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For Conscience and Kingdom

Martyrs, Monarchs and the Spirit of Modernity in Early Modern England

Abstract

This article compares the collective commemoration of martyrs to ascertain changes in cultural understandings of the relationship between the ultimate sacrifice offered by an individual and monarchal violence. This historical comparison is used to argue that changes in the nature of Christianity transformed the popular interpretation of sovereign violence from a desecrative to a redemptive force. While cultural individualism and political statism appear in secularized modernity as contradictory impulses, their birth in early modernity was induced by coherent and entirely consistent religious worldview.

Keywords: Sacrifice; Modernity; Monarchy; Martyrdom; Heresy; Conscience.

Theorists of the liberal vision of politics, from Judith Shklar to Mark Lilla and Bryan S. Turner, have argued that our modern situation is the result of the early modern emergence of the centralized sovereign state [Lilla 2008; Shklar 1989: 23; Turner 2013: 55-80]. This perspective, which emphasizes the philosophical intervention of Hobbes alongside historical events like the Treaty of Westphalia, argues that sovereign states emerged in the 16th and 17th century to rescue Europe from religious violence, and that through the monopolization of violence, Western states were able to initiate a modern politics defined by the rights of the individual conscience.

This liberal vision of Western history, in which the sovereign state smothers a violent form of superstition and encourages the growth of personal conscience, has been echoed in recent public debates over the relationship between religion, the state and individual liberty. It has been applied (in greatly modified forms) by public intellectuals across

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the political spectrum, from Steven Pinker on the left to Douglas Murray on the right [Murray 2017; Pinker 2011].

Though the liberal theory of the state has long been the most popular story of the birth of modern politics and sovereignty, it is not the only historical interpretation on offer. Those who have sought to rescue historical religion from the scorn of posterity (to paraphrase E.P. Thompson) have tended to diminish the role of religion and religious violence in the birth of the early modern state. For the historian of religion Karen Armstrong, most associations drawn between religion and violence—including analysis of Europe's "Wars of Religion"—are specious. Politics, and not religion, is the fundamental root of conflict; thus, any historical or political theory which identifies religion as inherently violent rests atop a shaky foundational premise [Armstrong 2015]. Similarly, the theologian William T. Cavanaugh has argued that the birth of the modern state was less a case of enlightened politics than of political extortion, that the history of the modern state as told by liberal theorists is not only empirically wrong but ultimately persecutory of traditional religion [Cavanaugh 1995].

Historical sociologists have also developed a substantive critique of liberalism's story of Western history. However, where defenders of traditional religion reverse liberal theory, depicting the rise of the state as a conflict against traditional religious belief, historical sociologists of the modern state have tended to minimize the role of religion altogether. The two primary schools of historiography on the early modern origins of the state tend to focus either on the role of conflict between competing forms of feudal power (e.g., kingdoms, city-states, class antagonisms) or cultural shifts in social organization (e.g., proto-bureaucracies). In the former camp are Marxists like Perry Anderson and Immanuel Wallerstein, as well as the political scientist Hendrik Spruyt; in the latter camp are cultural sociologists like Reinhard Bendix and historians like Joseph Strayer [Anderson 1974; Bendix 1978; Spruyt 1996; Strayer 1970; Wallerstein 2011]. Between the two are those like Charles Tilly and Norbert Elias, both of whom argued that the cultural foundations of the modern state's legitimacy emerged from cycles of conflict and the monopolization of violence [Elias 1982; Tilly 1992].

None of these otherwise antagonistic visions of the early modern state dwell on the specific form of cultural conflict—religious violence—which is often alleged by liberal theorists to be the source of both the centralized sovereign state and the modern politics of conscience. Even the recent historical work on confessionalization and

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the role of religion in early modern cultural and political change do not give prominence of place to sectarian violence. For example, the sociologist Philip Gorski has argued that to the extent that religion influenced the development of the state, it was largely as an unintended consequence of certain disciplinary dispositions found in Calvinism and adjacent asceticisms born during the Reformation [Gorski 2003].

Historical sociologists have, then, had much to say about the emergence of state sovereignty in Western history. However, while the topic of the state has been a primary interest, sociologists have only considered the liberal theory of history indirectly. This is surprising because the liberal theory of history—which posits that the state emerged as a form of intervention against religious conflict and subsequently established politics of personal conscience—cuts at the heart of canonical sociological theory.

Much like liberal theorists, the founders of the "science of modernity" were principally concerned with the relationship between the individual person and emerging, large-scale social structures like the state. For all of their disagreements, the collective efforts of Tocqueville, Weber and Durkheim suggest a discipline that would dedicate itself to resolving the question of how an age of individualism might also be an age of larger, more centralized organizational forms.

The theoretical concern with the relationship between individualism and modern, centralized social structures has lingered in sociology, if in greatly modified forms. Thus, much of late 20th century sociology was dedicated to the "structure-agency" debate which, in the form of someone like Anthony Giddens, occasionally made explicit reference to the "founding" interpretations of modernity [Giddens 1990]. Less obviously, one sees the classical preoccupation with modernity's founding tension in the work of thinkers as diverse as Foucault and Barrington Moore, both of whom have dealt with the seeming contradiction of societies dedicated both to politics of the individual person (which might be called individualism, liberty, liberalism, freedom, etc.) and to a political apparatus that is centralized, monopolizing and largely impersonal [Foucault 1990].

Sociologists, then, have long shared theoretical concerns with liberal theorists and thinkers. However, the approach to these concerns is quite distinct. Liberal theorists see the relationship between the modern sovereign state and the politics of individualism as both a historical necessity and a historical success. Sociologists have tended to see this same settlement—of societies defined by a culture of

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individualism and politics of centralization—as a potentially unsettling paradox, one which might produce the malign symptoms of anomie, alienation and tyranny.

But it is worth noting that historically-minded sociologists have not confronted liberalism's historical narrative directly, preferring to develop alternative explanations that focus on either material conflicts or organizational transformations. This is unfortunate, as the tensions observed by sociologists between individualism and the centralization and monopolization of social life remain. Indeed, this tension is most acute in political life, where debates over how to balance the powers of the state, individual rights and accommodations for religious groups are fundamental to larger struggles over (for example) migration, European integration and globalization.

At the same time, sociology has a celebrated history of explaining contemporary paradox with reference to historical analysis. Consider Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic*: observing a strong correlation between Protestantism and successful capitalist development, Weber noted the obvious paradox. How did the once pious Calvinist become a captain of industry? This mystery might have been explained away by simply dismissing the substance of Protestantism. Instead, Weber burrowed into Protestantism, arguing that its theological principles were unexpectedly hospitable to the development of the spirit of capitalism.

In this article I would like to develop a similar tactic for interpreting the contemporary tension in Western societies which prioritize both individualism and strong, centralized states. I argue that what appears contradictory in contemporary history has a historical logic which, in early modernity, was reasonable and consistent. Specifically, I want to invert the liberal theory of history and suggest that personal conscience was not a product of the sovereign state, but a necessary cultural pre-requisite. The primacy of personal conscience (in other words of cultural individualism) was encouraged by dramatic religious change in the late medieval and early modern period, especially the European Reformations.

With the Reformations, Europeans of all religious affiliations were increasingly confronted with situations in which truth was not part of a fixed exterior order, but something determined increasingly by the individual. However, the new prominence of personal conscience was accompanied by the grave threat of heresy: suddenly everyone was much more liable to dogmatic corruption. Faced with the threat of heresy, populations turned increasingly toward the central sovereign.

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This interpretation achieves three things. First, it offers a historical explanation for one dimension of the individual-structure tension which sociologists have long considered. Second, it overcomes the tendency in the liberal theory of history to explain the rise of the state in terms of its eventual accomplishments. Finally, this interpretation suggests a new mechanism in the historical process of secularization. In interiorizing truth and delegating new powers and authorities to emerging sovereign states, early modern religion created new social conditions in which religion itself was neither necessary nor particularly welcome.

Much like Weber's work in *The Protestant Ethic*, my goal here is not to test a causal hypothesis, but to demonstrate the historical logic which connects seemingly contradictory concepts. As with Weber's work, one might eventual derive causal hypothesis from the argument developed here. However, it is necessary to demonstrate the logic of a theory prior to testing it.

In demonstrating this argument, I will focus my attention on a fairly narrow patch of the empirical reserve. Were I testing causal hypotheses, this myopia would be unforgiveable. But the Weberian approach, especially when attempting to construct a sociological history of the present, benefits from the proximity offered by small-*n* studies (consider that Weber's "spirit of capitalism" is never clearer than when presented in a concise quotation by Benjamin Franklin). A smaller number of cases nurtures the sensation of being physically near to history, a sensation which can enliven concepts and cultivate the imaginative qualities required for an artful interpretation.

To demonstrate a new interpretation of the historical relationship between personal conscience, the sovereign state and religion, I will limit my analysis to three cases of martyrdom in English history, between the 12th and 16th centuries (the martyrs themselves are Thomas Becket, Thomas More and Thomas Cranmer). Cases of martyrdom offer an important test of the liberal theory of history, but are also well-suited to reflecting on the relationship between personal beliefs, political power and religion. This is because martyrdom is popularly understood as the product of both zealous persecution and zealous commitments. At the same time, martyrdom is a moment when a bereaved community commemorates a death collectively through the language of ultimate sacrifice. In this sense, martyrdom is not only a matter of conscience and of violence, but also a moment when communities reflect on larger questions like the legitimate means of violence or what might constitute a good death. Because

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martyrdom is both a matter of personal conscience and a reflection of the collective conscience, a historical comparison of martyrs is well-suited to the discussion at hand.

The selection of English martyrs—rather than martyrs of the Lowlands or France or southern Europe—is also not entirely arbitrary. While medieval and early modern England might not be perfectly representative of historical changes elsewhere in Europe, the case does present certain advantages for the present discussion. First, while continental Protestantism was extremely heterogeneous, English Protestantism was comparatively unified (intra-Protestant theological controversy suggested differences of degree rather than kind); this makes the identification of religious change somewhat simpler. Second, while the cases of martyrdom discussed below are separated by centuries, they are held together by the thread of English identity; Thomas Becket figured prominently in the prayer and thought of both Thomas More and Thomas Cranmer. Here again cultural consistency renders cultural change more apparent.

Cumulatively, the cases of martyrdom analyzed below will demonstrate a dramatic shift in the relation between individuals, traditional religion and temporal power in English life between the 12th and 16th centuries. This shift corresponds with the interpretation of early modernity outlined above, in which religious change (rather than religious violence) welcomes the arrival of centralized early modern states, ultimately catalyzing the historical process of secularization. This analysis bridges liberal and sociological theories of modernity, demonstrating the original coherence of a social order premised on both individualism and a centralized state, while also suggesting that this coherence was fractured by secularization. If the historical analysis below does not prove my theory of political and religious modernization, I believe it is suggestive enough to challenge the liberal theory of history and invite further historical assessment.

Martyrdom and monarchy in medieval england

In the early days of feudalism power and authority were "parcelized", which is to say fractured and local [Anderson 1974: 15]. By the 12th century, French and English kings ruled over expanding stretches of territory through a synthesis of traditional and charismatic authority, and were developing increasingly stable networks of loyal

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extractive bureaucracies [Cantor 1994: 277-288]. But these kings faced one insurmountable obstacle: the sovereignty of God and his church on Earth.

Thomas Becket's (c. 1119-1170) life and death is perhaps the most famous example of this conflict. Becket was a parvenu, climbing from obscurity to become chancellor to the Angevin king Henry II in 1154 and from their Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162 [Barlow 1990: 24-63]. Within a year of his election to Canterbury, Becket was feuding with Henry II, his former companion and employer.

At the heart of the conflict between Thomas Becket and Henry II was a struggle over the boundaries of monarchal power and authority. Henry's reign saw the monarchy's capabilities expand. Yet despite growing powers and a multiplication of authority, Henry's rule faced one obvious and irritating obstacle: the judicial independence of English clergymen. At the time of Thomas's appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury, the English church maintained the liberty to act as sole arbiter in the judgment and sentencing of any church official accused of a crime, regardless of the nature of the accusation [Pollock and Maitland 1889: 111-137]. Throughout 1163 and 1164, Henry II and Thomas Becket, now Archbishop of Canterbury, feuded over the matter of ecclesiastical courts. A series of dramatic showdowns between the two men culminated in Thomas fleeing England with a small retinue, eventually finding sanctuary as exiles in France. Thomas and his companions would stay in France for six years, his conflict with Henry transformed into a bitter epistolary attrition. This was not merely a matter of vendetta. Thomas and Henry were feuding over the nature of power and authority in a Christian culture. To support their rival claims, each sought out alliances with the continent's elite, both lay and clerical.

In July of 1170, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Henry II, King of England, were formally reconciled. The armistice had been affected by Pope Alexander III. However, even as the king and the archbishop were formally reconciled, the fundamental issues underlying the conflict remained unresolved. When Thomas landed in England he was immediately met by a delegation of prelates and representatives of the king. When he attempted to travel the kingdom he was detained by royal representatives and ordered to stay at Canterbury [Barlow 1990: 230].

With tensions mounting, Thomas celebrated Christmas Eve mass by excommunicating anyone who impinged upon the liberties of the church, referencing his neighboring royalist foes by name. With this

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dramatic gesture Thomas assured further conflict: not only had he alienated almost every bishop in the primacy, he had defied Henry's much prized customs by not consulting with the king before pursuing excommunication. Christmas Day brought the unwelcome news to Henry, adding to the surfeit of grievances he held against Thomas. Henry raged that his household was full of "miserable drones and traitors… who let their lord be treated with shameful contempt by a lowborn clerk!" Hearing that remark, four of the king's knights discretely departed for Canterbury, intent on avenging their king's honor (and him unaware of their plan) [Barlow 1990: 235; Schama 2002: 142].

When the four knights reached England, they joined local royalists, and together led a force to Canterbury with the apparent goal of taking over the archiepiscopal palace and pressuring Thomas into absolving all those whom he had recently excommunicated. On December 29, the party reached Canterbury and the four knights sought an interview with the archbishop. The knights charged Thomas with disrupting the peace, defying custom, and inspiring sedition [e.g., Guy 2012: 314-324].

The encounter erupted in mutually exchanged threats and the knights departed. The small invading force then entered the palace, forcing its residents and guests to flee into the adjoining church. Thomas was not cornered, but even as his clerks fled, the archbishop turned to face his pursuers. When the knights cried out for the traitor, Thomas replied, "[h]ere I am. No traitor to the king, but a priest of God. What do you want?" [qtd. in Barlow 1990: 245].

It is uncertain what, exactly, the four knights wanted. They would later claim to have hoped to seize Thomas and take him to the king. In any case, Thomas resisted the knights' attempts to grab him, and as more onlookers gathered to witness the commotion, some combination of desperation, confusion, and rage led the knights to raise their swords. Thomas then bent in prayer. A bystander attempted to protect Thomas, but the first blow cleaved the archbishop's skull. The next blow opened his skull. Finally, one of the men pierced the skull, crushing the brain and opening a gory flood of blood and matter [Black 1846: 109].

Even in its last, agonizing minutes, the life of Thomas Becket managed to capture the fundamental conflicts of Christian social life in late medieval England, and to do so in a manner that seems nearly choreographed for all of its symbols and poignant rhetoric. The final words exchanged are not quite scripted, but still capture the spirit of

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the scene. As they beat and stabbed the archbishop, the four knights shouted about royal honor, while in his dying moments Thomas is reported to have gasped "[f]or the name of Jesus and the protection of the church I am ready to embrace death" [qtd. in Guy 2012: 321].

If Thomas's life and murder vividly captured a power struggle characteristic of expanding monarchic ambition, his subsequent martyrdom suggests how particular features of medieval culture could be mobilized to critique or undermine the sovereignty of an otherwise ascendant king. In death, Thomas would achieve more than he ever could have in life; his posthumous influence weakened Henry and fortified the cultural and institutional powers of Christian culture in England and across the West. Almost immediately after the murder, two commemorative processes began to unfold that would transform a controversial cleric into one of the most beloved martyrs and saints of his time.

The first process central to the martyrdom occurred at the level of popular culture. Just days after his death, reports began to spread of miracles associated with the archbishop. Catalogued primarily by the monks of Canterbury, the miracles most frequently involved a dramatic health recovery [Magnusson 1883: 141]. In the year following his death, 176 miracles were attributed to Thomas. Though initially concentrated around Canterbury and associated with visits to the murder scene, roughly half of the miracles that occurred in the first year happened outside of the immediate vicinity, some as far off as Flanders [Prudlo 2011]. The proliferation of miracles generated mass affection for Thomas, but this seemingly spontaneous process was joined by a more deliberate form of commemoration. Immediately following his death, a tireless industry of literary production emerged.

The prodigious epistolary efforts of Thomas's clerks Herbert of Bosham and John of Salisbury, coupled with the reportage of the Canterbury monks, formed a narrative of suffering in which the miracles of Thomas were inseparably bound to his conflicts with the king and his eventual murder. In essence, the commemorative efforts of Christendom's literary elite forged a story of sacrifice in which Thomas's death redeemed his own struggles and suffering even as it exposed the injustice of Henry's violence. This process would culminate in the canonization of Saint Thomas of Canterbury by Pope Alexander III three short years after the murder.

The process of creating a martyr was initiated almost immediately following his death. John of Salisbury, one of Thomas's oldest friends and a witness to the murder, composed a widely circulated letter in

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early 1171. Just weeks after the murder, John assumes that readers on the continent are "already well-informed about the passion of the glorious martyr Thomas, archbishop of Canterbury [...] commonly known throughout the whole Latin world" [Giles 1846: 727]. In the same letter, John proceeds to establish the essence of the martyr's sacrifice: "Every circumstance in the archbishop's death agony conspired to glorify the dying man forever, to reveal the depravity of the assailants and brand them eternally with shame" [Giles 1846: 727].

In John's telling, Thomas is not only "the holy archbishop, primate of Britain, legate of the Holy See," but also "incorrupt", "protagonist of the Church's liberty", "a man who fought to the death to preserve his God's law and to make nought abuses which came from ancient tyrants" [Giles 1846: 727]. Thomas had "shown himself long since a living sacrifice" [Giles 1846: 727]. John describes Thomas as the ideal Christian: "he had been used to offer Christ's body and blood upon the altar: and now, prostrate at the altar's foot, he offered his own blood shed of evil men" [Giles 1846: 729]. John catalogues the sins of these evil men at length: not only are they murderers, but they commit sacrilege, murdering the archbishop on a holy day and in a sacred place.

Others quickly joined John of Salisbury: Louis VII, King of France, wrote to Alexander III regarding "the man who commits violence upon his mother", who "has with the sword pierced the beloved son of Christ" [Internet Medieval Sourcebook 1998]. Louis describes the violence as an act of injustice so brazen that it is unprecedented: "the novelty of a cruelty so unheard of." This is contrasted with the "Divine glory" of Thomas's suffering, which are "revealed in miracles." Faced with such a contrast, Louis suggests that the Pope "[l]et the sword of Saint Peter be unsheathed to avenge the martyr of Canterbury" [Internet Medieval Sourcebook 1998]

Why was Thomas's death the cause of such commemorative commotion, with pilgrims crowding Canterbury, clerics penning hagiographies, and kings rushing to assume postures of piety?

Faced with the turmoil and conflict of high medieval Western Christendom, it can be difficult to see the cultural consensus that bound combatants of the period. Thomas Becket, Pope Alexander III, Louis VII, Henry II, John of Salisbury, and the pilgrims seeking intercession at Canterbury: all shared the same assumptions about the workings of the cosmos. Despite political conflict and raucous theological debate, this was an era in which it was assumed that

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everything good on Earth was the product of a higher good: divine providence.

Thomas and Henry II were not disputing this fundamental reality, but were engaged in a protracted struggle over how God's higher goods would be mediated on Earth. Thomas's murder and martyrdom was a dramatic and morbid extension of this debate. Whomever controlled the legacy of his death might be able to draw on the magic and popularity of the murdered archbishop to advance their claims.

On their own, the miracles might have been politically neutral. However, Thomas's sympathizers formed a productive commemorative community that forged an influential explanation of Thomas's posthumous powers as a miracle worker. In their letters to elites across Christendom, the commemorative community offered vivid descriptions of the murder which formed a contrast between the saintly Thomas, honest and humble servant of God, and the villainous henchmen who murdered him on sacred ground. The descriptions of Thomas's sacrifice formed in these early postmortem correspondences produce a potent opposition: the sanctified archbishop who would suffer all for his God and church, and the king's men, lured by evil to violent sacrilege.

As ever, it is difficult to measure the direct consequences of a cultural object like martyrdom, doubly so if our measurements are transcribed in the units of modern politics. In 1173, Thomas was formally canonized by Pope Alexander III. This meant that the charismatic powers of Thomas were formally given a reality within Christian social life. For English Christians, and particularly clerical office holders, this recognition would have been a potent symbol: Thomas Becket would henceforth become a model for English clergymen.

But a more important, if less discernable outcome of Thomas's martyrdom involves its influence on the Angevin monarchy. After the martyrdom, Henry was forced to assume a penitent posture. Contrition is not a word frequently employed by Henry II's biographers, but the pressure was immense: the frenzy over Thomas's miraculous powers would only grow over the years. These powers were increasingly associated with the sacrifice of the archbishop, an act of violence that was said to be produced by the collision of the monarch's ambition with Thomas's devotion to Christ.

Given the excitement over Thomas's miracles, and their emerging association with the archbishop's suffering on behalf of church liberty, the king was forced to concede his involvement and accept some form of papal punishment if he was to be absolved. Some eighteen months after the murder, Henry met with papal legates in Avranches,

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Normandy. After two days of deliberation, the king and the papacy were reconciled, the parties having agreed to the general terms of penance [Guy 2012: 324-336]. Henry promised to go on crusade the following year and nullified the Constitutions of Clarendon, formally withdrawing claims of customary jurisdiction over the clergy.

To what extent were Henry's concessions merely symbolic? Henry's incipient bureaucracy, which established his reign as one of the era's most effective and influential, retained much of its power. However, its expansion into ecclesiastical territory was thwarted, particularly with regards to the issue of "criminous clerks" which had catalyzed the conflict in the first place [Cheney 1941: 189].

But beyond administrative policy, the consideration of the nature of Henry's concession prompts a reflection on the symbolic content of Angevin kingship and the influence of Thomas's martyrdom on the understanding of monarchical sovereignty. If Becket's murder and martyrdom left Henry chastened, the subsequent rebellion against the king, led by his sons and encouraged by his wife, would see him hobbled, if only temporarily.

Thomas Becket may or may not have inspired the "king in waiting", Henry III, to rise up against his father. Thomas had been the younger Henry's tutor and mentor for years, and the two had an affectionate relationship. It has been suggested that Thomas's murder inspired bad feelings between Henry II and his heir [Jones 1970: 30; Weiler 2009: 21-22].

Yet even if the martyrdom was not directly responsible for inspiring the rebellion, it played a pivotal role in its conclusion. When fighting first broke out in April of 1173, Henry II's success seemed inevitable. But when conflict persisted, Henry II sailed for England.

Writing just decades after the event, the historian William of Newburgh offered the following description of Henry II's return to England: "[…] remembering how much he had sinned against the church of Canterbury, he proceeded thither when he landed, and prayed, freely shedding tears at the tomb of Thomas" [Stevenson 1856: 493-5].

The vivid descriptions of Henry's pilgrimage offered by historians writing in the aftermath of the events seem to suggest a genuine contrition. William of Newburgh, for example, continues his brief description of the pilgrimage by recounting how "[o]n entering the chapter of the monks, he prostrated himself on the ground and with utmost humility entreated pardon; and, at his urgent petition, he, though so great a man, was corporally beaten with rods by all the bretheren in succession" [Stevenson 1856: 493-5].

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Other historians focus on similar acts of suffering, recounting how the king ate only bread and drank only water throughout the pilgrimage, how he walked the last miles to Canterbury barefoot, and how, perhaps in homage to Thomas, he donned clothes of irritating fabric [Magnusson 1883: 176-7]. While details of Henry II's pilgrimage vary, general aspects are confirmed across the histories: that under duress Henry II made a pilgrimage to Canterbury, where he pleaded for forgiveness and the saint's intervention. Nor is there any doubt that the end of the pilgrimage coincided with near immediate victory for the elder Henry.

The martyrdom of Thomas Becket—that is, the efforts of a vast commemorative community dedicated to connecting his life and causes to his posthumous powers—formed a rebuke to monarchic ambition. That the martyrdom prompted policy concessions, however slight or temporary, is undeniable. But perhaps more consequentially the martyrdom of Thomas Becket hardened those faint elements of Christian political theology which offered implicit rejection of absolute and divine monarchy. As an earthly king, Henry II could only ever be proximate to the divine. By contrast, the Christ-like suffering of Thomas Becket culminated in a sacrifice that opened a direct connection to a higher power and offered the most perfect earthly incarnation of the medieval Christian higher good.

Henry II's reign is generally seen as a gradual displacement of the "parcelized sovereignty" of medieval Western Christendom by a centralizing power. His reign was not, in any traditional sense, a revolution in rule. Rather, his success was achieved by modification, retaining much of the customs, institutions, and offices of feudalism but drawing them ever tighter in the webs of monarchic sovereignty. Against these developments, the symbolic contents of Thomas Becket's martyrdom proved a formidable bulwark. If the perpetual ambiguity of medieval Christian political theology had, for a moment, seemed to endow Henry II's early reign with far-reaching power and authority, the martyrdom of Thomas Becket drew clear limits to the sovereign ambitions of the regnum.

Martyrdom in early modern england

My goal here is not to isolate the martyrdom of the Middle Ages, but to use historical changes in the nature of martyrdom's "symbolic violence" to view wider social changes that accompanied the rise of

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modernity, particularly concerning the relationship between a culture of individualism and the emergence of the sovereign state. Shifts in the nature of the martyr's sacrifice across time will be used as a prism through which to view the changing interaction of sovereignty, religion, and the individual.

With that in mind, this section offers an analysis of English martyrs created by commemorative communities between the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. I have narrowed the abundant potential cases down based on three criteria: historical influence, uniqueness, and religious-political affiliation, with the ultimate goal of producing in the briefest survey some sense of the breadth and complexity of martyrs produced in England's first steps into early modernity.

Within these parameters, Thomas More (1478-1535) is the first in line, his death and martyrdom first of an era and foremost in fame. More's record as an intellect and writer, civil servant and persecutor, rebel and martyr, have motivated hagiographers and historians since his execution in 1535. With his canonization in the 20th century, More's celebrity increased and, ironically, became increasingly secularized.

In his manner of death More is frequently compared with Thomas Becket (a comparison urged by More in a late letter, and by circumstance—More was executed on the day of Becket's translation). It is an instructive comparison. There are, of course, several coincidences: two Thomases face off against two Henrys, both conflicts generally involving some interaction of religion and politics. Both Thomas Becket and Thomas More were onetime loyal servants to the king, and both emerged from relatively marginal London families to positions of prominence. But to what extent do these symmetries extend into posthumous territory?

The circumstances leading to More's death need only be briefly treated. More, long a reluctant partner to Henry VIII's ambition, retired from the office of chancellor in 1532. Two years after retiring, Parliament passed a succession of bills that established royal supremacy over the English church. The *Act Respecting the Oath to the Succession*, passed in 1534, intruded upon More's contemplative retirement. More could not accept the terms of the oath, which compelled those who were asked not only to pledge loyalty to Henry VIII, but to publicly accept Anne Boleyn as queen, honor the legitimacy of their offspring, and renounce the rights of "any foreign power or potentate" (including the papacy) to influence English domestic life [Solt 1990: 29].

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When called upon to take the oath, More tactfully declined. For this obstinacy, More was imprisoned for the period of a year in the Tower of London. During his imprisonment, Parliament passed the *Act of Supremacy* (1534), which formally granted the king complete supremacy over the English church. This sealed More's fate: in a brief interrogation, More seems to have slipped from silent obstinacy to vocal defiance, declaring that Parliament had no authority to declare the King of England to be the head of the country's church. Days later, More was tried for treason. Though he astutely parried all of the accusations presented, he was inevitably found guilty and sentenced to death. He was beheaded in a public ceremony at Tower Hill on July 6, 1535.

There is much in the precipitating details of More's death to distinguish it from the murder of Thomas Becket. At the cultural level, the influence of the early Reformation offers a clear contrast with the culture of Christendom that suffused Becket's murder. If the circumstances of the death were tinged by early modernity, what of the martyrdom that followed?

In the early years of Mary Tudor's reign, as the monarchy sought to revive the remains of monastic life and traditional worship (a process ignited in part by the bonfires of persecution), lay English Catholics were attempting in their own ways to come to grips with twenty years of anti-Catholic reforms in England. It was in this context, at a time of continuing conflict but also renewed hope for Catholics, that Thomas More's son-in-law William Roper commissioned Nicholas Harpsfield to write a biography of More.

Harpsfield's *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, likely written in 1557, is a fairly traditional, if not purely impartial, biography. Harspfield's many digressions—on the character of Cardinal Wolsey, on Henry VIII's attraction to Anne Boleyn—are colored with the author's personal assessments regarding character and motive.

Harpsfield is certain as to what Thomas More died for: the unification of Christendom. At the conclusion of the biography, Harpsfield expounds upon the unique role of the English nation within the history of Christianity, giving particular attention to the role England has played in conflicts over the faith [Reynolds 1963: 171-173]. According to Harpsfield, More sacrificed his life for a unified Christendom, once again proving the special status of England within the history of the Church.

But what violence was responsible for More's death? Who did a Catholic observer blame for the martyr's death? Not the king, who is

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faulted but largely absent from the text (as are the king's chief advisors, Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer). The catalyst of More's execution is the spectral force of heresy. England is described as "lamentably overwhelmed" by "heinous and hideous schisms and heresies," and Harpsfield argues that "there be no greater enemies to the commonwealth than wretched and disparate heretics" [Reynolds 1963: 75].

For Harpsfield, the desecrating force of heresy had corrupted England, and Thomas More's sacrifice, his stand for the unity of Christendom, "hath [...] triumphed upon the most grievous enemies that this realm has had" [Reynolds 1963: 168]. In his death, More became "the most notable and valiant captain against these pestilent and poisoned heretics" [Reynolds 1963: 169]. As Harpsfield concludes his account of More's martyrdom, he suggests that More's death was a "blessed intercession" which moved God to "cast his pitiful eye" and restore the kingdom of England to its rightful place though "his blessed minister and Queen, Lady Mary, and by the noble, virtuous, excellent prelate Cardinal Pole" [Reynolds 1963: 175].

Harpsfield's *Life and Death of Sir Thomas More* is not a story of conflict between a rapacious king and his pious servant. There is little overt conflict in Harpsfield's biography, a surprise given the turmoil that accompanied the dramatic social changes of Reformation England. In Harpsfield's telling, the martyrdom of Thomas More was produced by a conflict between the true and orthodox Christianity lodged in More's conscience, and the heretical forces that had come to overwhelm England's body politic.

If More's sacrifice was a "blessed intercession" against heresy, it was not, in Harpsfield's consideration, an intercession against the violence of the crown. The primary threat in the biography, heresy, may have corrupted the temporal sovereign, but the fundamental legitimacy of monarchical sovereignty remains unquestioned. Certain aspects of the biography's conclusion might even be read as deferential, implicitly supporting the expansion of the crown's power and authority.

More's sacrifice is characterized as the first "lay" martyrdom in English history. Thomas More never held an office of the Church. In Harpsfield's interpretation, this only amplifies the sanctity and glory of More's martyrdom. Whereas Thomas Becket's fight concerned law and justice, and was thus enmeshed in organizational and material concerns, More's fight was one of personal conscience. Harpsfield's biography argues that More's struggle and death have inaugurated

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a new martyrological tradition unmediated by organizational loyalty, untainted by connivance and driven only by conscience.

A martyrdom of conscience immediately diminishes the stakes of sacrifice, reducing transcendent or divine claims of truth and justice to the motives of the self. What did More's sacrifice produce? How can skeptical readers be assured that it was More's conscience—rather than Henry VIII's or Thomas Cranmer's—that was justified and true? Harpsfield can find no better proof than the ascendance of Mary Tudor, a good Catholic ruler, and her aide-de-camp the loyal Catholic Cardinal Pole.

If in life Thomas More strained to uphold and maintain the cultural essence of medieval Christendom, in death he was thrown into early modernity, the first in a new genus of martyrs. Of course, such a vocal proponent of the old often appears out of place in the new, and thus his commemoration could not help but be muddled and, often enough, contradictory. But More was hardly the only English martyr produced by the Reformation and the birth of the early modern English state. In fact, an entire industry would develop devoted to producing the new martyr, its massive commemorative machinery smoothing and polishing the details that appear so rough in More's martyrdom.

Just a year after Harpsfield wrote his biography of More, the accession of Elizabeth I heralded the final defeat of Catholicism in England, initiating a new industrialized age of martyrology. In the early years of Elizabeth I's reign, the Protestant John Foxe would publish a catalogue of Christian martyrs from the faith's early days to the time of "our gracious lady now reigning." Foxe's book was first published in 1563 as *The Actes and Monumentes touching things DONE AND PRACTISED BY THE Prelates of the Romishe Churche* [...] *with such persecutions, and horrible troubles, as have haypened in these last and pearilous dayes* [...], the title continuing on and running out at a length of 91 words. Popularly known as *The Acts and Monuments*, and more recently as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, the text is perhaps the longest, and certainly the most successful martyrology ever created.

Writing *The Acts and Monuments* in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, Foxe had to form meaning out of decades of persecution at a time of uncertainty and faint promise for the Protestant cause. The task was formidable: how to commemorate sacrificial deaths that were often authored by the crown while not undermining the power and authority of the sitting monarch?

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This challenge is most apparent in Foxe's account of the Marian martyrs, those Protestants killed not by a reform-minded king but by the avowed Catholic Mary Tudor. The case of Thomas Cranmer, former archbishop of Canterbury, is particularly compelling.

Shortly after the accession of Mary Tudor in 1553, the archbishop was sent to the Tower of London accused of treason. Subsequently transferred to a prison in Oxford, Cranmer was tried under papal jurisdiction and on December 4, 1555 was found guilty of heresy and deprived of his archbishopric. In the following months, Cranmer issued several recantations, each successive iteration growing more desperate as his execution day approached. Yet despite submitting to the monarch, acknowledging papal supremacy, disavowing Luther, and accepting transubstantiation (that is, repudiating his entire theological legacy), and in defiance of the standard practice of absolution typically granted after such recantations, Cranmer's death sentence was upheld by the queen. He was burned alive on a stake in Oxford on March 21, 1556.

Cranmer's manner of death complicated his commemoration. He had been a leading figure of the Reformation in the courts of Henry VIII and Edward VI. But his recantations presented an immediate obstacle for potential commemorative interpreters like John Foxe. Yet in *The Acts and Monuments* Foxe was able to forge a case of ultimate sacrifice from Cranmer's death, and to do so without defaming the monarchy (or even the Catholic monarch Mary Tudor).

Foxe smooths Cranmer's biographical blemishes first by establishing much evidence of Cranmer's virtues. So pure was Cranmer's heart, that when Henry VIII attempted to murder his daughter Mary, Cranmer intervened and saved her life, in full knowledge that she might grow up to become a Catholic queen [Foxe 1576: 1477].

In Foxe's telling, Cranmer's affection for the child Mary grew and matured into an honest and pure loyalty. Foxe recounts how, after Mary's accession the archbishop was detained for publically denouncing attempts to reconcile with Rome. At his initial interrogation, Cranmer despairingly expresses "the greatest greefe I have […] one of the greatest that ever I had in al my lyfe, to se the kyng and Quenes maiestyes by their Proctos here to beco my accusers" [Foxe 1576: 1481]. Cranmer continues with a recognition of the Queen's authority: "theyr maiesties have sufficient auctorite & power both from God, and by ordinunce of the realm to punish me" [Foxe 1576: 1481].

This develops into a crisis of conscience: Cranmer knows that the queen is an absolute sovereign, of unchecked power and authority. But

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what if the queen submits to the foreign authority of the pope? In Foxe's telling, Cranmer's subsequent tribulations, his wavering and his recantations, are a response to the intractable dilemma of a conscience completely loyal to the monarch, but in full knowledge of the monarch's corruption [Foxe 1576: 1550-1551]. Cranmer summarized his own predicament well in a letter to the queen published in *The Acts and Monuments*, noting that he resisted papal authority because of his "bounden dutye to the crown, liberties lawes and customes of thys realme of England, but most specially to discharge my conscience in vttering the truths to Gods glory" [Foxe 1576: 1577]. In *The Acts and Monuments*, Cranmer's struggles, his lapses, and his final triumphs are, much like the stories of Thomas More (whom Cranmer had interrogated twenty years earlier), a battle of the conscience.

Having established Cranmer's crisis of conscience, Foxe is brief on Cranmer's lapse. Though he had "manly constancy", a relentless campaign of threat and seduction prevailed on the archbishop, but only (according to Foxe) because otherwise he would be too greatly admired, leaving readers doubtful of their own ability to live up to such perfection [Foxe 1576: 1566].

In any case, Cranmer's recantation was but a stumble, and in Foxe's telling the archbishop's conscience was shortly rectified. On the 21st of March, 1556, Cranmer was taken to a sermon, where he was presented on stage so that he might read his recantation and publically humiliate the Protestant cause. Speaking from the pulpit, Cranmer was "never before more gloriously," exemplifying "true humilitie [...] sincere pacience, ardet criying to God, depe sighing in spirit" [Foxe 1576: 1568]. But after exhorting his audience to practice Christian love and charity, Cranmer quickly denounced both papal supremacy and the doctrine of transubstantiation. He was dragged from the pulpit, taken to the place where his pyre had been prepared, and chained to the stake. As the flames rose, Cranmer appeared a model of "constancie and stedfastness" [Foxe 1576: 1571].

Reflecting on the death, Foxe describes Cranmer as the "very middle man of all the Martyrs" [Foxe 1576: 1572]. It might seem a curious statement given Cranmer's preeminent position within English Protestantism and his prominent role in the *The Acts and Monuments*. But Foxe seems to be suggesting that Cranmer is something of a composite or average of English Protestant martyrdom. Cranmer's struggle, though heightened and extended, is paradigmatic of the struggle that tears at the seams of the early modern conscience.

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It was clear enough to Foxe who was at fault for this violence abuse of conscience. The heresy of Roman Catholicism corrupted all that it touched. And Foxe is also clear on what it was that Cranmer died for: like earlier generations of Christian martyrs, Cranmer had died for his faith.

It would be easy to halt the analysis there, to suggest that Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and Cranmer's final oration are products of a persecuting society in which one's enemies are satanic agents who must be destroyed at any cost. From this perspective, the difference between medieval martyrdom on the one hand, and early modern on the other, is that where in the former the agents of desecrating violence are (for all their faults) human, in the latter the enemy is something else, more oppressive and worthy of retribution.

There may be something to this interpretation, but it misses the substance of 16th century English martyrdom for all of its fiery rhetoric. Beneath the tirade and polemic, martyrologies of both the Protestant and Catholic traditions converge in several shared qualities. These same qualities do not fit easily into the analysis of sectarian warfare and enlightened sovereignty outlined in the preceding paragraph. What unites Thomas More and his interrogator Thomas Cranmer is conscience. Both men may have died for a truth inherited from early Christians, but the nature of that truth, confined to the interior reflection of the person, is a faint shadow of the world-rejecting Christianity of earlier epochs. Conscience can only ever be of this world.

Conscience is a strikingly ecumenical concept. In both Catholic and Protestant martyrologies, conscience exists in absolute opposition to heresy. Heresy authors the horrible violence of persecution, but conscience redeems the persecuted to form the pure sacrifice of martyrdom. The power of heresy—Protestant or Roman Catholic—overwhelms all it touches, but it never touches the righteous conscience. Foxe assures his readers that Cranmer may have affirmed the Catholic creed with his signature, but was never truly at risk of falling into heresy. A solid conscience is an armor that heresy cannot pierce.

This might seem an oddly mellow conflict—two wholly opposed forces utterly incapable of meeting, the sort of battle one sees in the stagecraft of scripted wrestling matches. But conscience and heresy are each equipped with force by their intermediary, the royal sovereign. If the martyr's conscience is never truly bothered by heresy, it is perpetually vexed by the sovereign, who is always both

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the most powerful vessel of divine authority but also, incongruously, constantly susceptible to the whispers of a well-placed heretic.

Conscience is, then, both a cause of the martyr's predicaments (personal and persecutorial), but also its solution. The martyr's crisis of conscience is produced by a theological commitment which is mediated by sovereign authority. A corrupted sovereignty disorients that commitment, sending loyal servants of the crown like Cranmer and More into a spiral of doubt and grief and further doubt.

It is at this point that the early modern martyrologist sets to work, solving the dilemma through the work of commemoration. The commemorative community, whether Harpsfield on More or Foxe on Cranmer, can see what the martyr could not: that their sacrifice in death is a restorative measure. For Harpsfield, More's sacrifice nudged God into promoting Mary Tudor. Foxe is just as confident that the Marian martyrs catalyzed the rise of Elizabeth. In all cases, the noble conscience which is offered in sacrifice reaffirms its central premise while resolving its contradictions.

Between Thomas More and Thomas Cranmer—or, more accurately, between Nicholas Harspfield and John Foxe—a new martyr appears to be forming. In the commemoration of Thomas Becket in the 12th century, the forces of desecrating violence were urged on by a corrupting sovereignty. The medieval sovereign was a necessary organ of the body politic, but if its desire for domination went unchecked, then the polity would expect a metastasis of sin. In the medieval martyr these malignant monarchies faced a potent treatment, for medieval martyrs like Becket, fueled by righteousness and armed with miracles, were a reminder of a higher power, a rebuke to political ambition that could marshal tremendous public excitement.

By contrast, the author of desecration in 16th century martyrologies is the noxious vapor of heresy, occasionally embodied by the distant figure of the Pope or Martin Luther. This change produces an unlikely effect on the role of the sovereign in martyrologies: still ostensibly culpable for the violence of persecution, they are nevertheless absolved of their brutality. Avarice and unjust violence, which had previously been thought of as a threat inherent to earthly sovereignty, are now, for early modern commemorative communities, an aberration induced by a sort of demonic possession. Gone is the sacred heart of Jesus, with its overwhelming other-worldly commands, displaced by the whinging heart of individual conscience.

This change does not merely muffle the critique of the sovereign, but reverses it: the sacrifice of the pure conscience restores the true

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nature of the earthly sovereign rather than rebuking it. In these early modern martyrologies, the sovereign is not quite wholly sacred, but offers a compelling earthly reflection of divine will.

Martyrs, monarchs, and modernity

What differences distinguished the medieval political and social order from its early modern predecessors? In terms of intellectual history, this transformation is captured most clearly in the rupture between John of Salisbury's treaty on kingship and the body politic and early modern theorists like Thomas Hobbes and Jean Bodin [Bodin 1992; Hobbes 1982]. For John of Salisbury, the body politic was not defined in terms of an absolute governmental sovereignty, but by the correspondence of interdependent parts [Nederman 1990; 2015]. The parcellization of sovereignty, of power and authority, through these various social organs meant that the sovereign monarch held necessarily finite, if still exceptional, powers and authorities. In Hobbes and Bodin, by contrast, society is coterminous with monarchical sovereignty. Just as strikingly, both Bodin and Hobbes suggest—in stark contrast to John of Salisbury—that sovereignty is a singular force, indivisible and wholly contained within the figure of the earthly monarch.

Much effort has been put into understanding the causes of the early modern state, how the princely sovereign could go from one organ of the social body to the body itself. Sociologists and social scientific historians have tended to concentrate on a variety of causal processes relating to conflict and cultural rationalization. Analysists have identified regional conflict, global economic expansion, taxation, and the birth of centralized bureaucracies as particularly salient forces in the development of early modern states [Spruyt 1996; Strayer 1970; Tilly 1992; Wallerstein 2011].

Those who have identified the importance of war-making to the early modern state have focused, forgivably, on the material consequences on inter-state conflict in establishing the basis for centralized states (e.g., taxation, a la Tilly 1992). Theorists of the culture of the state have tended to concentrate on shifts in rationality and social organization [e.g., the rise of bureaucrats or the disciplinary systems introduced by confessionalization, as in Reinhard 1989, Strayer 1970, or Gorski 2003].

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These "physicalist" and "symbolic" accounts have largely elided the dominant interpretation of state provided by the liberal theory of history. In establishing the role of conflict and organizational change in the birth of the early modern state, sociologists and historical social scientists have demonstrated the weaknesses of a theory which tends, especially in its more popular variations, to see the early modern state as a fully-formed, substantively rational arbiter of secular reason and justice. Yet in challenging the liberal theory of history's *explanans*, historical sociologists have tended to overlook its explanandum: the simultaneous emergence of a highly-individualized field of social action with a centralized, monopolizing state.

In order to asses this foundational tension in modernity, I have focused on cases of martyrdom drawn from high to late medieval Christendom and cases from the early modern Reformations (limited in both cases to England). In assembling the cases, I have attempted to (1) locate the defining elements of martyrdom in each period in order to (2) compare changes in the nature of martyrdom, so that I might (3) form a new narrative concerning changes in the nature of "symbolic violence", or how communities form cultural relationships with physical force (particularly with the physical force of varied historical forms of sovereignty). I believe this narrative demonstrates a theory of historical change that is, at its core, an inversion of the liberal theory of history. By this interpretation, the prevalence of personal conscience in Reformation religions (Protestant and Catholic) led early modern communities to see the monarch as an essential protector against heresy. Yet contained within this settlement was the promise of future secularization: a situation in which truth is interior, and in which spiritual protection is provided by the state, is also a situation which does not require traditional religion.

It is easy, given their gory content, to read the early modern martyrologies as a singularly irrational element of a still-young modernity, as the last bloody relic of a formidable age in the midst of rapid modernization. The evidence presented here suggests just the opposite. Changes in the nature of English martyrdom from the medieval to the early modern period suggest that a sort of religion of individual conscience anticipated and welcomed the maturation of a centralized state.

This is most clearly evident when comparing each periods' disparate depictions of the "higher goods" reflected in and defended by the martyr. In cases of medieval martyrdom, the martyr's sacrifice, as in the murder of Thomas Becket, was made for God, and

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specifically for the divinely authored social order. The sacrifice of the martyr restores health to a sickly social body threatened by an earthly sovereign. Martyrs of the early modern period also made sacrifices for their Christian beliefs, but in these cases the right and truthful Christianity was interiorized, contained not out in the universe but inside the believer's heart. Sacrifice in this case does not restore a natural order, but resolves a worried conscience.

At a basic level, the shift in the nature of the martyr's sacrifice corresponds neatly to the core feature of modern, rational liberalism: individualism. It is not surprising that Thomas More is commonly remembered as a martyr for individualism. The commemorative community that made More's death into a case of martyrdom described his struggle and death as a matter of conscience, of individual reflection, rather than as a conflict between divine virtues and human vice.

For commemorative communities in medieval Christendom, a martyr's sacrifice formed a connection to real universal goods. The reality of these goods was clear enough in the posthumous miracles associated with martyrs. The goods enshrined by early modern martyrs, by contrast, were contained within the individual martyr.

This was because the raw culture used by commemorative communities to create martyrs had been transformed. Disparate threads of individualism, from late medieval nominalism to Luther's Protestantism and proto-humanism, were spooled together to form the sanguinary fabric of sacrifice, now a vivid display of conscience and its great opposite, heresy.

Yet historical changes in the nature of the martyr's sacrifice were also interconnected with a new emerging sovereign order. The increasingly individualized and interiorized nature of Christian truth required an external power capable of interceding on behalf of the righteous and in opposition to the specter of heresy. In early modern English martyrdom stories, the incipient state offers this earthly salvation.

Early modern martyrdom stories reveal one of the deep ironies of Reformation history: that despite ostensible arguments about the legitimacy of sacramental mediation on earth (particularly concerning transubstantiation and papal authority), both sides of the theological controversy ultimately yielded sacral authority to earthly sovereignty. Why should this be the case?

In 1610, the poet John Donne published a pamphlet dedicated to the "mightie and sacred Soveraigne" titled *Pseudo-martyr*. Donne's goal with *Pseudo-martyr* was to convince English Catholics of the

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legitimacy of Protestant monarchs, and of their duty to obey and take an oath of allegiance to the sovereign. He pursues this argument through a critique of Catholic martyrdom, with specific reference to conscience [Donne 1610].

According to Donne, English Catholics who flaunt royal authority and submit to execution are committing a double-heresy. First, they violate the dignity of their own life in the pursuit of false glory. But they also violate natural law, for "God hath immediately imprinted in man's nature [...] to be subject to a power immediately infus'd from him" [Donne 1610: 131]. In other words, the monarch rules by divine right, and submission to the king is imprinted on human nature by God. In his double-critique of martyrdom, Donne is not merely creating a theological challenge to the efficacy of sacrifice, but is more generally rebuking the religious basis of political dissension.

But, Donne allows, the Catholic subject may still feel conflicted, especially when the terms of political loyalty cut against papal or priestly pronouncement. In such instances, however, the Catholic should take solace: their crisis of conscience, their internal suffering, is a true and pious form of martyrdom. In effect, Donne argues that in pledging loyalty to the monarch, the English Catholic can shape their conscience into a living sacrifice without succumbing to the heresies of pseudo-martyrdom.

With John Donne's meditations on conscience, martyrdom, and sovereignty, the tendencies in English martyrdom first revealed in the case of Thomas More come to their logical conclusion. In Donne, as in the biographies of Thomas More, the martyr's sacrifice has lost its sacramental character. In *Pseudo-martyr*, martyrdom is now entirely post-sacramental: wholly contained within the conscience, suffering and sacrifice are now mere progressions of selfhood.

Changes in the nature of martyrdom between the 12th and 17th centuries reflect broader shifts in the nature of political and social life toward centralization and rationalization. But, as Donne's polemic confirms, these changes also reflect—and reinforce—an emerging conception of the state not merely as a centralized and rationalized sovereign, but as a sacral one. Early modern martyrologies described the conflicts of their subjects as essentially interior, a struggle between conscience and heresy. The royal sovereign stands between conscience and heresy, always vulnerable to corruption, but also uniquely capable of intervening in history, and indeed the only figure with enough sacral power and authority to correct the course of history and reconcile the kingdom to divine will.

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In searching for a power which might justify and protect a true Christian conscience, early modern commemorative communities were imbuing the incipient central state with a powerful cultural logic, that of divine right. Divine right both explains and justifies the centralization of power and the rationalization of authority. Early modern martyrdom stories, a product of their time, reflected these developments. However, as a historical form of resistance, used by medieval Christians to rebuke monarchic overreach, the early modern period saw fundamental changes in the commemoration of sacrifice and the relationship between martyrdom and sovereignty. Martyrs were now increasingly contained within wider histories of the nation, in which the sovereign was seen as the nearest source of divine power and will, capable of rescuing a people from their suffering and from the dreaded specter of heresy.

Since the fall of the Roman Empire, Western Europe had struggled with the ambiguous political theology of Christianity. As Europe gradually developed into the fragile and fractured community of Christendom, the tension of Augustine's famous "two cities" metaphor gave way to more unitary conceptions of social life. Society was conceived of in organic terms, as a body politic. Like all bodies, the social body could succumb to illness. But all of its components were held and propelled by the divine, each organ or limb guided in its work by the Holy Spirit. In moments of extreme affliction, the body politic could rely on the remedying force of divine power, channeled in some instances by a martyr's sacrifice.

At the dawn of modernity, the body politic began a gradual process of mutation: where once the royal sovereign was a mere organ, it increasingly came to operate as an autonomous body in its own right. That this body was still said to be animated by the spirit of the divine is a testament to the endurance of Christian culture. Indeed, the ease with which early Christians attached themselves to these divine monarchs, not in spite of the bloom of personal religious conscience but because of it, testifies to symbiosis of Reformation-era Christianity and early modern sovereignty. This symbiosis was only possible because of a great change: Christian culture survived in an essentially pasteurized form, and martyrdom, once a defiant channel of otherworldly goods, was now peacefully absorbed into the body politic.

For the early modern commemorative communities that forged narratives of Christian conscience and sacrifice, there was no tension between a strong central authority and the inner-sanctum of individual faith. Within the milieu of Reformation Christianity

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(Catholic and Protestant), in which individuals forged increasingly personalized relationships with Christian truth and were beset on all sides by the corrupting force of heresy, a strong and enlightened monarch could only appear as a sort of earthly salvation. Yet what was once perfectly logical, the product of a consistent theology, has been wholly transformed by secularization. That which was once a key to salvation can appear now only as contradiction. Exorcised of the spirit of heresy, the individual must now confront an angry god of its own making.

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Résumé

Cet article compare différentes commémorations collectives de martyrs pour préciser la manière dont se transforme la compréhension culturelle de la relation entre le sacrifice ultime d'un individu et la violence monarchique. Cette comparaison historique permet d'affirmer que des changements dans la nature de la chrétienté ont contribué à transformer l'interprétation populaire de la violence souveraine comme force profanatrice en une force rédemptrice. Alors que l'individualisme culturel et l'étatisme politique apparaissent dans la modernité sécularisée comme des impulsions contradictoires, leur naissance au début de la modernité a été induite par une vision du monde religieuse entièrement cohérente.

Mots-clés : Sacrifice ; Modernité ; Monarchie ; Martyre ; Hérésie ; Conscience.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag vergleicht verschiedene, für Märtyrer organisierte, kollektive Gedenkfeiern, um darzustellen, auf welche Art und Weise kulturelle Verständnisse die Beziehung zwischen individueller Opferbereitschaft und monarchischer Gewalt verändern. Dieser historische Vergleich verdeutlicht, wie eine sich verändernde Konzeption des Christentums bei der Öffentlichkeit zu einer Neuinterpretation der Gewaltausübung eines Herrschers führt – von einer ruchlosen zu einer erlösenden Gewalt. Obwohl der kulturelle Individualismus und der politische Etatismus in der säkularisierten Moderne als sich widersprechende Impulse verstanden werden, geht ihre Entstehung zu Beginn der Moderne auf eine ganz kohärente, religiöse Weltvorstellung zurück.

Schlüsselwörter : Opfer; Moderne; Monarchie; Märtyrer; Ketzerei; Gewissen.

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