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Romans Jest at the Protestant Test or How Catholic Missions and Debate Changed Protestant Minds about Toleration

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Romans Jest at the Protestant Test or How Catholic Missions and Debate
Changed Protestant Minds about Toleration

OR

Worship without “Tricks”: The Catholic Mission’s Effect on Discussion and
Practice of Toleration

“Let Rome no more jest at the Protestant test,
and swear all our souls are confounded.
Taking wonderful pains and puzzling their brains,
how to damn England’s church and the roundhead.
Some said we should turn or else we should burn,
but who’s such a fool to turn Roman?
The Protestant’s Sweet Orange

Make Endnotes

**Need Intro—wider concept of toleration: missions crucial to this—when/why did it
(toleration?) happen and to what extent?**

King James viewed the establishment of toleration for Catholics as foundational to the conversion enterprise. The king first suspended the enforcement of anti-Catholic laws against specific individuals, and then issued a general Declaration of Indulgence in 1687 from all laws against recusants—thus enforcing an inclusive toleration. At the same time, he pushed for the election of a Parliament that would support his unilateral action and repeal the penal laws and the Test Act prohibiting non-Anglicans from holding office. Both of these tactics, in addition to his non-Parliamentary appointment of Catholics, Dissenters and other royal supporters in positions of responsibility throughout the country, led to widespread discussion regarding the merits of toleration. While James’s extra-Parliamentary activity (widely agreed by his subjects to be illegal) came

under almost unanimous criticism, the idea of toleration itself evoked many different responses.

The intriguing unintentional consequence of James's reign, however, is that the controversy generated during this time, both by the missionary activity and James's conduct, led to the articulation of, and widespread agreement on, basic principles of toleration. Practical toleration, enforced by James's dispensing with the penal laws and Test Act, formed the backdrop for and then shaped the debate. To understand English men and women's vision regarding toleration, one must place their arguments in the context of their daily interactions with those who held different beliefs. I will first look at the printed debate over toleration—revealing what Catholics and Protestants meant by this term, what their aims were, and what other concerns informed the controversy. Next, I investigate the implications of the practical, daily experience of toleration during James's reign (1685-88). Finally, I explore the effects of the debate after the Glorious Revolution and its contributions both to the religious groups involved (Dissenters, Catholics, the Church of England) and to the conclusions many of the protagonist came to regarding toleration's role in religious and public life.

Need more/less historiography?

Scholars addressing the debate over the development and nature of toleration in early modern England have traced two separate threads that contributed to the 1689 Act of Toleration: political philosophy and theology. H. F. Russell-Smith, writing at the start of the twentieth century, posited that a change in theology had resulted in the promotion of religious toleration. Traditionally, the concept of the national church had been theologically defended by pointing to the Old Testament nation of Israel as an example of

what God wanted for his people. “When the Dissenters attacked the system of national churches as the first step towards advocating toleration,” Russell-Smith wrote, “they had to give an explanation of the position of church and state among the Jews and show that it is a false analogy to a modern national church.”¹ Likewise, John Spurr and John Bossy, while ultimately differing from Russell-Smith on the fundamental significance of religious change in the seventeenth century, still see a change in theology as leading first to moralism and then toleration. “The gospel according to the Restoration church,” Spurr contends, “. . . offended against the tenets of the Reformed Protestant tradition in their teaching on justification, faith, and salvation.” The Anglican church after 1660 emphasized lifelong repentance rather than a crucial turning point at conversion.² “Predestinarian pastors who made a bid for the moral tradition fell to a sort of Catch 22,” Bossy explains. The more they emphasized the moral tradition (which Bossy defines as charity among neighbors), the more they had to leave Predestination behind.³

This move away from Calvinism and toward a consensus on the practical morality of the Christian life comprehended more diversity of Christian belief—as long as Christian virtues were promoted. Toleration, then, was possible because of a theological consensus regarding morality. Thus, by this definition, the Church of England’s limited ideal of toleration—allowing for religious practice outside the established church—was the result of a theological evolution.

¹ H. F. Russell-Smith, *The Theory of Religious Liberty in the Reigns of Charles II and James II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 35.

² John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 298.

³ John Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 95.

In contrast, Mark Knights makes a strong case for viewing “the debate about toleration as a political and secular problem as much as a religious one and that it needs to be placed or replaced in that context.”⁴ He argues that the religious justification of persecution heard in the 1670s was replaced with a more secular language. “The turbulence of 1678-81 served to align more emphatically than ever before the political view of dissenters with the religious one.”⁵ “Toleration,” he contends, “was a political matter.”⁶

Rather than being the culmination of a long process, toleration is often seen as political accident, the unwanted stepchild, of the Revolution settlement in 1689. It was not intended nor was it the logical end of an inevitable progression; rather these historians argue that it was forced on England by William of Orange and his cohorts. Jonathan Israel makes the case for considering “King William’s Toleration” to be separate from the Act of Toleration. “William III’s contribution to the advancement of religious and intellectual freedom in both Britain and the Low Countries... was immense.”⁷ His political needs, Israel argues, meant that he championed the cause of toleration and not merely Protestantism. This made him more appealing to his Catholic allies against France. But after William’s death, High Church Anglicans were unable to reverse the tide that he had set in motion. “King William’s Toleration had by 1702 achieved such an impact on national life,” Israel states, “that the Low Church, Dissenters, anti-Trinitarians,

⁴ Mark Knights, “‘Meer Religion’ and the ‘church-state’ of Restoration England” in *A Nation Transformed*, eds. Alan Houston and Steven Pincus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2001), 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷ Jonathan Israel, “William III and Toleration,” in *From Persecution to Toleration*, eds. Ole Peter Grell, J. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 131.

and Free-Thinkers had become altogether too numerous and well-ensconced to be easily swept aside.”⁸ William’s policies, then, ensured an initial toleration, and his personal influence during his reign expanded it to such a point that it became ingrained in English society.

Hugh Trevor-Roper agrees that William’s advent in England was what ensured the Act of Toleration. But he goes on to argue that the toleration, which was “limited and conditional,” was in grave danger throughout Anne’s reign and the toleration granted to recusants was not improved until the end of the eighteenth century. “That there was a natural right to toleration was no more admitted in 1760 than in 1688,” Trevor-Roper contends.⁹ In his view, the Act of Toleration itself was not significant, and toleration remained very limited for the next century at least.

I argue that the widespread commitment to toleration in the late seventeenth century was not primarily the result of a post-1688, Williamite agenda. Nor was the push for toleration simply a readjustment of theology on the part of the English Protestants. Instead, it was a recognition of the practice of Roman Catholic and Dissenter recusancy as relatively harmless, and even potentially beneficial; a recognition obtained by observing Catholicism first hand, with no camouflage. While sympathetic to Mark Knights’s compelling story of political rationale as the basis for the discussion of

⁸ Israel, “William III and Toleration,” 167.

⁹ Trevor-Roper, “Toleration and Religion after 1688,” in *Nation Transformed*, eds. O. P. Grell, J. Israel, and N. Tyacke, 402. C. John Sommerville also contends that the state was ahead of society in the promotion of religious toleration, *The Secularization of Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 124.

toleration, I argue that it was more than a reaction to James himself and his policies. The discussion of toleration, while certainly not new, developed a significance during the reign of James that shaped its development and debate for generations to come. The practical experience of toleration, along with the free dialogue with Catholics, informed the conflict and conclusions regarding this issue. The debate among Protestants and Catholics influenced (and reflected) change in both political and religious ideology. This chapter contends that the Catholic missionary effort was crucial to the process of coming to an ideal of religious toleration, one that went deeper than mere governmental statutes.

Toleration Debate

Catholics, while very happy to have a monarch of their own faith, were wary at the beginning of James's reign. Even Jesuit missionaries, the most visible and closely watched of the Catholic clergy, were careful in their use of this opportunity. After the king used his prerogative to suspend laws against Catholics, however, the Jesuits were bolder in their activities.¹⁰ James, throughout his reign, granted dispensations to Catholics to be relieved from the laws against them and enabled them to occupy places of duty or honor.¹¹ Catholics frequently accepted these responsibilities, but not without concern, and they did not always agree with James's methods of giving them these opportunities. The English Jesuit John Keynes' report that the king consulted

with many Catholic lords, who have the chief places in the kingdom, to find a method to propagate the faith without violence. Not long since, some of these lords objected to the king that they thought he made too

¹⁰ Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, vol. 5 (London: Burnes and Oates, 1879), 149-150.

¹¹ "Dispensation granted to Obadiah Walker," May 1686, Add MS 38856, f. 102, British Library, London; Middleton to d'Albyville, May 1688, Add MS 41823, f. 67(b), British Library, London; Narcissus Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs* (Oxford, 1857), 367, 378.

much haste to establish the faith. To whom he answered: I am growing old and must take large steps, else, if I should happen to die, I might perhaps leave you in a worse condition than I found you.¹²

Clergy and laymen alike expressed the ambivalence they felt between their desire to be relieved of hardships and their fear of alienating their Protestant countrymen.¹³

Catholic literature advocated a variety of forms of obtaining a partial toleration.

Sir John Reresby, early on in James's reign, recorded what some "gentlemen of interest amongst their party, the papists," expected would come of James's reign.

The king would expect the taking away of the sanguinary laws, and the allowance of the practice of the Roman Religion in private for the papists, from the next Parliament; and that they, or at least such as had served the royal family in the wars or other ways, might be made capable of employment under him; that his Majesty would give satisfaction to the nation in Parliament as to the preserving their religion and properties.¹⁴

One anonymous Catholic urged another method of promoting a legal toleration—by enforcing the present laws regarding church government.

I fear your Majesty may run some hazard of compassing your ends if you too securely depend upon them [Dissenters]. Wherefore, to obviate this danger, I have thought of a method wherein if your Majesty think fit to proceed, you shall do nothing but what is legal, pious, and honorable, and therefore nothing hazardous; and appear a great supporter of the Church of England, according to your promise.... And all this, only by compelling the Church of England clergy to do their duty."¹⁵

¹² Quoted in Foley, *Records of the English Province*, vol. 5, 158.

¹³ Dean and Chapter to the King, June 1685, Add MS 23095, ff., 220, 221, British Library, London; also many examples of this letter can be found in the Archdiocese Archives of Westminster Series "A", vol., 34, 290, 928-941; A letter by Mijm Heer Fagel, in *Somers Tracts*, vol. 9 (London 1813), 186; Gilbert Burnet, *History of My Own Time*, vol. 2, (Oxford, 1833), 210, 226. Popular opinion had it that James was driven by Father Petre and other Jesuits who "over reached" themselves in their attempts to promote "popery," *A Dialogue Between Father Petre and the Devil* (London, 1688), 2.

¹⁴ John Reresby, *Memoirs of Sir John Reresby* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1991), 363.

¹⁵ "Proposal Concerning the Clergy, 1687," Add MS 32095, ff. 247-250, British Library, London.

This author wanted toleration, but thought that could be achieved willingly by both Dissenters and Anglicans, if the clergy saw how hard it was to obey fully the Church of England's laws against holding multiple benefices and requiring frequent preaching. Charles Middleton, Earl of Middleton and member of James's Privy Council, although not yet a Catholic, articulated one Catholic version of securing a limited toleration. The king, he counseled, could secure the Church of England by "excluding Catholics from the House of Commons, by which they can never [encompass] the legislative power [and by agreeing] that those of the Church of England only shall be capable of possessing Church dignities and benefices."¹⁶ The toleration expected by Catholics, then, was only a limited one. They wanted to worship freely in private and to be able to hold offices if they had served the king well. This, anyway, is what they communicated to the king, each other, and to their fellow Englishmen.

With regard to toleration in principle, Catholic sermons and polemic promoted free debate and leniency toward those who differed in belief. Catholics continually defended themselves against the charge that they were persecutors. The typical Protestant view of a "papist," contended the author of *A Papist Represented*, was one "that has disturbed this Nation now above an hundred years with Fears and Jealousies; threatening it continually with Fire and Massacres."¹⁷ The author, the priest John Gother, thought toleration was necessary to correct "the common prejudices and mistakes" that "the vulgar, or the multitudes" had regarding Catholicism.¹⁸ When Christians persecute

¹⁶ Middleton to D'Abbeville 21 Sept. 1688, Add MS 41823, f. 73(b), British Library, London.

¹⁷ John Gother, *A Papist Misrepresented* (London, 1685), A5.

¹⁸ Gother, *Papists Protesting against Protestant Popery* (London, 1687), 19.

each other, another Catholic priest, John Dormer, declared in a sermon at Whitehall, “they have more of the Pharisee than the Christian . . . The zeal which each one has for the religion he is in ought to be tempered with charity.” Human authorities were to regulate the “good or bad use man makes of his liberty as far as it comes within their verge and relates to the public.”¹⁹ Catholic polemic accused Protestants of sometimes having an intolerant spirit in their literature and sermons and in the desire some of them expressed to continue the penal laws.²⁰ They attempted to shame them by declaring that “no man of Reason and Conscience . . . is of Opinion that the severity of all those Penal Laws enacted against Recusants (extending in their latitude to the Privation of life and Estate) ought to be inflicted on Roman Catholics purely and solely upon the Score of Religion.”²¹ “Consider us, too, what we are and what our Manners and Conversation amongst you has been,”²² Joseph Johnston pleaded. Catholics, he argued, only wanted room enough to explain themselves, not to dominate. “We have no other Ends but Truth, no designs but to convince your Judgements.”²³ Knowing that Protestants feared the Catholic tendency toward persecution (an opinion given fuel by the forced conversion of the Huguenots in France in 1685), Catholic apologetic attempted to demonstrate that Catholicism was consistent with loyalty to the government and to charitable treatment of

¹⁹ J. D., *A Sermon Preached before His Majesty at Whitehall* (London, 1688), 8, 15, 20; John Sergeant, *The Fourth Catholick Letter* (London, 1688).

²⁰ Antoine, *A Vindication of the Roman Catholics* (London, 1688), preface, 10.

²¹ “An Essay on the Penal Laws,” Add MS 28252, f. 126, British Library, London.

²² Joseph Johnston, *A Vindication of the Bishop of Condom’s Exposition of the Doctrine of the Catholic Church* (London, 1687), 110.

²³ *Ibid.*, 111.

religious difference. Toleration was both hoped for, and considered beneficial. Catholic desires for their own freedom to worship thus forced them to articulate publicly theories of toleration that had a wider application than their church had traditionally espoused.

Since the Catholics were accusing the Church of England of being intolerant, and thus, perhaps, gaining the support of Dissenters, Anglicans responded by defending their tolerationist credentials. Gilbert Burnet, a clergyman whose opposition to James and his tactics had led to his exile to the Continent, wrote of the Church of England clergy that “they did not move for the execution of severe or penal laws, but were willing to let those sleep, till it might appear by the behavior of the papists, whether they might deserve that there should be any mitigation made of them in their favour.” He even insisted in print that “I had rather see the Church of England fall under a very severe Persecution, than fall to Persecute others . . . how much soever we may hate their corruption.”²⁴ While not all Anglican clerics were as positive about lenience toward Catholics as Burnet asserts, such defensive attitudes regarding persecution forced them to make some claims regarding their view of charity, truth, and toleration.

The Church of England laymen and clergy sounded out with loud praises of tolerance and good will. “Nothing can be more anti-Christian,” wrote George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, “nor more contrary to sense and reason than to trouble and molest our fellow Christians because they cannot be exactly of our minds in all things relating to

²⁴ Gilbert Burnet, “An Answer to a Paper Printed with Allowance,” 1687, Stowe 305, f. 49, British Library, London; Burnet, *The Case for Compulsion in Matters of Religion Stated* (London, 1688), 15. In fact, Burnet insists here that the penal laws, since the time of Queen Elizabeth had not been enforced until the Catholics started up rebellions and trouble. He makes a heavy historical case for the Church of England as a bastion of toleration.

the worship of God.”²⁵ “The Golden Rule is both a higher law and a greater good than our test and penal laws are,” wrote another Anglican.²⁶ “There always have been, there are, and there ever will be differences in our judgements.”²⁷ “Men will not care so much to hear recusants when they are not restrained from hearing them,”²⁸ another churchman argued. “Though some weaker men of the clergy,” conceded Burnet, “retain their peevish animosities against the Dissenters, yet the wiser and more serious heads of that great and worthy body now see their error.” They now “abhor one of the worst things in it... their zeal toward heretics.”²⁹ “The Church of England has, of late years, especially,” insisted another author, “been on the charitable side towards the papists, and has allowed them to be Christians . . . a true church.”³⁰ The Anglican divine Robert Hancock warned:

Let it be the peculiar honor of papists and Turks to propagate their religion with sword and bloodshed; let us regulate our zeal with prudence, obedience, and charity, which make up the truly Christian temper of English Protestants; let no private passion or interest transport us beyond the bounds of our duty to God and our allegiance to our sovereign; for if they do, we shall convince all impartial men that we have as little sense of true religion as do our adversaries of Rome.³¹

²⁵ George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, *A short Discourse upon the Reasonableness of Men's having a Religion* (London, 1685), in *Somers Tracts*, vol. 9, 13.

²⁶ *A Few Short Arguments* (London, 1687).

²⁷ *An Answer of a Minister of the Church of England*, (London, 1687), 7.

²⁸ *Prudential Reasons for Repealing the Penal Laws* (London, 1687), 7.

²⁹ Burnet, *An Apology for the Church of England*, printed in *Somers Tracts*, vol. 9, 180.

³⁰ *The Trial and Examination of a Late Libel*, printed in *Somers Tracts*, vol. 9, 206.

³¹ Robert Hancock, *The Loyalty of Popish Principles Examined* (London, 1686), 174; James Paston, *A Discourse of Penal Laws* (London, 1688), 25-26.

Clearly, these writers were stumbling over themselves in their hurry to establish their tolerationist credentials.

They understood that the king, as a good Catholic, would want to allow other Catholics freedom of worship. Englishmen “ought not to grudge the privileges allowed by the king to those of his own communion [so long as] he does not desire that they should stand upon equal terms of public privileges and advantages of the tasting of the sweet church revenues.”³² “We ought to show ourselves quiet and obliging neighbors to those Romanists who dwell among us.”³³ Since the Church of England had all the public places of worship, they argued, “have we reason then, to grudge him [James] two or three small chapels, and the subjects of his faith their private oratories?”³⁴ “If all that were now asked in favour of Popery,” Burnet wrote, “were only some gentleness towards their Papists; there were some reason to entertain the debate.”³⁵

Anglicans, however, insisted that this toleration take place through legal, parliamentary means.

The king thinks his own to be the true religion and that God requires him indispensibly to believe and profess it, and to endeavour the propagation of it too, by all lawful means among his subjects If he can win men by arguments and persuasions or any other allurements of his own

³² *Answer of a Minister*, 30.

³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴ *How Members of the Church of England Ought to Behave* (London, 1687), 38.

³⁵ Gilbert Burnet, *Reasons against Repealing the Acts of Parliament Concerning the Test* (London, 1687), 6. See also Robert Southwell to his nephew [J. Perceval] May 1685, Add MS 46962, f. 37, British Library, London.

promotions, he does that religion all the right and service he can without wronging ours.³⁶

Toleration could only take place after being “considered and reflected in Parliament.”³⁷

The Bishop of Durham, Nathaniel Crew, wrote the king “advising him to withdraw his protection from Romish chapels . . . [and to] proceed in all other affairs according to their [English] original statutes and constitutions.” He further advised that the king call a free Parliament.³⁸ In defending themselves against Catholic charges regarding their hypocrisy about this issue (accusing Catholics of being persecutors, while forcing participation in a state church themselves), Anglicans sounded out in favor of toleration, but placed limits on how far they would go in allowing Catholics full liberty.

Englishmen, then, while advocating toleration, were careful to add that an established church was necessary to promote that very toleration. Because Catholics were less tolerant, they argued, they must be kept out of power at all costs. The Marquis of Halifax wrote:

Let us be still, quiet, and undivided firm at the same time to our religion, our loyalty, and our laws Our disunion is not only a reproach, but a danger to us . . . for us it is as justifiable to have no religion, as willfully to throw away the human means of preserving it [the established church].³⁹

One author maintained the need for an established church, with regulated dissent, because, he wrote, “for my own part, I admire the world is so fond of uniformity in the

³⁶ *Answer of a Minister*, 17.

³⁷ Letter to James Harrington, Add MS 36707, f. 27, British Library, London.

³⁸ Nathaniel Crew, Bishop of Durham to the king, 1687, *Calendar of State Papers*, 1686/1687 (London: HM Stationary Office, 1856), 441.

³⁹ George, Marquis of Halifax, *A Letter to a Dissenter*, in *Somers Tracts*, vol. 9, 57-58.

externals of religion that in most things else prefers convenience before it.”⁴⁰ Thus, if the basics regarding Christian theology and practical morality were secured by having an established church, the flexibility offered by having alternatives might be agreeable to everyone.

The problem, according to Anglicans, was that some people took advantage of toleration, and both Catholics and Dissenters might bring in unruliness and intolerance themselves if the established church were not there to stop them. In the past, wrote Buckingham, “the reason [the Dissenters] were denied their liberty of meeting in greater assemblies was because such assemblies were represented as greatly endangering the public peace and safety It was not religion alone which was considered and pretended, but the public peace and settlement.”⁴¹ “For a toleration or liberty of conscience (which the papists seemed to apprehend), if it were general, some seemed willing to grant,” contended Sir John Reresby, “but resolved at the same time not in any alteration to give a capacity to the papists to come into any place or employment in the government.”⁴² Anglicans, explained Burnet, “have no mind to trust the keeping of their throats to those who they believe will cut them, and they have seen nothing in the conduct of the papists, either within or without the kingdom, to make them grow weary of the laws for their sakes.”⁴³ Even those who fully supported the king’s plan, contended Burnet, understood the need for the security of the established church. “Many books

⁴⁰ *Prudential Reasons for Repealing the Penal Laws*, 11.

⁴¹ Buckingham, *A Plain Account of the Persecution*, in *Somers Tracts*, vol. 9, 171.

⁴² Reresby, *Memoirs*, 362.

⁴³ Gilbert Burnet, *An Answer to a Paper*, 1687, Stowe, 305, f. 49, British Library, London.

were writ for liberty of conscience. And since all people saw what security the tests gave, these spoke of an equivalent to be offered The papists began to talk everywhere very high for public liberty, trying by that to recommend themselves to the nation.”⁴⁴ Thus, it is clear that toleration and liberty of conscience were the accepted language, although how far they should go, and the means of attaining them, continued to be contested.

Dissenters, while desiring toleration, varied in their responses as well. Like Catholics, Dissenters sometimes wrote the king asking to be “a partaker of that goodness and clemencie by the exercise of which his Majesty hath given himself a command of the hearts of so many.”⁴⁵ One writer explained the spectrum of responses: “some Dissenters address to the king by way of thanks; Quakers through Penn’s own spirit. Anabaptists and Wade with some Western rebels, gave florid thanks yesterday, first for their lives, then for liberty of conscience. The Presbyterians will not do it.”⁴⁶ The citizens of Clifton thanked the king for the tangible benefits of toleration, writing that

it is now obvious to all the observing world, how inept and weake a project it was, to settle the peace and grandure of the church upon a forced conformity against the light and dictates of the people’s consciences, since

⁴⁴ Idem, *History of My Own Time*, vol. 3, 180.

⁴⁵ R. Skelton from Matthew Mead. Aug. 20, 1686, Add MS 4819, f. 240, British Library, London.

⁴⁶ *Letters . . . Addressed to John Ellis*, vol. 1, 274. April 19, 1687, from London. The situation with the Dissenters was sometimes complicated by the fact that many were suspected of participating in Monmouth’s rebellion soon after the king’s ascension to the throne. So those in the Netherlands were being watched for signs of such disloyalty and others who had somehow escaped Judge Jeffrey’s “bloody” Assizes, made sure to say, when they were being pardoned, that they had not been in trouble for anything other than being Nonconformist. One John Kay, who admitted to being in the uprising, still threw himself on the king’s mercy because of the spate of dispensations the king had been handing out. “The Examination of John Kay, at Newgate,” Oct. 28, 1685, Add MS 41804, ff. 74, 75, British Library, London.

immediately upon the relaxing of the bands, the [non?] conformists in England are no less glad of an escape than the new [converts?] in France.⁴⁷

“Addresses have been presented to his Majesty,” recorded the seventeenth century observer Narcissus Luttrell, “to thank him for his declaration for liberty of conscience, some of them also assuring him to choose parliament men that shall repeal the penal laws and the tests.”⁴⁸ Still others wanted to distance themselves from the echoes of the Civil War and maintain a loyalty to both the king and parliamentary law. “Let that thread bare cloak of Rebellion, the noisy apprehension of Popery shelter those Imps of ingratitude who still have the Impudence to wear it,” wrote the Dissenting members of the grand jury at Norfolk. “We shall take all the strictest care (when you shall please to call a Parliament) to chose such men as are entirely disposed to take off those scandals to our reformation, the Test and Penal Laws.”⁴⁹ Such notices of thanks to the king came from many dissenters—but many pointedly chose not to thank the king for the dispensation itself, and thus implicitly criticized his claim to that prerogative as illegal.⁵⁰

On the other hand, many people saw that these addresses were less than they might appear to be. “Those few that pretend to do it [send addresses],” wrote a Dissenting satirist, “have proceeded so awkwardly in their acknowledgements, as renders

⁴⁷ To the king from the citizens in the Borough of Clifton in Devon, 1687?, Stowe, 305, f. 37, British Library, London.

⁴⁸ Luttrell, *Brief Historical Relation*, 427, Jan. 1688; The *Gazette* also printed addresses, some of which are ambiguous in their commitments to what the king is trying to do.

⁴⁹ To the king from the grand jury at Norfolk, 24 April, 1688, Add MS 25490, f. 9, British Library, London.

⁵⁰ John Spurr counts eighty addresses of thanks, but also points to such important figures as Bates and Howe, the Presbyterian leaders, and others who refused to issue letters of thanks. He also points out that when the seven Bishops were imprisoned for petitioning the king not to force the clergy to read the Declaration of Indulgence in their churches, they were visited by ten leading nonconformist divines, who thus showed they did not approve of the king’s actions. Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 147, 148.

them of very little value. For to thank His Majesty not absolutely for the main scope of his healing declaration, but only for one single expression therein,” is not really thanking him.⁵¹ After discussing the possibility of an Act of Toleration in a letter to John Ellis, one writer commented that “I find some that are much joyed at it [the king’s Declaration of Indulgence]; but others seem to be less transported than they were in 1672 [when Charles II attempted to promote a Declaration of Indulgence for Dissenters], and do not seem to have yet resolved whither to accept or refuse the benefit of it. Some, you know, there are, will run counter to all the acts of Government.”⁵² Non-conformists were not dependable from a royalist point of view.

While Dissenters approved in general of toleration, they had no real consensus on what actual toleration might look like. But they understood that suspicion of Catholic intentions affected their own fate. Thus, they found it necessary to explain that neither they nor the Catholics were agitating for the downfall of the established church. Instead, both groups merely wanted “a free and undisturbed Exercise of their Religion according to the Conviction of their Consciences The Same Law will give the Church of England her Prominence in Powers, Revenues, and all other Advantages . . . and the Papists the bare Liberty of the Profession of their Religion.”⁵³ On the other hand, while some simply wanted freedom to worship independently, Presbyterians were more concerned with comprehension within the established church than with freedom to

⁵¹ *An Address of Thanks on Behalf of the Church of England to Mrs. James* (London, 1687), 1.

⁵² *Letters . . . Addressed to John Ellis*, vol. 1, 260. 19 March, 1687, author unknown.

⁵³ *An Answer to a Letter to a Dissenter* (London, 1687), 2; “A Plain Account of the Persecution now laid to the Charge of the Church of England,” *Calendar of State Papers*, 2144, 1685; “To the Lords upon the present condition of government,” 1689, DDCa 17/214, f. 9, Lancashire County Record Office, Preston, England.

worship outside it. They wanted to alter the form of the Church of England so that it reflected what they believed a godly polity should be. Once this was done, they were not as interested in promoting toleration for those outside the church.

The attempt by Catholics to explain their church and beliefs to English Protestants as well as the English response to James's activities made the discussion of toleration more urgent and widespread. Anglican tracts and books were directly responding to Catholic polemic, both sides defending themselves against charges of persecution. Dissenters used that conflict to make their own cases for toleration. There was unanimous assent to the view of toleration as a virtue, even while definitions of that term varied. The complication of James's methods of promoting his religion made the responses more nuanced and weighted. The Dissenter Henry Philip summed up the dilemma faced by Catholic and Protestant alike.

A great difficulty there is to form ecclesiastical laws (they being the same where uniformity is much stood upon for a whole nation) as not to leave grounds of dissatisfaction to many; men's apprehensions being various through the degrees of light, insomuch as that may be sin to one man that is a liberty to another of a greater degree of light.⁵⁴

Thicken up analysis. The assumption since the Reformation had been that unity in religion was ideal for a nation, but these debates revealed a new consensus that physical punishment for religious opposition was indefensible.

Sectional title?

Several other important themes came into the discussion of toleration. Events on the continent, and the examples of toleration (or otherwise) there, greatly informed the debate. The implications for citizenship and the relation of religious belief to loyalty to

⁵⁴ Henry Philip, *The King's Authority in Dispensing with Ecclesiastical Laws* (London, 1687), 12.

one's country also began to be fleshed out. And multilateral accusations of persecution helped to illustrate what toleration might mean by defining its opposite.

The actions of King Louis XIV in France were a constant concern to English Protestants. "Our affairs here depend so much on what may be done abroad that our thoughts though never so seasonable may be changed by what we may hear by the next post," wrote the Marquis of Halifax to the Prince of Orange. "Our resolutions at home are to be suited to the interests abroad which we shall happen to espouse."⁵⁵ This was never more true than the monarchical tyranny and Catholic oppression that England saw taking place in France. In the wake of the persecution of the French Huguenots following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, masses of French Protestants fled to England. "Here was such a real argument of the cruel and persecuting spirit of popery, wheresoever it prevailed," wrote Gilbert Burnet later, "that few could resist this conviction. So that all men confessed, that the French persecution came very seasonably to awaken the nation."⁵⁶ "The persecution still raging in France," recorded Evelyn in 1688, "multitudes of Protestants, and very considerable and great persons flying hither, produced a second contribution, the Papists, by God's Providence, as yet making small progress amongst us."⁵⁷ When an appeal from the English gentry to the Prince and Princess of Orange was written in 1688, it pointed to the threat of tyranny to the Protestant religion and liberty. Alongside such fears, the authors added "We will not

⁵⁵ Earl of Halifax to Prince of Orange, May 31, 1687, *Calendar of State Papers*.

⁵⁶ Burnet, *History of my Own Time*, vol. 3, 82.

⁵⁷ John Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. E. S. De Beer (Oxford, 1955), vol. 2, 284.

mention the notorious actual prosecutions of that popish resolution in several kingdoms . . . The instance alone of the French king is enough to be named instead of all.”⁵⁸

Against the negative example of France was the positive one of Holland. Not only was the Princess of Orange the heir to the throne, but many of the religious and political exiles who had angered James II by their outspoken dissent were at the court of William and Mary. The correspondence between the two countries, and the experience of the English refugees there, led to a natural comparison. James himself appealed to the Dutch example, saying “he was resolved to lay aside all the penal laws in matters of religion: they saw too well the advantages that Holland had by the liberty of conscience that was settled among them.”⁵⁹ “Roman Catholics continue still in your country,” wrote one Protestant polemicist about Holland, “and though the ill inclinations they showed made it necessary for public safety to put them out of the government, yet they still enjoyed their common rights of the country with the free exercise of their religion.”⁶⁰ Even a Dissenter such as Edward Calamy found that his experience of toleration in Utrecht (during the reign of James) positively affected his opinion of Catholics.⁶¹ In the end, the appeal to the Prince of Orange included a desire to show England what true toleration could be, “to give due limits to the prerogative and our Liberty to secure us that

⁵⁸ From the English Protestants to the Prince and Princess of Orange, 1688, Add MS 32095, ff. 283-296, British Library, London.

⁵⁹ Burnet, *History of My Own Times*, vol. 3, 166.

⁶⁰ “Reflections on a Pamphlet entitled *Parliamentium pacificum*,” March 16, 1688, Stowe 305, f., 156(b), British Library, London; interestingly, the Catholic writer Joshua Basset thought Holland was a bad example of religious practice because it was a divided and ungodly country, *Reason and Authority* (London, 1687).

⁶¹ Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), 171.

are the Protestant subjects in our Religion and to show the king what sort of liberty he truly ought to expect for his Roman Catholique subjects.”⁶² The Netherlands, viewed as England’s natural Protestant allies, gave a clear model for what toleration could look like.

The connection between loyalty to the king and loyalty to one’s religion complicated the debate. The king was sometimes unsure whether he could count on Dissenters, and those coming from Holland or Scotland were particularly suspect. The king’s push for toleration, and his strategy to get Nonconformists to support him, forced him to accommodate those of whose political ties he was suspicious.⁶³ The same was true with Protestants who were evaluating Catholic loyalty. “We reflect not on the credit or truth of any Roman Catholic lords, or others,” the Protestant appeal to the Prince of Orange maintained, “in giving their testimonies in matters of private interest, wherein the cause of their church is not in question.”⁶⁴ One Anglican letter-writer urged a Presbyterian who approved of King James to “go and practice what was recommended to him, which was to teach his hearers to be good Christians, and then the King did not doubt but they would be good subjects.”⁶⁵ The implication was to focus on the common practices and beliefs of all Christians, rather than emphasizing Protestantism. The connection between loyalty to the king’s method of toleration and of actually wanting toleration oneself was rife with perils.

⁶² Mr. Sergant Finch? Speech to Commons Jan 28, 1689, DDCa 17/214, f. 29(b), Lancashire Record Office, Preston, England.

⁶³ John Rolfe to Mayor of Harwich, Nov. 7, 1685, Add MS 41804, f. 80, British Library, London. This concerns a nonconformist with Irish Protestant ties, whose politics James’s agents are worried about.

⁶⁴ Add MS 32095, ff. 283- 296, 16, British Library, London.

⁶⁵ *Letters . . . Addressed to John Ellis*, 30 April 1687, 285.

On the one hand, James was seen as doing his monarchical duty in giving peace, through toleration, to his subjects.⁶⁶ The king's duty was to promote the interest of his people, and this James did, argued one Protestant. "Why shall any free borne English man be fettered with laws that deprive him of his birth rights so long as they behave themselves like good and loyal subjects to their king and country?"⁶⁷ John Sheffield posited that because "Liberty of Conscience" was so popular, if James had declared his support for such a liberty at the same time that he confessed his allegiance to the Roman Church, he would then have demonstrated that his actions were disinterested.⁶⁸ This would have kept him from using the suspicious methods that made the toleration a concern to Englishmen. "If we can but get our Juries, Sheriffs, Judges, High Courts of Chancerie, and Parliament settled as they ought to be," insisted another Anglican on the eve of the Glorious Revolution, "the Army at least reduced, the militia regulated; and a due libertie of conscience established to all protestant dissenters; and so far to papists only as the law against conventicles does admit, we may yet be happy."⁶⁹ Thus, the toleration itself that James had attempted to establish was seen by many as being potentially good for the people.

⁶⁶ *Prudential Reason for Repealing the penal laws*, 1; James Paston, *A Discourse of Penal Laws* (London, 1688), 31.

⁶⁷ Geo. Hickton? "Morralties offered to the consideration of all honest and [?] gentlemen," (1689), DDCa 17/214, f. 34b, Lancashire County Record Office, Preston, England.

⁶⁸ John Sheffield, Earl of Musgrave, 1688. "False Steps on Both Sides," Add MS 27382, f.77, British Library, London.

⁶⁹ "To the Lords upon the present condition of government," DDCa 17/214, f. 9b, Lancashire County Record Office, Preston, England.

But, on the other hand, the methods he used first concerned, then frightened and angered too many of his subjects to be effective. According to the petitioners to the Prince of Orange

the legal securities provided by the kings and kingdom in Parliament against the dangers of their religion and liberties, are by the king's absolute command thrown aside and made useless by pretense of his power to dispense with those penal laws notwithstanding the subjects' right in them, for the protection and safety of their religion, liberties, and lives, whereby the very foundation of all the subjects rights and properties is undermined and shaken, and a new claim is set up and maintained, that the subjects have no right, property, or security against the will and pleasure of their king.⁷⁰

Therefore, their fears regarding the political implications of a Catholic king were realized. "It's but reasonable according to their [Catholic] principles, for all hereditary princes of that communion take upon `em a despotical, nay and what's worse, many not so content, [go on to] assume the Legislative Power."⁷¹ This, one pamphleteer contended, was why

Catholics could not be put in positions of public trust. They love the "Holy Church better than Father or Mother, Wife or Children,"⁷² and the king's "obligation to his religion [is] greater than any other obligation he can lie under."⁷³ Thus, out of zeal to [his] religion, [James] utterly forgot all humane obligation."⁷⁴ The potential for a good thing

⁷⁰"From English Protestants to the Oranges," Add MS 32095, ff. 283-296, 2, British Library, London.

⁷¹ S. T., *A Receipt to Keep out Popery* (London, 1689), 1.

⁷² *A Friendly Letter to Father Petre* (London, 1690), 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

(toleration) was ruined when managed by a Catholic who (Protestants had long believed) were ingrained with the principles of persecution and tyranny.

The missionary effort was intended at least partly to clear Catholics of such charges. Both Protestants and Catholics claimed to be disgusted with persecution. Gilbert Burnet denounced as persecution actions that had been taken for granted as recently as the Popish Plot. “If Men were to be attainted for Treason, for being reconciled to the Church of Rome, or for reconciling others to it; if Priests were demanded to be hanged for taking orders in the Church of Rome; and if the two-thirds of the papists Estates were offered to be levied,” then, he argued, England could be accused of persecuting the Roman Church.⁷⁵ Burnet was thus arguing that the Church of England no longer wanted to engage in such actions. Instead, he turned the spotlight on Catholic persecution. “Would God the Roman church had never obtruded her opinions on the world by any other means but these gentle and rational persuasions, her neighbors would not have had so just cause to complain of her.”⁷⁶ William Wake, traveling on the continent in the 1680s concluded that in spite of all the good he saw in Catholics, “their narrow and uncharitable spirit in confining salvation only to their own church and party . . . gave me no less a dislike to their Religion and abundantly secured me against the danger of being seduced by them.”⁷⁷ “Consider,” another Protestant writer argued, “What has been the observation of all promises made for liberty of conscience to heretics

⁷⁵ Burnet, *Reasons Against Repealing the Acts of Parliament concerning the Tests*, 6.

⁷⁶ Thomas Comber, *Friendly and Seasonable Advice to the Roman Catholics of England* (London, 1686), A5.

⁷⁷ William Wake’s Diary, MS 2932, 12b-13, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

by Roman Catholic princes ever since the Reformation.”⁷⁸ Buckingham, arguing for a greater toleration, maintained “...the Church of Rome is a persecuting church and the mother of persecution.”⁷⁹

What the discussion of toleration during the Catholic missionary effort revealed, then, was a consensus that toleration was a positive good, but that certain groups could not be trusted to promote it. Toleration that allowed Catholics to operate within society on the same level as Protestants was viewed more suspiciously because should Roman Catholics gain the upper hand, they would bring in persecution. Especially Anglicans emphasized that an established church was needed to prevent this from happening—usually intending a broader Church than the existing Church of England that would incorporate Dissent. Toleration was something to extend to Protestants and meant the absence of penal laws, not total legal equality. Catholics themselves never argued against the principle of an established church, and Dissenters did so rarely. Catholics pointed to the hypocrisy of the Church of England in attacking popish persecution while squashing recusancy in England. When responding to these attacks, Anglican polemicists were forced to make more and more welcoming statements concerning toleration, even with regards to Catholics. The implications of this debate were very important. The penal laws that had enforced uniformity of religious practice were no longer helpful, many were saying—and were, in fact, hurting people’s consciences. Observing the relatively harmless effect of toleration in English society, polemicists strengthened their arguments for softening the punishments for religious heterodoxy in England.

⁷⁸ Reflections on a Pamphlet, March 1688, Stowe 305, f. 155, British Library, London.

⁷⁹ Buckingham, *A Short discourse*, 171.

Putting Toleration into Practice

While practicing Catholics had lived among English Protestants since the Reformation, James's reign was the first time since that of Queen Mary that priests had been able to hold public masses. With a few exceptions, this overt practice and proselytizing by the Catholic clergy was accepted peacefully. In contrast, almost any missionary activity that James himself spearheaded, or any promotion of Catholics on his part, caused anger, suspicion, and jealousy. Gossip and news reports centered on who the new Catholics in power were and which Protestants might convert in order to keep a position of honor. In numbers, the new converts were few, but the hold they had on the public imagination was large, especially with regards to promotions.⁸⁰ "This was a time of great trial," John Evelyn recorded regarding the king's closeting campaign, which involved the king's isolating the peers and officers of state one at a time and attempting to get them to convert. "But hardly one of them assented, which put the popish interest much backward."⁸¹

The clear favoritism given to Catholics in court patronage took on a sinister aspect. Sir John Reresby recorded that Parliament was very disturbed by James's overt promotion of Catholics. "The truth is, it gave great dissatisfaction to see the laws invaded in that particular; and the kings best friends . . . were much alarmed at it, and were very free in their discourse concerning it."⁸² "It will undoubtedly prove irksome," wrote another, of the placing of a Catholic into office, "and needs must grate on the

⁸⁰ *Letters . . . Addressed to John Ellis*, From J. F. May 17, 1687, vol. 1, 299-300.

⁸¹ Evelyn, *Diary*, vol. 2, 273, 274.

⁸² Reresby, *Memoirs*, 398.

spirits of any English man to [be] brought under an awe of a ruling Papist and to quash and damn up that uppish humour and proud conception.”⁸³ Catholics not only replaced Protestant officers at court, but were also inserted into local county and city governments when James reorganized city charters. These actions incited suspicion and ill will toward Catholics, who were seen as opportunists.

It was James’s interference with statute law that created animosity, not his indulgence of recusant worship. Burnet insisted that James’s promotion of Catholics was going too far and that the dominance of the Jesuits at court made the rest of the Catholics look bad.

Burnet wrote:

A cessation of all severities against them, is that to which the Nation would more easily submit. But it is their Behavior that must create them the continuance of the like compassion in another Reign. If a restless and a persecuting spirit were not inherent in that Order, that now has the Ascendant, they would have behaved themselves so decently under their present Advantages as to have made our Divines, that have charged them so heavily, look a little out of countenance.⁸⁴

On the eve of the Glorious Revolution, James’s advisors urged him to reinstate the Protestants he had ousted in his reorganization of government along lines favorable to Protestants, and to turn out of Catholics from the army and universities. This return to the legal principles of forming government, without squashing the public worship of

⁸³ To English Merchants in Rotterdam from Thom. Beddingford? 16 Sept. 1686, Add MS 41819, f. 278(b), British Library, London. This situation has nationalist overtones as well because the consul in question was Scottish, adding insult to injury.

⁸⁴ Burnet, *Reasons Against the Repealing the Acts of Parliament Concerning the Test*, 6.

Dissenters or Catholics was seen as being the best way of securing the good favor of the people.⁸⁵ Promoting Catholics and Dissenters, and especially throwing out lawfully constituted officers to do so, caused hostility. Granting freedom of worship did not.

In spite of the discussion of toleration, however, a few Catholic priests were harassed, especially in London. The Dominican monk John Ellis was informed that “the London hotheads were bantering Mr. Sandford’s chapel.”⁸⁶ They took a cross and a crucifix, and frightened the priest, but did not hurt him. When the trained bands were asked to stop the riots, the people said they were “only pulling down popery” and the local militia replied that in that case they could not “in good conscience” stop them.⁸⁷ When the Lord Mayor and the Justices of the Peace of Middlesex were unable to control anti-Catholic bonfires celebrating Guy Fawkes Day, they were reprimanded. “Strict inquiry is to be made into the promoters of these insolencies in contempt of the Government.”⁸⁸ In Coventry, a number of apprentices, some of whom had sticks, gathered at the house of the dyer Thomas Hox [?]. When apprehended, the young men argued that they were only going to observe a mass that they had heard was to be said in Hox’s house.⁸⁹ Narcissus Luttrell reported similar instances. “There hath been some disorders committed in the city of York about some Roman Catholics, which before they

⁸⁵ Middlton to D’Abbeville, 2 Oct. 1688, Add MS 41823, f. 77, British Library, London; Tynemouth Castler, Villiers to Danby, Dec. 18, 1688, Egerton 3336, f. 101, British Library, London; John Hough to his cousin, 9 Oct. 1687, MS 922, f. 33, Lambeth Palace Library, London; Luttrell, 451 July 1688.

⁸⁶ *Letters . . . Addressed to John Ellis*, vol. 1, 118.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

⁸⁹ To Earl of Sunderland by Men of Coventry, 12 May, 1686, Add MS 41804, f. 160, British Library, London. Signed by the mayor and others.

were quieted some mischief was done.”⁹⁰ “On Sunday last there was a great disturbance in Limestreet, at the Romish chapel there, occasioned by the priests scurrilously reflecting on the translation of our Bible.”⁹¹ These attacks on the practice of Catholicism stand out because they were relatively unusual. There were cases in which intolerance did exist. People were not happy with the promotions given to Catholics, and sometimes exuberant crowds (often young people) attacked the chapels and protested against the Catholic presence. But more often, English Protestants referred to the Catholics they knew with affection and a positive willingness to get along. In general, Catholics worshipped unmolested, Catholic printing continued unabated, and priests felt free to walk about publicly in their habits.

Even more clear is the fact that Protestants and Catholics were interacting socially on a regular basis. The solidly Protestant Brockbank family in Westmoreland were friends with the Catholic Leyburns and visited with Bishop Leyburn at his father’s house during his apostolic visit.⁹² These social connections were repeated throughout England. “Many of them [Roman Catholics] are our kind neighbors, familiar acquaintances, or near kindred,” wrote Thomas Comber, “and some of them (where prejudice doth not blind them) persons of great reason and of good inclination.”⁹³ **Transition to international relationship given tensions on continent and that more hotheaded of both sides went there.** William Wake preached at a Presbyterian woman’s funeral on the

⁹⁰ Luttrell, *Brief Historical Relation*, 434.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Diary and Letterbook of Rev. Thomas Brockbank*, Chetham Society, vol. 89, (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1930), 2.

⁹³ Comber, *Friendly and Seasonable Advice*, A3.

continent, “to a numerous audietory [sic] of papists as well as Protestants.”⁹⁴ This phenomenon seems to have been common especially on the continent. English exiles, both Protestant and Catholic, clung together. Wake noted this over and over and recorded all his own interactions with Catholics, which greatly impressed him.

I plainly saw that neither the Father nor Dr. Piques were any bigots for the Corruption of their Church. Of this I had further Evidence, in my last Discourse with the latter just before I left Paris. Which was another Argument to me that I had no need to change my Religion, even in their opinion in those particulars.⁹⁵

Transition “I dined with the Archbishop of York, where was Peter Walsh, that Romish priest so well known for his moderation,” admitted John Evelyn, “professing the Church of England to be a true member of the Catholic Church. He is used to go to our Public Prayers without a scruple, and did not acknowledge the Pope’s Infallibility, only primacy of order.”⁹⁶ John Gother contended that “there are few ministers, but have some Papists in their parish; and few Laymen of any Business, but have some Relations, Neighbors, Correspondents, Acquaintance, or Conversation with some Papists.”⁹⁷ He challenged his readers to look at those Catholics with whom they interacted to determine the character of the Roman faith. Both Catholics and Protestants, then, articulated that social interaction between the faiths produced understanding and moderation on the part of both parties.

James’s attempts to promote the Catholic religion through toleration meant that Dissenters, too, were relieved from the penal laws of the previous reign. The Church of

⁹⁴ William Wake’s *Diary*, 14, MS 2932, Lambeth Palace, London.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹⁶ Evelyn, *Diary*, vol. 2, 258.

⁹⁷ John Gother, *Pulpit Sayings: Or the Characters of the Pulpit Papist Examined* (London, 1688), 3.

England understood that James was attempting to woo the Dissenters by promises of toleration, and it responded in kind. By necessity, appeals to Protestant unity included provisions (never quite fleshed out) for giving in to Nonconformists on some things. For instance, “letting Dissenters see that we do not justify these things [persecution], for which they (justly) blame us, I should think the most likely way to recommend us to their good will.”⁹⁸ Luttrell reported that “some of our bishops have had a meeting with some heads of the Presbyterian party, and there is a discourse as if they were near some accommodation.”⁹⁹ Anthony Wood also characterized the Protestants as hanging together. “In the beginning of this month a discourse of a Toleration to be given to Dissenters. The Anabaptists are glad to receive it. The Presbyterians and Independents will not, but stick to the Church of England.”¹⁰⁰ Although these distinctions were not completely true, it was useful for some people to categorize in this manner. From Amsterdam, Gilbert Burnet declared that Catholic pamphleteering had pushed Anglican leaders to articulate more clearly their stance concerning safeguarding true religion:

The just Detestation which they have expressed of the Corruptions of the Church of Rome, has led them to consider and abhor one of the worst things in it, I mean their severity toward Hereticks It cannot be imagined [if England’s state is ever settled] that the Bishops will go off from these moderate Resolutions So that all considerations concur to make us conclude, that there is no danger of our splitting a second time upon the same Rock [persecution of Dissent].¹⁰¹

Transition

⁹⁸ To John Strype from James Bonnell, 17 April 1688, Add MS 5853, f. 13, British Library, London.

⁹⁹ Luttrell, *Brief Historical Relation*, 452.

¹⁰⁰ Wood, *Life and Times*, 191. John Ellis also received a report that “our Presbyterians think it a great indignity put upon them to be linked with Quakers and Romanists.” *Letters*, vol 1, 252 5 March 1687.

¹⁰¹ Gilbert Burnet, *An Apology for the Church of England* (Amsterdam, 1688), 6.

Englishmen of all religious stripes protested against James's prosecution of the seven Anglican bishops in June 1688. Their protest against James's demand for ministers to read the Declaration of Indulgence from the pulpits reflected a wide concern over the king's interference in matters of religion.¹⁰²

The desire for a practical toleration on a day-to-day basis can be seen most clearly in the answers to the survey that the king sent out to the counties in 1687 and 1688. In order to see if he would have support for his agenda when he called the next parliament, the king requested that all the deputy lieutenants and justices of the peace be asked three questions. If called to Parliament themselves, would they vote to repeal the penal laws and Test Act? If not called themselves, would they elect someone who would vote this way? And would they support the king's declaration by living in a friendly manner with subjects of all persuasions?¹⁰³

There was an overwhelmingly negative response to the first two questions. Englishmen eligible for office or to vote for official positions repeatedly stated that they were suspicious of the plan to repeal the penal laws and did not want to commit to any position before there was a discussion in Parliament regarding this issue. But time and again, virtually unanimously, the responses to the third question show that people were willing to say they would live with their neighbors, even if they disagreed with them. "I have ever been of the king's opinion that conscience ought not to be forced;" "I think

¹⁰² Luttrell, *Brief Historical Relation*, 448; Edward Gee, *The Jesuit's Memorial* (London, 1690). (Gee dedicates this work to William Lloyd, Bishop of St. Asaph. Because of his "moderation" in following through on his "promises and intentions about accommodating matters with the moderate Dissenters, as well as giving ease to the rest of them," p. A4).

¹⁰³ *Calendar of State Papers*, 1687-9, 440.

there ought to be no preference even for religion or conscience;” “I declare I was always of the opinion that none ought to be restrained of Liberty of Conscience;” and “The Tests . . . are absolutely against the world of God, and contrived on purpose to destroy Monarchy.”¹⁰⁴ “I doe very well approve of the king’s Declaration of Indulgence,” Richard Musgrave went so far as to say. But he refused to say which way he’d vote and declared that he did “support the Protestant religion as it is now by law established.”¹⁰⁵ Clearly Englishmen did not want the king interfering with established parliamentary procedure in attempting to identify supporters before elections and parliamentary debate had occurred, but they did like the vision of tolerance that James advocated.

Even those who said they were not for repealing the Test Act agreed that they would live peaceably. Others said they would get along with their neighbors, but without reiterating that they would do so in support of the King’s Declaration. Many said it was what they did anyway, and they would simply continue to do so. “I do not (in my weak judgment) think that the taking away of the penal laws would be for the general good of this nation [But] to live peaceably (under the Government) with my fellow subjects of what persuasion soever, is a duty which I owe, both to God and the King.”¹⁰⁶ Some remembered that their own families had been persecuted and this experience made them want to be more tolerant themselves.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Duckett, ed., *Penal Laws and Test*, 31, 37, 43.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰⁷ From C. Morris, 15 Aug 1688, Stowe 746, f. 103, British Library, London.

The answers to the three questions demonstrate for the first time how widespread the attitude in favor of personal tolerance was. The wide polling shows a general agreement that unity of religious belief was not seen as necessary for peace and loyalty. The practical experience of the previous two years, in which Catholics and Protestants had worshipped openly side by side, contributed to this consensus, as shown by the manner in which it was referenced by the participants in the debates. **Give quotes**

In fact, many saw pluralism as promoting religious vitality. The Church of England was better off after this toleration, one polemicist explained. “Sermons [are] delivered almost from every pulpit, the ministers doubling their pains in emulation to the Catholic fathers, that they may retain their flocks firm to the Protestant religion.”¹⁰⁸ “Many of the clergy . . . set themselves to study the points of controversy,” wrote Burnet. “And upon that there followed a great variety of small books that were easily purchased and soon read This was done in so authentical a manner that popery itself was never so well understood by the nation, as it came to be upon this occasion.”¹⁰⁹ Edward Gee celebrated the efforts of the Anglican responses to Catholic tracts and “how successful they were. . . . to the lessening our Differences . . . and persuading great numbers to return and unite themselves to their Parish Churches.”¹¹⁰ “The English clergy everywhere preached boldly against their [Catholic] superstition and errors,” Evelyn concurred,

¹⁰⁸ *How Members of the Church of England Ought to Behave*, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Burnet, *History of My Own Time*, p. 98; John Gother also referenced the “zeal” of the Protestants in attempting to combat the Catholic missions: *Good Advice to the Pulpits* (London, 1687).

¹¹⁰ Edward Gee, *The Catalogue of all the Discourses Published against Popery* (London, 1689), 1.

and were wonderfully followed by the people. Not one considerable proselyte was made in all this time. The party were exceedingly put to the worse by the preaching and writing of the Protestants in many excellent treatises, evincing the doctrine and discipline of the reformed religion to the manifest disadvantage of their adversaries.¹¹¹

William Sherlock, the dean of St. Paul's, asserted that "popery was never so generally understood as it is at this day; the meanest Tradesmen can now dispute against popery with sufficient skill and Judgment, and need not be beholding to the prejudices of Education to secure them."¹¹² William Wake remembered his time living among Catholics on the continent and debating points of religion with them as being very helpful to the securing of his own faith.

For first of all I here contracted a good acquaintance with several eminent persons of different persuasions in matters of Religion To our house came strangers of all countries and Religions, with whom I freely conversed. This variety of company confirmed me in the Resolution I had before taken of Examining all things with the utmost impartiality and following that which upon the best Judgment I could make should appear to me to be Right.¹¹³

The debate that was waged so aggressively between Catholics and Protestants under James resulted, according to Protestant observers, in a more educated laity.

Thus, the toleration enforced on England, while treated suspiciously because of its extra-parliamentary nature, promoted a widespread agreement that Christians of all stripes could certainly live peacefully next to each other; that Catholicism was not as powerful in England as had been feared; that Protestants could support each other against

¹¹¹ Evelyn, *Diary*, vol. 2, 273, 274. 10 March 1687) Roger North agreed that Anglican clergy were kept in "perpetual exercise by the papists and the sectaries." BL, Add MS 32526, f. 86. "of the clergy."

¹¹² William Sherlock, *A Preservative against Popery* (London, 1688), 1.

¹¹³ MS 2932, 11b-12, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

tyranny and superstition; and that pluralism, while anxiety-producing, was beneficial to religion overall—especially if there was an established church to lean on.

Aftermath

The Act of Toleration in 1689 allowed for limited licensing of meeting houses for Trinitarian Protestant Dissenters. Penal laws were still on the books for Catholics and other recusants, although they were rarely enforced. The discussion leading up to the Act reflected the same issues that had come to the front through the debate with the Catholics under James II. “As to the Act or clause of pains and penalties,” wrote Roger North, “I think they intend thereby to convict and punish all that shall be excepted, most by fine, some with disabilities, but none with death.”¹¹⁴ The idea that the Act of Toleration should be temporary, based on the good behavior of the Dissenters, “was rejected; there was now an universal inclination to pass the ActIt was thought very unreasonable, Burnet remembered, “that, while we were complaining of the cruelty of the church of Rome, we should fall into such practices among ourselves.”¹¹⁵ However, while it might be fine to take away the penal laws, most English Protestants wanted to keep the Test Act on the grounds that Catholics did not need high positions.¹¹⁶

The Act of Toleration was cobbled together out of bits and pieces of lessons learned. But the tide had turned in the discussion of toleration; it was now widely agreed upon in sentiment. But what it meant, exactly, continued to be debated. “Concerning

¹¹⁴ Roger North to? Jan 1689, Add MS 32524, f. 2, British Library, London.

¹¹⁵ William Gibson, ed., *Religion and Society in England, and Wales, 1689-1800* (London: Leicester University, 1998), 30, 31.

¹¹⁶ R. S., *A Letter to a Person of Quality* (London 1689), 1-3. This author had visited St. Omers and was quite moderate socially, but still thought it best to keep Catholics out of office, as many of them could be suspected of being Jacobites.

Toleration and Persecution, . . . 'tis impossible to speak intelligibly of the one without supposing the other, there being no middle way of Acting, in matters purely speculative or indifferent.”¹¹⁷ Persecution could be defined as “the greatest Severities, as Deprivations, Finings, Imprisonments, and Banishments”¹¹⁸ or in more colorful terms as “Fire, Sword, and Dragooning, . . . Inquisitions, Gallies and Massacres, or . . . Fines, Imprisonment and Banishment.”¹¹⁹ When fines could be considered persecution, the debate can be seen to have moved a long way from the controversy during the Popish Plot, when priests were drawn and quartered.

Even Catholicism might be less menacing than had been thought. “[Popery] was propogated, cherished, and made to grow as much as twas possible in our cold and stubborn climate,” a Protestant taunted, and yet, it failed.¹²⁰ The Earl of Halifax counted “popery” as one of the “things that can never prevail upon men’s minds, if they have time enough to consider them.”¹²¹ While Catholicism had not taken root, the passion for toleration had. “I think it very plain,” Archbishop Tillotson wrote two years after the Act passed, “that no man can join in prayers in which there is any petition which he is verily persuaded is sinful. I cannot endure a trick anywhere, much less in Religion.”¹²² The

¹¹⁷ John Toland to a dissenter, 1707, MS 933, f. 8, 2, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

¹¹⁸ Unisigned letter to--, endorsed by Tenison. October 1703, MS 929, f. 13, 8-9, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

¹¹⁹ Robert Fleming, *Divine Government of Nations* (London, 1699), 37, 38.

¹²⁰ *A Friendly Letter to Father Petre* (London, 1690), 6.

¹²¹ Halifax to Prince of Orange, Aug. 25, 1688, *Calendar of State Papers*, 1687-9.

¹²² From Archbishop Tillotson to Nelson, 5 Dec. 1691, Add MS 4236, f. 249, British Library, London.

practice of Catholicism under James had demonstrated the possibility of religious worship without a “trick.”

The Church of England was forever changed. It now permanently had to court Nonconformity of all stripes.¹²³ No longer was it enough to accuse Dissenters of being radical regicides. “I further urged the boast of the Dissenters made of their proselytizing many that had been members of the Church of England,” an Anglican clergyman wrote to his bishop, “and that now especially (in the present posture of affairs) it stood upon us, to be more than ordinary vigilant and active in securing our people against their insinuations and snares.”¹²⁴ Good schools were promoted, to compete with Dissenting academies.¹²⁵ When the plan for widening the Church of England by comprehending Dissent into the established church failed, the ideal of a truly national church died.¹²⁶ One Whig Dissenter explained that an Act of Toleration meant that churches would have to work harder to get members and that this would benefit all concerned.

But hold Sir! Is't Impossible to Save
The Church's Life, and keep her from the Grave,
Unless these steel Prescriptions we have?
Pray tell me how in Ages Primitive
She made a shift to keep herself alive,
And flourished, too? Or else resolve me how
All pious pastors hold up churches now

¹²³ Thomas Comber to Mr. Munlove, 7 March 1691, Birch 4275, f. 117, British Library, London. Even the French Huguenots would sometimes choose to join Dissenting churches instead of the Anglicans and so had to be treated well—Petition from seven French ministers to Tenison, 1694, MS 929, f. 53, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

¹²⁴ Edward Bowerman to Bishop of Lincoln, 17 Dec. 1692, MS 933, f. 9, p. 10, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

¹²⁵ Maurice, Master Wheeler to Tenison, 11 Feb 1699, MS 929, f. 49, pp. 2-3, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

¹²⁶ Diary of Liturgical commission by Dr. Williams, 1689, MS 1774, Lambeth Palace Library, London; and Tillotson to Stillingfleet, Sept. 1689, Add MS 4236, ff. 19-20, British Library, London.

By preaching and good lives and so may you.¹²⁷

Historian John Spurr argues that the Anglican polity never recovered from this failure of the vision of unity, and became hopelessly fragmented.¹²⁸

Anglicans hoped that Dissenters might “forgive and forget,”¹²⁹ and for some this was possible. Occasional conformity increased, and the theological urgency of Dissent had died out with the loss of emphasis regarding belief in the Antichrist and predestination.¹³⁰ But most agreed with John Hampden who wrote his friend that

I should be much for actual union among all Protestants in England, if I thought it could be obtained; but I have really laid aside all thoughts of Comprehension, ever since I saw plainly that the design of some who drove it was only to destroy obliquely, and by a sidewind, what had been gained at a favorable time in the Act of Toleration, which they durst not directly attempt to overthrow. Tis . . . much more adviseable to stick at Liberty of Conscience.”¹³¹

Thus, the evangelistic aspect of Dissent remained prominent, with schools and congregations rising and falling with the demand.¹³²

For Dissent as well as Catholicism and the Church of England, the missionary efforts under James had institutionalized toleration and, thus, competition. Edward

¹²⁷ *The Twinne Shams* (London, 1693?), 9

¹²⁸ John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 379.

¹²⁹ Lawrence Mayer to Mr. Strype, 30 Sept. 1700, Add MS 5853, f. 34, British Library, London.

¹³⁰ Spurr, *English Puritans*, 181, 169; Every, 110; BL Add MS 4275, f. 329. From John Howe to J. Boyse, 3 June 1699.

¹³¹ “To Rev. Mr. Tallents from John Hampden, 27 May 1693,” Stowe MS 747, f. 16, British Library, London.

¹³³ Vincint Alsop and Richard Stretton to a Cambridge minister, 1697, Add MS 4276, f. 144, British Library, London; Tillotson to Bishop of York, 1692, Add MS 4236, f. 57, British Library, London; Richard Stretton from Richard Gilpin, 1698, Birch 4275, British Library, London; Newcastle Congregation to Timothy Manlowe, 1699, Add MS 38856, f. 114, British Library, London.

Calamy, active under William in the Reformation of Manners movement, explained that his Nonconformist father had inculcated practical “moderation” and toleration “into me from my very cradle.”¹³³ Calamy testified to the manner in which intimate friendships with Anglicans and others had vested him with an affection for “all such as were truly pious and bore the image of God upon them, whatsoever their particular sentiments might be.”¹³⁴ Once again, the practical experience of toleration, as well as the invigorating debate among Christians, expanded the possibilities for a permanent toleration.

The reign of James and the Catholic missions had proven that Protestant toleration was reasonable, necessary, and even beneficial. Thus, the thrust of the English Protestants’ petition to William and Mary on the eve of the Glorious Revolution included the request that the Oranges help England settle a legal toleration.

Time and accident always made changes in the usefulness of laws, and that it hath so happened in our penal laws made for uniformity in the profession of faith, and in the outward worship of God... We therefore humbly pray our highnesses to procure as a case of necessity that none be disturbed until a legal Parliament shall have resolved the case for the profession of their faith in matters merely supernatural, or the outward expression of their worship so as both terminate only in God, and neither wrong nor hurt any man on earth in Body, goods, and good name; but their own souls only if they be mistaken therein.¹³⁵

The Catholic missionary effort then, was crucial for promoting an arena for Englishmen and women to discuss toleration and the effects of living with others of different persuasions. The debate regarding James’s measures to promote his religion centered around their legality, not the principle of toleration (which they all claimed to

¹³³ Edmund Calamy, *Historical Account*, 72-73.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³⁵ BL, Add MS 32095, ff. 283-296, 28. English Protestants to William and Mary, (1688).

hold). The polemic between Anglican and Catholic divines forced the former to articulate their position of toleration and compelled them to plan for a post-1688 settlement that would allow for diversity of communion. The experience of toleration taught English Protestants that they were in no danger of becoming Catholic and that as long as popish principles were kept out of government, more freedom could be given to recusancy. The ubiquitous emotion (which would not have been imagined in the aftermath of the Popish Plot less than ten years earlier) after the Glorious Revolution was expressed in “A Poem upon the Bill of Conformity,” which demonstrates an anti-Catholicism that is directly connected to Jacobitism--there is danger of popery, but it is even more overtly political than ever before:

Far from us let Persecution Reign,
Slavery in France and Bigotry in Spain;
The best of kings the best of gifts bestowed,
Kind toleration by Law allowed.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ BL, Add MS 25490, f. 13. Henry Loall. “A Poem upon the Bill of Conformity” *Britain in hazard of Bondage* (London, 1710?). Demonstrates an anti-Catholicism that is directly connected to Jacobitism. There is danger of popery, but it is even more overtly political than ever before.

