, Legajo 932, n. 1.
- 52 BNE, MS.20526, f. 15r.

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