MEMBERS OF HIS BODY: CHRIST’S PASSION AND COMMUNITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH POETRY, 1595-1646

A Dissertation

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by

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This dissertation studies representations of the most significant event of Christian history—the Passion of Christ—in English devotional poetry in the post-Reformation period. The Passion was central for both Catholic and Protestant writers in early modern England, and, despite the period’s widening theological and confessional distinctions, writers drew on a common set of devotional discourses in order to represent Christ’s Passion in a variety of literary genres, and especially in poetry. In examining the Passion as a set of discursive strategies visible in a variety of texts across confessional lines, this study challenges traditional scholarly accounts of devotional poetry in Renaissance England, accounts which typically isolate Catholic and Protestant writers from one another and which privilege theological or confessional identities over shared representational strategies. Additionally, this study complicates recent critical claims that the Passion receded in literature as the seventeenth-century progressed. By privileging previously neglected Catholic writers such as William Alabaster and John Beaumont and contextualizing their work against broader discursive traditions of the Passion, this

After identifying a set of trans-confessional representational strategies common to Catholics and Protestants, this dissertation then examines the poetry of Robert Southwell, William Alabaster, John Donne, Sir John Beaumont, and Richard Crashaw in order to discover how each poet appropriates the Passion to speak to problems of ecclesial and political community in seventeenth-century England. While each writer adapts similar Passion discourses to his work, each also enlists the Passion to critique and construct various visions of the church, of political community, and of literary communities. Ultimately, in arguing that the Passion continued to be vital to English poets for engaging questions of communal identity, *Members of His Body* suggests that future study of the period must reconsider how received accounts of the waning of Catholicism and the ascendancy of Protestantism shape traditional and often incomplete accounts of English literary history in the post-Reformation period.
For Andrew, Michael, and Gabriel

And for Marianna—

Such wilt thou be to me, who must

Like th’other foot, obliquely run.

Thy firmness makes my circle just,

And makes me end, where I begun.
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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation studies representations of the most significant event of Christian history—the Passion of Christ—in English devotional poetry in the post-Reformation period, from the poetry of Robert Southwell to that of Richard Crashaw. The Passion was central for both Catholic and Protestant devotional writers, and despite the post-Reformation period’s widening theological differences, writers drew on a common set of devotional discourses of the Passion in order to construct communion with Christ, and in order to explore various understandings of political and ecclesial community in early modern England. In studying the Passion as a set of discourses and rhetorical strategies used in texts across confessional lines, this study challenges traditional accounts of devotional poetry of the seventeenth century that tend to isolate Catholic and Protestant writers from one another or that emphasize confessional identities rather than representational strategies in interpreting religious poetry. Most importantly, in privileging neglected Catholic writers such as Robert Southwell, William Alabaster, and Sir John Beaumont, this study rethinks our conceptions of mainstream and marginal poetry in seventeenth-century English writing, arguing that conventional critical accounts of literary canonicity do not always accurately represent the communities of readers and writers that participated in seventeenth-century devotion.

By studying representations of the Passion across confessional lines, this dissertation contributes to recent criticism that has challenged received narratives of
religious poetry which isolate Catholic and Protestant poets according to their theological differences. Such scholarship demonstrates that the boundaries between early modern Catholicism and Protestantism were much more permeable and fluid than polemical articulations of contested theology and dogma would suggest.  

Although studying representations of the Passion fruitfully contributes to this larger historicist project, only one book-length study of the Passion in English poetry has been undertaken.  

In complementing that study, this dissertation first examines the devotional discourses of the Passion found in Catholic and Protestant Passion texts of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, arguing that despite confessional disputes, writers tended to draw on the same discourses in representing communion with Christ. After identifying the representational strategies writers used to construct the Passion, I then explore the poetry of Robert Southwell, William Alabaster, John Donne, Sir John Beaumont, and Richard Crashaw, demonstrating that English devotional poets share a much more complex set of representational strategies of Christ’s Passion than scholars have previously thought.  

Beginning with Southwell, whose poetry became immensely popular among Catholic and

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2 J.A.W. Bennett, *The Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982). Bennett’s insights into Passion devotion demonstrate the larger trends in English Passion poetry over the course of twelve centuries, but his ambitious scope allows only one chapter on the seventeenth-century English religious lyric. This study complements Bennett’s survey and deepens his analysis through attention to the ways Catholics and Protestants appropriated common discourses and enlisted them to explore questions of religious community in the post-Reformation period.
Protestant readerships, and concluding with Richard Crashaw, whose devotional lyrics were first published one year after John Milton’s 1645 Poems, this study also claims that intensely intimate and vivid communion with Christ’s Passion remained a vital part of the English poetic tradition through the seventeenth century, an imaginative focus that allowed writers to explore questions of religious community and confessional identity so significant to Catholics and Protestants of the period.

The Significance of the Passion for Study of Seventeenth-Century Devotional Poetry

From the beginning of the thirteenth century and through the post-Reformation period, the Passion of Christ was the predominant focus of devotion, an imaginative locus where the soul meditated on the meaning of redemption, the mysteries of sin and forgiveness, and the love of God. As scholars such as Richard Kieckhefer, Ewert Cousins, Sarah Beckwith, and Eamon Duffy have shown, Passion piety produced a variety of popular devotional manuals and Passion narratives both in Latin and in the vernaculars, texts which saturated late medieval and early modern English religious culture. Based largely on the mysticism of St. Bernard of Clairveaux and on the atonement theology of St. Anselm, and further developed through the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Bonaventure, late medieval and early modern Passion devotion emphasized the humanity and vulnerability of Christ, privileging the vir dolorum or “man

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of sorrows” over the *Christus Victor* motif that characterized earlier strains of piety. As James H. Marrow and F.P. Pickering have shown, medieval writers developed complex narratives of Christ’s death, including non-scriptural details and dwelling on the various tortures, wounds, and sorrows that Jesus suffered. These elaborated narratives continued to shape Passion devotion even after the Reformation. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, anonymous writers adapted and expanded Passion narratives, which later were attributed to Bernard, Bonaventure, the Venerable Bede, and Anselm of Canterbury. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, the most popular and influential late medieval devotions were works such as the *Meditationes vitae Christi* of Pseudo-Bonaventure, the *Liber de passione Christi et doloribus et planctibus matris ejus* and *Meditatio in passionem et resurrectionem Domini* of Pseudo-Bernard, as well as the *De meditatione passionis Christi per septem diei horas libellus* of Pseudo-Bede. Other popular Passion devotionals in England through this period included the “Fifteen Oes of St. Bridget” and Richard Rolle’s *Meditations on the Passion*, works which, as Eamon Duffy has shown, were deeply indebted to the cult of the five wounds of Christ that pervaded fifteenth- and even early sixteenth-century devotion.

All of these Passion manuals privilege intimate communion between the crucified Christ and the soul, a communion whose objective is the stirring of the affections to contrition, compassion, tenderness, and a love of God, of Christ, and of the Virgin. Two excerpts from the highly influential *Meditationes* of Pseudo-Bonaventure, translated into

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5 Duffy, 238-65.
English by Nicholas Love in the fifteenth century, illustrate the combination of intimate communion and the vividly physical, crucified Christ that remains vital to Catholic and Protestant Passion accounts in the early modern period. The introduction to this pseudonymous manual underlines the importance of vivid imagination, claiming that effective devotion lies in meditating on the event as if it were audibly and visibly present:

[W]herfore thou that coveyest to feele truly, the fruyte of this presente booke thou must with all thy thoughte & thyne entent procure thee in thy soule present to those thinges that be here written, said, or done of our lorde Jesu. And that earnestly and respectively as thoughe thou heardest them with thy bodily eares or sawest them doone with thy bodily eyes, puttinge awaye for the time, and levinge all other occupacions and busines.  

In this devotional tradition, Passion meditation should draw the soul into intimate and vivid communion with Christ. Such texts often dwell on Christ’s open wounds, elaborating their issuing blood into a variety of metaphors and heightening the sense of Christ’s immediate and intimate presence. In short, based on a single verb in the gospels— *crucifixerunt eum*—Passion texts develop an entire set of rhetorical and discursive strategies for narrating the Passion and drawing the reader into the scene. Though such texts might appear alien to mainstream seventeenth-century English poetry, this devotional rhetoric was central to English Passion piety throughout the early modern period. As this study demonstrates, such discourse was popularized through Protestant and Catholic reprints of late medieval Passion narratives, as well as through popular Jesuit meditative works that were often adapted by Protestants, with minimal editing, for a broad readership throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

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Scholars have traditionally aligned this highly visual and intimate discourse with pre-Reformation Catholicism and with the Counter-Reformation, often claiming that Protestantism shunned overly-corporal and graphic devotion to the vir dolorum. While Louis Martz, in his seminal The Poetry of Meditation, shows the lasting influences of late medieval devotional manuals in seventeenth-century English poetry, Barbara Lewalski argues that English poetry of this period does not stem from medieval devotional trends, but rather from indigenous Protestant Biblicism and from an emergent understanding of the individual’s relationship to the literary texts of scripture. More recently, Michael Schoenfeldt has argued that Protestant poets of the seventeenth century “move away from identification with the spectacularly gruesome suffering of the crucified Christ,” and that whereas “Catholic meditational writers emphasize the emotional affect the [Passion] stirs,” Protestant poets—generally those like Donne, Herbert, and Milton, figures who scholarship has deemed the center of the literary canon—“focus on the psychological effect of the Passion.” Sarah Covington has analyzed the wound as a metaphor in seventeenth-century poetry, but claims, “For all their vivid borrowings from scriptural metaphors and the deployment of them in conversion narratives and meditations, protestants [sic] did not give themselves over to the sensuous and highly visualized recreations embarked upon by Catholics influenced by Jesuit meditative practices or

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Finally, Erin Henriksen has claimed in a recent study of Milton that “Post-Reformation passion poems…shift the focus away from the crucifixion to concentrate on other events in the passion sequence and the rather different idea of Jesus’ role that they put forward,” similarly implying that although the Passion remains part of English Protestantism, its devotional and theological emphases are markedly different from those of Catholicism. Critical discussions of the Passion in seventeenth-century poetry, then, tell a story of disparity or opposition: vividly physical and intimate devotion to the Passion is generally conceived as a Catholic mode distinct from Protestant piety. This bifurcation contributes to the marginalization of Catholic poets and the privileging of Protestant writers as mainstream, inadvertently perpetuating older critical narratives of the literary ascendancy of Protestantism over a moribund Catholic tradition in the early modern period. Perhaps no English poetry of the seventeenth century embodies the consequences of the critical tendency to claim the marginality of intimate and vivid Passion discourse more than the work of Richard Crashaw, a poet whose corporeal and often erotic emphasis on Christ’s bloody death has contributed to his critical neglect as a “baroque” or “Counter-Reformation” poet who lacks the poetic facility and intellectual rigor of Donne or Herbert.

The first major goal of this dissertation is to challenge this scholarly narrative that separates Catholic and Protestant devotional traditions by examining the publication histories of Passion narratives in post-Reformation England, by surveying the representational strategies of Protestant and Catholic Passion writers in a variety of

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genres, and by reading devotional poets for how they participate in this trans-confessional set of discourses. Such an examination reveals that Protestants and Catholics shared a wide range of representational strategies in constructing and meditating upon the Passion, and that many medieval Catholic and contemporary Jesuit Passion accounts were highly popular among Catholic and Protestant readerships. Moreover, original Passion texts such as the sermons of Joseph Hall, Lancelot Andrewes, John Foxe, and William Perkins demonstrate similar discursive tendencies when they construct the Passion and encourage their readers to meditate on that event, despite their occasional tendency to emphasize slightly different strategies than Catholic texts. Thus, while traditional criticism forwards a narrative of seventeenth-century Passion devotion that privileges exclusivity and opposition between Catholicism and Protestantism, I complicate such perspectives by arguing that instead of employing a model of opposition, critics need to recognize the ways disparate confessional communities participate in a shared field of devotional discourses in order to explore various concepts of ecclesial and political community.

The second major goal of this dissertation, implied in the first, is to challenge interpretive models that privilege consistent theological systems or confessional identities as analytical keys to understanding religious poetry. This approach sometimes leads to arguments that attempt to align a particular poet (or particular poems) with a specific set of doctrines or with a specific religious confession.11 By focusing instead on the

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11 This is not to say that such scholarship always sets out the confessional identification of a poet as its chief goal. Rather, there is a venerable critical tradition that tends to assume that a poet’s confessional identity is consistent with official church dogmas, and that poetry encodes or reflects particular doctrinal formulations. In addition to Lewalski’s seminal Protestant Poetics, see for instance Helen Gardner, “General Introduction” to John Donne: The Divine Poems, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), xv-xxvii; Rosemond Tuve, A Reading of George Herbert (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1952); William Halewood, The Poetry of Grace: Reformation Themes in English Seventeenth-Century Poetry (New Haven:
discourses and rhetorical strategies of Christ’s Passion in early modern writing, this study problematizes more strictly theological interpretations of poetry that read imaginative literature for how it encodes and reflects dogma, or for how it demonstrates a writer’s allegiance to a particular confessional camp. In his recent work on early modern theology and literature, Brian Cummings has argued that the rise of humanism in the early modern period affected the development both of literary production and theology, since both fields operate within language, and both rely on scriptural interpretation, syntax, and grammar to formulate their claims. More importantly, as Cummings, T.R. Wright, and R.V. Young have argued, there is an important difference between the official declaration of dogma and the appropriation of dogmatic theology to devotional literature like the meditative manual or the lyric poem: in literary texts, theology does not “happen” prior to the text itself, but instead unfolds in the “inclinations and deviations by which a sentence moves, the countervailing pressures of conjunction and amplification, the rise towards peroration, the threat of sudden cadence,” and all the rhetorical strategies that characterize religious writing of the period.12 Building on the work of Cummings, Wright, and Young, this dissertation interprets devotional texts—both prose Passion account and lyric poems—for their representational strategies of the Passion, and as such

12 Brian Cummings, The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace (Oxford UP, 2002), 11; see also T.R. Wright, Theology and Literature (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); R.V. Young, Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2000). Young’s work on devotional poetry, privileging the trans-confessional appropriations of grace, Biblicism and sacramental theology, tends to nuance the distinctions between doctrinal formulations and poetic devotion, and as such provides a helpful corrective to conventional accounts that foreground doctrinal and confessional identities and distinctions.
complicates interpretations of poetry as an embodiment of official dogma or as a polemical defense of a particular confessional identity.

This is not to say that doctrinal assertions have no reality outside the language that articulates them. Rather, scholars must be attentive to how devotional discourse shapes, responds to, conflicts with, and modifies doctrinal assertions. Rhetorical considerations, after all, shape articulations of dogma, and often borrow the strategies of other genres, such as the sermon or the treatise or the prayer manual. Though literary study of this period’s devotional poetry needs to be attentive to the realities of theology and to the very real problems of confessional identities and how they shape devotional language—as indeed criticism often has—it must also concern itself with how the formal features of poetry engage and even construct theology “on the ground,” in imaginative writing.

Hence, in addition to taking into account questions of publication history and circulation, this study acknowledges the importance of poetic form and the significance of specific representational strategies in shaping writers’ appropriations of the Passion, a method inspired by the recent work of Heather Dubrow in early modern lyric, which encourages a productive methodological synthesis between formalism, historicism, and cultural study.¹³

The third contribution this dissertation makes is an important recovery, inspired by recent discoveries by scholars such as Alison Shell, Arthur Marotti, Molly Murray, Susannah Monta, Ronald Corthell, and Frances Dolan, of generally neglected Catholic

writers who were a significant and often vexed part of early modern English culture.\textsuperscript{14} For instance, Alison Shell has shown that Robert Southwell’s devotional poems were among the most popular and influential works in early modern England, despite Southwell’s traditionally marginalized place in canonical English literature.\textsuperscript{15} In furthering Shell’s insights, this dissertation rethinks the interplay and interdependence of Catholic and Protestant reading communities as well as our own scholarly formulations of mainstream and marginal literary communities, examining long-neglected Catholic poets and putting them into dialogue with devotional texts read and produced by both Catholics and Protestants. Hence, in approaching Passion poetry from the perspective of shared discourses, and in blurring the lines between dogmatic theology and common representational strategies, this study challenges conventional understandings of canonicity in the seventeenth century. Accounts of English poetry in this period simply can no longer interpret Catholic and Protestant writing and reading communities in isolation from one another. English poets read and were influenced by each other’s work despite their differing confessional allegiances, just as Catholic and Protestant Passion accounts appealed to readers of all doctrinal persuasions.

Finally, this study’s fourth goal is to show that the Passion allowed writers to explore questions of imaginative communion with Christ in poetry, as well as social and political problems regarding the nature of religious and ecclesial communities. On the

\textsuperscript{14} See n. 2 above.

one hand, as Sarah Beckwith has argued in *Christ’s Body* and Debora Shuger has demonstrated in *The Renaissance Bible*, Passion devotion, in encouraging affective response to Christ and in foregrounding the abject body, provided a locus for individual communion with and imitation of Christ, as well as a mode of subject-formation for medieval and early modern Christians.\(^{16}\) Hence, this study asks how poets imagine the Passion, how they appropriate literary tropes, poetic forms, and rhetorical strategies to explore the speaking self’s relationship to God, and how they imitate (or refuse to imitate) the suffering Christ they imagine. Passion devotion, in short, is predicated on *communion*, and such communion can be manipulated and represented in different ways—for example, allowing poets to collapse their own identities into Christ’s, or to express the utter gap that exists between the longing soul and God.

On the other hand, and more importantly, the Passion also allows writers to speak to larger issues of religious *community*, to problems of confessional and ecclesial allegiances and identities.\(^{17}\) As scholars including Helen C. White and Richard Kieckhefer have argued, poetry is the genre in which public and private meet, where the discursive modes of particular devotional and religious traditions are appropriated by the voice of a specific speaker, often in order to interrogate or support particular ideological, religious, and political goals.\(^{18}\) As Ramie Targoff, Timothy Rosendale, and Achsah Guibbory have shown, in this period the lines between private and public prayer, between


\(^{17}\) This is one of the major claims of Beckwith’s magisterial *Christ’s Body*, where devotion to the suffering Christ is a method of interrogating dominant social ideologies; see Beckwith, 78-111.

personal devotion and ecclesial or liturgical worship, are porous rather than rigid; the
categories that shape our modern understandings of “public” and “private” literary genres
are largely inapplicable, or at best highly fluid.\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore, as a recent collection of
essays on religion and writing in early modern England has argued, religious writing can
be \textit{communicational}; that is, writing

played a significant role in the creation or consolidation of a community.
Sometimes it was denominationally exclusive, which meant that the writing
tended to shape or reinforce one particular kind of religious identity. Sometimes it
was more inclusive: a community of readers, which cut across the religious
borderlines pertaining in some other areas of social interaction.\textsuperscript{20}

Passion devotion can be understood as a community-building activity as well as an
exercise in communion: while writers and poets construct imaginative encounters with
the Passion, the Passion is also an imaginative focal point through which writers attempt
to consolidate or create particular confessional communities, through which they explore
the nature of the Christian church.

Hence, just as the body of Christ symbolizes the intersection of private and public
communion, of the individual and the community,\textsuperscript{21} Passion poetry allows the interplay
of intimate communion with potent issues of community and of confessional and even

\textsuperscript{19} Ramie Targoff, \textit{Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England}
(Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001); Timothy Rosendale, \textit{Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant
England} (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007); Achsah Guibbory, \textit{Ceremony and Community from Herbert to

\textsuperscript{20} Roger D. Sell and Anthony W. Johnson, “Introduction,” in \textit{Writing and Religion in England,

\textsuperscript{21} As Henri de Lubac argues, in the late medieval period, the terms \textit{corpus mysticum} and \textit{corpus
verum} were variously used to describe both the transubstantiated body of Christ in Holy Communion, and
the mystical body of Christ as the Church. See Henri de Lubac, \textit{Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the
political identities. Understood in this light, Passion discourses are fluid in two important ways. First, they can be enlisted across genres: devotional rhetoric found in a Jesuit manual can appear in relatively unchanged form in a Protestant sermon, and homiletic discourse is just as often appropriable to lyric poetry. Second, such discourses can be enlisted to a variety of confessional and political purposes: as the following chapters show, Passion poets often engage the Passion to identify with one confessional community over another, or to consolidate or construct various reading and devotional communities through their poems. For instance, the poetry of Southwell and Crashaw is often (to use Sell’s and Johnson’s language) inclusive in its engagements of confessional identity and reading communities: while Southwell’s poetry was popular among both Catholics and Protestants, Crashaw’s poetry emphasizes a mystical communion with Christ’s body, and attempts to drain confessional particularity out of the Passion. On the other hand, Alabaster and Beaumont are often exclusive in their treatments of the Passion, using Passion poetry to consolidate specifically Catholic communities against Protestantism—despite the fact that both poets participate, perhaps against their own intentions, in trans-confessional Passion discourses that are not necessarily circumscribed by the confessional identities they wish to uphold.

In sum, this dissertation invites critics to rethink the canon of religious poetry in seventeenth-century England, to reflect on how we construct the categories of mainstream and marginal literary communities in the period, and to understand how often our received assumptions regarding the presumed ascendancy of Protestantism and the marginalization of Catholicism in England shape our formulations of mutually exclusive, confessionally-delimited bodies of religious literature. By reading neglected poets like
William Alabaster and John Beaumont alongside John Donne (traditionally the paradigmatic poet of the early seventeenth century) and Richard Crashaw (traditionally the baroque foreigner of English poetry), and by interpreting them within the broader contexts of English Passion devotion, I show that understanding Passion discourses, which are not restricted to particular literary genres or religious communities, complicates traditional scholarly constructions of the seventeenth-century canon of English religious verse. Such an undertaking also challenges previous narratives of the period’s literature that claim that Christ crucified recedes in the English literary imagination as the seventeenth century progresses.

**Organization of this Study**

Because Robert Southwell’s poetry, a body of work that joined English verse forms with fervent religious devotion, was immensely influential in the seventeenth century, this study focuses on the years between the initial publication of Southwell’s lyrics in 1595 and the publication of Richard Crashaw’s *Steps to the Temple* in 1646. Chapter 1 surveys a variety of Catholic and Protestant Passion accounts from the early sixteenth century through the middle of the seventeenth century and identifies five basic discourses of the Passion prevalent in post-Reformation English writing. Although I acknowledge that Catholics and Protestants occasionally demonstrate different patterns of rhetorical emphasis, especially when engaging controversial questions of soteriology and the sacraments, I claim that despite such tendencies and despite the occasionally polemical language of Passion accounts, Catholic and Protestant works on the Passion appropriate the discourses of *visuality, intimacy, imitation, substitution, and temporality*
in strikingly similar ways, privileging intimate and vividly physical meditation on the Passion that ideally leads the devotee to contrition, gratitude, and a desire to imitate Christ. In short, Chapter 1 characterizes Passion discourses in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, develops a vocabulary of rhetorical strategies that will be used to discuss the poems in the subsequent chapters, and suggests how different writers appropriate trans-confessional discourses to their particular rhetorical, and sometimes polemical, ends.

Chapter 2 argues that Robert Southwell’s literary goals to reform English poetry were deeply imbricated with his religious mission. Southwell created Passion lyrics designed to console and unify his Catholic co-religionists and to substitute, at least partially, for the mass, the public expression of communion and community which Catholics were denied by law. By privileging intimate identification with Christ’s suffering, these lyrics constitute recusant Catholics as an afflicted and persevering community of martyrs. The poems achieve this communal consolidation by appropriating discourses of intimate identification, encouraging readers to voice the lyrics as their own utterances and thus to recognize their participation in the Passion as members of Christ’s suffering body. Moreover, Southwell’s martyrdom in 1595 and the subsequent explosion of his poetry’s popularity in Protestant print markets allow the poems to collapse the distance between Christ and Southwell after the Jesuit’s death, so that to “partake” of the Southwell’s Passion poetry is to participate in his literary remains—whatever the confessional affiliation of the reader. Ironically, the poet’s biographical imitation of Christ’s death and his sacrifice for a particular confessional community contributed to his
poetry’s popularity among a wider, Protestant market, making his work an influential model of Passion poetry in the seventeenth century.

William Alabaster, the subject of Chapter 3, believed when he composed his sonnets that vividly embodied communion with the crucified Christ was by nature Catholic rather than Protestant. Alabaster, a serial convert from English Protestantism to Catholicism and back again, composed his sonnets on the Passion in the wake of his first fervent and highly publicized conversion to Rome. But while Alabaster claims in his account of his conversion that affective and tender communion with Christ is exclusive to Catholicism, his Passion poems appropriate the discourses of intimate and vivid communion that are found in Passion accounts across confessional lines—in the Protestant reprints of Jesuit meditative manuals as well as in the highly popular Protestant adaptations of medieval texts by Thomas Rogers. Additionally, Alabaster’s Passion sonnets often yearn for a communion that is rarely achieved in the space of his often ambiguous poems: communion is deferred to a realm where polemically constructed confessional identities are no longer relevant. Alabaster’s Passion engagements show a subtle subversion of his own polemical claims: while he asserts that compassionate communion with Christ is quintessentially Catholic, his lyrics routinely slip away from polemical categories and into the trans-confessional Passion discourses that characterize the larger and predominantly Protestant community from which Alabaster claims to flee.

While Southwell and Alabaster draw much of their inspiration from the Jesuit meditative tradition beginning with St. Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*, John Donne, the subject of Chapter 4, writes Passion poems and sermons indebted to the popular English translations of Pseudo-Bernard, as the multiple references to Bernard and Bernardine
sources in his sermons suggest. Like Southwell’s and Alabaster’s engagements of the Passion, Donne’s Passion devotion is implicated in his desire to be a part of the true Christian community. Unlike Southwell’s and Alabaster’s work, though, Donne’s is more clearly liturgical and deeply colored by his developing ecclesiology. On the one hand, for the Donne of the later sermons, the Passion is an object of personal devotion, constructed in heavily Bernardine rhetoric, that is capable of consolidating, instructing, and encouraging the ecclesial body of Christ; Donne appropriates Passion discourse originally intended for personal meditation to his homiletic performances. On the other hand, Donne’s Passion poems show that devotional lyrics, too, can explore and engage communal practices of ecclesial and liturgical worship while attempting to commune with an intimately-constructed Christ. As such, Donne’s work suggests the deep connections between communion with Christ’s cross and specifically liturgical and ecclesial communities.

Chapter 5 explores the as-yet unpublished epic of Sir John Beaumont, *The Crowne of Thornes*, and argues that despite its apparent historical marginality, the epic—a work by a paradoxical figure who was a life-long recusant Catholic as well as a Stuart court poet—partakes of mainstream English political discourse at the same time that it radically critiques Stuart absolutism. Appropriating the Passion discourses of intimacy and the visualized body in pain, Beaumont’s epic argues that the true English *ecclesia* is the Roman Catholic community suffering under state persecution. He also enlists the Passion in the service of comforting and consolidating the English Catholic community through a forceful and idealized narrative of English ecclesial history. Whereas Donne uses the Passion to explore the significance of liturgical worship and ecclesial community
more generally, Beaumont uses the Passion and its intensely intimate and vivid
discourses of communion to assert the primacy of Roman ecclesial politics over Stuart
absolutism and to establish a hagiographical English history as a model for the current
political order.

Chapter 6 examines the poetry of Richard Crashaw, a figure who has traditionally
been exiled from the mainstream of English poetry because of his perceived baroque and
Counter-Reformation Catholicism. This chapter reads Crashaw’s poetry against the
immensely popular Bernardine Passion piety that shapes early and mid-seventeenth-
century English prose devotions. Taking Crashaw as a test case for traditional scholarly
perspectives on canonical and marginal literature of the period, this chapter challenges
critics to rethink the devotional contexts within which we interpret the seventeenth-
century religious poem. Read within the context of trans-confessional Passion discourses,
Crashaw is interpretable as a figure deeply engaged in a devotional tradition native to
English piety, a poet much closer to the mainstream of seventeenth-century English
religious writing than previous narratives of Crashaw as an exiled papist have suggested.

Finally, a brief concluding chapter suggests future avenues of research, and
gesture toward John Milton’s engagement of the Passion despite the traditionally
canonical poet’s supposed aversion to this event. The conclusion suggests the ongoing
relevance of the Passion to mainstream literature of the period, just as the publication of
Milton’s Poems in 1645, one year before Crashaw’s Steps to the Temple, represents not
an end to Passion devotion in the period’s poetry, but instead the continuing work that the
Passion could perform in the complex literary and devotional communities of the
seventeenth century.
CHAPTER 1:
A SURVEY OF PASSION DISCOURSES IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

The exposition of the saving Passion and death of Christ the Lord we have given briefly. Would to God that these mysteries were always present to our minds, and that we learned to suffer, die, and be buried together with our Lord; so that from henceforth, having cast aside all stain of sin, and rising with Him to newness of life, we may at length, through His grace and mercy, be found worthy to be made partakers of the celestial kingdom of glory!

--The Catechism of the Council of Trent

Let us steadfastly behold Christ crucified with the eyes of our heart. Let us only trust to be saved by his death and passion, and to have our sins clean washed away through his most precious blood; that, in the end of the world, when he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead, he may receive us into his heavenly kingdom, and place us in the number of his elect and chosen people.

--“Second Sermon of the Passion,” in the Elizabethan Homilies

Despite the polemical and theological wars that characterized much religious writing in post-Reformation England, the Passion continued to be vital for both Catholic and Protestant devotion. Scholars of seventeenth-century devotional poetry have long

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2 Sermons, or Homilies, Appointed to be read in Churches (London: Prayer-Book and Homily Society, 1833), 298.
recognized the significance of doctrinal assertions and theological controversies in shaping much of the religious poetry of the period. While this critical approach has been invaluable in broadening our understanding of the interaction between theology and literature, I would like to shift the discussion away from poetry’s theological engagements and its construction of confessional identities, and instead read Catholic and Protestant writers for the devotional discourses of the Passion they hold in common, and for how writers shape those discourses to various ends. Emphasizing discursive patterns and representational strategies rather than doctrine will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the devotional approaches available to writers across the confessional divides. By reading seventeenth-century religious poets within the broader contexts of Passion piety, this chapter will complicate traditional narratives of monolithic and generally exclusive Catholic and Protestant devotional writing—interpretations epitomized in the critical debate between Louis Martz and Barbara Lewalski and their followers in the late twentieth century.  

This chapter has three goals. First, it reads Catholic and Protestant Passion accounts across a variety of genres—meditative manuals, sermons, treatises, official and pastoral documents—and isolates five representational or devotional discourses operating in such works. This survey will provide a common language to describe individual poets’ engagements with the Passion in the subsequent chapters. Second, this chapter will show the broad similarities found in Catholic and Protestant accounts of the Passion; it will also

note divergent patterns of emphasis that characterize Catholic and Protestant versions of
that event, especially when devotional texts approach controversial matters of theology.
However, though theological distinctions between the confessions occasionally shape
particular patterns of emphasis, the majority of writers participate in the same discourses
regardless of their confessional identities. The purpose of this analysis is not to develop
rigid categories; rather, it is to show the shared representational strategies of the Passion
available to poets and writers in the period, discourses which are not coterminous with
any particular confessional identity. Third, in arguing that Catholic and Protestant
Passions can occasionally emphasize particular strategies even though they draw on the
same trans-confessional devotion, this chapter also suggests that Passion devotion is
implicated in questions of confessional identity and religious community. This will
become especially evident in the final section of the chapter on the language of
temporality. Subsequent chapters of the dissertation will then explore how particular
poets appropriate trans-confessional Passion discourses to their own visions of this event
in order to construct intimate communion with the crucified Christ as well as to engage
questions of religious and confessional community.

The Five Discourses of the Passion

This survey describes five discursive categories characterizing Passion devotion
in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English texts. These representational approaches
are largely indebted to the late medieval traditions of St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure,
but they are also found in the works of Jesuit meditation that have long been recognized
as significant influences on English literature in the period.
1. The Discourse of the Visualized Body in Pain (Visuality)
2. The Discourse of Spatial Intimacy
3. The Discourse of Imitation and Identification
4. The Discourse of Substitution
5. The Discourse of Temporality

I will define these categories in detail below. For now, what is significant is that despite the professed theology and confessional allegiances of Passion writers and devotional poets, almost all articulations of Christ’s Passion dealt with in this study employ some or all of these five trans-confessional discourses. Additionally, discursive categories are fluid rather than rigid, descriptive rather than proscriptive: particular discourses can cross the tentative boundaries between categories, and sometimes a rhetorical strategy can embody multiple devotional discourses. Furthermore, writers often employ apparently contradictory discourses within individual pieces, so that, for instance, Christ’s suffering can be imagined in the past tense at one point in a given text, and in the present at another. The point is that there are virtually no mutually exclusive discursive categories or representational strategies in this analysis.

On the other hand, this study does not claim that the period’s devotional poetry or Passion accounts do not diverge in how the Passion is construed both imaginatively and theologically—even a casual reading of Donne’s “Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward,” Crashaw’s “Song Upon the Bleeding Crucifix,” and Southwell’s “Christes bloody sweate” reveals differences in conception that cannot originate in generic distinctions alone (they are all relatively short lyrics in the first person, for example). There are a number of reasons for these divergent approaches among poets and even
among several poems of the same poet. Yet one significant reason for differing representational emphases of the Passion between poets lies in their adherence to disparate theologies: quite often, the closer a poet approaches to matters of controversial theology and confessional identification, the more his discursive emphases are enlisted to support his religious position. I will show toward the end of this chapter, for instance, how a Catholic theology of the mass can shape a temporal rhetoric of the liturgical present, while a stricter Protestant belief in man’s depravity and in solafideism can lead a writer to emphasize substitutive discourse and economic tropes. This occasional tendency to emphasize discursive patterns in order to assert particular confessional allegiance or identities suggests that Passion devotion plays an important role in each writer’s exploration or assertion of religious community, the imagined or actual readerships envisioned by the poets themselves through the Passion. However, though Catholics and Protestants occasionally privilege one discursive pattern over another and thereby suggest their doctrinal predilections, the differences arising from writers’ theological persuasions is one of degree and emphasis rather than of kind.

**The Discourse of the Visualized Body in Pain (Visuality)**

Perhaps the most significant trans-confessional Passion discourse is the visualized body in pain (which I will also call “visuality”), a devotional approach that characterizes Bernardine and Bonaventuran spirituality and which permeates the English devotional literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Visual discourse emphasizes Christ’s bloody physical torments in vivid, sometimes erotic detail. Related to the discourses of spatial intimacy and imitation described below, the discourse of visuality is deeply rooted
in the affective piety of St. Bernard, whose Passion devotions were printed repeatedly on
mainstream English presses throughout the period. The translator of the 1631 edition of
the Bernardine *Sighes, Sobbes and Teares*—“W.P.”—makes this affective piety plain in
his prefatory letter: “I have much endeavoured, so to expresse the grievous Passion of our
gracious Redeemer, as if it were now in present action before our eyes, that I might the
better stirre up fervent motions of piety in the mind, and kindle the sparkes of true
devotion in the heart of the Reader.”4 Later on in the treatise, the author apostrophizes
Christ (apostrophe being a rhetorical figure common to Passion accounts and related to
the discourse of spatial intimacy) and again underlines the visual dimensions of the
Passion: “thou hast left thy owne selfe unto us, that wee should have a continuall
spectacle of thy most holy Passion in our mindes, and often thinke upon thy innocent
death in our repenting hearts.”5 The goal of Bernardine meditation is to stir the reader’s
pity and compassion through a “realistic” imagining of Christ’s death, expressed
primarily through the eyes, which will ultimately result in the movement of the mind and
heart toward God. Spiritually, this compassion should lead the soul to repentance, the key
moment of justification in Catholic and Protestant soteriologies.

Pseudo-Bernard urges both his reader and his own soul to turn his eyes toward
Jesus crucified again and again, often complete with details of Christ’s torture that are
vividly presented: “oh my soule, turne hither thine eyes, and more steadfastly behold
him...behold him naked, beaten, bruised, and mangled with stripes, nailed to the Crosse

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5 Pseudo-Bernard, *Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares*, 1.83-84. There are two separate paginations in this
volume. Subsequent references will include pagination series and page number.
with iron railes.” In Pseudo-Bernard’s meditations, this visuality assumes iconic status, contributing to the medieval tradition of the five wounds of Christ, which are in this text presented with gruesome detail: “View him, pouring out plentifull streames of blood, gushing out from the five wounds of his tender hands, feete, and side, pitifully wounded and cruelly pierced.” This visual exercise moves the devotee to compassion and repentance, the perennial goal of affective piety, so that Christ’s blood and the soul’s tears become one fluid: later on the page, the soul is to “bathe his bleeding wounds with the streaming teares of thy true and zealous repentance.” Pseudo-Bernard’s exemplary and popular Passion piety is clearly governed by a prayerful and highly visual devotion to the physical torture of Christ, an emphasis on the vir dolorum of late medieval piety, as well as on the need for compassion in the human soul.

The discourse of visuality, of Christ’s vividly portrayed body in pain, finds an amenable home throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in predominantly (though not exclusively) Catholic texts. The 1523 English manual A gloryous medytacyon provides an excellent example. The cover page presents a detailed engraving of Christ, stripped and wounded from head to toe. Visible are the crown of thorns, the pillar and scourge, his cloak (which he carries)—the basic elements and metonyms of Christ’s torture. Likewise, the text provides emblems to illustrate the meditations, including loaves from the Last Supper (which resemble the flat, unleavened hosts used in the Eucharist) (4v), the scourges (5r), the nails (7v) and the crown of thorns (6v), the hammers (7v), the gall and vinegar and the spear (8r), the ladder and pliers-like

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6 Ibid., 2.204.
7 Ibid., 2.205.
implements used to depose the body from the cross (8v). Also illustrated are the crowds spitting on Jesus’ face (9r), as well as his body in the sepulcher (9v). A similar visual strategy occurs in Gasparo de Loarte’s *The godly garden of Gethsemani* (1579 or 1580), a Jesuit manual of meditation published in England (both on official and clandestine presses), in which the meditations are each headed by detailed illustrations of the relevant event of the Passion. The work’s frontispiece includes a crucifixion complete with the two thieves, the mocking priests and people, the centurion, the Virgin, and Mary Magdalene. Though the later editions of this work, titled *Meditations of the life and passion of our Lord* (1596-98) omit the illustrations (while preserving the identical text), this omission is due not to a decreased visuality in Jesuit Passion piety, but likely to the text’s printing on Jesuit Henry Garnet’s secret press in London, in a process whose speed and stealth precluded the use of elaborate designs and excessive amounts of paper.

Such vividly visual and corporeal discourse appears consistently throughout the range of Catholic Passion accounts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. John Fisher’s popular and much reprinted Good Friday sermon meditates almost gruesomely on “the book of the crucifix”:

Seest thou not his eyes, how they bee fylled with blood and bytter teares?

Seest thou not his mouth, how in his dryghnesse they would haue filled it with Asell and Gaule?

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Seest thou not his sydes, how they were skourged with sharpe whyps?

Seest thou not his armes, how they were strayned by the violence of the ropes?

Seest thou not his feet, how paynefully they stay and bere vp the wight of his whole body?¹⁰

Though for obvious reasons regarding medium—this is a sermon, after all—Fisher uses language to paint a picture for his auditors, it is also true this visuality is rooted in the physical rood that would have been present above the chancel and behind the pulpit from which Fisher spoke before the Henrician Reformation; the repeated gestures to this image all saturate this verbal text with the ghostly presence of the visual icon which served as a physical background. Likewise, the pervasive Ignatian tradition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, itself shaped by Bernardine piety, is predicated on almost painfully detailed visuality through the *compositio loci*, the act of composing the details of a biblical narrative in the imagination. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius Loyola regularly urges detailed visualization of the Passion in the meditation on the third week, urging the meditator “To see the people at the supper, and by reflecting within myself to try and draw some profit from them / ...To watch what they are doing, and draw some profit.”¹¹

As already suggested, Loarte’s treatise regularly itemizes the appropriate visual elements of each meditation. Consider this from “The Scourging of Christ our Saviour”:

Consider the sharpnese and bitter cruelty of those pitylesse tormentors in [the] scourging of that most meeke Lambe, in spoyling him of his garments, and


binding him strongly to a piller, and to beate him without all mercy...how cruelly he was whipt and beaten with roddes, so that there remayned no one part of his blessed body unwounded nor unbathed with blood, from the crowne of his head to the soles of his feete.\textsuperscript{12}

Fulvio Androzzi, another Jesuit author whose meditative manuals and spiritual autobiography were translated into English at the turn of the seventeenth century, includes in his Passion account strikingly specific visual elements, as in the following passage from the 1606 English translation of his \textit{Meditations Uppon the Passion}:

1. So manie filthie spittles, with which they berayed his most holy face.

2. So manie buffets giuen him uppon his face by people so miserable, infamous and vile.

3. So manie sorts of garments wherewith they did apparell him, now in white, now in redd, as if he had ben a verie foole.\textsuperscript{13}

As the Bernardine and Ignatian modes of meditation show, such features highlight detailed images of Christ’s Passion as intrinsic to, not merely ornaments of, fruitful meditation, and in many instances, as in Loarte’s and Fisher’s accounts, the visual components offered are extra-biblical, suggesting their ultimate debt to the late medieval Passion narratives emanating from the followers of Bonaventure and Bernard.\textsuperscript{14} The deeper implication is that visuality is central to the very act of reflecting on the Passion,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Gasparo de Loarte, \textit{The godly garden of Gethsemani, furnished with holsome fruites of Meditation and prayer, upon the blessed passion of Christ our Redeemer} (London, 1580), O5r-O5v.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Fulvio Androzzi, \textit{Meditations Uppon the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ} (Douai: 1606), 67.
\item \textsuperscript{14} For the development of the late medieval, extra-biblical narratives of the Passion, see F.P. Pickering, \textit{Literature and Art in the Middle Ages} (Coral Gables, FL: U of Miami P, 1966), 223-307; James H. Marrow, \textit{Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narration} (Ars Neerlandica: Van Ghemmert Publishing, 1979), 1-27.
\end{itemize}
that through imaginatively reconstructing the Passion we are made fruitful partakers of it. As Fisher emphasizes time and again in his sermon, the faithful Christian must apply himself to Christ’s Passion meditatively and visually in order to become a “parteiner” to it, a partaker and participant in this central event of Christian history.

Though critics such as Michael Schoenfeldt and Erin Henriksen have claimed that Protestants generally privileged the spiritual and theological significances of the Passion rather than its brutally realistic, physical details, English Protestant Passion accounts appropriated the discourse of visuality freely and frequently throughout the period.¹⁵ Though suspicious of emphasizing Christ’s physical sufferings at the expense of their spiritual meaning in his *The Passion Sermon* (1609), Joseph Hall, staunch proponent of establishment Protestantism, routinely urges the reader to look, to behold:

Looke up O all ye beholders, looke upon this pretious body, and see what part ye can find free? that head which is adored and trembled at by the Angelicall spirits, is all raked and harrowed with thorns: that face, of whome is said, *Thou art fairer then the children of men*, is all besmeared with the filthy spettle of the Jewes, and furrowed with his teares.¹⁶

Hall not only urges the reader through deictic imperatives to behold “there,” but also blends this command with very visual descriptions of Christ’s sufferings, similar to the method of Pseudo-Bernard. In his *Declaration of the True Manner of Knowing Christ Crucified* (1596), the Calvinist theologian William Perkins admonishes his readers to behold Christ intimately before the eyes in order to understand the profound graces of

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God. After two pages in which Perkins details Christ’s suffering, following each detail with its spiritual meaning—“When thou readest, that he was clad in purple and crowned with thornes...behold the everlasting shame that is due unto thee”—Perkins then admonishes the reader to behold Christ in terms echoing Bernardine piety: “When thou commest to die, set before thine eyes Christ in the middest of all his torments on the crosse: in beholding of which spectacle to thy endless comfort, thou shalt see a paradise in the middest of hell.”17 Never leaving the spiritual significance of Christ’s sufferings behind, Perkins employs visual discourse and connects it directly to appropriate spiritual understanding.

Likewise, in his The Mirrour of Humilitie (English trans. 1618), Daniel Heinsius, a Dutch theologian and influential supporter of the Synod of Dort in 1619 (the Calvinist council that reaffirmed strict Calvinist theology over its Arminian formulations), uses a very similar rhetorical strategy, mingling a long series of visual details with the spiritual meaning of those details, and including the command “Ecce homo: Behold the man; Behold him that is Lord Paramount of whatsoever is inclaspt within the circuit of this spacious World: and yet now hee standeth poore and unfurnished of all things....”18 Similarly, in his closing prayer, Heinsius foregrounds the eye as the gateway of affective devotion to the Passion, writing “Oh let us always reflect our Eyes upon thee, and let thy sufferings take a deepe impression both in our Memories and in our affections.”19

17 William Perkins, A Declaration of the True Manner of knowing Christ Crucified (Cambridge, 1596), 34, 34-35 (the series of visual details), 35.


19 Ibid., 94-5.
Heinsius does not shy away from highly visual language, often constructing Christ as vividly as Pseudo-Bernard: “There was not scarce any part of his whole body, that was not either exposed to reproach, or tormented by griefe. His head pierced with thornes, beaten with fists, bruised with staves; his face beslimed with spittle, his cheekes swelled out with blowes, his tongue and palate offended with distastefull vinegar and gall….”

And later: “Hee that was thus set out, and emblemed with so many gracefull ornaments, lyeth now disfigured with wounds, weltring and panting in a crimson river of his owne bloude…How many wide sluces & passages have they opened for the venting of [his blood]? What full streams & torrents gushed out at his nostrils?” For these committed Calvinist Protestants, even the need to understand a “correct” theology of Christ’s Passion, a rhetorical goal they often forward in opposition to presumed Catholic practice, does not preclude the striking visual details of Christ’s suffering; indeed, for all of them the sight of the Passion, even metaphorically, should move the human soul to sorrow and repentance.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Catholic Passions tended to favor Bernardine visuality and its concomitant emphasis on Christ’s vivid, bodily suffering. From Loarte and Androzzi, who both emphasize repeatedly the visual nature of Christ’s bloody wounds, his scourging, his painful nailing to the cross, the spittle of his mockers, to the Bernardine Sighes, Sobbes and Teares which exemplifies the spiritual need to dwell on Christ’s flowing blood and painful death, to John Fisher’s moments of visual emphasis, Christ’s suffering body is a central locus proving his humanity and the efficaciousness of his love.

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20 Ibid., 59.

21 Ibid., 62-63.
This tradition continues in Catholic Passion writers through the seventeenth century: John Falconer, an English Catholic and one of the Jesuits banished from England in 1618 who later returned to serve Catholic families clandestinely, uses language almost identical to the above excerpts in his 1633 *Fasciculus Myrrhae*. This text relishes the specific details of Christ’s physical suffering, from Christ’s agony in Gethsemane in which Christ lets his blood “gush forth through his garments, on the ground,” to his appearance after the scourging, where Christ’s “hayre of his head and beard [are] clotted, and glewed togeather with gore bloud; his face all over besmeared; finally the delicat proportion of his limbes marred with swellings,” to the crucifixion itself, where, like in Pseudo-Bernard, “the foure streames, flowing from his sacred woundes were as foure springs, rising from the depth of this earthly Paradise.”22 This is precisely the kind of physical and visual emphasis on Christ’s suffering and often liquefying body characterizing Bernardine piety, in which Christ’s blood spouts out of his wounds, where scourges create deep stripes on his back, and where blood and tears are hardly separated from the spittle of Christ’s tormenters. Tellingly, Falconer’s title is a direct reference to the Song of Songs 1:12, a verse which the Vulgate renders *fasciculus murrae dilectus meus mihi inter ubera mea commorabitur*, and to the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* by St. Bernard, an immensely popular text in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries referenced directly or indirectly by almost every major Passion writer in this study.

Because of the widespread popularity of both Bernardine texts like *Sighes, Sobbes, and Tears* and Jesuit manuals—many of which, like Loarte’s, were published on

22 John Falconer, *Fasciculus Myrrhae, or A briefe Treatise of our Lord and Saviours Passion* (Douai, 1633), 28, 61, 76.
Protestant presses with very little emendation—Protestants partake of similar visual traditions in their Passion accounts. The official Elizabethan Homilies, commanded by the crown to be read at every Sunday service from King Edward’s reign through Elizabeth’s, invoke the imperative “behold” just as so many of the Passion accounts across the confessional divide do. In one homily on the Passion, we read:

Call to mind, O sinful creature, and set before thine eyes, Christ crucified; think thou seest his body stretched out in length upon the cross, his head crowned with sharp thornes, and his hands and his feet pierced with nails, his heart opened with a long spear, his flesh rent and torn with whips, his brows sweating water and blood; think thou hearest him now crying in an intolerable agony to his Father, and saying, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

The description is as vivid as much of the language of Bernardine piety or Jesuit meditation, placing the sermon’s auditors at the foot of the cross to imagine not only hearing Christ’s words cited in Scripture, but seeing the specific elements of his torture, viewing the piercing of his all-too-human body. Similarly, William Perkins closes his Calvinist analysis of the Passion with a similar, though less vivid, summary of this vision, writing, “If thou wouldest come to God for grace, for comfort, for salvation, for any blessing, come first to Christ hanging, bleeding, dying upon the cross, without whome
there is no hearing God.” Thomas Ailesbury, a little-known and anti-Catholic English preacher of the early seventeenth century and author of *The Passion Sermon* (1626), partakes of the same discourse:

like a worme hee crawles upon the ground, and upon that earth he is crucified without a Crosse; feare and love are the nailes, our sinnes the thornes, his Fathers wrath the speare to cruciate him, which cause a bleeding shower to migne throughout all his pores, that in a cold night he sweats without heat, and bleeds without a wound, all his body is besprinkled with a crimson dew; the very Vaines and Pores expediting our Saviours will of their own accord.

Here physical detail blends with spiritual significance, so that Christ’s agony manifests both his humanity as well as his divine love. Anthony Stafford, a Protestant who venerates the Virgin Mary in *The Femall Glory* (1635), uses even more vivid imagery combined with the present tense in his Passion text, *Day of Salvation*, published the same year:

they binde [Christ’s hands] so fast, that the Cord eates into his tender flesh...they set a Crowne of Thornes so fast, that his purest Blood runnes in streames down his sweetest Face...That Body...they unmercifully and uncessantly whippe from the top to the bottome, so that from head to foot hee was but one continued sore.

The above passages differ in the degree of vividness they create: while Ailesbury, Hall, and Perkins tend to emphasize the wounded and bleeding savior in order to link those visual markers with spiritual significance, others like Stafford will dwell on the physical wounds themselves, allowing the visualizing of Christ’s pained body to manifest his

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25 Perkins, 38.


incarnate humanity and thus to move the meditating soul to sorrow and compunction. But regardless of this rhetorical range, Catholic and Protestant Passion accounts all tend to draw on this fundamentally Bernardine tradition that privileges Christ’s pained body as the site of compassion and salvation, as the channel of heavenly grace.

In English Protestantism of the period there is no clearer proponent of the need to visualize Christ on the cross than Bishop Lancelot Andrewes. Andrewes also tends to employ the physical and visualized details of Christ’s Passion while spiritualizing their meaning. Andrewes’s three extant sermons on the Passion, from the Good Fridays of 1597, 1604, and 1605, are all predicated on beholding Christ in the hope that Christ, moved by the soul’s contrition, will “regard” the devotee. In the 1604 Passion sermon, Andrewes uses Lamentations 1:12 as his text—*Have ye no Regard, o all ye that passe by the way?*—and organizes the entire homily around the spiritual obligation to “regard” Christ on the cross. He warns his auditors that if we do not “regard” Christ’s sacrifice—and this “regard” includes spiritual and literal registers of meaning—“it may pertaine to us, but wee pertaine not to it...None pertaine to it, but they that take benefite by it; and none take benefite by it, no more then by the brasen Serpent, but they that fixe their eye on it.”

The Brazen Serpent is a commonplace type of Christ for Catholic and Protestant alike: like the serpent that preserved the Israelites who looked upon it in the desert, so too does the vision of Christ crucified save those who regard it faithfully. This reference is ubiquitous, and is found, for instance, in the “Second Sermon on the Passion” in the *Homilies*. Indeed, for Andrewes, spiritual vision of Christ’s Passion is synonymous with

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28 Lancelot Andrewes, *The Copie of the Sermon preached on good Friday last before the Kings Majesty* (London, 1604), F1r.

29 Numbers 21:9
saving faith. In his 1605 Passion sermon, this relationship is made clear throughout, where Andrewes uses Hebrews 12:2—*Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith*—in order to connect spiritual vision to grace:

Our eye then is the eye of our mind, which is faith; and our *aspicientes* in this, and the *recogitantes* in the next verse, all one; our looking to Him here, is our thinking on Him there; on Him and His Passion over and over again, *Donec totus fixus in corde Qui totus fixus in cruce*, “till He be as fast fixed in our heart as ever He was to His cross,” and some impression made in us of Him, as there was in Him for us.\(^{30}\)

For Andrewes, it seems, all meditation is ultimately a spiritual “beholding” or “regard” for Christ’s sufferings as manifestations of God’s love and compassion. While the vision Andrewes advocates tends to ebb and flow rhetorically between literal vision and metaphorical meaning, the point is that Andrewes tends to equate Christian faith with a proper vision of Christ on the cross, and uses that vision to signify the spiritual benefits of faith in the Passion. Visuality in Andrewes assumes spiritual dimensions, using Christ’s body itself as the sign of divine love and grace.

Both Catholics and Protestants thus privilege Christ as *vir dolorum*, dwelling on Christ’s wounds and his suffering for humanity’s sins. Protestants, especially when writing in a polemical mode, tend to spiritualize the vision of Christ’s Passion, often out of the stated desire to avoid a devotional emphasis they deemed overtly Catholic. In other words, while Protestants, even staunchly Calvinist Protestants, do indeed partake of the discourse of visuality and the body in pain, they sometimes metaphorize that visuality into explicit spiritual meanings (and occasionally, as in the cases of Perkins and, as

shown below, John Foxe, directly criticize perceived “superficiality” or fleshliness in Catholic devotion to the crucifix). Yet even in this theologically-shaped spiritualization of the *vir dolorum* tradition, Protestants rely on the discourse of Christ’s suffering body made visually present to the devout soul. Andrewes, for instance, is very clear that a deep understanding of Christ crucified comes from a spiritual vision that sees Christ’s agony as a manifestation of love. Yet Andrewes’s spiritualizing of the body is grounded in corporeal metaphor: “First then, not slightly, superficially or perfunctorily, but steadfastly, and with due attention, to ‘look upon Him’.” And not to look upon the outside alone, but to look into the very entrails.” Andrewes uses the anatomical metaphor again a page later, urging his listeners to look even into “the bowels of compassion and tender love” of Christ.31 For Andrewes, “bowels” and “entrails” are both physical referents—we presumably might see them through the wound in the side of “him whom they have pierced”—as well as the seat of spiritual compassion; they are simultaneously corporeal entities and spiritual sources of love, a trope drawn from early modern physiology that, as Michael Schoenfeldt has shown, is central to seventeenth-century thought.32 The point is that the devout soul must look both at Christ’s suffering body as well as into its deeper spiritual signification.

John Foxe also warns against superficial meditation on the mere outward Passion. In his popular *The Sermon of Christ Crucified* (1585), Foxe criticizes his perennial polemical archenemies, the papists, for their superstitious vision:


they know not his crosse, neither do they see much more in the passion of Christ than Animalis homo, that is, the sensible man may do...But this is not inough. To knowe Christ Jesus crucified, and to knowe him rightly, it is not sufficient to staie in these outward things: we must go further than the sensible man: wee must looke inwardly wyth a spirituall eie into spiritual things.33

Similarly, William Perkins, despite his use of visual discourse to depict Christ’s Passion, warns against an incorrect, popish manner of beholding, admonishing us to “behold him often, not in the wooden crucifixe after the popish manner, but in the preaching of the Worde, and in the Sacraments, in which thou shalt see him crucified before thine eyes.”34

Interestingly, Perkins does not de-emphasize the imperative to visualize Christ, but instead relocates that power of vision from a physical and iconic form—the crucifix—to the inward registers of sacramental devotion and Scripture, to the metaphorical, rather than “merely” corporeal image, which Perkins and his confessional sympathizers would have likely construed as idolatrous. John Andrewes, a little-known Protestant divine and sometime-poet, who dedicated his 1614 Christ His Crosse to King James, refers to this kind of spiritual rather than more corporeal or “carnal” (to use a favorite Protestant pejorative) mode of vision when he urges his readers to behold Christ crucified, but not “superstitiously,” in a reference to the presumed Catholic practice of venerating the cross and crucifix rather than the spiritually living and verbally or spiritually present Jesus.35

Finally, the Calvinist preacher Bartholomew Chamberlain’s Sermon Preached at S.

33 John Foxe, The Sermon of Christ Crucifyed: Preached At Paules Crosse, the friday before Easter, commonlie called Good fridaye (London, 1585), A3v-A4r.

34 Perkins, 29.

35 John Andrewes, Christ His Crosse, or The Most Comfortable Doctrine of Christ crucified, and joyfull tidings of his Passion, teaching us to love, and imbrace his Crosse, as the most sweete and celestiall doctrine unto the soule, and how we should behave our selves therein according to the word of God (Oxford, 1614), 51.
James (1580, reprinted 1584 and 1595), a bestseller in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, deliberately avoids rehearsing the details of Christ’s Passion, claiming to discuss the Passion “briefly to avoyd tediousnes, plainely to edifie all, truely out of Scriptures.”

Though Chamberlain’s point might indeed be to “avoid” the “tediousness” of a lengthy sermon, his words also suggest a deliberate avoidance of the non-Scriptural emphases on Christ’s bodily suffering that came to characterize Bernardine piety (the abuse of which Foxe and others rail against). Instead, it seems, Chamberlain’s goal is to draw specific theological doctrine from a scriptural narrative whose rehearsal should serve to illuminate doctrine, not merely draw the auditor intimately close to Jesus’ Passion to affect the emotions.

However, despite the suggestion of such passages that Protestants favored spiritualized versions of Christ’s visualized, pained body, Catholic Passion accounts, too, emphasize the spiritual meaning of Christ’s sufferings. Indeed, because the ultimate goal of visualizing Christ’s pained body is to move the soul to contrition and repentance, there is an inherent link between the corporealized suffering of Christ’s visualized body and the spirit; visualized suffering and affectivity are intertwined. For instance, this kind of spiritualization of physical suffering seems the point of Androzzi’s poem in his Meditations:

[O Lord] Wherefore wouldest thou be spitted on?
To clense thy filthines.
Wherefore wouldest thou be scourged?
To free thee from eternall scourges.
Wherefore wouldest thou be lifted up on the crosse?

36 Bartholomew Chamberlain, The Passion of Christ, and the benefits thereby. Preached at S. James, before the right honorable Lords of Her Majesties prime council, the 29. of Aprill. 1580 (London: 1595), A2v.
To lift thee up into heaven.
Wherefore wouldest thou be crowned with thornes?
To crowne thee in everlasting glorie.\textsuperscript{37}

A theology of substitutive atonement (one among several theologies of the atonement)\textsuperscript{38} clearly motivates this passage. But more importantly, Androzzi uses the same words—\textit{scourge, lift, crowne}, for example—to refer both to a physical element of the Passion and to a subsequent merit given to the soul, thereby spiritualizing the corporeal, forcing the visualized and suffering Christ to point toward the invisible grace his Passion produces (in this case) through affectivity. Hence, on the one hand, Catholic accounts privilege Christ’s vividly suffering body to stir the soul to contrition, but they often spiritualize and metaphorize the brutal details to foreground the significance of grace and Christ’s merit. On the other hand, though Protestant accounts very often participate in Bernardine piety, they sometimes explicitly metaphorize and spiritualize that affective piety when comparing “rectified” Protestant devotion to “superstitious” Catholic practice, emphasizing a deeper, spiritual vision that seeks to know the “correct” theology of the cross rather than to dwell extensively on the outward implements of Christ’s torture.

Awareness of the visually conceived body in pain broadens our understanding of the varieties of devotional poetry of the Passion. It allows us to ask pertinent questions regarding the ability or desire of a poet to envision Christ’s bloodied visage, or to behold the gruesome details of his Passion. It may also allow us to distinguish between poets’ vacillating preoccupations with both intellectual and theological knowledge, as well as to

\textsuperscript{37} Androzzi, 89-90.

\textsuperscript{38} For a concise summary of the various theologies of the atonement characterizing early Christianity, see Michael Slusser, “Primitive Christian Soteriological Themes,” \textit{Theological Studies} 44 (1983): 555-69.
understand the differing approaches poets take to the affective dimensions of Christ’s Passion. How Christ’s body emerges in poetry—how Donne handles his meditation on Good Friday, or Southwell depicts Christ’s agony in the Garden, for instance—has a direct effect on how a poem constructs communion between speaker/reader and God, as well as on how the salvation of the yearning human soul ultimately takes place both within and without a particular poem. Moreover, as the Protestant tendency occasionally to downplay visuality as an overtly Catholic strategy suggests, the discourse of the visualized body in pain demonstrates the shaping forces of confessional identity on imaginative communion with Christ, or at least the fear that visual discourse can be marked by a writer’s Catholic or Protestant confessional identity.

The Discourse of Spatial Intimacy

Closely related to visuality is the discourse of spatial intimacy, which refers to the representational strategies Passion writers use to draw the reader or auditor more closely into the narrated events of the Passion. This discursive category closes the imaginative spatial gap between the suffering Christ and the devout soul, rendering Christ and the events surrounding his death intensely present to the auditor. Spatial proximity or intimacy can be achieved through three specific rhetorical strategies: narrative strategies that use enargia to make the Passion more present; deictic markers that locate the auditor spatially (sometimes temporally) close to the Passion; and apostrophe, the direct address either of speaker to Christ, or of Christ to the speaker, or of one character to another within the text. The first of these, narration or enargia, can sometimes include highly visual details, as the classical origin of the word denotes, and as such, this dimension of
spatial intimacy is especially related to the discourse of visuality, though it encompasses more than the vividly portrayed, suffering body.

In the sense I use the term here, *enargia* refers to a writer’s use of specific details surrounding Christ’s Passion, such as the presence of other figures at the Passion, or descriptions of the setting, or the narrative progress of the Passion itself—all intended to make the events of the Passion intimately present to the reader. The second strategy, deictic marking, refers to the use of words, commands, and phrases such as “here,” “now,” “there,” and “see” to render the Passion as a specifically located, proximate, and immanent event. The third strategy, apostrophe, is fairly pervasive in Passion accounts and, unsurprisingly, devotional poetry. It includes prayers, admonitions, reproaches, dialogues—any utterances that represent speech between Christ and speaker/auditor, or between Christ and other figures present at the crucifixion, or between the devout soul and such figures. The discourse of spatial intimacy, like that of imitation and identification described below (which can, for example, let the speaking voice merge with Christ’s), has a strong connection to the appropriation of Passion discourses in poetry in that it can shape the formal features of lyric poems—their settings, the figures included in them, the addressees and the speakers—and hence affect their construction of the Passion and its meanings.

The first of these strategies, narrative *enargia*, is indebted to late medieval Bernardine crucifixion narratives, but it is also found in Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*, which is essentially a codification of the late medieval devotional tradition. The *compositio loci*, as Ignatius defines it, is an imaginative strategy whereby the soul reconstructs specific events of Christ’s life and death in painstaking detail, and Ignatian
writers of Passion accounts tend to use this strategy quite often—as do many Protestant writers. Since the entire purpose of manuals like Androzzi’s and Loarte’s is to make the Passion intimately present in order to allow the devotee to conform more closely to Christ, a few examples should suffice. Loarte uses both *enargia* and deictic marking to introduce his meditation on the Agony in the Garden:

Now our saviour going into the garden, to which place he knew his enemies should come for to apprehend him...he fel downe flat on the grounde, and with most great reverence, he made his prayers three times to his father...Nowe that his affliction and anguishe increasing, which willingly he received, raused hym at the last to sweate droppes of blood, that fell uppon the earth.\(^{39}\)

Loarte will go on a third time to use the marker “nowe” to introduce the next series of details; the repetition enhances the proximity of Christ’s private sorrows in Gethsemane, using the details of the scriptural narrative to draw the meditator closer to the event. The passage combines this deictic tendency with clear details of Christ’s sweating blood and his falling on his face and weeping, all for the purpose of rendering the event as realistically present as possible. The reader’s goal is to become a witness to Christ’s suffering in the present moment. Androzzi also uses a very similar technique, except that rather than using the deixis characterizing Loarte, he begins first with a picture of the Virgin’s sufferings: “Consider how sorrowfull the blessed virgin was seing her sonne so misused...Her patience, she not doing nor saying any thing, in the middest of so many cruelties,” and then draws into the picture the rest of Christ’s friends present at Calvary: “The manner of God so diverse from that of the world, that he maketh even his dearest

\(^{39}\) Loarte, *The godly garden*, M7v-M8r.
friends to suffer so much as were his sonne, & his mother, and others beloved of him.”

The goal of such strategies is to draw the reader into the Passion’s setting, to make the other figures present to the meditating soul, to locate the reader immediately in the deictic world of the Passion account or poem.

Spatial intimacy characterizes many Protestant Passion accounts as well. John Foxe’s *The Sermon of Christ Crucified* uses a lengthy narrative of the Passion to make the reader see God’s love for man through Christ’s suffering. Although Foxe claims to adhere to scripture, in Bernardine fashion he seasons his Passion account with details that are extra-scriptural and that are intended to close the distance between event and auditors. He writes, for instance:

> The pains and torments which this innocent Lambe of God sustained upon the Crosse were great, the rebukes & scornes which he abode, were greater: but specially that, which hee suffered in spirite and soule was greatest of all, when as hee not onelie in bodie decaying for weakenesse and bleeding, but also in soule, fainting with anguish and discomfort, beganne to crie with a loude voice: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken mee?* seeming by these wordes to be in such a case, as happenneth to Gods children sometimes, thinking with themselves, that God hath utterly left and forsaken them.\(^{41}\)

Foxe dilates the bare details of the Passion narrative, fleshing out, as it were, possible motivations for Christ’s scriptural utterance, suggesting the specific sources of Christ’s psychic and physical pain. The effect is less direct than Loarte’s or Androzzi’s clearer deixis and *enargia*, but the intended effect is similar: to draw the reader intimately into the events of Christ’s death by providing realistic, if exaggerated, details of Christ’s torment, his psychic disposition, and the people who mock him. As discussed below in

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\(^{40}\) Androzzi, 82-83.

\(^{41}\) Foxe, H1v-H2r.
the section on the discourse of substitution, Foxe also uses apostrophe to make Christ utter a lengthy non-scriptural speech from the cross. Though Christ speaks not to the reader but to Satan and Death in this long apostrophe—a passage in which he declares that sin and death no longer have legal claim on humanity—the effect nonetheless is to make Christ into an actor on a stage, so that his lengthy discourse places the reader in the position of a play-going audience overhearing a dying man’s final lines. Likewise, several decades later Anthony Stafford gives details that dilate the gospel narratives, thus rendering Christ more present to the reader through sometimes gruesome *enargia*: “The paine he endureed in his feeling, was diffus’d cleane through his body, his Nostrills drew in nothing but Noysome stinks, and dampes arising from putrified Carkasses, for it was the common place design’d both for the Execution and buriall of Malefactors.”

Thomas Ailesbury, writing like Stafford a generation or more after the Jesuits Androzzi and Loarte, uses several spatial rhetorical strategies:

> The witness of all this, and chiefe mourner was the *Blessed virgin*: *Nature & Grace* are the wellsprings whence flow such rivers of teares for her innocent sonne; now *Simeons* Prophecy is made good...by a reflex[ive] act her hands and feet with his are pierced, her side wounded and head bruised with thornes, as if but one soule in two bodies. *Oh my Lord!* thy griefe was the greatest that ever was in man.

Here all three rhetorical strategies of spatial intimacy come to bear: the suggested details (though metaphorized in this passage) of Christ’s bruised head and pierced limbs, the deictic marker “now” describing the temporally present fulfillment of Simeon’s prophecy to Mary in Luke 2, and the apostrophic ejaculation—*Oh my Lord!*—creating both an

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42 Stafford, 165.

43 Ailesbury, 26.
intimate communication between God and man as well as the emotive immediacy of an exclamatory prayer. Furthermore, though Lancelot Andrewes does not invoke the qualities of *enargia* and apostrophe to the degree present in Loarte or even in Ailesbury or Stafford, he too invokes moments of spatial intimacy: “And now, lay all these before you (every one of them a *Non Sicut* of it self) the paines of his Body, esteemed by Pilates *Ecce*; the sorrowes of his Soule, by his sweate in the Garden; the comfortlesse estate of his Sorrowes, by his crie on the Cross.”

Although Protestant writers like Perkins and Chamberlain often will not use these representational strategies to create imaginative intimacy between Christ’s Passion and their readers (there is nothing comparable in their treatises on the Passion to the vividness of Loarte or even Andrewes), the general tendency in many Protestant Passion accounts of the period, as Ailesbury’s sermon of 1626 and Stafford’s meditation of 1635 suggest, is toward spatial intimacy, an expressed desire to “regard” and participate in the imaginative event of the Passion in order to recognize its benefit to humanity and to embrace the fruits of faith.

Even when a writer does not emphasize the detailed *enargia* outlined above, he can take advantage of deictic markers to collapse the distance between the historical Passion and the present reader or auditor. Lancelot Andrewes seems particularly fond of deictic interjections in his sermons: in describing Christ and our need to “regard” him, Andrewes writes, “But as for this point it needeth not to be stood upon to us here at this time: we are not going by, we need not to be stayed; wee have stayed all other our affaires, to come hither, and here we are all present before God, to have it before us, that

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44 Lancelot Andrewes, *The Copie of the sermon*, E3r.
wee may consider it. Thither let us come.”\(^{45}\) Christ is not only described in the words of
the sermon, but Andrewes’s deictic repetitions—“this time,” “going by,” “hither,” “here,”
and “thither,”—reinforce the presence of Christ crucified within the world of the sermon.
His language reiterates the local presence of this imagined crucifixion, and he urges his
auditors to follow “here” and “there” to witness Christ’s Passion, to “regard” it always.
Joseph Hall similarly uses deictic markers to encourage his readers to feel Christ close to
them in Gethsemane: “Behold, this field was not without sweate and bloud; yea a sweate
of bloud,” he declares, in language that quickly locates the reader somewhere close to
Christ in the Garden, close enough to “behold” him sweating blood.\(^{46}\) Later, Hall will use
this strategy to close the distance between Christ on the cross and the audience: “Looke
but up to Christ Jesus upon his Crosse, and see him bowing his head, and breathing out
his soule, and these feares [i.e., of our own sinfulness] shall vanish.”\(^{47}\) We see the same
deictic imperative in Stafford: “O fixe thine Eyes here for ever, and lose thy sight
together with this object.”\(^{48}\) The imperative to “see” or “look,” and especially to “look
here” or “look up,” is typical of deictic moments in Passion accounts (and clearly related
to visuality), so that even when a writer is not doting on the physical details of Christ’s
Passion as Androzzi or even Foxe, he is conscious of bringing Christ’s Passion closer to
the reader’s imagination. Sometimes the flash of intimacy deictic language creates is not
as firmly rooted in a particular location in the Passion narratives, but nonetheless has the

\(^{45}\) Ibid., B1v-B2r.

\(^{46}\) Hall, 39.

\(^{47}\) Hall, 81.

\(^{48}\) Stafford, 149.
effect of drawing the audience into intimate relationship with the events of the Passion and Christ’s life. Ailesbury, for instance, uses such a figure when he writes, “Let us trace his footsteps, though with Peter we follow him a farre off, and in the Gospell there is such a living Commentary of his death and passion, that we doe not read but see him crucified.” For Ailesbury, Passion devotion is about becoming an eye-witness to Christ’s immanently present life and death.

Apostrophe is a third form of the discourse of spatial intimacy. At the simplest level, any prayer voiced to God in the Passion narratives is an apostrophe, and its general effect, depending on the presumed location of Christ or God, is to close the distance between the historical event being described and the soul in the present. This kind of closure is especially significant to readers: for when a reader reads a poem, she also is able to voice that poem, to adopt the words, as it were, as her own, in a way similar to the function of public and liturgical prayer in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and in a way pertinent to the highly popular poetry of Robert Southwell, discussed in chapter 2. Apostrophe, then, is an important device that can allow a reader to speak the words of a poem as her own and thereby draw the reader more intimately toward Christ through direct address. There are two types of apostrophic prayer: prayer to a non-specifically located God or Christ, and prayer to Christ or some other figure within the deictic world of the Passion account. Though these two types can have subtly different effects on the account’s spatial intimacy, it is often difficult to say which type is

49 Ailesbury, 17.

being used, and for the most part they render the divine auditor immediately present to the devotee regardless of the location of that auditor. Loarte’s manual is riddled with both formal and ejaculatory prayer. For instance, he interrupts himself regularly in the first half of the treatise with prayer: “For it so pleased his entier love the more to suffer for us, and so to make the greater satisfaction to the justice of God. O love without measure, O infinite clemencie and pitie most evidently declared, in that thou wouldest showe thyself cruell to thy self, to be pitiful towards us”; and again, “Ah my God and gracious Lorde, where was my judgement & wit, when I was so bolde to commit suche sinnes against thy divine majestie?”

Androzzi, too, sprinkles his manual with the appropriate formal prayers for devotion to the Passion, and in at least one prayer, he specifically associates the Christ he addresses with the crucified one: “O mie Lord Jesus Christ, I beseeche thee by that sorow & griefe which thou didst feele in the garden, by that bloud which thou diddest sweate, by that fervent and inflamed praier which thou didst make...that thou wilt vouchsafe to graunt me the gift of praier, and that I make speede to thee in al mie afflictions.”

Protestant accounts also employ apostrophe quite liberally. Daniel Heinsius prays, “For thou sweet Saviour art our head, and wee thy members: Thou our shepheard, and we thy sheep, thou the Vine, and we thy branches.” William Perkins ventriloquizes the reader, urging him to look on Christ crucified and to pray, “O good God, What settest

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51 Loarte, The godly garden, C7r.
52 Ibid., D3v-D4r.
53 Androzzi, 55.
54 Heinsius, 90.
thou heare before mine eyes? I, even I have sinned, I am guiltie and worthy of damnation. Whence comes this chaunge, that thy blessed sonne is in my roome, but of thy unspeakable mercy?”

Perkins’s prayer is especially intimate, since it both addresses God the Father, making him present to the Passion, and also indicates the immediate presence of Christ on the cross. Joseph Hall derides those who claim that humanity’s good works can be united with Christ’s, then prays, “Oh blessed Saviour, was every drop of thy bloud enough to redeeme a world, and doe we yet need the help of men? How art thou a perfect Saviour, if our Brethren also must be our redeemers?”

As prayers in Passion accounts often do, Hall’s text in this passage implies a theological polemic, so that Christ not only comes closer to the auditor through the speaker’s prayer, but also becomes a Protestant Christ—one whose sacrifice excludes the efficacy and co-operation of works.

Intimacy through apostrophe works both ways, however: it can appear as the author/reader’s words to Christ, and it can appear as Christ’s words to his people—to his ecclesial flock, of which every Passion writer deems himself a member. This dynamic also suggests the potential of Passion texts to consolidate and even construct religious community through readers’ participation in the imagined encounter. Foxe is perhaps the best exemplar of this, since he dedicates over nine octavo pages to Christ’s non-scriptural speech from the cross, in which Christ rebukes and ridicules the devil, emphasizing a theology of atonement to describe his payment for humanity’s infinite debt of sin. Heinsius, taking advantage of the tradition of the Improperia or divine reproaches (likely

55 Perkins, 34.
56 Hall, 66.
used in Herbert’s “The Sacrifice”), makes Christ speak to his servants: “O my people what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testifieth against me.”

Joseph Hall invokes the same dynamic, putting scripture in Christ’s dying mouth and creating a vividly present mind coming to grips with his own pain:

My Disciples are men, weake and fearefull; No marvell, if they forsake me...Men are men, graceless, and unthankefull...but thou, O Father...thou of whom I have said, *It is my father that glorifies mee*, what? *forsaken me*? Not onely brought me to this shame, smitten me, unregarded me; but, as it were, forgotten, yea, forsaken me?  

Once again we see a Christ whose extra-scriptural words flesh out the details of his agony, so that Christ is made intimately close to the reader both by speaking his agonies from the cross and by becoming, as in Foxe’s treatise, a speaking character in a drama unfolding before our eyes. Likewise, Loarte includes several addresses of Christ to the faithful Christian, including this one in which Christ quotes both the scriptures and the divine reproaches, “O all ye that passe by the way consider and see, if there were ever any sorow like unto mine,” as well as another passage where Christ chastises sinners for their guilt: “Behold, O man, the rewarde I have received for thee, Behold howe I am handled for thee, Behold howe I suffer the scourge of thy dispensings.” And Lancelot Andrewes deftly stitches the biblical text of his 1604 Good Friday sermon into his own argument, making Christ’s voice surface throughout as a voice of warning and

57 Heinsius, 65.

58 Hall, 47-48.

59 Interestingly, in passages like Hall’s above, and even in Foxe’s writing, the inherent linkages between dramatic portrayals of the Passion and liturgical time reminds readers that many Protestants were not categorically opposed to drama as a form of instruction, despite later Puritan objections to the stage.

60 Loarte, *The godly garden*, C3r, D2v.
admonishment: “Have ye no regard all ye?” “Consider and behold, if ever there were sorrow, like to my Sorrow?” Like many other Passion writers, Andrewes will also occasionally let other figures in the Passion narrative speak: Pilate’s Ecce homo! as well as the crowd’s Not him, no, but Barabbas rather; Away with him! both appear in his 1604 sermon. Like Christ’s direct reproaches of his beholders, the inclusion of other speaking voices within the Passion narrative allows the events to become more proximate to the reader, and imbues Passion accounts with an enargia and spatial location that transcends the more abstract world of theological polemic or controversial dogma by imaginatively dramatizing the spiritual effects of scriptural events on the soul.

What is happening through this discourse of spatial intimacy, then, is a form of poesis, in which the scriptural events of the Passion and the sometimes divergent theologies that are interpreted out of them assume more concrete form in literary works. As we have seen, Christ is capable of serving confessional and polemical ends, as in Hall’s prayer regarding works or Foxe’s ventriloquizing of Christ. And although both Catholics and Protestants appropriate strategies of spatial intimacy fairly regularly, as I briefly suggested above, Catholic Passion accounts (especially meditative Jesuit manuals) tend to create more sustained periods of intimate exchange between speaker/reader and Christ imagined in his Passion, a mode of affective piety that ideally stirs the emotions and will toward better imitation of Christ and sorrow for one’s sins. Protestant accounts, on the other hand, will similarly use deictic markers and ejaculatory prayers to render Christ present in brief flashes of intimacy, but will sometimes allow Christ to speak or be

61 Lancelot Andrewes, The Copie of the sermon, A2r, A4r.
62 Ibid., B4r, C2r.
addressed as a vehicle for doctrine rather than as merely *vir dolorum*, the man of sorrows that characterizes late medieval crucifixion piety. Once again we can see within a specific discursive category both the similarity across confessional boundaries, as well as the subtle tendencies that particular confessional theologies produce, often in order to speak directly to controversial matters of theology significant to Catholic and Protestant communities. The distinction between Catholic and Protestant appropriations is one of degree, not of kind.

Perhaps most significantly, though, the discourse of intimacy, especially in its use of apostrophe, provides Passion poetry with a means to create dynamic and fluid voicing between Christ, speaker, and reader. This voicing—the ability of a poem’s words to be appropriated and uttered by a reader as the reader’s own—allows Passion poems to become both individual and public expressions of intimacy between human soul and suffering Christ, and a devotional mode suited to engaging questions of religious community as well as individual, intimate communion. As such, intimacy and apostrophic address also permit poets to explore the fluid and porous connections between the speaker/author who utters the words, the community of readers that can adopt such words as their own, and the poetic language that mediates between speaker, reader, and Christ. As we shall see, such a dynamic becomes significant in the poetry of Robert Southwell, William Alabaster, and Richard Crashaw, poets whose works use the fluid identification between Christ, speaker, and reader to create variously imagined ecclesial and literary communities.
The Discourse of Imitation and Identification

If compassion is a chief goal of devotion to the cross, then written into such a response is the desire to imitate Christ, to “suffer with” him, as the etymology of “compassion” suggests. The discourse of imitation or identification has its roots in the New Testament, where St. Paul admonishes the Ephesians “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (Eph 5:1-2), and asks the Corinthians “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Though one might expect Ignatian and Bernardine Passion accounts to emphasize imitation and identification more regularly than Protestant accounts, Protestants, too, use very similar descriptions of Christ’s exemplary virtue as a model for all Christian behavior—as a subject of conformity and imitation. As Nandra Perry has shown in an astute article, the tendency in the Renaissance to practice spiritual mimesis of Christ (as well as the stylistic mimesis of Christian and classical texts) was pervasive.63 This mimetic desire is deeply indebted to centuries of Christian devotion that did not simply vanish after the Reformation. For instance, Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitatio Christi*, the late medieval treatise on conforming one’s self to Christ’s virtuous and exemplary life, was a highly popular work in England, published at least 44 times between 1500 and 1660 in a variety of English translations—the most popular of which, as Perry points out, was by Thomas Rogers, a Protestant and a prolific adaptor of medieval devotional texts. In addition to the tendency towards Christian imitation evidenced by the regular publication of Kempis’s treatise, scholars such as Thomas Freeman and Susannah Monta have shown

the cultural importance of imitation as manifested in Catholic and Protestant martyr narratives, suggesting not only the widespread significance of imitation to religious culture but also the Passion’s power to legitimate the confessional communities whose martyrs imitated that event through their own deaths. The influential Ignatian meditative tradition, too, is predicated on such imitation, as the ultimate goal of the *Spiritual Exercises* is for the devotee to become more Christ-like in everyday living. In short, imitation of Christ’s life, and especially of his Passion, was, for all Christian communities, a significant mode of devotion, a way of being in the world as a member of Christ’s corporate body. Moreover, the discourse of imitation is also bound up with questions of community and confessional identity: the soul that faithfully imitates Christ’s death demonstrates his own membership in Christ’s ecclesial flock.

Hence, in Passion accounts across the confessional spectrum, Christ is a model of virtue, the quintessential exemplar of holiness and self-sacrifice that every Christian should imitate. The Elizabethan *Homilies* enjoin such imitation, claiming “For it shall little avail us to have in meditation the fruits and price of his passion, to magnify them, and to delight or trust in them, except we have in mind his examples in passion, to follow them.” Salvation, while not dependent on imitation, necessarily involves following Christ: “Let us, therefore, now open our hearts again to him, and study in our lives to be thankful to such a Lord, and evermore to be mindful of so great a benefit; yea, let us take up our cross with Christ, and follow him.” Additionally, Christ “is the most perfect


65 *Sermons, or Homilies*, 290.
example and pattern of all meekness and sufferance,” the figure who every Christian should both behold on the Cross through faith, as well as follow in this life.⁶⁶ Even more overtly Calvinist writers advocate moral imitation. Perkins writes, “We deceive our selves, if we think he is onely to be knowne of us as a Redeemer, and not as a spectacle and pattern of all good duties, to which we ought to conforme our selves,” and, “Our conformitie with Christ stands either in the framing of our inward and spirituall life, or in the practice of outward and morall duties.”⁶⁷ For Joseph Hall as well, imitation of Christ is indispensible to the Christian life, which is a combat in which we must follow the general: “What should we doe but strive & suffer, as our Generall [Christ] hath done; that we may raigne as he doth, and once triumph in our Consummatum est?”⁶⁸ Hall’s language melds both military rhetoric and moral conformity, making Christ’s last words on the cross a rallying cry for Christian imitation and warfare. Though Daniel Heinsius does not compare the imitative life to warfare as Hall does, Christ remains a pattern and example of salvific suffering for him as well, when Hensius writes, “[Christ] alone is the absolute embleme & patterne of patience and perseverance,” praying at the end of his treatise that “we may crucifie all the inordinate Lusts of the Flesh, all our wanton and Lascivious cogitations, and that wee may be like [Christ] in sufferings, that we may be like [Christ] in glorie.”⁶⁹ Bartholomew Chamberlain claims in his Sermon Preached at S. James that the moral imitation of Christ both in choosing the good and conforming one’s

⁶⁶ Ibid., 288.
⁶⁷ Perkins, 13, 14.
⁶⁸ Hall, 57.
⁶⁹ Heinsius, 54, 95.
self to Christ’s cross in suffering are two of the fruits of salvation (not strictly “necessary” for salvation, but a necessary consequence of it). He claims also that such imitation is intrinsically part of meditation: “we shal meditate on the passion of Christ aright, if after his example we forgive our enemies when they offend us, if we love them though they hate us, if we pray for them, though they curse us, after the example of Christ.” Here meditation is virtually identical with moral imitation. In his 1607 sermon *The Life and Death of Jesus Christ*, one Samuel Walsall, of a generally Calvinist outlook, makes a similar point with his own characteristic concision: “The true fruit gathered of the Tree of Christs Crosse is our imitation of Christs example.” John Andrews likewise claims Christ must be a moral example to Christians, “a guide and leader unto eternall life.” From Chamberlain’s Calvinist bent to Andrewes’s more moderate theology to Walsall’s more eclectic Protestant perspective, imitating Christ’s moral exemplarity is an important dimension of fruitful Passion meditation. The devout soul is not only to feel compassion at the imagined sight of Christ’s torture, but he is also to conform himself to Christ’s moral example.

In the above examples, moral imitation plays slightly different roles in the order of salvation. We see, for instance, that while in some Passion accounts the imitation of Christ’s virtue is a concomitant action conducing to salvation, something that is done at the same time as beholding Christ crucified with a lively faith, in other Protestant accounts imitation is a consequence of salvation, a “fruit” of an already occurring

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70 Chamberlain, C6v-C7r; C2r-C2v.

71 Samuel Walsall, *The Life and Death of Jesus Christ* (Cambridge, 1607), E3v.

72 John Andrewes, 66.
spiritual state. In any case, though, in more Calvinist versions of the Passion, we can imitate Christ, but never ultimately become quite like him; there is, as Calvin suggests in his *Sermons on Isaiah*, always an insuperable barrier between Christ and mankind: “We must therefore be conformed to the Son of God, for He is our mirror and pattern—not, as I have said, that we can have goodness equal to His; but although we cannot come near it, we must strive towards it.”73 This fundamental unlikeness between Christ and mankind characterizes some Protestant visions of imitation, forming a kind of mimetic exemplarity that man can only strive toward asymptotically. In summarizing how Protestant Passions characterize imitation, then, we can assert that despite Protestant qualifications regarding the fundamental difference between God and humanity, Protestant Passions privilege imitation both for the individual and for the Christian community: the Christian’s ultimate goal, whatever the precise soteriology underpinning the account, is to recognize the self in Christ, and to become like Christ through imitation, just as the church’s fundamental goal is to become increasingly incorporated into Christ’s body by conforming itself as a society to his example—in both Protestant and Catholic communities, often the example of martyrdom.

Catholic Passions, drawing on their medieval antecedents and participating in this trans-confessional discourse of imitation, regularly privilege Christ’s exemplarity and the need to recognize the self in Christ and to imitate him. Following Ignatius, Gasparo de Loarte claims that imitation of Christ is the animating spirit of the devout life:

The fourth maner and sort of meditation is, by way of imitation, or following, that is, to the ende to followe the marveilous vertue and rare examples that Christe our redeemer showeth and setteth forth in his passion, as well in the wordes which he spake, as in the workes which he did, and in the maner of his suffering. All which to consider is a certayne lively example and paternne of perfection, for thee to use as a glasse to beholde what vertue wanteth in thee, and so to use thy selfe that thou mayest obtain it.  

Loarte advocates Christ as the example of moral perfection, the mirror in which to judge how short mankind falls of that example. Unlike more Calvinist versions of moral imitation, where Christ’s perfection is usually outside the reach of sinful humanity’s grasp, Loarte suggests the possibility of attaining moral perfection. This attainability is possible, though, only through grace: “thou must deesire to follow by his grace as much as is possible in thee, staying thy selfe chiefly upon the consideration of that vertue which thou knowest principally to be lacking in thee.” In Loarte’s Ignatian understanding, the devout life consists in developing one’s own moral character through imitation of Christ and reliance on Christ’s grace; such attention to the self emphasizes individual flaws and weaknesses with an eye to correct them by imitation. By meditating on Christ, Loarte tells us, we learn our own faults as well as how to amend them. Likewise, in Androzzi’s Ignatian treatise, the devotee must imitate Christ’s example of loving self-abnegation. After claiming that man’s works are like incense united to Christ’s sacrifice, Androzzi writes, “This remembrance and union is so gratefull a thing to almightie God, that praier and other good workes offered up to him with such union, are without comparison more

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74 Loarte, *The godly garden*, B3r-B3v.
75 Ibid., D7r.
76 Ibid., F7v.
acceptable and pleasant to his divine majesty.” In this perspective, mankind’s works are not necessarily consequences of an already-wrought salvation, but are unified with Christ, acting presumably in concert with Christ’s self-sacrificing love. Moreover, this imitation is necessary for salvation according to Androzzi, rather than strictly a consequence of it. In the last sections of this treatise, Androzzi outlines specific meditations on Christ’s Passion and follows each meditation with a prayer. Often the prayer asks that the reader be infused with the grace to act as Jesus has in the previous meditation, as in this passage:

O my Lord, by this thy wounderfull charitie, powre, I beseeche thee, into my sowle a newe spiritte, renew in my bowels thy right spirit, that I may have thee always ingraved in my heart, and may still remaine with thee uppon the crosse, and still pray for them that speake or doe yll unto me, that folowing thee here on earth as thy child, I may after see thee and injoy thee in heaven. Amen.

Imitation in this prayer is represented differently than in most Calvinist works: here, imitation is necessary for, rather than a product of, redemption. Androzzi’s conditional tense makes this clear, for the prayer resolves itself into a dependent clause in which “I may after see thee,” provided that the devotee receives the grace to act as Christ did on the cross—forgiving his enemies, following Christ on earth. The use of the word “engraved” also moves the reader into a physical register of likeness, suggesting an almost material link between Christ’s image and the devout soul’s. In Androzzi, as in Loarte, imitation is a process of becoming like Christ in a very real, attainable way; it is, as Androzzi makes clear, the very heart of imitation: “for the nature of true love is,” he

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77 Androzzi, 14.
78 Ibid., 81-82.
writes, “to transforme and chaunge him that loveth, into the thing beloved.”  

Whereas in some Protestant Passion accounts, the consummation of conformity to Christ is rhetorically impossible in Androzzi and Loarte, writing in the tradition of Ignatius, the merging of identity with Christ in love is precisely what meditation, prayer, and grace are supposed to effect. Imitation, in these Catholic perspectives, is necessary for, not only consequent to, redemption.

If Catholic and especially Ignatian Passion accounts and manuals tend to emphasize imitation, they also intensify this dynamic using identificatory language that blends the identities of Christ and the devout soul. This blending usually takes place through the concrete language of crucifixion, where the writer describes himself becoming conformed to Christ’s cross. Loarte emphasizes this blending in a prayer in his *Godly garden*: “graunt me grace that [thy torments] maye be alwayes fixed in my harte and minde as the percing arrowes of thy tender love, and that renouncing all vayne love of this worlde, I maye be surly nayled and fastened to thee in perfect love and obedience.”  

Loarte continues: “Thoroughly nayle my fleshe with the feare of thee, that it be not rebellious agaynst th[y] spirit: and let my hands and feete be so nayled with thine, that they neither move nor stretche besides thy blesed will.”  

Loarte uses the verbs of the crucifixion to describe what must happen to the faithful soul to become like Christ, thereby heightening the sense of identification between the soul and Jesus. Even the potential salvation of the soul is likened to Christ’s Passion, based on the Pauline

79 Ibid., 16.
80 Loarte, *The godly garden*, Q1r.
81 Ibid., Q1v.
language of receiving the “crown of glory” in heaven: Loarte prays to rejoice in being “reviled and dispised in the world for [Christ’s] sake” so as to be “crowned of [Christ] in heaven.”

The rhetoric here not only uses New Testament language to describe salvation, but conflates that “crown” with Christ’s sufferings and hence with his crown of thorns—a trope that, as chapter 5 argues, characterizes Sir John Beaumont’s epic on the Passion.

Imitative discourse characterizes Catholic writing before the Jesuits, as well as the writing of influential Protestants. Bishop Fisher takes advantage of similar devotional discourse. Fisher admonishes his audience: “O christian soule take thou upon thee, the crosse of penance, and bee crucyfied with him, and then without doubt thou shalt be partener of the merit of his crucifying, and of his most fruitfull passion.”

Fisher is insistent throughout his sermon on the crucifix that we must be “perteyners of his sufferying” in order to be saved, using a word and its variants—“perteyners” and “partener”—to emphasize both the “partaking” of Christ’s merit through meditating on his Passion, as well as the “pertaining” that occurs when one imitates Christ by faithfulness in life’s sufferings or by self-mortification (implied in taking the “crosse of penance” upon the self). On the Protestant side, few examples of imitative or identificatory discourse approach the effects of Perkins’s rhetoric and deft use of parallelism and carnal language:

if thou wouldest be revived to everlasting life thou must by faith as it were set thy selfe upon the crosse of Christ, and applie thy hands to his hands, thy feete to his feete, and thy sinnefull heart to his bleeding heart, and content not thy selfe with

82 Ibid., P3r.
83 Fisher, 313.
Thomas to put thy finger into his side, but even dive and plunge thy selfe wholly both bodie and soule into the woundes and bloode of Christ. 

Perkins envisions the faithful soul not only imitating Christ’s virtue, but physically joining Christ’s body—a trope often invoked by writers as diverse as Southwell and John Donne. The parallel structure heightens the sense of identification body part by body part, culminating in an admonition that the reader inhabit Christ’s wounded body and hence collapse the identificatory distance between Christ and devout soul. As Sarah Beckwith has adroitly shown, the wounds of Christ can act as openings through which the Christian “passes” and negotiates self-identity, and Perkins takes advantage of that spiritual implication of Bernardine and late-medieval Passion piety. The discourse of identification and imitation, then, can traverse the spectrum from an admonition to follow Christ’s moral example, to being metaphorically a partaker of Christ’s sufferings and hence attain to divine grace, to the very physical metaphors that envision the devout soul becoming enfleshed within Christ’s suffering body, within his open, bleeding wounds.

Understanding both the rhetorical similarities surrounding imitation as well as the potential theological differences beneath representational variations can help us ask pointed questions of devotional poetry. For instance, what happens when a speaker of a devotional poem voices Christ from the cross? How does imitation and identification elucidate Southwell’s “The Virgin Mary to Christ on the Crosse”? And how does the discourse of identification succeed or break down in poems like Donne’s “Spit on my face ye Jews” or Crashaw’s “On the wounds of our crucified Lord”? Finally, how does

84 Perkins, 3.

85 Sarah Beckwith, Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings (London: Routledge, 1993), 22-44.
this discourse allow a poet to engage questions of communal or ecclesial imitation, the
notion that Christ’s body is not only the suffering man on the cross, but the persecuted
church on earth? The discourse of imitation and identification, then, can help us to
explore questions of fluid voicing in poetry that the recent work of Heather Dubrow has
shown characterize early modern lyric,\(^86\) as well as to understand how poets from across
confessional camps construct Christ’s Passion and the religious community’s relationship
to it. Indeed, in the Passion poetry of William Alabaster and John Beaumont, the
discourse of imitation is vitally important to the poets’ conceptions of religious and
ecclesial community; the faithful Christian and true ecclesial community is defined, in
their various poetic works, as the one who follows Christ and becomes identical with him
through persecution and suffering.

**The Discourse of Substitution**

Another discourse informing Passion accounts is the discourse of substitution.
Though Protestantism’s theological emphasis on *sola fide* sometimes leads Protestant
accounts to privilege substitutive over imitative discourse, especially when such accounts
deal more explicitly with theological controversy, both Catholic and Protestant Passions
partake of this important set of devotional strategies to construct communion. In this
category fall all the statements, metaphors, and analogies that describe Christ as having
suffered death in place of sinful mankind. Substitutive discourse emphasizes Christ’s
death as a sacrifice or offering on behalf of humanity; it can also include descriptions of

\(^{86}\) Dubrow, 54-105.
the Father’s wrath exercised against Christ during his Passion, wrath that humanity deserves but that Christ endures in our place. Finally, this category also includes the economic rhetoric of exchange, payment, debt, discharge, and forgiveness that often characterize both Catholic and Protestant theologies of the atonement, drawing largely on the atonement theories of St. Anselm, whose *Cur Deus Homo?* describes Christ’s atoning death along the lines of ancient Roman law. Indeed, the word *redemption* is intrinsically bound up with the rhetoric of economic exchange, deriving from the Latin *redimere*, “to buy back.”

Protestant accounts across genres tend to emphasize substitutive language, especially when such accounts approach more polemical rhetorical purposes. Jean Calvin in his *Sermons on Isaiah* provides a basic outline for substitutive discourse:

> But since our Lord Jesus Christ was not spared and God executed the severity of His judgment upon Him, and He was there in our name as our surety for us, we can be assured that God will no longer proceed against us, nor enter into judgment with us, nor punish us according to our unworthiness and offences. And why? Because our Lord Jesus has cleared us of them.

Christ stands as a surety that frees mankind from the just penalties due to original sin, clearing souls of their infinite debt to God. Substitutive discourse, influenced by the Reformation’s privileging of *sola fide*, is a staple of Protestant Passion accounts throughout the period. The 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* favors this language regularly: in the rubric for Holy Communion, we read, “as the Son of God did vouchsafe to yield up

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88 Calvin, *Sermons*, 69.
his soul by death upon the cross for your health[,] even so it is your duty to receive the communion together in the remembrance of his death,” and that we must receive communion “to the end that we should always remember the exceeding great love of our master and only Saviour Jesus Christ, thus dying for us, and the innumerable benefits which by his precious bloodshedding he hath obtained to us.”  

William Perkins is quite clear on the substitutive dimension of salvation when he writes in his A Declaration that the faithful Christian must apprehend that Christ “stood in thy very roome and place in which thou thy selfe in thine own person shouldest have stood; that thy very personall and particular sinnes were imputed and applied to him; that he stood guiltie as a malefactor for them.” Perkins insists again that Christ stands in our place in almost the same language thirty pages later: “When thou readest of his death, consider that thy sinnes were the cause of it, and that thou shouldest have suffered the same eternally, unless the Sonne of God had come in thy roome.”

The Elizabethan Homilies reiterates this basic discourse, paraphrasing the book of Isaiah: “then, even then, did Christ the Son of God, by the appointment of his Father, come down from heaven, to be wounded for our sakes, to be reputed with the wicked, to take upon him the reward of our sins, and to give his body to be broken on the cross for our offences.”

Lancelot Andrewes, generally silent on the finer points of Calvinist theology, makes this substitutionary discourse clear as well: “He stepped between us and the blow, and received it in His own body; even the

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90 Perkins, 3, 36.

91 Sermons, or Homilies, 293.
dint of the wrath of God to come upon us.” 92 And Anthony Stafford employs substitutive language, claiming by Christ’s death “the defect of our satisfaction is supplied.” 93 Substitutive discourse in its most basic form, especially in Protestant documents, relies on the notion of Christ standing in for humanity’s punishment, often in a rhetoric of space and place, as in Perkins’s treatise, or in the metaphor of a shield standing between God and mankind, as in Lancelot Andrewes’s sermon.

Often the discourse of substitution also assumes economic forms, as the excerpt from Calvin above intimates. John Foxe in The Sermon of Christ Crucified allows Christ himself to articulate this substitutive rhetoric from the cross, as Christ tells Death and Satan: “let go thy captives: yeeld from thee thy bill of debt, wherwith thou hast them indebted to my Father, and condemned unto death: whome now I here discharge, and receive for my people, and set them free for ever.” 94 Again Christ says, “I have satisfied the debt of al mankind. Which being discharged, then good right it is that the bookes shoulde bee cancelled.” 95 Joseph Hall writes in this vein: “Now, in this word and act, our sinnes are discharged, death endured, & therefore we cleared: the debt is paid, the score is crossed, the Creditor satisfied, the Debters acquitted.” 96 Likewise, Perkins employs the rhetoric of debt and exchange when he writes,

[W]e owe unto Christ an endlesse debt. For he was crucified onely as our surety and pledge, and in the spectacle of his Passion we must consider our selves as the

93 Stafford, A10r.
94 Foxe, H7r.
95 Ibid., H7v.
96 Hall, 58.
chiefe debters, and that the very discharge of our debt, that is, the sinnes which are inherent in us, were the proper cause of all the endless paines and torments that Christ endured.\textsuperscript{97}

Almost twenty years later, John Andrewes echoes the commonplace: “[Christ] himselfe alone, hath fully discharged by his death, the debt which all we owed.”\textsuperscript{98} Finally, the \emph{Homilies} make the rhetoric of exchange plain, in the first homily for Good Friday:

Christ put himself between God’s deserved wrath and our sin, and rent that obligation, wherein we were in danger to God, and paid our debt. Our debt was a great deal too great for us to have paid. And without payment, God the Father could never be one with us....It pleased him, therefore, to be the payer thereof, and to discharge it quite.\textsuperscript{99}

Throughout Protestant-influenced Passion accounts, then, we see Christ often equated with payment and exchange; salvation is conceived through the rhetoric of debt and forgiveness, and often in quite literal terms, as we see in Foxe a “cancellation” of the ledger book containing our offences, and in the \emph{Homilies} the actual “ rending” of the obligation we owed to God for our wrongdoings. This rhetoric of economic substitution is given emphasis by Protestantism’s highly Anselmian theories of justification, where God’s gratuitous grace allows the sins of humanity to be imputed to Christ, who then “pays” for humanity's crimes mercifully without negating justice.

This economic trope is not unique to Protestantism; it occurs in Catholic Passion accounts as well. The \emph{Catechism of the Council of Trent} uses the same language in its article on justification and Christ’s Passion, saying “the satisfaction which Jesus Christ...

\textsuperscript{97} Perkins, 25.
\textsuperscript{98} John Andrewes, 13.
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Sermons, or Homilies}, 285.
has in an admirable manner made to God the Father for our sins is full and complete. The price which He paid for our ransom was not only adequate and equal to our debts, but far exceeded them.”

Tellingly, we see in this document the same language of economic exchange we find in Protestant accounts, and the fact that the catechism was issued under the authority of Pope Pius V, the same pontiff who in 1570 excommunicated Queen Elizabeth and her supporters, argues that Passion discourses transcend purely confessional and even generic distinctions. In like fashion the Bernardine Sighes, Sobbes and Teares, the epitome of intimate and visual discourses, uses economic, substitutive language in a prayer to Christ: “let me never cease to marvaile at the wonderful work of thy Passion, which thou didst so patiently suffer, that by thy innocent death, thou mightest cancell the obligation of our infinite debt, and affix it to thy Crosse.”

Pseudo-Bernard’s prayer here captures in almost identical rhetoric the Homilies’ metaphor, suggesting a literal kind of “cancellation” in which the physical bill or “obligation” is nailed to the cross with Jesus, likely alluding to Colossians 2:14-15, where St. Paul claims that the “handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, [Christ] took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” Pseudo-Bernard picks up the economic strain again in a later meditation: “Now he had cancelled the Obligation of my infinite debt, and not with silver or gold, but with his owne most precious blood purchased my Redemption.”

The English translation makes explicit the monetary trope so often used to describe Christ’s redemption through substitution; the silver and gold

100 Catechism of the Council of Trent, 60.
101 Pseudo-Bernard, Sighes, Sobbes and Teares, 1.332.
102 Ibid., 1.385.
may not always appear in Passion accounts’ appropriation of economic language, but exchange is always implicit. Hence, substitutive discourse permeates English Passion piety across the confessions, drawing heavily both on scriptural precedents as well as patristic sources.

Despite a tendency to privilege imitation, Catholic writers also freely articulate Christ’s general substitution for mankind’s sins. Gasparo de Loarte expresses substitution by admonishing his readers to “remember howe much more thou owest to him...who hath suffered suche paynes and tormentes for thee, and not onely tormentes, but also moste bitter and shamefull death, through which thy sinnes were cancelled and rased oute of remembranuce.”¹⁰³ Earlier in the century, Bishop Fisher uses such language in his sermon on the crucifix: “Behold O thou Christian soule the extreme paines, that our sauiour suffered on the crosse, for thy sinne.”¹⁰⁴ Androzzi also employs substitutive discourse, exclaiming, “O My Lord, wherefore wast thou sold? / To redeeme thee. / O Lord, wherefore didst thow pray so much? / To pac’fie the wrath of my father against thee.”¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, the language of Christ’s substitution, whether broadly in its terms of exchange or specifically in economic rhetoric, is amenable to many Christian writers, from the Calvinist Hall and Perkins to the staunchly Jesuit Androzzi and Loarte—as well as to official Catholic theology codified at Trent.

Another very common rhetorical feature falling loosely under this substitutive category is the figure of the wrathful God the Father. As Deborah Shuger argues in *The

¹⁰³ Loarte, *The godly garden*, F2r.

¹⁰⁴ Fisher, 319.

¹⁰⁵ Androzzi, 89.
In *Renaissance Bible*, we find this emphasis mainly in Calvinist Passion accounts; Shuger in fact adduces this wrathful father motif as evidence of an emerging Calvinist automachia in the period.\textsuperscript{106} To be sure, the wrathful Father is common in Protestant accounts, and tends to characterize Protestant Passions more than Catholic ones. In *The Mirrour of Humilitie*, Daniel Heinsius claims that by Christ’s Passion “the wrath of God [is] appeased, and our peace procured.”\textsuperscript{107} Heinsius does not merely limn this anger: “God, who is tearmed of the Prophets, a devouring fire, an overflowing torrent of wrath, as violent as a rough storme of hayle, as impetuous as a tempestous gust of wind maketh our Saviour the onely butte to receive the shafts of his fury and indignation.”\textsuperscript{108} Joseph Hall also employs this commonplace: “he would thirst, that thy soule might be satisfied: he would beare all his Fathers wrath, that thou mightest beare none; hee would yeeld to death, that thou mightest never taste of it.”\textsuperscript{109} Hall’s passage exemplifies a fairly typical syntactical strategy that juxtaposes a series of parallel clauses in order to compare Christ’s suffering to the merit that suffering gives to mankind; here, isocolon seems to mime substitution. In another instance, Thomas Ailesbury claims that Christ felt not even the comfort of the martyrs in his Passion: “Tis happinesse to be a Martyr; but to Christ afflicted what comfort is afforded? His Father never so angry bent against him as now, when he personated universall sinners.”\textsuperscript{110} Ailesbury’s use of “personated” underlines the substitutive dimension by likening Christ’s Passion to a performance in which Christ acts

\textsuperscript{106} Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, 107-12.

\textsuperscript{107} Heinsius, 81.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 74.

\textsuperscript{109} Hall, 72-73.

\textsuperscript{110} Ailesbury, 20.
the part of mankind, thereby taking mankind’s place and punishment (and, like Foxe’s speech of Christ from the cross, implicitly comparing the Passion to a drama performed on a stage). Lancelot Andrewes points out the direct connection between Christ’s Passion and the Father’s anger: “The Cause [of Christ’s suffering]: that is God, that in his wrath, in his fierce wrath, doeth all this to Him, which cause will not leave us, till it have led us to another cause in our selves, and to another yet in him; All which serve to ripen us to Regard [Christ].”111 The above passages all show a Passion caused (at least in part) by the Father’s hatred of sin and his anger at Christ as Christ assumes responsibility—indeed, “personates” all sinners as though acting in a cosmic drama of salvation—for mankind’s sinfulness.

Despite the fact that the above writers are generally Calvinist in outlook, the trope of a wrathful God-the-Father is not restricted to strict Calvinist theology and devotion. Bishop Andrewes was hardly a lock-step supporter of Calvinist soteriology, and interestingly, at least a few Catholic accounts also make use of the angry Father motif. The Tridentine Catechism invokes God’s wrath in its article on Christ’s Passion: “Again, it [the Passion of Christ] was a sacrifice most acceptable to God, for when offered by His Son on the altar of the cross, it entirely appeased the wrath and indignation of the Father.”112 The Jesuit John Falconer uses language almost identical to the above excerpts in Fasciculus Myrrhae, claiming Christ “personally assumed [man’s nature] and dignified his nature, to satisfy the utmost rigour of divine Justice, pacify the wrath of his

111 Lancelot Andrewes, The Copie of the Sermon, A4v.

112 Catechism of the Council of Trent, 60.
eternal Father against sinners, [and] make their full peace.” And though he does not use the term “wrath” or “anger,” it is clear that Loarte outlines the same dynamic of an angry God the Father when he writes that man should hate sin for seeing it so grievously punished in Christ, that we must “consider how much [sins] offend God, that he would punish the same with so great severity.” God as angry and wrathful Father, then, is found not only in Calvinist accounts, but also in some form in both the more “moderate” Protestant Andrewes as well as in the Jesuits Falconer and Loarte, and in the official documents of the Council of Trent—documents which span the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

A final constituent of substitutive discourse illustrates both its wide use and its ability to be appropriated for different theological and confessional perspectives: the language of sacrificial offering. In his *The Life and Death of Jesus Christ*, the Calvinist Samuel Walsall claims that Christ’s death is a burnt offering on God’s altar, and that Christ’s love is like incense: “Nowe as aromaticall perfumes bruised in pceces, so this love beeing discoursed in particulars will be then most odoriferous and frag[r]ant.” Walsall subtly equates the “bruising” or breaking of Christ’s body with a discursive “analysis” of the Passion’s various parts, linking sustained meditation to a sweet-smelling sacrifice—language echoing Bernardine piety, where the *fasciculus myrrhae* of the Song of Songs is compared to Christ, who is crushed as an offering to God. In similar

113 Falconer, 7.
114 Loarte, *The godly garden*, B3r.
115 Walsall, D4r.
language, though in a much different context, John Andrewes in *Christ His Crosse* describes humanity’s utter sinfulness and Christ’s ability to mask that sinfulness through sacrifice: “for what is [man] else but a filthie dunghill of all abhominations, & uncleanness: the stinke whereof, hath infected heaven and earth, & no perfume could ever allay it in the nostrils of the Lord; saving only the Passion of Jesus Christ, being a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour to Almightie God?” Finally, Fulvio Androzzi invokes a similar rhetoric of burnt sacrifice:

> [E]verie devoute person ought to unite all his woorks of pietie and devotion...his intentions, his praiers, his fastings, his watchings...together with those of Christ, and to offer them up so united to almightie God, to whome they wil be most acceptable, as a perfume of diverse sweete savours kindled and burned together.117

In the preceding three excerpts, we see a very similar rhetoric of sacrifice employed to a very different end, a move indebted perhaps to St. Paul’s similar statement in Ephesians where Christ is likened to “a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (5:2). In the first excerpt, Walsall compares Christ’s sacrificial love to an offering along typological lines: Christ is the sacrificial Lamb of the Passover, as well as incense to be ground and ignited in the fire of divine love. Our participation in the Passion through devotion partakes of this sacrifice in Walsall’s metaphor. John Andrewes similarly emphasizes Christ as a burnt offering, but his crushing and death is not explicitly a fragrance of love, but rather a masking scent that covers the foul, putrid odor of human sin. The dynamic in Andrewes surpasses mere substitution, making sacrificial incense a mask—even a

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116 John Andrewes, 29.
117 Androzzi, 13-14.
disguise—to cover up the stench of mankind’s fallen nature; Christ’s offering does not so much replace or stand in for humanity as alloy and disguise its foulness. However, in Androzzi, we see a different use of the sacrificial motif: here, the faithful soul unites his sufferings and prayers with those of Christ, and the soul’s offerings then mingle with Christ’s own sacrifice of love and become a combined offering to God the Father. The emphasis in Androzzi, then, is not merely on appeasing wrath through substitution or masking humanity’s depraved odor, but rather on becoming conformed to Christ’s death, by commingling our own prayers with Christ’s in one sacrifice. This is a superb illustration of how a particular discourse like substitution (which encompasses the rhetoric of sacrifice) can span across confessional accounts of the Passion, manifesting itself in very similar and sometimes identical language, while simultaneously serving very different devotional and theological ends—ends which are often bound up with the writer’s identification with a particular religious community and with his particular theological aims.

Thus, substitutive discourse is highly relevant to poetic engagements of the Passion, for it suggests a variety of imagined relationships in poetry between the devout soul and Christ on the cross: in what ways does a poem suggest that Christ substitutes for humanity? How does substitutive discourse modify, complement, or oppose imitative discourse? How does substitutive discourse construe Christ, the devout soul, and the public body of the religious or ecclesial community as a sacrifice? Because the discourse of substitution speaks directly to questions of merit, sacrifice, and identity between Christ, soul, and the church, it is a vitally important set of rhetorical strategies that devotional poets across the confessions appropriate to their works in order to interrogate
what it means to commune with Christ, what it means to suffer for Christ, and what it means to suffer for one’s Christian community.

**The Discourse of Temporality**

The last devotional discourse playing a significant role in Catholic and Protestant accounts is the discourse of temporality. This complex category describes how a writer envisions the temporal location of Christ’s Passion, how grammatical tense as well as the other representational strategies explored above combine to create a sense of Christ’s Passion happening in the past or the present, or how they combine to create an understanding of the Passion as either a perpetuated or commemorated event in the life of the individual soul and in the ecclesial community. As this chapter has suggested, most texts privilege the present tense in describing the Passion, a corollary of the discourses of spatial intimacy and visuality that characterize so many Passion narratives of the period. Yet because the discourse of temporality is also bound up with questions of liturgical worship and sacramental theology, temporality is also bound up, more clearly than any other devotional discourse in this chapter, with questions of ecclesial and confessional community. As such, Protestant Passion accounts often avoid construing Christ’s Passion as part of a reiterable, ongoing sacrifice whenever their Passion accounts explicitly deal with controversial issues of soteriology and ecclesiology. Similarly, both Catholic and Protestant biblical commentaries tend to foreground confessionally marked liturgical practices and soteriological beliefs, with Catholic commentaries emphasizing the ongoing nature of Christ’s sacrifice in the present through the mass, and Protestant commentaries underlining the commemorative and perfected nature of the historical event.
This suggests that the closer a Passion writer approaches to matters of controversy, the more a text’s construction of temporality can become marked by specific Catholic or Protestant understandings of liturgical or historical time. Conversely, however, when Passion writers do not explicitly address such liturgical questions, when they deal more explicitly with the significance of the Passion for the building up of the soul and the mystical body of Christ, their depictions become far less confessionally-marked and far more similar in their uses of the past or present tenses. Therefore, this final section will first show how Catholic and Protestant Passions, when they speak more clearly about confessional and theological identities, deliberately emphasize their own theologies and concomitant understandings of liturgical or historical time. Often, Protestant accounts are more defensive about the past-ness of the crucifixion when they address liturgical and soteriological matters, but even these more polemically motivated assertions do not irrevocably separate Protestant handling’s of temporality from Catholic devotional approaches. Second, this section will show that even when writers explicitly emphasize the past-ness and historicity of the Passion, they still do so largely in the present tense, using the discourse of temporality whether they are writing from a Catholic or a Protestant perspective. Temporality, then, illustrates the trans-confessional appropriations of Passion discourse, as well as the influence of religious communities and their controversies on devotional strategies.

The closer Protestant Passions approach to sacramental theology, the more they tend to describe Calvary as a “perfected”—meaning grammatically “completed”—event rather than as something iterable in any liturgical sense. This location of the Passion in more polemical sections of Protestant accounts is a direct consequence of Protestant
theology of justification, which maintains that the soul’s justification stems from the individual’s faithful apprehension of what Christ has already performed on the cross. Bartholomew Chamberlain outlines a typical sense of justification in the past tense, in a series of past participles that foregrounds the completed nature of the event: “by the vertue of his passion our ransome is paiied, our wounds healed, satisfaction for our sinne made, death conquered, Sathan subdued, hell overcome, sinne killed, God pacified, and wee to him reconciled.” Hensius’s Mirror uses the language of completion to celebrate the already-accomplished justification of humanity: “Oh blessed and happie day, wherein the force and guilt of Sinne was taken out of the world, and the sinner taken up to heaven.” Joseph Hall, too, tends to emphasize the past-ness of justification, appropriating Christ’s words on the cross to his implied theology: “upon the throne of his Crosse: his enemies are vanquishet, his father satisfied, his soule with this word at rest and glory, It is finished.”

Explicit rejection of liturgical temporality is strikingly evident in Protestant materials that deal explicitly with the Catholic mass, which claimed to re-present Christ’s Passion every time it was celebrated. Such ritual is inimical to the already accomplished nature of justification infusing much Protestant theology, and Protestant commentators like Hall above often glossed Christ’s “it is finished” to prove their position. Zwingli, in his A briefe rehearsal of the death resurrection & ascention of Christ, published in English around 1561, makes this clear in his gloss on Christ’s “it is finished”: “Let us learne here

118 Chamberlain, A3v-A4r.
119 Hensius, 87.
120 Hall, 52-53.
that our salvation is finished in Christ.... There remayneth nothing that can be added to it eyther by the Pope, or by any creature.”

Calvin, in his *A Harmonie upon the Three Evangelists* (English, 1587), an immensely influential work in Elizabethan England, also directs his gloss of Christ’s last words against the mass as a sacrilegious and presumptuous addition to the satisfaction made by Christ’s death, claiming “The abomination of the Masse is principally condemned by this voyce of Christ.”

The *Thirty-Nine Articles*, too, emphasize the past temporality of the Passion in articles 28 (“Of the Lord’s Supper) and 31 (“Of the one oblation of Christ finished upon the cross”), both of which maintain that the ongoing sacrifice of the mass is anathema to the scriptures and to the “offering of Christ once made” as the “perfect redemption,” that act that was (quite grammatically) “perfected” at Golgotha.

Perhaps no Protestant Passion writer is as adamant about the past-ness of the Passion as John Foxe, whose *The Sermon of Christ Crucified* is explicitly intended to combat Catholic worship. In his introductory epistle to *The Sermon*, he summarizes the mystery of the Passion, in which we see

*GODs wrath killed, his favour reconciled, all things pacified both in heaven and in earth, the divell conquered, death vanquished, hell gates destroyed: to know that crucified sacrifice of Christs bodie to be a perfect deliverance of al his people from the beginning, to the end of the world, to be a full satisfaction once and ever for all our sinnes, an absolute discharge and acquittance for all our debts.*

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123 Cited from article 31, *Sermons, or Homilies*, 425-34.

124 Foxe, A4r.
Foxe employs a similar series of participles evident in Chamberlain’s sermon, and his “once and ever” drives the point regarding temporality home: the crucifixion is an event in the past, something that happened “once,” not repeatedly as the papists presume. Foxe’s specific goal in his Passion sermon is distinguishing the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ from the mass, which he deems an anathema to the historical Passion and to justification, which “was offered actually once and no more.”\footnote{125} The only cause of reconciliation for Foxe is the historical Passion which cannot be re-presented: “on Christes part, the cause onely which worketh reconciliation, and remission of sinnes is his onely death and blood sheading once sacrificed actually (and never els) upon good Fryday.”\footnote{126} Any ongoing sacrifice in the church, then, is inimical to scripture: “the dayly Sacrifyce of the Popes Masse, [is] most false and contrary to al scripture.... How is that wound cured for ever, which every day needeth a newe plaster?”\footnote{127} “For if the reconciliation of Gods favour purchased by Christ once for us, is perfect and perpetuall, then this daily sacrificing for sinne, is superfluous. And if the same must needes be continued...then must the sacrifice of Christs priesthoode be unperfect.”\footnote{128} Hence, the more relevant Catholic liturgical understanding is to a Protestant Passion’s argument, the more that Passion account tends to downplay the iterable and liturgical presence of the Passion in favor of a rhetoric of commemoration and of the historical past.

\footnote{125}{Ibid., C4r.}\footnote{126}{Ibid., C5r.}\footnote{127}{Ibid., C8r.}\footnote{128}{Ibid., D3r.}
Other influential texts of English Protestantism, such as the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Geneva Bible, also privilege the past tense when engaging Christ’s Passion—often in direct response to Catholic worship. In the *Book of Common Prayer*’s rubric for Holy Communion, the minister speaks the following words:

> Almighty God our heavenly Father, which of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and did institute, and in his holy gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again...  

As Timothy Rosendale has shown, the *Book of Common Prayer* attempted to reconcile disparate conceptions of theology and liturgical time: at the same time that it recognized the “real presence” of Christ in Holy Communion, it also emphasized that this presence was spiritual, and that the sacrament was a commemoration. In the above passage, however, the emphasis clearly falls on the past-ness of Christ’s sacrifice, reiterating this historical temporality with its almost pedantically repetitive “by his one oblation of himself once offered,” and its “full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice,” language no doubt intended to refute absolutely the Catholic theology of the mass as Christ’s re-presented, iterable, and temporally present Passion. While in this liturgical prayer the effects of Christ’s Passion are made present, the communion prayers always remind the faithful that the event itself is commemorated and memorialized: the sacraments have been given “as pledges of his love, and continual remembrance of his death, to our great and endless

129 *Book of Common Prayer*, 263.

comfort,” not as carnal or bodily re-presentations of Christ’s death. Similarly, the Geneva Bible (1580) reiterates the past-ness of Calvary in another example of a Protestant text asserting Reformed sacramental theology over Catholicism. In Matthew’s Gospel, the Geneva Bible glosses Christ’s words regarding the bread and wine (26:26-29) with “[The bread is] a true signe and testimonie that my body is made yours,” and then insists on the historical rather than ongoing presence of Christ’s physical body in the church: “You shal no more enjoye my bodelie presence til we mete together in heaven.” Geneva’s glossators address the substantial presence of Christ in communion by calling the bread and wine testimonies of man’s right to Christ’s body, thereby refusing to equate the Eucharistic elements with any kind of substantial transformation that would make Christ’s Passion temporally or corporeally available (as in Catholic sacramental theology). The annotation on the parallel passage in Luke likewise emphasizes the significatory capacity of the bread and wine, calling them “true signes” of the new covenant, using the same language as article 25 of the Thirty-Nine Articles to denote not Christ’s temporal presence, but the commemoration of the historical crucifixion through signs. Similarly, the gloss on Christ’s last words in John’s gospel—“It is finished”—underlines the past accomplishment of Christ’s atonement for man: “Mans salvation is perfected by the onelie sacrifice of Christ: & all the ceremonies

131 Book of Common Prayer, 259.

132 The Bible translated according to the Ebrew and Greeke, and conferred with the best translations in divers languages; with most profitable annotations upon all the hard places, and other things of great importance, as may appear in the Epistle to the reader (London, 1580), DD3r.

133 Ibid., DD3r.

134 Ibid., KK4v.
of the lawe are ended." These glosses show the deeper sense in Protestant—and in the Geneva Bible’s case, particularly Calvinist—understanding of the Passion as a historical event rather than as the foundation for a perpetual ritual of sacrifice. The emphasis on the completeness of the Passion in the gloss on John’s gospel, combined with the insistence on the end of Christ’s bodily presence until after the soul’s earthly death, all suggest the same temporal past-ness of Christ’s actions, rooted in history, that the Passion accounts of Chamberlain, Foxe, Hall, and other Protestants privilege when addressing theological and liturgical controversies.

Theological controversies, then, clearly influence aspects of temporal discourse. While the Geneva Bible reflects fundamentally Reformed theology, the Rheims New Testament (1582) reiterates Catholic liturgical practice and sacramental theology, glossing the Passion as justification for the ongoing practice of the church. For instance, the marginal glosses on Christ’s Passion all reference historical events as foundations for liturgical prayer. In Matthew’s gospel, we read such glosses as:

The NOCTURNE of mattins in the churchs service, answereth to this night part [sic] of our Saviours passion, and consequently the other Canonical hours of the rest.136

The Gospel upon munday the first weeke of Lent.137

135 Ibid., OOlr.

136 Gregory Martin, The New Testament of Jesus Christ, translated faithfully into English, out of the authentical Latin, according to the best corrected copies of the same, diligently conferred with the Greeke and other editions in divers languages; with arguments of bookes and chapters, annotations, and other necessarie helpses, for the better understanding of the text, and specially for the discoverie of the corruptions of divers late translations, and for cleering the controversies in religion, of these daies: in the English College of Rhemes (Rheims, 1582), 76.

137 Ibid., 73.
Similarly, the elements of the Last Supper and the Passion are glossed for their continuing liturgical meaning, suggesting the imminent presence of Christ in the *ecclesia*. The glosses on Matthew 26, for instance, a major source for the institution narrative, glosses “Christ blessed the bread” as “consecration”; it glosses Christ’s words to the Apostles, “but me you have not alwayes” as “Christ alwaies with us in the B. Sacrament”; when Christ and the Apostles “watch and pray” in the garden after the supper, it is an example of “vigils and nocturnes.” And the gloss upon the wrapping of Christ’s body in linens for burial in Matthew’s gospel is annotated as an example of the “Reverent using of our L. Body”: “And so in the whole Church it is observed by S. Silvesters constitution, that the Corporal whereupon our Lordes body lieth on the altar, must be pure and plaine linnen.” In Luke’s gospel, when Christ commands that the Apostles break bread “as a commemoration of me,” the annotation on the passage—a lengthy explanation of the nature of the Eucharist and the mass—begins, “The Sacrifice and Sacrament is to be done perpetually in the Church for the commemoration of Christ, specially of his Passion.” Though here Gregory Martin uses the same language of commemoration as the English *Book of Common Prayer*, this commemoration is in tense relationship with “perpetuity” (rather than the “continual” commemoration of the *Book of Common Prayer*’s Good Friday rubric), a word which itself denotes something ever-present and iterable rather than something only recalled in memory. And in John’s

138 Ibid., 85.
139 Ibid., 85.
140 Ibid., 205.
Gospel the marginal gloss on the passage describing Mary and John standing at the foot of the cross uses the moment to explain contemporary liturgical art: “By this you see why in Catholic Churches MARIE and John stand by the Roode.”\textsuperscript{141} Martin’s telling “stand” in the present tense heightens the reader’s awareness of the liturgical temporality at play in Catholic commentary: John and Mary seem to stand perpetually before Christ crucified, and the additional choice of “rood” rather than “crucifix” or “cross” similarly links the perpetuity of Christ’s sacrifice to the liturgical temporality encoded in Catholic architecture, statuary, and worship.

Despite the defensive assertion of history over liturgy and the past-perfect over the present tense, though, Protestant Passion materials tend to engage in such controversial rhetorical strategies only when directly engaging religious controversy over sacramental theology or soteriology. Indeed, even the most staunchly anti-Catholic Protestant Passions also regularly rely on the present tense to describe the Passion when they are not dealing explicitly with controversial theology. As Rosendale and A.B. Chambers have shown, liturgical worship and liturgical temporality were not purely Catholic constructs, but deeply meaningful aspects of much Protestant theology and worship, and, indeed, a formative influence behind much of the poetry of the period scholars traditionally consider canonical.\textsuperscript{142} This is not to say that whenever a Protestant writer uses the present tense he is invoking liturgy; rather, it is to reiterate that the Passion is an event that the individual beholds intimately in the present, immediately before the eyes and senses of the devout soul. For instance, John Foxe’s often aggressive

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 273.

denouncement of the mass and assertion of the perfected sacrifice of Good Friday in history often relies on the present tense even as he reiterates the past-ness of the event. In the passage quoted above, Foxe relies on the past tense, but also regularly uses “ever” to characterize the effects of the Passion, so that despite his claims that the Passion is an event strictly having happened in the past, it continues to be “ever” present through its effects. Similarly, Foxe reiterates the past-ness of justification paradoxically by ventriloquizing Christ on the cross in a lengthy, triumphal speech to Satan that emphasizes the legal and substitutive language of already accomplished legal exchange—but does so in the present tense, as if we are watching history performed or re-presented before our eyes: “now I here discharge, and receive for my people, and set them free for ever...I have satisfied the debt of al mankind. Which being discharged, then good right it is that the bookes shoulde be cancelled, so that thou shalt have no more claime nor title to them.”\(^{143}\) The Calvinist Walsall relies on the present tense as well, including the entire church in his admonition to “see Christ Jesus, that bride grome of bloud celebrates a marriage with his Church upon the geniall bed of the crosse, his head resting upon a pillow of thornes, and himself attired with the rich wedding garment of love…. This king exacts no tribute but love, requires no homage but love, injoynes no duty but love.”\(^{144}\) In the peroration of his treatise on the Passion, Perkins urges the reader to see Christ crucified in all things every day: “Beholde him at thy table in meate and drinke, which is as it were a lively sermon and a daily pledge of the mercie of God in Christ. Beholde him in all thine afflictions, as thy partner that pitieth thy case…. Behold him in thy most

\(^{143}\) Foxe, H7r-H7v.

\(^{144}\) Walsall, E2v.
dangerous temptations.” 145 In short, though Protestants tend to distance their texts from the imminently-present tense of the Catholic mass when explicitly dealing with Reformation controversies, on balance they privilege the present tense as a meditative and literary strategy to construct communion with Christ. While theological controversy can contribute to a pattern of emphasis marked by Protestant confessional identities, and while, as the Rheims New Testament shows, Catholics can use the Biblical Passion to support confessionally-marked liturgical and sacramental worship, both Catholics and Protestants appropriate the present tense to draw Christ closer to the devout soul, to collapse the temporal distance between the crucifixion of history and the crucifixion of imminent grace. This seems true whether the present tense that is invoked is a literary present tense, intended to bring the individual into intimate relationship and communion with Christ, or a liturgical present that views time as fundamentally iterable and the past as imminently contained in the present.

The vast commonality of the imminently present Passion, likely related to Bernardine piety, the Jesuit-influenced meditative tradition, and to the widely shared liturgical inheritance of English Protestantism and Catholicism, pervades Passion accounts across the confessions. However, as the biblical glosses of Rheims and Geneva as well as the polemical stance of Foxe and the resonances of the Book of Common Prayer show, the discourse of temporality elicits questions regarding ecclesial and communal worship and identity: the closer a Passion text, Catholic or Protestant, approaches to theological and sacramental controversy, the more likely it is to emphasize a particular temporality, either the liturgical and iterable present, or the perfected past-

145 Perkins, 37.
ness of history. This in turn suggests that the discourse of temporality is also bound up with the identities of the various religious and ecclesial communities of which Passion writers are a part. Temporal discourse can thus help us understand how poets characterize the imminence of the crucifixion, its location in time and space, and even its relationship to particular communal practices. How “present” is the crucifixion to the speaker and reader, for instance? Does the poem address the Passion as a historical or liturgical event? What temporal relationship does a poem construct between Christ’s crucifixion and the religious or political community—the church, the opposing confession, or the state? Perhaps more than any of the previous discourses—visuality, spatial intimacy, imitation, or substitution—temporal discourse allows us to see the social and communal dimensions implicated in a writer’s construction of communion with Christ: how Christ is pictured in time and in relationship to the poetic speaker is implicated in how he is present in a particular ecclesial and political community.

As this survey has argued, Catholic and Protestant writers throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries drew on a set of trans-confessional devotional discourses in order to engage Christ’s Passion in a variety of genres, and often did so in strikingly similar ways despite the theological differences and confessional identities that differentiated the writers from one another. Additionally, an analysis of devotional discourse rather than specific doctrines underlying devotional literature of the period reveals a broader and more complicated picture of shared representational strategies, advancing a narrative of interaction and exchange among writers rather than one of strictly confessional opposition and of mainstream versus marginal devotional literature.
in the period. However, as each of the above sections also reveals, even though these devotional discourses are not restricted to any particular confessional community, occasionally theological and confessional distinctions shape devotional strategies in particular ways, especially when writers engage matters of controversy. This suggests that approaching the Passion as a collection of common discourses rather than as a flashpoint for theological definition can provide a useful set of terms through which to analyze how devotional poets engage this central devotional event, how they create communion between Christ and the devout soul, and how theology and devotion inform one another in imaginative texts. Most significantly, because devotional discourses are influenced and appropriated by members of particular confessional communities, analyzing the discursive strategies of the Passion also shows that communion and community are interdependent, that questions about the individual’s relationship to the crucified Christ are related to questions about the various communities—ecclesial, political, and literary—of which the writer and reader are members.

In order to explore how the devotional poetry of the seventeenth century appropriates Passion discourses to a variety of goals, and how intimate communion between Christ and poetic speaker allows poets to explore questions of religious and literary communities, the next chapter will turn to Robert Southwell, the poet who first integrated the late medieval and early modern Passion discourses of visuality and imitation with native English verse traditions, creating a vivid, popular, and influential synthesis of poetry and devotion to the crucified Christ.
CHAPTER 2:

ROBERT SOUTHWELL: SACRIFICE, COMMUNION, AND CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT READERSHIPS

...my aim in entering religion was that, by constant mortification of self and by submitting myself to all men for Christ's sake, I might become as like to my crucified Savior as I could, and use my every endeavor to sustain his love.

--Robert Southwell, *Spiritual Exercises and Devotions* ¹

*My choise was guided by foresightfull heede... It shall be followed with performinge deede.*

--Robert Southwell, “From Fortunes reach” ²

In his *Spiritual Exercises and Devotions*, Robert Southwell claimed that in giving himself as a potential martyr for the Jesuit mission in England, he identified himself with Christ’s Passion. This identification was consummated when, in February of 1595, he was executed at Tyburn as a traitor. Southwell’s poetry played an integral part both in his mission to English Catholics, as well as in fashioning himself as one whose personal and literary actions culminated in a “performinge deede” modeled on the sacrifice of his


² Southwell, “From Fortunes reach.” ll. 7, 9. All quotations from Southwell’s poetry are from *St. Robert Southwell: Collected Poems*, ed. Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007), and will henceforth be cited parenthetically by line number.
“crucified Savior.” I would like to take seriously Southwell’s claim to imitate Christ’s Passion in his own life, but rather than reading that claim as a way of illuminating his Jesuit mission, this chapter will read that claim for how his biography and mission shape the discourses of his Passion poetry and influence his poetry’s subsequent popularity among Catholic and Protestant readerships. In reading Southwell’s Passion lyrics, I will show how the poems appropriate discourses of the visualized body in pain, spatial intimacy, and imitation in order to comfort and consolidate his primary audience of English Catholics. Moreover, though Southwell appropriates such discourses to consolidate the Catholic community legally denied its public rituals of communion, his poetry’s compelling and melancholic speakers and his use of the Passion to instill virtue are influential forces in devotional poetry of the early seventeenth century. This chapter will argue that intimate and vivid communion between Christ’s Passion and the speaker (and reader) allows Southwell’s poetry to meld with his potential (and later, actual) martyrdom, imbuing his often melancholic poems with the qualities of ongoing sacrifice, identification, and communion the Passion idealizes. Paradoxically, although Southwell’s poetry is primarily intended to console a recusant Catholic audience, the fluid identification between Southwell’s martyrdom, the Passion, and his poetry ultimately catalyzes the popularity of his work in mainstream Protestant reading communities of the seventeenth century.

In his 1935 biography of Southwell, Pierre Janelle claimed that we would better understand Southwell if he “had been dealt with as the head of a school, and considered in relation both to contemporary Catholic writers, to non-Catholic followers, and lastly to
the line of devotional poets which begins with Donne and ends up with Crashaw.”

Louis Martz continued this trend twenty years later, and more recently scholars such as Alison Shell, Anne Sweeney, and Gary Bouchard have deepened our understanding of Southwell’s influence on seventeenth-century English devotional poetry. In the wake of this critical shift, Southwell’s poetry has also been analyzed through the lens of his Jesuit mission in studies by Nancy Pollard Brown, Geoffrey Hill, and Scott Pilarz. However, though these scholars have helpfully pointed out Southwell’s desires for religious tolerance in late Elizabethan England, they also tend to overemphasize Southwell’s calls for ecumenism to the detriment of Southwell’s goal to reconcile English Protestants to Catholicism and to comfort and encourage recusants—Southwell’s own stated intentions in many of his prose works. This is not to say that Southwell does not envision his poems

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reaching a wider audience than English Catholics; after all, in his “The Author to his loving Cosen,” Southwell opposes not Catholic writing to Protestant, but sacred poetry to profane: “the Vanity of men cannot Counterpease the authority of god, who dileveringe many partes of scripture in Verse, and by his Apostle willing us to exercise our devotion in Hymnes and spirituall Sonnetts warranteth the art to bee good and the use [of poetry] allowable.” Nor is it to say that Southwell did not express hopes for a more ecumenical relationship between English Catholics and Protestants—something he did throughout his poetry and prose. Rather, it is to emphasize that Southwell’s literary intentions, his desire to use poetry to teach virtue and perseverance, grow primarily out of his mission to consolidate and comfort his English Catholic coreligionists.7

Though another school of Southwell criticism has recognized the debt of Southwell’s literary training to Jesuit aesthetic theory and has focused on the relationship between his Jesuit mission and his poetry, occasionally this approach flattens Southwell’s verse into pedagogical vehicles for doctrine, in effect viewing Southwell’s literature as a servant of his doctrinal belief.8 Thus, in showing the influence of Southwell’s verse on


8 For an excellent and intelligent essay on Southwell’s use of Jesuit theories, see John R. Roberts and Lorraine Roberts, “‘To weave a new webbe in their owne loome’: Robert Southwell and Counter-Reformation Poetics,” in Sacred and Profane: Secular and Devotional Interplay in Early Modern British Literature, ed. Helen Wilcox, Richard Todd, and Alasdair MacDonald (Amsterdam: VU UP, 1996), 63-78. As John O’Malley has shown, however, the terms “Counter-Reformation,” “Tridentine Catholicism,” and “Post-Reformation Catholicism” have a vexed history in scholarship; though each term conveys some aspect of Catholicism in the period, each is also quite limited and sometimes misleading. O’Malley proposes the term “early modern Catholicism” to encompass all the previous terms. I will use the term throughout to describe the theology, culture, politics, and belief structures of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Catholicism. See John W. O’Malley, Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000). Janelle’s still useful The Catholic Reformation outlines the significance of the theories of Torquato Tasso and Jacobus Pontanus on Counter-Reformation literary
seventeenth-century poetry, many readings of Southwell unfortunately tend to downplay the importance of his original Catholic audience, while other accounts almost paradoxically concede that Southwell’s work was influential on subsequent poets at the same time that they suggest that Southwell’s aesthetics were marginal to the poetics of George Herbert and John Donne, figures who would later epitomize the mainstream English literary tradition of this period. Though Alison Shell and Anne Sweeney have begun to appreciate Southwell’s membership in the mainstream of English literature, and though Gary Kuchar has adroitly examined Southwell’s influential role in English Catholic literary culture, Southwell’s poetry needs to be read against the Passion discourses that are as native to English writing in the period as the works of Herbert or Milton, and also understood in light of the poetry’s rather paradoxical relationship to his recusant Catholic and mainstream Protestant reading communities.

Therefore, I will first argue that Southwell’s Passion poetry is intended to consolidate his primary readership—English Catholics—around the imaginatively constructed event. Such consolidation is, in part, a substitution for the absence in late Elizabethan England of the Catholic mass, which, through the Eucharist, was the vehicle of Christ’s physical body as well as the preeminent sign of Christ’s mystical body—the

9 Although Martz does charitably concede that there are at least eight or nine poems by Southwell “without some grievous flaw” (The Poetry of Meditation 183).

ecclesial community that is unified by the sacrament. Second, I will show how Southwell’s Passion lyrics appropriate the discourses of visuality and spatial intimacy in order to make Christ’s sacrifice present to his isolated and often melancholic speakers as well as to his readers. Third, I will show how Southwell uses the discourse of imitation and identification to create fluid poetic voicing in his lyrics—that is, in order to allow his lyrics to be voiced by virtually any reader. Though Southwell’s poems often represent isolated speakers, Southwell appeals to Christ’s self-sacrificing love, as well as to his own potential martyrdom on the Jesuit mission, to encourage his readership to spiritual martyrdom as members of Christ’s mystical body, a dynamic which allows his poems to bridge the gap between isolated speaker/reader and the larger ecclesial community. Ultimately (and ironically), the fluid voicing of the melancholic lyrics, their representation of self-sacrificing, Christ-like love, and Southwell’s own actual martyrdom in 1595 for the English Catholic community, contribute to Southwell’s subsequent popularity among a wider English and largely Protestant readership in the seventeenth century.

**The Eucharist, Christ’s Passion, and the Suffering Ecclesial Body**

Throughout the late medieval and early modern periods, the Passion was explicitly connected to the Eucharist, the central ritual of Catholic and Protestant communal worship, and a subject of great theological conflict throughout the Reformation. Despite the differences distinguishing Protestant and Catholic sacramental thought, the presence of Christ in Holy Communion and its re-presentation (or commemoration) of the Passion was necessarily linked to the consolidation of the
worshipping ecclesia, the corpus mysticum of the church. Put another way, Passion devotion was implicated in questions of religious community and confessional identity through its connection with Holy Communion. This dynamic is central to Southwell’s mission and poetry in the late sixteenth century. While the sacrament of Holy Communion was the preeminent locus where Christ’s Passion was made present and applied to the church and to the individual in both Catholic and Protestant belief, after Elizabeth’s accession in 1558, the Catholic mass was legally prohibited in England. By the 1580s, not only were all trappings of the mass or “popish religion” banned, but in light of Pope Pius V’s 1570 excommunication of Elizabeth and the subsequent work of Jesuit priests in England, by the 1580s the state also considered the presence of any Catholic priest or the harboring thereof to be treason, punishable by hanging, disemboweling, and quartering. Because the Eucharist was the sign of both Christ’s physical body and of the ecclesial community, prohibiting the mass was viewed by the Protestant English state as vital to the consolidation of state power over the influence of the presumably disobedient and treasonous Catholics. Such a prohibition eliminated the public unification of the Catholic ecclesial community that, extrapolating from William T. Cavanaugh’s recent work on torture and the Eucharist, theoretically threatened to transcend the religio-political body of the Protestant state.

11 I use the term to refer specifically to Christ’s body construed as the church. See Henri de Lubac, Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages, trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2006).


14 For an account of the relationship between the Catholic Eucharist and totalitarianism, see William Cavanaugh’s Torture and the Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ (Oxford:
Regina Schwartz has argued for a general early modern cultural shift in which the divine presence produced by the Eucharist was transferred to devotional poetry, while Anne Sweeney has helpfully posited that in the specific case of Robert Southwell, poetry could help substitute for the communal dimensions of the Eucharist and consequently could play an important role in the Jesuit mission in England. This transferability of Christ’s presence to private prayer and imaginative literature was especially crucial for Catholics after the legal prohibition of the mass. As Lisa McClain has shown, English Catholics could, “In the absence of the traditional rituals of the Mass...search for alternative means to reap the benefits of the sacrament—saving grace and a connection to

Blackwell, 1998). Cavanaugh describes the power of the sacrament to frame a polity: “The Eucharist is not a mere sign which points to some more concrete political reality. Christ’s Eucharistic body is both res et sacramentum, sign and reality. Christ does not lie behind the Eucharistic sign but saturates it. Christians do not simply read the sign but perform it. We become Christ’s body in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the true ‘polities’, as Augustine saw, because it is the public performance of the true eschatological City of God in the midst of another City which is passing away” (14). He furthermore argues that state-sponsored torture—and Elizabeth’s government used torture regularly to interrogate and punish political and religious dissidents—acts directly against this unifying power: “[T]orture is a kind of perverted liturgy, a ritual act which organizes bodies in the society into a collective performance, not of true community, but of an atomized aggregate of mutually suspicious individuals. Just as liturgy is not a merely ‘spiritual’ formation which then must be applied to the physical world, torture is not merely a physical assault on bodies but a formation of a social imagination” (12).

15 Regina Schwartz, “From Ritual to Poetry: Herbert’s Mystical Eucharist,” in Mystics: Presence and Aporia, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003), 139-40; and Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008), 3-35. Anne Sweeney agrees with such a “transferability” of the Eucharistic “real presence” to Southwell’s poetry in her discussion of Southwell’s “On the Blessed Sacrament of the Aulter”: “What few of his English flock could hope to experience he supplied directly into their imaginations, as it were, through poetry, the angels acting in historic, poetic, and real time, carrying the inspirations they brought Southwell to the readers in their turn….Father Southwell’s poetic Mass, complete with sweet music and the scent of incense, is assisted by real angels, who therefore help to bring the sacred bread to the table of the English reader’s imagination—the poet-priest’s way of offering his congregation a virtual Eucharist, to console them for the loss of the actual one” (Sweeney, Snow in Arcadia, 243).

Christ (especially to the body of Christ).”\textsuperscript{17} Such a poetic “substitution” for participation in the communal dimensions of the Eucharist is suggested throughout Southwell’s poetry, including poems such as “Lauda Sion Salvatorem” and “Of the Blessed sacrament of the Aulter,” works which explicitly celebrate the mystery of Christ’s presence in the sacrament and its relationship to the “heavenly companye” of Christ’s flock.\textsuperscript{18} This is not to say that Christ’s corporeal presence was believed to exist in poetry precisely as Catholic doctrine taught it existed in the Eucharist; rather, it is to acknowledge that other cultural productions like art can, as Jacques Maritain argues in his seminal work on art and poetry, point beyond their own incompleteness toward transcendence, and reveal deeper connections between earthly and divine realities, between Christ’s Passion and his suffering body manifested in art.\textsuperscript{19} Southwell’s devotional poetry appropriates the community-building functions of the Eucharist, and often assumes the role, however imperfect, of manifesting Christ’s sacrifice and the presence of the ecclesial community to the poet’s audience. Such a role for poetry is commensurate with Henry Garnet’s belief, typical of the Jesuit order of which he was head in England, that the “real presence” of Christ’s Passion could be transferred to other objects when the sacrament unifying the ecclesial community was outlawed.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} Lisa McClain, \textit{Lest We Be Damned}, 114.

\textsuperscript{18} “Saint Thomas of Aquines Hymne read on Corpus Christy daye. Lauda Sion Salvatorem,” l. 72.


\textsuperscript{20} McClain, \textit{Lest We Be Damned}, 107. Indeed, this fundamental transferability of devotional modalities underpins Louis Martz’s entire thesis regarding Ignatian meditation and rosary devotions in the English religious lyric. See Martz’s \textit{The Poetry of Meditation}, esp. chapter 2.
The imaginative connection between the Passion, the Eucharist, and the ecclesial dimensions of Holy Communion seems typical of broader English Catholic thought of the sixteenth century. For instance, Thomas More’s unfinished *A Treatise Upon the Passion*, written in the Tower, begins as a biblical commentary on the events leading to Christ’s execution and culminates in a long explanation of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist and of the sacramental, unifying dimension of the Last Supper. Similarly, we can also see the tendency to link Passion devotion to Eucharistic worship in the 1523 *A glorious medytacyon of Jhesus crystes passion*, which uses emblems interspersed with prayers on specific events of the Passion to heighten the link between the historical event of Christ’s wounding and devotion to his five wounds, the Eucharist, and the physical elements of Christ’s torture. Such a relationship between wounds and the *ecclesia* is sanctioned by the ancient identification of the piercing of Christ’s side in John 19:34 with the issuing of the church’s sacraments and hence of the church itself—a typological reading of that passage that further connects Passion devotion to communal worship and the building of the ecclesial community. Ignatian texts also foreground the connections between the Passion and the Eucharist. While St. Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises* devotes the whole of the third week to the Passion, he also emphasizes the relationship between the Passion (more specifically, the Last Supper) and the Eucharist: “after having eaten the paschal lamb and finished supper, He washed their feet and gave His most holy body and blood to His disciples.” Gasparo de Loarte’s *Godly garden* (1579) and Fulvio Androzzi’s *Meditations Upon the Passion* (1606) also both foreground the Eucharist-Passion connection throughout their accounts. In short, throughout the sixteenth century, Passion devotion and the Eucharist are virtually inextricably related to one another; both are modes
through which individuals can access or imagine themselves as part of an ecclesial community. Most importantly for Catholics, the ecclesial and community-building dimensions of the sacrament could easily be absorbed into imaginative literature, especially during a period when the mass was largely unavailable. Instead of accessing and manifesting the community through ecclesial ritual, Catholic readers could participate in constructing the ecclesial community by imagining other Catholics partaking of the same literary works (such as devotional lyrics), and by emulating the represented spiritual sacrifice of Christ as a member of his ecclesial body.21

Building on the traditional association between the Passion and Christ’s ecclesial and physical bodies that the Eucharist signifies, Southwell viewed the suffering Catholics in England—the primary, though not the only, audience of his poetry—as the suffering body of Christ, and encouraged his fellow Catholics to do so as well.22 This is evident in his earliest prose work, An Epistle of Comfort, written in 1587 (the title of which possibly

21 This attempt to make the church’s communal function present through adapted Jesuit meditation seems to be one of the motives that underlie publications of Jesuit meditation manuals like Gasparo de Loarte’s The godly garden of Gethsemani, furnished with holsome fruietes of Meditation and prayer, upon the blessed passion of Christ our Redeemer (London, 1580), which was published at the very outset of the Jesuit mission to England (1579 and 1580) and again at the height of Jesuit persecution (1596-98). William Carter printed it initially in London, but Father Garnet printed the second edition on his clandestine press. Timothy Rosendale has suggested that the Book of Common Prayer constructed an imagined community of English Christians, in his Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), chapter 1, “The Book of Common Prayer and National Identity.” For the classic account of imagined communities, see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Revised and Extended Edition, 2nd Ed. (New York: Verso, 1991).

22 Southwell was clearly aware of the extent of English Catholics’ suffering. See, for instance, Southwell’s An Humble Supplication: “Divers have bene throwne into unsavourie and darke dungeons, and brought soe neere starvinge, that some for famine have licked the very moisture of the walls; some have soe farr bene Consumed that they were hardly recovered to life. What unsufferable Agonies we have bene put to upon the Rack, it is not possible to expresse, the feeling soe farr exceedeth all speech. Some with Instruments have bene rowled up together like a ball, and soe Crushed, that the bloud sprowted out at diverse parts of their bodies.” Southwell, An Humble Supplication, ed. R.C. Bald (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1953), 34. Even given the potential for exaggeration Southwell’s rhetorical task in this letter may have motivated, the standard treatment and execution of Elizabethan traitors—Catholic priests no less than the Babington conspirators in 1586—is well documented.
echoes More’s 1534 *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*). He addresses it to “the Reverend Priests, and to the Honourable, Worshipful, and other of the Lay sort, restrained in durance for the Catholic faith,” and in his prefatory letter claims he is writing of the “principal causes of consolation to those that suffer in God’s quarrel.”

Chapter 3 is explicit about the link between the Catholic community and Christ’s Passion:

Let us but consider the last tragical pageant of his Passion, wherein he won us and lost himself; and mark the excessive love shewn therein, which if any other than God had uttered, it would have been deemed a senseless dotage. Let us view him with the eyes of our heart, and we shall discover, saith St. Bernard, a most lamentable sight. We shall see his head full of thorns, his ears full of blasphemies, his eyes full of tears, his mouth full of gall, his body full of wounds, his heart full of sorrow, and yet in all these torments doth he cry to man, saith the same Saint, *More am I pained with the wounds of thy sin than with the wounds of my own body:* more sorrowing at man’s ingratitude than at his own affliction.

Significantly, here Southwell encourages the reader to turn “inward” and view Christ imaginatively, but does so using a plural imperative. The language Southwell employs is Ignatian in style, but it also invokes the Bernardine-influenced discourse of visuality as it names the images of the Passion the heart should “see” when contemplating Christ: the thorns, the gall and vinegar, the wounded body, as well as Christ’s tormentors. Importantly, Southwell’s imperative is almost identical to the “Second Sermon of the Passion” in the Elizabethan *Homilies*, which reads, “Let us stedfastly behold Christ crucified with the eyes of our heart.” As in the *Homilies*, Southwell’s repeated use of

\[\text{23 Epistle of Comfort, 3, 4.}\]
\[\text{24 Ibid., 43-44.}\]
\[\text{25 Sermons, or Homilies, Appointed to be read in Churches (London: Prayer-Book and Homily Society, 1833), 298.}\]
the first person plural and the imperative mood encourages the reader to imagine a community of English Christians (though for Southwell they are specifically Catholics) all bound by Christ’s Passion, by his body imagined by readers, thus conceptualizing the individual’s relationship to the *ecclesia* through personal devotion—turning political isolation into potential communion with Christ’s literal and ecclesial bodies through Southwell’s spiritual guidance. Finally, the suggestion that this meditation is also a “tragical pageant” heightens the communal implications of the passage, for “pageant” intimates a public procession or display of the Passion, one reminiscent of the *corpus christi* processions once popular in England that by Southwell’s time only occurred in the memories of the persecuted audience.26

Later, at the close of chapter 3, Southwell makes the connection between the Passion and Christ’s suffering ecclesial body clear:

> Considering therefore how glorious, how decent, yea and how necessary it is for a Christian to take up his cross with Christ and tread the path of tribulation which he hath plained unto us by his own example, let us not be dismayed with these cross adventures that befall us….Finally we are Christians, whose Captain is a Crucifix, whose armour patience, whose battle persecution, whose victory death, whose triumph martyrdom.27

Southwell compares his audience under persecution to Christ’s martyrs who must take up their crosses to imitate his Passion, and “cross adventures” punningly emphasizes the identification between Christ and persecuted English Catholics. Also, Southwell’s final sentence moves what was initially a personal meditation on Christ’s Passion into the

26 For an account of the importance of corpus Christi celebrations to late medieval Catholicism, see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Devotion* (New York: Cambridge, 1991).

27 *Epistle of Comfort*, 47.
public realm, using martial language under the symbol of the crucifix to rally his readers into militant and communal identification with Christ. The crucifix foregrounds Christ’s Passion as both an inward source of meditative strength and an outward expression of ecclesial unity under the sign of Christ’s body for all those “restrained in durance for the Catholic faith,” the persecuted *corpus mysticum*. Hence, Southwell urges readers to imitate Christ’s example, and in so doing become aware of their membership in Christ’s body despite the suppression of their ecclesial community—even to the point of a militant form of martyrdom that for Southwell consolidates a particularly Catholic *ecclesia*. Such passages show the centrality of the Passion as the narrative through which his audience’s suffering assumes final meaning, and suggest that such meaning is attained through individual consideration of the “tragical pageant” of the Passion. For Southwell, texts can work to unify and manifest the English Catholic community in its persecutions, through encouragement to imitative, spiritual self-sacrifice.

Southwell’s devotional texts, like the Eucharist, attempt to make Christ’s Passion present to their “partakers,” urging generally isolated readers to identify with the Passion as an imagined communal body. “The virgin Mary to Christ on the Crosse” exemplifies the importance of Christ’s Passion and its communal dimensions made present through poetry. In this poem Southwell conceives Catholics as Christ’s ecclesial body as well as his physical body suffering on the cross. Additionally, the traditional close identification of Mary’s and Christ’s sufferings permits the Virgin’s words to be spoken by the persecuted church that identifies with her sorrows at the loss of the *corpus mysticum*. As

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28 Ibid., 3.

the Rheims New Testament shows in its gloss on chapter 12 of the Apocalypse, the plight
of “the woman”—a figure identified with Mary in Catholic traditions—is intertwined
with the suffering church in England: the woman fleeing the dragon is compared to “the
Church Catholike now in England in this time of persecution.” The poem’s metonymic
voicing, with the Virgin’s standing in for the ecclesial community, is also suggested in
much devotional literature and art surrounding Christ’s Passion, and is represented, for
instance, in the late medieval *Stabat Mater*, which envisions Mary at the foot of the cross
as an example of true compassion for Christ’s persecution—a devotional identification
that Richard Crashaw will take up decades later in his own engagements of the Passion:

The traditional symbolism of Christ’s persecuted body, the church, and the
woman subsequently allows the poem to be read as an exchange between the lone
speaker-reader, Christ, and the ecclesial community his suffering body tropes. The poem
first evokes, through visual discourse, a “dimd” crucifix-like image that causes Christ to
move in and out of the imaginative composition:

What mist hath dimd that glorious face,
What seas of griefe my sun doth tosse?
The golden raies of heavenly grace
Lies now eclipsed on the crosse. (1-4)

Paradoxically, the visual indeterminacy in these lines heightens the sense of Christ’s
presence to the speaker and reader, as if by not seeing Christ’s body clearly, we are

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31 The *Stabat Mater* provides precedent for such identification between Mary and the Church in
exile, and Richard Crashaw’s attraction to this hymn when he was likely still a Protestant suggests that
Mary need not necessarily be identified with only the Catholic Church: *Quis non potest contristari, / Matrem
Christi contemplari / Dolentem cum filio. / In me sitat dolor tui, Crucifixo fac me frui / Dum sum in exilio.*
Quoted from Richard Crashaw, *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, ed. George Walton
motivated to seek it more urgently with our eyes. Christ’s visualized body is eclipsed by grief—both his and Mary’s—but is then rendered intimately close through the apostrophe of the next lines:

Jesus my love, my sonne, my God,
Behold thy mother washt in teares:
Thy bloody woundes be made a rod,
To chasten these my latter yeares. (5-8)

Mary’s direct address functions in two ways. First, by employing the traditional iconography of Calvary, with Mary at Christ’s feet, the lines produce a composition of place where the Virgin becomes a speaking character, thus creating spatial intimacy between Christ’s image and the lone speaker. Second, this intimate language allows the reader to voice Mary’s melancholic plaint as his own, creating intimacy and even communion between Southwell’s readers and Christ on the cross through Mary’s words.32 This multi-layered voicing allows the poem to close the distance between the lone speaker of the poem and the ecclesial community reading the lyric, as well as between that community and the dying Christ. Moreover, the Virgin as symbol of the ecclesia now persecuted in England also heightens the poem’s engagement with the isolated Catholic community, suggesting that the individual reader is identifiable both with the Virgin Mary and with the ecclesial community she represents. The poem represents the isolated Catholic reader lamenting the loss of Christ in the Eucharist: the Virgin speaks for the community, lamenting the “death” of her son’s sacramental presence. But the poem also suggests that the Catholic ecclesial community is unified in

32 Gary Kuchar indirectly corroborates this shift from Christ’s carnal presence to alternative modes of presence in his reading of Mary Magdalene’s Funeral Tears, in which he claims that Christ instructs the Magdalene to rejoice at his spiritual presence within rather than to lament his physical loss. Kuchar, Divine Subjection, 55-71.
its lament through the voice of the lone speaker: the Virgin speaks as an embodiment of the community itself, and her words are voiceable by the individual members reading the poem.

The poem’s dramatization of the loss of Christ suggests that Passion poetry offers a substitute for actual Eucharistic ritual; the outward and public rite of Holy Communion can be interiorized for the individual, isolated members of the ecclesial community, who are now essentially members of a reading—a literary—community. The Virgin asks that Christ be buried in her heart through Gabriel’s intercession:

Come helpe me now to cleave my heart
That there I may my sonne intombe. (15-16)

Alluding to the Annunciation as well as to Simeon’s prophecy in Luke 2:35 (“and thine own soule shal a sword pearce”), Mary recasts Simeon’s meaning, asking that Christ’s body be “buried” within the heart of the believer who reads the poem as a substitution for the corporeal and communal presence of the proscribed Eucharist. The poem completes the internalization of Christ within Mary’s heart in the last stanza:

But waile my soule, thy comfort dies,
My wofull wombe lament thy fruit,
My heart give eares unto my eies,
Let sorrow string my heavy lute. (25-28)

Mary’s words connect Christ’s body to her own womb, alluding to the nativity narratives of the New Testament. But read against the plea for interiorization of Christ’s body in line 16, the stanza re-emphasizes both the corporeal loss of Christ—he was once the fruit of Mary’s physical womb—and its re-inscription into Mary’s soul in another register. The poem intimates that the Passion can be translated into the song of Mary’s “heavy lute,” into poetry. “The virgin Mary to Christ on the Crosse” takes advantage of traditional typology surrounding Christ and the Virgin as metonyms for the Eucharist and
the church respectively in order to show that even though the Catholic community is
severed and isolated from its rituals and from one another, the Passion can remain a site
of imagined community-building. By participating in Passion devotion produced by the
poet’s “heavy lute,” recusants can identify with Southwell’s melancholic speaker and
become part of an imagined community of Catholics, as well as part of another, literary
community of readers who find solace and ecclesial solidarity in partaking of the Jesuit’s
Passion poems.

Sacrifice and Communion in Southwell’s Passion Poems

Although the goal of Southwell’s Passion poems is to consolidate and comfort his
primary Catholic audience—to remind them that they are in communion with one another
and with Christ—his lyrics often dramatize a lone and isolated speaker rather than a
unified ecclesial community. Southwell does not privilege explicit fulfillment or
unification of the Catholic community in his lyrics; instead, he emphasizes and
encourages spiritual imitation of Christ’s self-sacrifice as the preeminent mode of
consolidating his readers into Christ’s ecclesial body. This is suggested in “The virgin
Mary to Christ,” in which the reader voices the Virgin and thus recognizes his identity as
a member of the persecuted church lamenting the loss of the Eucharistic Christ. In order
to encourage self-sacrifice in his readers and thereby to allow them to recognize their
identification with Christ’s ecclesial body, Southwell appropriates the rhetoric of
martyrdom and discourse of imitation to his poetry; a lonely self-immolation is
paradoxically the predominant mode of becoming a member of Christ’s unified, public
corpus mysticum. The Greek term St. Paul uses in the Letter to the Philippians to describe
Christ’s utter self-abnegation is kenosis, the emptying out of selfhood and divinity that Christ performs in his Incarnation and Passion. Kenotic love is a vital part of Passion devotion, as it models the path by which the soul is fulfilled in God: imitation of the vir dolorum, whose example on the cross moves the soul to contrition and above all, to imitation. Kenosis is also an important component of the mass, which, as John Bossy has shown, performs two social and theological functions: sacrifice, in which the Passion is re-presented to the community as a model of self-sacrifice and as an oblation for their sins; and communion, in which the ecclesial community is incorporated into Christ’s spiritual body. 33

Southwell’s lyrics tend to privilege sacrifice and martyrdom as the preeminent mode of becoming incorporated into or communing with Christ’s ecclesial body. As such, his lyrics often feature isolated speakers longing to be conformed to Christ or desiring to be immolated in divine love, all in order to encourage individual readers to imitate Christ and to ventriloquize the generic speakers of many of his poems. Drawing on the discourses of spatial intimacy, visuality, and above all, imitation and identification, Southwell’s Passion poetry evokes Christ’s sacrifice in order to consolidate an imagined community of spiritual martyrs. Thus, although ecclesial community is rarely explicitly invoked in Southwell’s lyrics, this should not be taken to mean that Southwell’s poems are not concerned with the public and ecclesial dimensions of Holy Communion or with its importance to English Catholics. Instead, for Southwell communion with Christ’s mystical body is achieved primarily through sacrifice, through imitation of and conformity to Christ’s kenotic love made present to isolated readers in the vivid and

33 Bossy, 34.
intimate depictions of the Passion. In what follows, I will examine several of Southwell’s Passion lyrics, showing how they represent Christ’s Passion as imminently and intimately present, and how they also tend to foreground isolated and melancholic speakers who utter words that readers can make their own—all in order to produce a community of spiritual martyrs constructed through the individual sacrifice idealized in Southwell’s poetry.

**Kenosis and Fulfillment in “Sinnes heavy loade”**

“Sinnes heavy loade” dramatizes the upward and downward dynamics sacrifice and communion as it simultaneously creates an intimate and visual encounter with Christ through visual discourse and apostrophe. The poem also demonstrates through its concluding ambiguity the distinction between abstract theology and poetry in dramatizing communion between Christ and longing soul. As Sweeney and Pilarz have argued, the poem alludes to the Stations of the Cross (not necessarily to Gethsemane, as Nancy Pollard Brown claims) so popular to late medieval and early modern devotion.  

34 Sweeney points out that this poem is typical of Southwell’s tendency to dramatize in his poetry the “cross-action of grace” between God and man.  

35 The speaker uses visuality to draw the reader close to Christ’s plight: sin forces Christ’s “knees to bowe” (2); the speaker shows us Christ fallen “flat,” “oppreste” with the speaker’s sin (3), so that “bloody sweat runs tricklinge from [Christ’s] browe” (4). The weight of man’s sin makes Christ “bowe yea

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35 Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia*, 134.
flat fall to the grounde,” and Southwell’s use of the sibilant /s/ in “Alas if god himself sinke under synne” (17) suggests the downward sliding of Christ beneath the cross on the *via dolorosa*—or perhaps even the serpentine associations of sin in Genesis. Southwell invokes the visceral images of the Stations and creates a colloquy between Christ and the individual whose sin causes Christ’s death. The poem’s vivid and affective imagery of Christ’s repeated falling before the speaker’s and reader’s eyes encourages affectivity in the same way as the period’s Passion accounts: to invoke the language of the Elizabethan *Homilies* and Southwell’s *Epistle*, Christ is presented before the “eyes of the heart” to stir the soul to contrition and imitation. The repeated falling also establishes the significance of sacrifice—the downward movement of kenosis—to Southwell’s encounter with the Passion.

The poem also uses apostrophe to heighten the intimate communion between lone speaker and suffering Christ and to explore the meaning of Christ’s kenotic sacrifice. As in “The virgin Mary to Christ,” the speaker’s address to Christ can also be voiced by the reader, foregrounding the immediate temporal presence of the events and the individual’s participation in them. For instance:

First flat thou fellst when earth did thee receive  
In Closet pure of Maryes Virgin breste  
And now thow fallst of earth to take thy leave  
Thou kissest it as cause of thy unrest  
O loving lord that so dost love thy foe  
As thus to kysse the ground where he doth goe. (19-24)

Christ’s first “fall” was into earthly flesh, a kenotic descent into matter. The second fall Southwell describes is the literal fall of Christ during his Passion, an action in which Christ “kisses”—an act of adoration—the earth from which man was made. Two aspects of Christ’s sacrifice become apparent in this prayer: first, Christ’s Passion is a
relinquishing of his divinity, enacted in the kissing of the earth and made present through the lines’ emphasis on the visualized body in pain and of spatial intimacy. Second, Christ’s sacrifice is inseparable from his Incarnation, his “fall” from heaven into the “masse of fleshe and bloode” (“Christ’s bloody sweate” l. 24). The Incarnation and Passion become one act of self-sacrificing love and an imitative model for the speaker/reader addressing Christ. The next stanza elaborates kenosis even more forcefully:

Thow minded in thy heaven our earth to weare
Dost prostrate now thy heaven our earth to blisse
As god to earth thou often wert severe
As man thou seal’st a peace with bleedinge kisse.
For as of soules thou Common Father art
So is she mother of man’s other parte. (25-30)

After the Fall, the earth and God stood opposed—God often was “severe” to the earth (27), perhaps in reference to the plagues and punishments depicted in the Torah. Yet the Incarnation inverts this relationship, with God submitting to the earth, so that Christ’s “bleedinge kisse” cements, in a gory yet allusively healing image of alloyed blood and clay, a “peace” between God and humans who were formed from the earth. This pathetic and corporeal image of blood-drenched dust beneath the cross—an image Donne will take up in “Goodfriday, 1613,” “Could I behold… / …that blood… / Make durt of dust[?]” (23, 25, 27)—culminates in the image of Christ’s shrouded corpse in stanza 6, where Christ’s soul will be yielded “a waye to Satans Cave,” there his “cors in tombe to shroude / And with them all thy Deitye to have” (32, 33-34). Christ’s fall beneath the weight of sin tropes the downward, sacrificial, and kenotic action of the poem adumbrated in Christ’s suffering body: his relationship to mankind is always a downward motion, an emptying out and abasement of divinity to earth and decay. The poem’s
downward fall through its deictic signposts resonates with theological significance, miming the fall of original sin (to dust thou shalt return), as well as humanity’s suggested redemption through Christ’s “fall” into flesh. Rather than teaching abstract theology, the poem draws on a theology of sacrifice and communion in order to construct an imitate picture of Christ’s suffering body, in order to draw the devout and sorrowing soul into an encounter with sacrifice using the visualized body in pain and of spatial intimacy—in order, in other words, to dramatize and produce imagined communion between the lone speaker/reader and Christ’s sacrifice.

Significantly, the poem alludes to the communal and sacramental dimensions of sacrifice. Beginning in lines 5 and 6, the poem suggests the relationship between the Eucharist and Passion poetry:

For as of soules thow Common Father art
   So is she mother of man’s other parte.
   She shortly was to drinke thy dearest bloode
   And yelde thy soule a way to Satans Cave. (29-32)

The image underlines the graphic visuality of the earth absorbing Christ’s effusing blood. Yet the verb “drinke” ambiguates line 31, for the word in the context of Christ’s bloody sacrifice echoes the institution prayer of the Eucharist that re-presents the Passion, a prayer that Southwell likely repeated often during his clandestine ministry to recusants—Accepite, et bibite ex eo omnes, hic est enim calix sanguinis mei. In the poem, Christ’s blood is taken into the earth, foregrounding his abject suffering, while also limning the connection between his crucifixion and the communal sacrament of the altar. For if a human is “earth” (a “sacke of dust” in “Christs bloody sweate”), it is by “drinking” Christ’s blood and becoming incorporated into his spiritual body that the soul is ultimately redeemed. The poem’s insistence on Christ’s kenotic and corporeal sacrifice
conceived as falling reaches a potential zenith, a promise of communion and incorporation, at the moment of its apparent nadir: the first fall of the Incarnation yields to the falling of Christ under the weight of sin, and ends in his fall into death, symbolized by the earth’s “drinking” Christ’s allusively sacramental blood.

In its concluding section, the poem suggests the possibility of spiritual ascent or fulfillment and communion through downward kenosis. The speaker’s presumed ascent to God, suggested in the final prayer “And ether yeld with me in earthe to lye / Or els with thee to take me to the skye” (41-42), can occur only through Christ’s suffering, through his fall into humanity and consequently into his role as vir dolorum. The entire colloquy also intimates the applicatory rhetoric found not only in the staunchly Catholic Passion accounts of the period, but also in a variety of Passion accounts from the Homilies to the works of Foxe and Perkins, all of which claim that Christ’s merits—his redemption—are applied only through reflecting upon and understanding the Passion through faith and through the sacrament. Read this way, the poem’s use of physical imagery, its flashes of Christ as physically suffering human being, its intimacy with Christ’s effusing blood, all create a sense of Christ’s ongoing sacrifice made present in poetry and identified closely with the reader’s potential to imitate, apply, and partake of sacrifice. Additionally, by saturating the poem with Eucharistic reference, Southwell also combines a vivid picture of kenotic love with the potential fulfillment of spiritual communion and ecclesial community that the Eucharist promises: communion seems to be promised to the isolated reader and speaker through imitative sacrifice.

However, in this poem, as in Southwell’s other Passion poems, ultimate conformity with Christ’s suffering and incorporation in Christ’s ecclesial body exists
beyond the poem’s bounds: “Sinnes heavy loade” describes Christ’s kenotic sacrifice through visual and imitative discourse, but the sinful speaker and reader remain “shryned in earth,” to be taken “to the skye,” if at all, only in the distant future, in a telling grammar of conditionality. While redemption and glorification are the promised soteriological consequences of self-abnegation, in this poem Southwell’s final ambiguity—the suggestion either that Christ will “yeld” with the speaker “in earthe to lye” or that he may take the speaker “to the skye”—puts extra weight on imitative sacrifice and kenotic love as the condition for salvation. If ultimate communion with Christ’s glorified spiritual and ecclesial bodies will take place, it will only happen when the readers voicing the lyric as their own prayer to the suffering Christ identify themselves with Christ’s sacrifice, with his self-emptying as the quintessential martyr of history. Southwell produces a poem in which communal fulfillment and membership is not explicit, not consummated, but only allusively suggested through a sacramentally-colored kenosis. “Sinnes heavy loade” holds out the unfulfilled promise of incorporation with Christ’s body as the function of a single, longing speaker: O prostrate Christ, erect my croked mynde / …And ether yeld with me in earthe to lye / Or els with thee take me to the skye.

Immolation and Imitation in “Christs bloody sweate” and “The burning Babe”

Another example of Southwell’s engagement with the sacramental and communal dimensions of the Passion in the midst of encouraging his readers to identify wholly with Christ’s kenotic sacrifice is “Christs bloody sweate,” a poem which renders Christ’s suffering through the formal structures of the verse in a way not unlike Herbert’s “Easter
Wings” or “The Altar.” Like “Sinnes heavy loade,” this lyric allows the speaker’s words to be voiced by virtually any reader, and as such, the poem encourages identification with Christ’s kenosis as the primary mode of incorporation with Christ’s spiritual, ecclesial body. “Christs bloody sweate,” however, also strengthens the thematic emphases of “Sinnes heavy loade”: whereas in the previous lyric, Christ’s sacrifice was rather obliquely connected to the Eucharist, in “Christs bloody sweate,” Christ’s agony is described in strongly sacramental terms. And while the previous lyric ended with a conditionality that underlined the need to imitate Christ’s self-abnegation, “Christs bloody sweate” begs God to immolate the speaker’s soul in fiery, kenotic love. As such, the lyric dramatizes the absolute centrality of spiritual martyrdom and kenotic, self-effacing love to Southwell’s engagement with the Passion and to his vision of a united ecclesial community.

Appropriating the discourse of the visualized body in pain, the poem visually and syntactically represents the Passion in its opening, producing in its ambiguous and multidirectional structure a variety of meanings contained in Christ’s kenosis. The first stanza employs a series of mostly iambic clauses describing the drops of Christ’s bloody sweat pouring from his face in Gethsemane:

Fatt soyle, full spring, sweete olive, grape of blisse
That yeldes, that streams, that powres, that dost distil
Untild, undrawne, unstamped, untouched of presse
Dear fruit cleare brooks, fayre oyle, sweete wine at will
Thus Christ unforc’d preventes in shedding bloode
The whippes the thornes the nailes the speare and roode. (1-6)

The first four lines are readable in multiple directions, yielding a polyvalent image of Christ’s sweat sliding down his face. Read horizontally, the lines evoke an almost cardiac pulse in their iambic beats, the spaces between clauses intimating the anxious, hesitant
punctuations of respiration—perhaps of both the reader and of Christ represented in the stanza. As the lines progress horizontally, the poem images Christ’s body as a field that yields both “olive” and “grape” to be “pressed” into oil and wine, respectively. The lines’ repeated structure of four clauses apiece also suggests a vertical organization. Because of this, Sweeney and Davidson have reproduced the poem’s first four lines in columns (as it appears in the Waldegrave MS),\(^{36}\) revealing the four principle elements evoked in the stanza: the fruitful soil of column one; the running streams of column two; the flowing olive oil of three; and the pressed, distilled wine of column 4. The downward motion of these lines/columns further imitates the bloody sweat of Christ to which the semantic level refers: syntactical structure in this poem mimics the physicality of running bodily fluids, producing Christ’s Passion, as it were, at the formal level through the experience of the reader.

Most importantly, as Sweeney notes in her reading of the poem, this poetic structure and evocation of bread, wine, and oil (the principle elements of the Eucharist and of anointing) manifest the sacraments through Christ’s bodily effusions, making the poem a linguistic “confecting” of Christ and imbuing it with Christ’s imminent presence.\(^{37}\) Lines 5 and 6 confirm the link between Christ’s materially realized suffering body, the ecclesial sacraments of “fayre oyle” and “sweete wine,” and traditional Passion devotion: for the bloody drops of sweat in the first four lines are willed (Christ is “unforc’d”) prefigurations of Christ’s five wounds, alluded to in “The whippes the

\(^{36}\) Cf. the Davidson and Sweeney edition, p. 17.

\(^{37}\) Sweeney even more forcefully connects the poem to the Eucharist, writing, “Southwell is here administering in the magic of poetic numbers the holy emanations of Christ’s Passion, just as he would if giving Holy Communion” (Snow in Arcadia 252).
thornes the nailes the speare and roode” (6). These four clauses parallel the clauses in each of the first four lines; stanza one clearly attempts to make the ongoing effusion of Christ’s blood present through the undulations, repetitions, ebbs, and flows of Southwell’s syntax. As verbal analogues to the emblem tradition of the five wounds, these lines use a visual idiom found in texts like *A Gloryous meditacyon* in order to foreground the link between the Passion and the church’s ongoing sacrament of Holy Communion. By embodying Christ’s Passion through the visual fluidity and undulations of the verse, and in uniting the Passion to Eucharistic elements, the poem limns the ecclesial body seeking communion with and through Christ’s sacrifice: the Passion produces, in a sense, the fair oil and sweet wine of the church’s community-building sacraments.

While the first stanza unites Christ’s suffering physical and ecclesial bodies through sacramental allusion, the second stanza establishes the central image of the rest of the poem, the paradoxical flow of burning blood that sensuously expresses the self-sacrifice that leads to communion with Christ’s body:

He Pelicans he Phenix fate doth prove
Whome flames consume whom streams enforce to die
How burneth bloud howe bleedeth burning love
Can one in flame and streame both bathe and frye
How coulde he joyne a Phenix fyerye paynes
In fainting pelicans still bleeding vaynes (7-12)

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39 This iconic relationship is illustrated in *A gloryous medityacon of Jhesus crystes passyon* (London, 1523), B2v.
The combination of flame with fluid is not unprecedented in contemporary Passion accounts: Loarte, for instance, uses similar language in his *A godly garden*, when he directs his reader that “thou be mindefull alwayes to have thy heart inflamed in love towards him, & melting with the meditation and remembraunce of his tender love towards thee.” But here Southwell introduces two avian mythologies to this combination that suggest the communal and even political implications of the poem: that of the pelican, believed in early modern lore to feed its young with its own blood (and as such a commonplace symbol of Christ), and the Phoenix, a figure of death and rebirth, but also a possible figure of Queen Elizabeth, often identified with the mythological bird. Such a reference conflates the Passion represented by the pelican with the contemporary English political community. Conflating the Phoenix and the pelican in the same line might also suggest a tentative symbolic unity between the self-sacrificing, Christ-like pelican and the English state represented by the queen—a potential engagement with mainstream politics Southwell will later elaborate in *An Humble Supplication to Her Majestie*.

These are, however, very oblique interpretive possibilities, and though the Phoenix reference opens the possibility of Southwell’s subtle refutation or modification of English political mythologies in favor of an ecclesiology of kenotic, spiritual martyrdom, it is likely that Southwell employs the birds as general spiritual symbols of self-sacrifice and resurrection, and uses them to emphasize the importance of imitative, spiritual martyrdom for his primary audience. In employing these traditional symbols, Southwell stretches the limits of metaphor and conflates the actions of melting and

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40 Loarte, *The godly garden*, I1r.
burning, creating a complex, visual language of self-immolation. In line 9, the pelican’s streams of blood and Phoenix’s consuming flames are combined syntactically into the bleeding, burning love of Christ, who in line 10 becomes “one in flame and stream,” in which both birds “bathe and frye.” The stanza’s final couplet reflects on the impossibility of the conceit by questioning this single mysterious flame the poem has created: how can Christ combine both the self-sacrificing blood of the pelican and the burning, regenerating fire of the Phoenix? In a highly self-reflective move, the poem enlists metaphor first to grapple with kenotic self-sacrifice, but then to show the impossibility of fully understanding doctrinal formulas in literary tropes.41

What answer could such an impossible and self-reflexive question elicit? “How coulde [Christ] joyne a Phenix fyerye paynes / In fainting pelicans still bleeding vaynes”? Though the tentative answer, *kenotic love*, begins to emerge in stanza 2, stanza 3 provides a biblical authority for the strained metaphor, revealing Southwell’s reliance on biblical motifs for devotion, a practice urged in the preface to the 1582 Rheims New Testament. But more significantly, Southwell uses biblical sacrifice to pray for, and to entice his readers to pray for, self-effacing, kenotic immolation. It was perhaps for this reason and the following stanza’s emphasis on martyrdom that lines 13-24 were not published until the nineteenth century: although Southwell’s appropriation of Passion discourses to a poetics of self-sacrifice was amenable to Protestant readers, this poem’s elaborated emphasis on martyrdom combined with the biography of its author might have been too politically charged to be printed in the aftermath of the execution of Southwell and other

41 “Accommodation” is one of Southwell’s motives in using analogy and metaphor, according to A.D. Cousins. See A.D. Cousins, 39-53.
Jesuits in 1595. Stanza 3 configures spiritual martyrdom by alluding to 1 Kings 18, in which

Elias once to prove gods sovereign power
By prayer procur’d a fier of wondrous force
That blood and wood and water did devour
Yea stones and dust beyond all nature’s course (13-16)

In 1 Kings, Elias demonstrates God’s power by preparing a sacrifice of bullocks, stones, and water around an altar; God’s fire then miraculously consumes all the material offerings (1 Kings 18:38). The allusion suggests that Southwell appeals to a biblical “solution” for the stretched Phoenix and pelican conceit. Such a solution in turn may imply Southwell’s attempt to write for a wider audience of English Protestants who would likely find an Old Testament analogue of Christ appealing, a scriptural warrant for the poem’s fiery and bloody devotion to Christ’s Passion. However, the allusion could have biographical relevance, suggesting both Southwell’s Catholic mission as well as his position within the broader English religio-political landscape: although many figures in the New Testament mention Elias, and Jesus at the Transfiguration converses with the prophet (and with Moses), Christ’s only direct reference to Elias is in Luke 4:24-26:

“And he said: Amen I say to you that no prophet is accepted in his own country….There were many widows in the days of Elias in Israel…And to none of them was Elias sent, but to Sarepta of Sidon, to a widow woman.” In potentially suggesting Southwell’s own spiritual mission (and typologically, his imitation of Christ), the reference to Elias reminds readers that this and other of Southwell’s poems grow out of the poet’s awareness of and service to English Catholics. The context of Southwell’s religious

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42 See Sweeney and Davidson’s edition, 125.
community seems to insinuate itself into the poem’s intensely personal construction of Christ’s suffering, suggesting that the poem’s longing for self-abnegating sacrifice and martyrdom is implicitly related to Southwell’s mission to console and build up the Catholic ecclesia.

The speaker’s desire for sacrifice, a kenosis linked to a particular ecclesial community, culminates in the last stanza’s prayer for immolation—a desire that, like in “Sinnes heavy loade,” is not immediately connected to an explicit resurrection or fulfillment in Christ’s body. In analogizing God’s love to fiery oblation, the following lines privilege sacrifice and self-denial as the preeminent imitation of Christ:

Such fire is love that fedd with gory bloode
Doth burne no lesse then in the dryest woode (17-18, emphasis mine)

Christ’s kenotic love is figured as the blood and sweat of stanza one, embodied in undulating, fluid syntax. Yet Southwell reminds us that this sacrificial blood is for the historical and contemporary church a fulfillment—and an imminently, vividly present one—of Old Testament sacrifice, a burnt offering legible as fire and purgation to all who read the poem. The “bleeding vaynes” of the pelican are also “fyerye paynes” of divine love that feed sacrifice rather than ameliorating it. The implied resurrection of the Phoenix is thus foreclosed, suggesting that ultimate fulfillment in Christ can only be accomplished through the speaker/reader’s imitation of Christ’s exemplary self-immolation. If, as Bossy claims, Eucharistic ritual re-presents Christ’s self-immolation and sacrifice in order to produce ecclesial communion with his spiritual body, then this poem privileges sacrifice and only implies the unification of the ecclesial community, instead emphasizing the individual’s emulation of spiritual martyrdom. Imitative sacrifice
culminates in lines in which the speaker prays for his and his reader’s own self-immolation:

O sacred Fire come shewe thy force on me
That sacrifice to Christe I maye retorn (19-20)

Southwell voices Elias, calling down fire from heaven, but the target of this heavenly holocaust is not the troops of Ochozias in 2 Kings, but the speaker himself: shewe thy force on me (emphasis mine). The lines not only emphasize the imperative of self-sacrifice for the reader and speaker, but they also link that sacrifice to imitation of Christ’s example: the speaker asks for divine love in order to offer himself in “reorne.” Such a gift can only come through the grace of the Passion in the first place: the fire of love must “shewe” its “force” on the speaker in order for the speaker to render sacrifice back to God—an action reminiscent of one of the Offertory prayers of the mass Southwell would have offered for recusant Catholics: Accendat in nobis Dominus ignem sui amoris, et flammam aeternae caritatis.

Finally, the concluding couplet underlines the passivity of the individual in the face of the Passion. The lines leave the speaker longing for effacement:

I withered am and stonye to all good.
A sacke of dust a masse of fleshe and bloode. (23-24)

After describing the miraculous immolation of Elias’s sacrifice, the speaker describes himself as composed of the materials that God’s love combusts, rhetoric underlining the centrality of martyrdom. The lines also intimate the relationship between visual/bodily and imitative discourse: the poem opens by graphically constructing Christ’s agony through sacramental allusion, and concludes by longing to imitate sacrifice in similarly

43 Cf. 2 Kings 1:10
bodily language. However, the last line also links immolation to the “masse” itself, the ecclesial and communal act that commemorates the “fleshe and bloode” of Christ—the shedding of which opened the poem. Through an allusively corporeal noun, the poem implies that such discourses are linked to the ecclesial community that is Southwell’s primary audience. Yet the poem also ends, like so many of Southwell’s lyrics, in melancholy and potential isolation: like the foreclosed resurrection of the Phoenix, imitative and highly corporeal immolation stands apart from potential resurrection and from participation in the religious community that Southwell wants to consolidate, comfort, and convert. Southwell, his speaker, and the reader are left crying for grace in the conditional mood, pitiful “masses” of flesh and blood unable to commune with Christ without Christ’s immolating, consuming grace.

Southwell’s most studied poem, “The burning Babe,” takes up a similar theme of self-immolation, privileging kenotic love that imitates Christ’s. The poem also alludes to the sacramental qualities of sacrifice and purification that suggest the poet’s awareness of and concern for the ecclesial community he serves. Addressing the lone speaker, the child explains:

My faultles brest the furnace is the fuell woundinge thornes  
Love is the fire and sighs the smoke the ashes shame and scornes  
The fewell Jusice layeth on and Mercy blowes the coales  
The metal in this furnace wrought are mens defiled soules (9-12)

The Christ-child draws intimately close to the reader through direct address and uses visual language to foreground sacrifice: the enumerated details gesture toward the bodily, physical elements of his future Passion—the “woundinge thornes,” “sighs,” “shame” and “scornes.” As in “Christs bloody sweate,” the poem describes divine love as an intense fire capable of immolating human souls. Also like in the previous poem, divine love, the
object of humanity’s imitation, is described in terms of fire and liquid, and the metaphor assumes more explicitly sacramental dimensions in the next lines, where Christ’s fiery love and effusing blood cleanse and sanctify the defiled souls who pass through:

For which [i.e., for the souls] as nowe on fire I am to worke them to their good
So will I melt into a bath to washe them in my bloode. (13-14)

The fire-blood metaphor characterizing “Christs bloody sweate” here resolves into the baptizing and purifying blood of Christ, which is in turn allusively sacramental: the Christ-child will “worke” souls “to their good,” or sanctify them, by washing them in his blood. The Christ-child becomes an embodiment not only of the suffering church in England, alone in the woods on a “hoary Winters night,” but also of sacramental and thereby ecclesial redemption, a communal dynamic emphasized the poem’s insistence on a plurality of souls metaphorically passing through the speaking apparition. Finally, the conclusion of the poem gestures toward the liturgical and ecclesial dimensions of dramatized kenotic love:

With this he vanished out of sight and swiftly shronke awaye
And straight I called unto mynde, that it was Christmas daye. (15-16)

The Christ-child, embodiment of sacrificial love that purifies defiled souls through sacramental washing, recedes from the speaker’s and reader’s vision: it is Christmas, a liturgical reminder that suggests the poem’s potential connection, however oblique, to the ecclesial dimensions of sacrifice.

Despite this potential fulfillment or sanctification through the Passion, in “The burning Babe,” just as in “Christs bloody sweate,” final communion between Christ, the human soul, and the suggested religious community is conditional, existing in the future, and not fulfilled within the poem: no one draws near the Christ-child burning with sacrificial love. As in the other Passion poems, Southwell has appropriated discourses of
the visualized body in pain, of spatial intimacy, and of imitation to “The burning Babe,” emphasizing an intense desire for self-immolation and martyrdom as the ideal act of identification with the crucified Christ. On the one hand, in constructing a vividly-conceived Passion privileging Christ’s kenotic sacrifice, Southwell’s Passion poems allude to the religious community his poetry is designed to consolidate, the English Catholics who suffer persecution as Christ’s mystical body. On the other hand, despite the poems’ associations both contextually and thematically with the recusant community, Southwell’s Passion poems are spoken by a melancholy, lone “I” that seeks refuge in Christ’s suffering and in potential martyrdom, a voice who hopes for salvation in the world to come, rather than a speaker convinced of his identification with Christ or of his communion with him or of his ability to consolidate the church’s members: as the speaker of “The burning Babe” laments, “Yet none approach to warme their hartes or feele my fire but I” (8). Just like the poems’ content, the biographical resonances of these poems, combined with the historical reality that they were written by a man known to be a Jesuit priest, suggests a tension between the communal designs of his poetry and the markedly melancholic and unfulfilled voices that long for self-immolation and martyrdom. In short, understood through Bossy’s analysis of sacrifice and communion in the mass, Southwell’s Passion poems often dramatize sacrifice, but their representation of ecclesial communion is more ambiguous and allusive.

Given that most of Southwell’s poems are spoken by isolated and melancholic speakers, how does Southwell’s poetry bridge the gap between such isolation and even desolation, and the Catholic ecclesial community his poetry, especially as it circulated in manuscript, was designed to consolidate and console? How does the poetry generate
communion from the sacrifice that permeates the visual and metaphorical registers of his lyrics? And just as importantly, how does Southwell’s poetry speak not only to an imagined community of Catholic readers, but also to a broader and largely Protestant literary community that would ultimately find his poetry so attractive? As the final sections of this chapter will argue, Southwell’s poetry connects the lone “I” of his verse to his readership precisely through a generic and melancholic “I” that is voiceable by Southwell himself (due to his own potential and later, actual, martyrdom), and more importantly, by a variety of readers across the confessional divide. Southwell’s verse becomes highly influential in the seventeenth century because it generally avoids controversy and privileges trans-confessional Passion discourses, and because it allows each reader to speak as one who stands “shyveringe in the snowe” with the rest of the imagined ecclesial and literary community reading Southwell’s poetry.

Southwell’s Suffering Authorial and Ecclesial Bodies

Southwell uses Passion poetry to encourage his original Catholic audiences (the audiences that initially circulated and copied his manuscripts) to imitation and identification with Christ through spiritual martyrdom and sacrifice modeled on the Passion. By voicing Southwell’s speakers as their own, Catholic readers can participate in an imagined ecclesial community bound together through literature. Moreover, the generic “I” of Southwell’s poems and their thematic concern with martyrdom modeled on Christ’s Passion allow the poems to collapse the distance between Southwell’s biography and the poems themselves as well as the gap between the isolated “I” and the imagined community of readers. Southwell’s martyrdom also has an additional effect on the
influence of his poetry: his exemplary death at Tyburn in 1595 created a public sensation that ironically catalyzed his popularity among English Protestant readers. In short, despite the fact that Southwell’s poetry was originally intended to consolidate a recusant Catholic community, the poetry’s fluid identification between Southwell, speaker, and reader, combined with his actual martyrdom for the Catholic cause, allowed his poetry to become immensely popular and influential among mainstream English Protestant readerships in the seventeenth century.

As scholars of early modern martyrdom such as Susannah Monta and Thomas Freeman have shown,44 martyrdom and its representations played a crucial role in forming confessional communities, especially in post-Reformation England. Southwell’s poetry, the product of a martyr, is an excellent example of the power of martyrdom to create and consolidate religious community. Southwell understood this ecclesial dimension of martyrdom through conformity to Christ’s suffering when he wrote An Epistle of Comfort, in which he identified the true Catholic Church not only with those who suffered persecution in Elizabeth’s England “these thirty years,”45 but also with those who suffered throughout Christian history for the Catholic faith.46 Similarly, in “Decease release,” Southwell constructs Mary, Queen of Scots, as a Christ figure, using


45 Epistle of Comfort, 229.

46 See Southwell’s Epistle of Comfort, especially chapter 2, 6, 8, and 13, on the role persecution and martyrdom play in establishing the church’s true identity in history.
characteristic parataxis to “convert” suffering to sacrifice and final triumph through identification with the Passion:

The pounded spice both tast and sent doth please
In fading smoke the force doth incense shewe
The perisht kernel springeth with encrease
The lopped tree doth best and soonest grow.
Gods spice I was and pounding was my due
In fading breath my incense savored best
Death was the meane my kynnell to renewe
By lopping shott I upp to heavenly rest. (1-8)

Spoken by Mary, the poem begins by converting the earthly meaning of death as loss, finality, and pain into imitation of Christ’s Passion and spiritual triumph. In the first stanza, religious objects redolent of Eucharistic ritual (incense, grain) are crushed, as Christ is, in order to fulfill their ultimate “spiritual” purposes; the effect is to sacralize Mary’s execution by appropriating the Passion to her sacramentally conceived death. Like Christ, the queen becomes a sacrificial offering, as incense produced by “pounding” and burning at an altar. Mary’s penal execution, then, is converted in the poem to an exemplary imitatio Christi for the Catholic community; Southwell has inscribed the queen in the martyr narrative modeled on the Passion, turning her punishment into a political—and, by extension of her relationship to English Catholicism, an ecclesial—triumph, for all those “restrained in durance.”

In using the Bernardine trope of Mary as a fasciculus myrrhae, the poem appropriates Passion discourse in order to allow Mary to voice Christ, to speak words that could be just as easily spoken by the crucified God-man. And as in the poems above, in this lyric, despite its strongly identified speaker, the lines can also be appropriated and voiced by individual Catholic readers who suffer under English law. In the case of “Decease release,” Mary’s identification with Christ is a political triumph not only for a
convicted traitor to the crown, but by Christ’s body as a synecdoche of the ecclesial community (evinced in “The virgin Mary to Christ on the Crosse”), and by the idealized martyr as an example for Catholics, also for the recusant subjects existing within the English state. As such, the poem was problematic enough that it existed only in manuscript until the early nineteenth century, suggesting the poem’s daring appropriation of the Passion to exigent matters of political and ecclesial controversy.\(^{47}\) Spiritual martyrdom in imitation of Christ’s vividly present sacrifice provides the exemplary means of communal participation: it is the quintessential act of identification that “Christ’s bloody sweate” and “Sinnes heavy loade” yearn for, the means by which the melancholic, isolated, and self-immolating speaker binds together the community of individual readers. The martyr figure speaking in lyrics such as “Decease release” yokes the individual “I” to the “we” of the ecclesial community, for it is the “I” who witnesses or bears testimony to the larger entity of which he or she is one suffering member. And just as the Virgin’s plaint in “The virgin Mary to Christ on the Crosse” voices the church’s contemporary suffering at the loss of Christ in the Eucharist, here that other Mary voices Christ and is also voiceable for Catholic readers who are spiritual martyrs of the persecuted English church. Mary, Queen of Scots, represents and consolidates English Catholics as both an ecclesial and a reading community even though she speaks as an isolated martyr.

The fluid identity between Christ, martyr, and the community of readers intimated in “Decease release” illustrates that the distinction between martyr and Christ is generally ambiguous and permeable in Southwell’s poems, works which allow the author’s and

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reader’s voices to merge with Christ’s and with his spiritual members. Indeed, as Heather Dubrow has argued, early modern lyric is particularly susceptible to voicing ambiguities, due to its paratextual features and its re-appropriations by other readers and writers as manuscripts circulate. This fluid voicing allows Southwell to speak through his poetry as both martyr and Christ in “From Fortunes reach.” The poem initially presents a voice that could be Christ’s:

Lett fickle fortune runn her blyndest race
I settled have an unremoved mynde (1-2)

My choise was guided by foresightfull heede
It was averred with approvinge will
It shall be followed with performinge deede
And sealed with vow, till death the chooser kill
Yea death though finall date of vayne desires
Endes not my choise which with no tyme expires (7-12)

The speaker has committed to a course informed by foresight (7) and approved by the will (8). It is a course ending only in death (10), but death is not an end to the speaker’s life (12), which expires “with no tyme” (12). Stanza 3 limns the context of this death and disambiguates the speaking voice’s identity:

I ayme not at such fame as feareth fall
I seeke and finde a light that ever shynes
Whose glorious beames display such heavenly sightes
As yeld my soule the summe of all delights (15-18)

The implication is that the speaker’s death—whenever that comes—imitates Christ’s Passion as it yields the soul to the “summe of all delights,” which presumably means to God, the source of the “glorious beames” in line 17. It appears, then, that the ambiguous

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48 As Heather Dubrow shows, mediating devices such as titles or epigraphs can serve to stabilize a speaker’s identity by “locating [the lyric] spatially and ontologically,” implying the potential for slippage of speaker identities in early modern lyrics. Dubrow, The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007), 132.
“choise” referred to in line 12 is the speaker’s pursuit of “a light that ever shynes,” the Godhead itself. The poem also voices a human speaker who exchanges “vayne desires” (11) for transcendent glory, a spiritual dynamic analogous to Christ’s Incarnation and Passion.

Most importantly, the “I” of this poem represents Southwell himself as well as the English Catholic community reading the work, both through the poem’s fluid and generic identity, and through the idealized “performinge deede” (9) of martyrdom. Tellingly, Southwell uses the phrase “performinge deede” in only one other place in his lyrics, in “Of the Blessed sacrament,” where the phrase refers to Christ’s typological fulfillment of the Paschal feast with his Passion, the event in which “Performinge Deede presageing signes did chase” (4)—that is, the deed of which all Old Testament sacrifice was a type, the Passion that fulfilled the prophecy of salvation and “chased” away the previous signs or shadows of itself. The reference suggests once again the relationship in Southwell’s poetry between sacrifice, the Eucharist, and the ecclesial communion that the sacrament binds together; the martyr of this poem, and Southwell himself (who is closely identifiable with this speaker), participates in consolidating the eclesia by offering himself as a sacrifice for the solidarity of the community. Because of the multiple possibilities of voicing the lyric permits, the “performinge deede” is readable simultaneously as Christ’s Passion, Southwell’s mission, and spiritual martyrdom more generally, the central deed of Christian devotion. In “From Fortunes reach,” just as in so many of Southwell’s poems, Southwell’s literary and spiritual missions to England are intertwined in his appropriation of the Passion and the ideal sacrifice of martyrdom it models. Just as martyrs merge their identities with Christ through imitation, so too does
Southwell’s poetry merge with the performing deed of public and communal self-sacrifice represented in the Passion, binding together sacrifice, the ecclesial community, and poetry in the “performing deede” of the Jesuit’s own life.

It is this intimate relationship between martyrdom, community, and poetry that helps explain how Southwell’s lyrics, initially aimed at an English Catholic audience through manuscript circulation, gained such influence in mainstream, Protestant English poetry. Southwell’s sensational martyrdom popularized his poetry, which in turn helped to influence the blossoming of vivid devotional verse of seventeenth-century England.

Though according to *A Brief Discourse of the Condemnation and Execution of Mr Robert Southwell*, Southwell’s last speech on the scaffold at Tyburn closely aligned him with his spiritual mission to English Catholics (“I may yet this lytle while which I have to lyve, lyve a Catholick[e] and dye a Catholicke”), it is also clear that his dignity and perseverance in death appealed to all who witnessed it regardless of their differing confessional affiliations. Despite their obvious sympathy for the Catholic cause, and despite the fact that they use literary conventions common to martyr narratives throughout the period, the major biographical accounts—including letters by Henry Garnet, the anonymous *Brief Discourse*, and an account by a seminary priest calling himself Thomas Leake—corroborate that the crowd did not uniformly revile Southwell as a traitor as was customary upon execution: he prayed for Queen Elizabeth, for England, and for his soul, and his hangman was required by the crowd to show (relative) mercy by

letting Southwell hang until dead before butchering him. In short, Southwell’s final performance on the scaffold motivated a strong sense of awe and respect from many of those present, Catholic and Protestant. Southwell’s death illustrates what Thomas Freeman claims about martyrdom in early modern England: “Although [English Christians] could not agree on who the true martyrs were, they agreed on what a true martyr was.” Southwell viewed himself, even during his execution, as a reconciler.

Most significantly, Southwell’s notorious martyrdom ultimately bridges the gap between Catholic and Protestant readerships by catalyzing the hurried and repeated printing of his poetry immediately after his sensationalized death. Within a month of Southwell’s execution in February 1595, John Wolfe printed *Saint Peters Complaint, With other Poemes*, one month before Gabriel Cawood secured the copyright. By the end of 1595, Southwell’s poetry—much of it, at any rate—had been printed six times: three editions of *Saint Peters Complaint* under Wolfe and Cawood, and three editions of *Maeoniae* by John Busby (though Nancy Pollard Brown has reservations about the accuracy of 1595 for some of the *Maeoniae* editions). The number of editions for that year, combined with the evident competition to print Southwell’s poems quickly, suggest

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51 Freeman, “Over their Dead Bodies,” 51.

52 Pilarz, 267-80.

53 Southwell, *The Poems of Robert Southwell*, ed. Nancy Pollard Brown, lv, lxxi. Brown points out that it is highly unlikely that all three editions of *Moeoniae* could have come out between October, the month of the copyright, and March 1596, the end of the fiscal year.
the wide market for Southwell, especially, as Alison Shell argues, among non-elite readers. Moreover, this market was overwhelmingly Protestant.\footnote{Shell, \textit{Catholicism, Controversy}, 61-2.} The market for Southwell’s poetry expanded rapidly in the years immediately following his death. Gary M. Bouchard has summarized this relationship between the popularity of Southwell’s poems and his martyrdom:

Southwell’s body of poetical works, with its accompanying implorations and imbedded instructions on how to write sacred verse, was a textual body charged with the fresh memory of his more political body, very recently drawn, hanged, and disemboweled before an unusually sedate and sympathetic crowd at Tyburne.\footnote{Gary M. Bouchard, “The Roman Steps to the Temple,” 135.}

Arthur F. Marotti points out that in the early modern period, the language of print culture closely paralleled the language of relics and of bodies: “The corpse of the author and the corpus of his work were in closer imaginative proximity.”\footnote{Arthur F. Marotti, \textit{Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England} (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 2005), 27.} The immediate and sustained popularity of Southwell’s poetry—printed in thirteen mainstream editions between his death and 1640, as well as in sundry other editions from St. Omer\footnote{Shell, \textit{Catholicism and Controversy}, 61.}—supports Marotti’s claim that “[d]espite confessional differences and despite the atmosphere of polemical viciousness in print culture, the literary remains of a Catholic author could be preserved \textit{and venerated}.”\footnote{Marotti, \textit{Religious Ideology}, 31 (emphasis in the original).}
Does Southwell’s own martyrdom and the respect it garnered fully account for the popularity of his poetry to a mainstream Protestant readership, a readership that likely shared a theological and political outlook opposed in many ways to the Jesuit’s? On the one hand, printers suppressed lines and poems in the editions that were overtly “Catholic” in theological and ecclesiological outlook: as noted above, neither “Decease release” or “I dye without desert” appeared in print until the nineteenth century; half of “Christs bloody sweate” was excised (only lines 1-12 printed until 1856); and “The death of our Ladie” and “The Assumption of our Lady” remained unprinted until 1856 as well. Although the 1616 St. Omer edition of Southwell’s collected works (a Catholic publication) included “Of the blessed sacrament of the Aulter,” this poem did not appear in mainstream English editions until Joseph Walter’s 1817 volume. But such censorship does not completely explain Southwell’s appeal to English Protestants. Rather, the poetry’s popularity should be attributed both to his highly publicized martyrdom and to the wide commonality of the Christian devotional discourses of the period: though Southwell’s poetry (like many Catholic Passion accounts) privileged the sacraments, conformity of the will, and liturgical temporality as aspects of Christ’s Passion in meditation and devotion, Southwell’s Passion poetry could largely remain within the acceptable devotional tendencies of Protestant and Catholic narratives of the Passion alike. Moreover, the appropriation of trans-confessional representational strategies also allowed the poems to be voiced by Protestant readers seeking spiritual edification through poetry, so long as the poems avoided explicitly controversial matters.

Significantly, Southwell’s poetry popularized and revitalized English religious poetry by joining intense devotion to the Passion with older, traditional English verse.
forms, thereby forming the groundwork for the lyrics of figures like William Alabaster, John Donne, and later, possibly Richard Crashaw. Southwell’s popularity exists, then, in tension between his intention to make English poetry consolidate and comfort English Catholics, and the reality that his own death, in conjunction with his Passion lyrics and poetry of spiritual martyrdom, collapsed the distance between his authorship and mainstream English poetry, driving his popularity among Protestant English readers who found in Southwell’s execution an example of impeccable spiritual dedication.

**Entering Southwell’s Corpus**

“Man to the wound in Christ's side” dramatizes the collapse between martyrdom, poetry, and reading community by employing the trope of Christ’s suffering body as *ecclesia* to identify that sacrificed body with his audience and also with poetry itself. In the poem the speaker desires to enter the sanctuary of Christ’s wound:

O pleasant port, O place of rest,
O royall rifte, O worthy wound,
Come harbour me a wearie guest,
That in the world no ease have found. (1-4)

Drawing on the traditional *anima Christi*, these lines apostrophize Christ’s opened body as a sanctuary from the world’s vanity.\(^{59}\) By itself, this is unremarkable. Yet beginning in the fourth stanza, the deictic language wrenches the poem from its particular setting—presumably the foot of the cross—to a more generalized, self-referential poetic language:

Heere must I live here must I die,  
Heere would I utter all my griefe:  
Heere would I all those paines discrie,
Which here did meete for my releefe.
Heere would I view that bloudy sore,
Which dint of spitefull speare did breed. (13-18)

At first, “here” locates the speaker within the imagined world of Calvary, an example of spatial intimacy. But the word’s rhythmic repetition, its predominance as the initial word of virtually every line, makes the reader aware of the verbal nature of the devotion: the *here* of Calvary can refer to the opaque letters and language on the page, the medium through which the Passion becomes present to the reader. The poem’s apostrophe to Christ’s wound, then, combined with the deictic *here* of these lines, makes the crucifixion a transcendentally present discursive event, as Jonathan Culler’s analysis of apostrophe suggests (though the heightened fictiveness of apostrophe that Culler notes is seriously complicated in this poem by the historical and devotional precedents informing the crucifixion). The poem also suggests, through the traditional relationship between Christ’s side-wound and the church’s sacraments, the presence of Christ’s ecclesial body, and encourages readers to enter into that body through poetry. The poem reveals its sacramental nature, its ability to evoke Christ’s sacrificed and communal bodies through apostrophe and to make their power present through readers’ participation in poetic representation. This sacramental entrance into Christ’s wounds is not unique to Catholic Passion devotion. Even the Calvinist Samuel Walsall in *The Life and Death of Jesus Christ* (1607) identifies Christ’s suffering body as a place of rest and communion: “the

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60 Jonathan Culler, “Apostrophe,” *Diacritics* 7 (1977): 59-69, 68. Culler’s seminal analysis does not take into account poetry of devotion, prayer, or meditation, which in fact can problematize his understanding of both the fictiveness and transcendence he attributes to lyric.
faithfull soule by devout meditation may build upon CHRIST, and hide it selfe in his wounds which are open for entrance."  

In light of this reading, what began as an otherwise unremarkable lyric on the Passion becomes a summative invitation on Southwell’s part to partake of his poetry. The poem invites the reader not only into a prayer to enter Christ’s own body through his wounds, but into the act of reading poetry that makes Christ’s mystical body vividly and intimately present, a source of personal—as well as communal—imitation. Such an act of poetic reading, construed in light of Southwell’s own “performing deede,” is a way of partaking of Southwell’s own corpus, the body of his poems which gestures toward and is energized by Southwell’s Jesuit mission and by his own martyrdom and dismemberment. As F.W. Brownlow puts this relationship, “The theme of Southwell’s writing was also the theme of his life….Southwell not only wrote about sacrifice; he wrote himself as sacrifice and lived what he had written.” This poetic sacrifice is grounded in Christ’s Passion, as Brownlow goes on to say: “there seems to be no doubt in Southwell’s mind that God’s transforming masterpiece was the Passion, which, in reclaiming humanity, remade history”—and, I would add, remakes English devotional poetry through the exigencies and dictates of Southwell’s sacramental and literary mission to unify a body of believers through literature.

In identifying himself with Christ in his own “performing deede” at Tyburn, Southwell inadvertently ratified his poetry’s future place in mainstream English letters by

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61 Walsall, The Life and Death of Jesus Christ (Cambridge, 1607), F1r.
his own anticipated and actual death. It was a death he saw as an entrance into Christ’s wounds, just as his brother Jesuits understood the English mission to be an entry into the wounded and “crucified Savior” in whose love Southwell endeavored to persevere in his Spiritual Exercises and Devotions.\(^{63}\) In dramatizing such an entrance to death in “Man to the wound in Christ’s side,” Southwell asked his audiences—whether the Catholics he wished to console or the Protestant Englishmen who would buy his printed poems in droves after his death—to participate in a kenotic relinquishing of self in order to find solace in the “worthy wound” of Christ’s persecuted and suffering body. And in devoting so much of his poetry to a vivid portrayal of Christ’s sacrifice and martyrdom, Southwell invited readers, both Catholic and Protestant, not only into the community of the corpus mysticum, but into an emergent corpus of English devotional poetry. Though Joseph Scallon has written that Southwell’s life “was a better poem than any he ever wrote,”\(^{64}\) such an implicit, and sadly typical, devaluing of Southwell’s poetic contribution occurs precisely because one emphasizes his Jesuit mission at the expense of, rather than in complex relationship to, his literary goal to conjoin “the first Pageant of [Christ’s] Passion” to the “true use of this measured and footed stile,”\(^ {65}\) to his desire to manifest Christ crucified through the revitalized structures of English poetry.

\(^{63}\) Cf. Sweeney Snow in Arcadia, 94.

\(^{64}\) Scallon, The Poetry of Robert Southwell, S.J. (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg), 150.

\(^ {65}\) “The Author to his loving Cosen,” in the Davidson and Sweeney edition, 1.
CHAPTER 3:
WILLIAM ALABASTER: THE PASSION, COMMUNION, AND CONFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

I tooke my leave with a certayn exertation made upon the Passion upon good frydaie, with much more fervour and feeling of Devotion, and with greater tendernes of harte towards Christes Cross and Passion, then it seemed to the hearers that the protestantes were wont to feele or utter[.]

--William Alabaster, “Alabaster’s Conversion”¹

Though there is no hard evidence to verify that William Alabaster read Robert Southwell’s poetry, the publication of Southwell’s poems in 1595, Alabaster’s conversion to a Jesuit-inflected Catholicism and subsequent composition of 77 devotional sonnets in 1597 and 1598, and his acquaintance with the Jesuit network in England, make it likely that Alabaster was at least familiar with Southwell’s work then circulating in manuscript and print.² Several of Alabaster’s sonnets have distinctly Southwellian resonances, and one of the principal manuscripts containing Alabaster’s poetry, found at Oscott College, also contains Southwell’s poetry, and was compiled by Peter Mowle, an Elizabethan


² Alabaster was also acquainted with the Jesuit John Gerard, a friend of Southwell’s, further suggesting Alabaster’s access to Southwell’s work. For an informative note on the possible influence of Southwell on Alabaster, see John W. Dickinson, “Southwell’s “Burning Babe” and William Alabaster,” Notes and Queries 206 (1961): 425-26.
Catholic—strongly suggesting the appeal of both poets to the Catholic community of which both men (at least for a time, in Alabaster’s case) were a part. However, Alabaster’s understanding of Passion poetry is distinct from Southwell’s appropriations of the Passion. While the Jesuit martyr’s Passion poems tended to deemphasize theological or confessional controversies and posthumously appealed to both Catholic and Protestant readerships, Alabaster believed that intimate and vivid communion with Christ in Passion poetry was necessarily and exclusively Catholic, that effective Passion devotion was inextricably related to Catholic piety. Alabaster’s Passion sonnets privilege a largely Jesuit-influenced discourse of the Passion, one foregrounding intimacy and identification with Christ, often through visual language. His poetry also employs a highly martial rhetoric to underline his belief that Passion discourse is aggressively marked by Catholicism. Yet as this chapter will argue, Alabaster’s sonnets, composed when he first professed Catholicism in the mid-1590s, routinely demonstrate the slippages of Passion discourse away from strictly confessional associations and into broader, trans-confessional devotion to the cross. When we read his Passion sonnets against contemporary works such as Thomas Rogers’s Protestant adaptations of medieval texts, we learn that the more intimate and visualized Passion devotion becomes in

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3 For a discussion of the principal manuscripts containing Alabaster’s poetry, see G.M. Story’s and Helen Gardner’s discussion in *The Sonnets of William Alabaster* (London: Oxford UP, 1959), xliv-liv. It is interesting to note that Alabaster’s poetry did not appeal solely to Catholic manuscript compilers. One of the principal manuscripts containing Alabaster’s sonnets (Ms. Eng. Poet. e. 57, Bodleian Library, Oxford) contains a variety of anonymous devotional writing, as well as excerpts from Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* and an excerpt from a speech given by the Church of England Bishop Henry Leslie in 1638, a text advocating liturgical conformity to the English Church statutes. Similarly, John Payne Collier claimed to possess a manuscript (now lost to us) including several of Alabaster’s sonnets as well as sermons by John Donne and Henry King—mainstream Protestant preachers. For a detailed discussion of the contents of this last source, see *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George Potter and Evelyn Simpson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1953-62), vol. 1, p. 34.
Alabaster, the more difficult it is to restrict it to Catholic-Protestant confessional binaries or to subsume it into one Christian community’s devotional practice.

Alabaster scholarship tends to emphasize the Ignatian debt of his poetry, a debt identified with Alabaster’s attempts to stir the affections of his readers into fervent devotion through highly visual, meditative rhetoric and through intimate colloquies with Christ. A.D. Cousins claims that Alabaster’s poetry embodies the affective piety of the Counter-Reformation, while Anthony Raspa, Robert Caro, and George Klawitter have linked Alabaster to the Jesuit tradition of “engag[ing] the passions” through the familiar, tripartite meditative structure. Meanwhile, Alison Shell has connected Alabaster’s poetry with the tears tradition of Southwell, about which she claims “it would have been surprising if [Alabaster] had not known,” and has rightly underlined the highly visual and affective dimensions of Alabaster’s finest sonnets. These readings helpfully foreground the importance of intimate, visualized communion with the crucified Christ in Alabaster’s sonnets. On the other hand, the more recent work of Shell on literary form, conversion, and the social circumstances of Alabaster’s writing reminds us that we cannot read Alabaster as if he wrote in a “devotional vacuum,” attending only to the Ignatian

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5 Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 89; for Shell’s brief discussion of the visual qualities of Alabaster’s verse, see the same volume, 90-92.
structures influencing his use of the sonnet form. Likewise, Molly Murray’s insightful analysis of early modern Catholic conversion narratives alerts readers to the importance of interpreting Alabaster’s devotional writing within the shared representational strategies of the post-Reformation period. Such scholarship shows the importance of reading Alabaster’s poetry for its relationship to the trans-confessional discourses of his period, while also attending to the biographical resonances of his poetry and their relationship to his own conversion to Catholicism in the mid-1590s.

Building on these critical insights into Alabaster’s historical and social contexts, I will challenge Alabaster’s own claims in his conversion narrative (written at the English College in Rome, c. 1598) for the inherently Catholic character of intimate, vividly-conceived communion with Christ’s Passion. In reading Alabaster’s two groups of sonnets on the Passion, “Upon the Ensigns of Christ’s Crucifying” and “The Portrait of Christ’s Death,” I will argue that though Alabaster assumes effective and affective devotion is exclusively Catholic, such confessional marking in his Passion poetry fails to adhere to Catholic and Protestant polemical binaries. For each of the two groups of sonnets, I will adduce a variety of Passion accounts from Alabaster’s historical moment to show that Alabaster’s polemical claims in his conversion narrative are untenable: intimate and vividly visual communion with the crucified Christ was already popular across the prose texts of both Catholic and Protestant communities. Then for each sonnet group I will show that the ambiguities and roughly-hewn structures of Alabaster’s

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6 The phrase is cited with permission from an unpublished essay by Shell, “William Alabaster and the Palinode,” kindly shared with the present author on June 2, 2009.

sonnets often undermine his claims for the exclusivity of Catholic Passion devotion, showing instead a desire to transcend confessional binaries and manifesting occasional sympathy for Christians who fail to imitate Christ by forsaking life and limb for him. Ultimately, in reading Alabaster’s Passion poems I hope to show how intimate, visual, and imitative communion with Christ in poetry resists intentionally polemical attempts to enlist it in the ranks of a particular confessional community.

Alabaster and Passion Devotion

Though his poetry was not printed in full until Helen Gardner’s and G.M. Story’s 1959 Oxford edition,\(^8\) Alabaster was known in his own time as an ascendant poet at Trinity College, Cambridge. He finished the first book of the *Elisaeis* by 1590, an unfinished Latin epic celebrating Queen Elizabeth, and a work which Edmund Spenser praised in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*.\(^9\) Alabaster’s training prepared him to be a prominent English divine—he had, for instance, preached at least once at court by the early 1590s. However, by 1597 Alabaster found himself increasingly attracted to Catholic theology. During a trip to London in that year, Alabaster met the Jesuit Thomas Wright, kept under house arrest by Gabriel Goodman, and became convinced of the truth of Catholic dogmatic claims. After reading Wright’s copy of William Rainold’s defense of

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\(^8\) *The Sonnets of William Alabaster*, ed.G.M. Story and Helen Gardner (London: Oxford, 1959). This remains the only modern critical edition of Alabaster’s sonnets despite relatively renewed interest in his work and in early modern Catholicism more generally.

the Rheims New Testament, Alabaster tells us he was immediately and passionately converted to Rome:

I fownde my minde wholie and perfectly Catholique in an instante, and so to be persuaded of all and everie poynete of Catholique religion together, as I beleved them all most undoubtely and every point and parcell therof, though I knew not the reasons of all...I lept up from the place where I satt, and saide to myself, now I ame a Catholique, and then fell down upon my knees, and thanked God most hartely.  

Alabaster was put under house arrest at Cambridge, during which time he composed his sonnets. After being pressed by prominent Protestant theologians such as Bishop Andrewes to renounce his conversion, Alabaster escaped house arrest, stayed with the Jesuit John Gerard, who gave Alabaster Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*, and then fled to the continent and the English College at Rome. Eventually, Alabaster was arrested trying to return to England and was imprisoned in the Tower. After giving information to the government regarding possible Spanish Catholic plots against England, Alabaster renounced his Catholicism and found preferment at court by the late 1610s. Though it was rumored that Alabaster converted once again to Catholicism in the 1620s or 30s—Oliver Cromwell even suspected Alabaster of “flat popery” in his first parliamentary speech—the poet and divine died a Protestant in 1640.

When describing a sermon he gave on the Passion during the period leading up to his conversion, Alabaster writes,

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I took my leave with a certayn exertation made upon the Passion upon a good frydaie, with much more fervour and feeling of Devotion, and with a greater tendernes of harte towards Christes Cross and Passion, then it seemed to the hearers that the protestantes were wont to feele or utter; or ther spirit abyde.\(^{12}\)

Later, Alabaster elaborates this relationship between a purportedly more affective devotion to the Passion and the practices of Catholics and Protestants—with Catholicism winning the battle over whose devotion is better suited to “tender” communion:

My meditations whiles I was in heresie, upon the pious and devout places of the gospell and namely on the passion of Christ, were mere speculations without tendernes of compassion or desire of imitation, whereof I fownd all the contrarie as soone as I was Catholique: my often receaving of the protestantes communion wrought no effect at all in me for bettering of my life, nor my preparation thertow ever brought forth one dropp of teares, or new desyers of perfection or of punnishing my flesh...[.]\(^{13}\)

In Alabaster’s thinking, Catholic Passion devotion exclusively fosters tenderness, contrition, and a desire for moral imitation of and communion with Christ, while Protestantism produces “mere speculation,” a suggestively removed and distant apprehension of the Passion isolated from a contrite and faithful ecclesial community. By identifying Protestantism with “heresie,” Alabaster bifurcates Passion devotion into polemical categories, into the dichotomies between “friend” and “enemy” that Jesse Lander, drawing on the political theories of Carl Schmitt, argues characterize early modern polemic.\(^{14}\) as a Protestant in “heresie,” he felt the Passion as “mere speculation” without “compassion or desire of imitation,” while as a Catholic, he recognized that

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\(^{13}\) Ibid., 130.

rectified Passion devotion leads to spiritual perfection—to compassion, tears of contrition, and a desire to amend one’s life as a member of Christ’s true spiritual body. Alabaster’s assumption in his conversion narrative and by implication in his sonnets, then, is that affective communion with Christ, the “tenderness of compassion or desire of imitation” he experiences in association with his conversion, is directly and inextricably linked with Catholicism, with a particular confessional community and devotional practice standing in opposition to the “heretical” Protestants.

Written in the period immediately following his conversion, Alabaster’s sonnets manifest his attempts to create the intimate communion with Christ’s Passion he associates exclusively with Catholicism. However, his motivations for writing the sonnets also reveal an implicit tension and even spiritual instability that also surfaces in his poetry:

And I did sett some tymes a certayne strife and wager between my present affections and future, my present persuadinge to devise sonnets now and so full of fyerie love and flaminge ardour towards Christ, that then it sholde serve for a patterne and sample for the tyme to come, to shew upp and conserve my hart in devotion, but on the contrarie parte my future devotions made offer so to maintaine <and> increase the heate and vigour of love and affection in me, that when I should come afterwards to reed over my former sonnets I might wonder rather at the coaldes of them then gather heate by them: And thes verses and sonnetes I made not only for my owne solace, and conforte, but to stir up others also that sholde reed them to soew estimation of that which I felt in my self, for which cause my desier was so extreme ardent to impart this my happiness with others that I felt in me the trew force of that St Dionysius Ariopagita saith, bonum est sui diffusivum, the nature of goodness is to spredd itself to many.  

Alabaster acknowledges that his sonnets were intended in part to encourage others to ardent and affective communion with and imitation of Christ. This is commensurate with

Alabaster’s polemical assumptions regarding Catholic and Protestant piety: for if religious polemic divides groups into “friend” and “enemy,” it also attempts to build and consolidate religious confessions into like-minded communities.\textsuperscript{16} Yet Alabaster also claims that the sonnets serve an autodidactic purpose: they will serve as a “patterne and sample for the tyme to come,” as literary artifacts that will “conserve” his own future “hart in devotion.” The passage suggests that although Alabaster experiences a particular devotional fervor he associates with a specific ecclesial community, and even though he claims that he later found his devotion grew in ardor rather than flagged, he is also aware that his devotion, linked as it is with his newfound Catholic identity, may not be stable—it may ebb away with time or grow cold and fail, even though it seems secure in the present. Thus, although Alabaster claims a Catholic monopoly on affective, intimate, and visualized communion with Christ crucified, his poems should also be read with Alabaster’s telling suggestion in mind: devotional fervor may not be stable over time, and if devotion is linked in Alabaster to a particular confessional community, it may ultimately be fraught with ambiguity even as Alabaster composes poetry advocating polemically understood confessional categories. Indeed, that Alabaster subsequently converted between Catholicism and Protestantism at least twice more in his life also suggests a fluidity and instability rather than rigidity of confessional devotion in Alabaster’s spiritual life.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Lander, 34-35.

\textsuperscript{17} Michael Questier has detailed the instability and fluidity of “conversion” in early modern England, showing that the term applies not only to movement between confessional communities, but to a whole range of spiritual experiences that are not necessarily bound by doctrinal categories. See Michael Questier, \textit{Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625} (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996).
This tension between Alabaster’s association of affective Passion piety with Catholicism and the potential for instability in poeticizing such a claim is exemplified in Sonnet 71, “The Difference ‘twixt Compunction and Cold Devotion in Beholding the Passion of Our Saviour.”¹⁸ I agree with Shell that the poem is in fact about “the inferiority of Protestant devotional techniques,”¹⁹ and the first quatrain succinctly dramatizes a dichotomous vision of Catholic and Protestant piety:

When without tears I look on Christ, I see
Only a story of some passion,
Which any common eye may wonder on;
But if I look through tears Christ smiles on me. (71.1-4)

The poet identifies two modes of beholding Christ. The first, “without tears,” produces only a cold historical narrative or “story” of a man’s suffering, terms echoing the “mere speculations without tenderness” Alabaster identifies with Protestantism in his conversion narrative. “Only a story of some passion” may also suggest Alabaster’s counter to a commonplace Protestant claim that Catholic devotion wrongfully exceeds scriptural warrants, the only authorized “story” or narrative for Christian piety.²⁰ But whereas Protestants like John Foxe and Bartholomew Chamberlain attack Catholics for accreting non-scriptural details to Christ’s Passion, Alabaster here charges Protestant “common eyes” with enervating intimate, vivid communion with Christ by slavishly adhering to the bare, scriptural “story.” The poem indirectly devalues Protestant devotion,

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¹⁸ All references to Alabaster’s sonnets are from The Sonnets of William Alabaster, ed. Story and Gardner, and will be cited parenthetically by sonnet and line number.

¹⁹ Shell, Catholicism, Controversy, 90.

²⁰ This claim is epitomized by the Protestant Bartholomew Chamberlain, for instance, when he claims that he will discuss the Passion “briefly to avoyd tediousnes, plainely to edifie all, truely out of Scriptures,” in his popular The Passion of Christ, and the benefits thereby. Preached at S. James, before the right honorable Lords of Her Majesties prime councel, the 29. of Aprill. 1580 (London, 1595), A2v.
claiming that any “common eye” can apprehend the comparatively minimal Passion narratives of the gospels. Protestant narrative distancing is then juxtaposed with the second devotional mode in the quatrain, which suggests Alabaster’s version of Catholic piety: if the speaker beholds Christ through contrite tears, an intimate communion between Christ and poet is forged—Christ “smiles” on the speaker. Intimacy is strengthened by the rhyming diphthongs of line 4, where the /ai/ of “I,” “Christ,” and “smile” resonate with one another. Similarly, the rhyming of “me” and “see” in lines 1 and 4 suggest intimate reciprocity between devotee and Christ—all aligned with contrite tears that Alabaster identifies with Catholicism.

The second quatrain reinforces the visuality and intimacy vital to Alabaster, foregrounding the details of Christ’s body and the erotic relationship between Christ and poet:

Yea, there I see myself, and from that tree
He bendeth down to my devotion,
And from his side the blood doth spin, whereon
My heart, my mouth, mine eyes still sucking be[.] (71.5-8)

Alabaster indicates that successful Passion piety creates both communion and identification: not only does Christ bend down from the cross in the present tense, but the devotee also identifies with Christ. Moreover, intimacy and imitation are united through the physical details of lines 7 and 8: blood is pouring or “spinning” out of Christ’s side, an erotic site of identification in Passion accounts going back to the late Middle Ages. Erotic and intimate communion is also heightened by the syntesthesia of “heart,” “mouth, and “eyes.” For Alabaster, this vivid, visual, and intimate communion, at least partially indebted to Ignatian meditative techniques with which Alabaster was familiar, is inherently produced by Catholic piety: whereas “common” Protestant devotion produces
“only a story of some passion,” Catholic discourses produce intimacy, identification, and communion between the soul and Christ.

However, there are two ways in which the poem’s structure challenges Alabaster’s assumptions about intimate communion as an exclusively Catholic devotional modality. First, the sestet produces an ambiguity that challenges the neat distinction between Catholic and Protestant devotion:

Like as an optic works, one thing appears
In open gaze, in closer otherwise.
Then since tears be the best, I ask in tears,
Lord, either thaw mine eyes to tears, or freeze
My tears to eyes, or let my heart tears bleed,
Or bring where eyes, nor tears, nor blood shall need. (71.9-14)

Line 9 reinforces the distinction between “common” (i.e., distanced or purely narrative) vision and tearful intimacy, but line 11 proposes a prayer that alters the time frame in which intimate, identificatory communion is achieved. Whereas in the octave Christ appears and smiles on the speaker in the present tense, here the poet prays for the very tears he claimed he already achieves in viewing the crucifixion, suggesting that he now lacks the tears he possessed a few lines earlier. The repeated petitions heighten this sense of lack, and militate against the claims of an already achieved poetic encounter in the octave. Moreover, the final line, which completes the couplet, strikingly undermines the bifurcated modalities the octave tried to establish. Though Alabaster had claimed the superiority of affective communion that transcends the “common” “story of some passion,” in the conclusion he begs that Christ will glorify his body in the next life, converting him to another state in which the soul no longer needs eyes, tears, or blood to commune with Christ. If the sonnet initially privileges the presumably Catholic visual and intimate communion achieved through tears, and sets it against cold and distant
devotion to the mere “story” of the crucifixion, the poem concludes by begging for tears that were present and now are absent, and by longing for an existence in which such bifurcated devotional modalities no longer apply. What begins with the assurance that intimate, visual, and embodied communion surpasses ineffective Protestant devotion hence ends with ambiguity: Alabaster’s initial tears may have been illusory or theoretical, and true communion with the crucified Christ may only take place in the next life, in a space free from the confessionalized devotional modalities that characterize the octave but which disappear in the sestet.

Sonnet 71 dramatizes the central tensions in Alabaster’s Passion poetry by ambiguating his polemical vision of confessionally marked devotion; analyzing Alabaster’s shifting and often ambiguous language as a sonnet unfolds is vital for understanding the status of the Passion and its relationship to imagined ecclesial communities in the poet’s work. As I will demonstrate below, applying this formal approach to the sonnets, as well as reading the sonnets against the popular prose devotional texts of Alabaster’s historical moment, are vital to interpreting the poet’s engagements of the Passion. In what follows, I shall show how the two major groups of Passion sonnets in Alabaster’s oeuvre fail to sustain Alabaster’s polarized vision of Catholic and Protestant devotion, both because of their formal tensions and ambiguities and because of their relationship to and appropriation of broadly popular Passion discourses available to Catholic and Protestant reading communities alike.
“Upon the Ensigns of Christ’s Crucifying” and Contemporary Passion Discourse

Alabaster’s corpus contains two groups of sonnets on the Passion, but only one is actually named as a group, “Upon the Ensigns of Christ’s Crucifying,” in one of the principal manuscripts (designated “B” by Gardner and Story [Bodleian, MS. Eng. Poet. e. 57]). These eleven sonnets appear in virtually identical order in manuscript B and “J” (Gardner and Story’s designation for the manuscript at St. John’s College, Cambridge, press-mark T.9.30). As a group, the eleven sonnets demonstrate Alabaster’s attraction to the Passion discourses of visuality, imitation, and intimacy, precisely the kind of fervent and passionate communion with Christ Alabaster associates with Catholicism. However, as sonnet 71 (not part of the “Ensigns” group) intimates, the poems also tend toward ambiguous and highly conditional resolutions, often suggesting either a postponed or incomplete communion, or an intimate communion that does not so easily fall into polemically conceived confessional devotional practices. Moreover, when placed within the broader and trans-confessional Passion devotion of Alabaster’s historical moment, the sonnets also demonstrate Alabaster’s poetic participation, likely against his intentions, in the broader set of devotional discourses this study has identified.

Alabaster’s association of vivid communion with Christ to Catholicism grows out of his reading in Jesuit devotional texts. For instance, the Jesuit John Gerard translated the Meditations of the Passion of Italian Jesuit Vincenzo Bruno in four volumes in 1599. Gerard was working on this project during the period when he was harboring Alabaster, so it is probable that the poet had at least passing familiarity with the work. Paradigmatic of so many Jesuit texts, Bruno’s book admonishes his readers to “build a spirituall Tabernacle” for “Christ crucified, on whom as upon a firme & sure foundation we must
grounde and settle the ruinous building of our soule."\textsuperscript{21} The devotee should internalize the Passion in order to imitate him: "it sufficeth not only to behould: that is to say, to consider with our mindes, the life and actions of Christ our pattern: but also it behoveth us to doe, that is to imitate him."\textsuperscript{22} Bruno’s text also emphasizes Christ’s pained body, often relying on intense visual cues to do so:

Behold O my soule thy Lord and Creatour nailed on a Tree without any thinge to susteine him, save three Nailes which he hangeth by, most miserably with his extreeme grief, and without any refreshing: whereas if sometime for to mitigate the paine of his wounded feet, he desireth to rest him selfe upon his armes; then his hands doe rent more forcibly: and if for to succour the greefe of his hands he stay himselfe on his feet: Alas with incredible paine his woundes enlarge themselves and become more bitter.\textsuperscript{23}

Bruno privileges visuality and highlights the abject physicality of Christ’s torture. He also draws the reader into an intimate communion by addressing Christ directly:

\begin{quote}
[A]ll was consumate, since that ther remained not in your sacred bodie any member while and intire without having his perticuler torment; The head pearced with thorns, the heare toused & torne, the face with buffettes and spittell dishonored, the eares afflicted with infinite blasphemies and injuries, the handes and feet bored through with nailes, the wholle bodie brused and torne with whippes and scourges, the tongue bittered with that horrible drinke of gal, and viniger.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Bringing Christ’s body into sharp focus, Bruno emphasizes individual wounds and torments in order to move the soul to contrition, using the basic meditative strategies of

\textsuperscript{21} Vincenzo Bruno, \textit{The First Part of the Meditations of the Passion & Resurrection of Christ our Saviour}, trans. John Gerard (1599?), 3r.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 3v
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 159-60.
Ignatius’s *Exercises* to create intimacy and sorrow through apostrophe—a poetic strategy Southwell used in poems like “The virgin Mary to Christ on the Crosse.”

Yet it would be a serious mistake to concede Alabaster’s claim that such rhetoric was exclusively Catholic; as I have shown in chapter 1, a variety of Protestant and Protestant-adapted religious works of the period employ identical discourses of intimacy, visuality, and imitation. For instance, Gasparo de Loarte’s *The Exercise of a Christian Life* was published on Father Garnet’s secret press (1597), at St. Omer (1610), and at Rouen (Person’s press, 1584), but it was also printed by W. Leake in London twice in 1594, as well as by W. Carter in London twice in 1579. In the 1594 version of Loarte, intended for a largely Protestant readership, the details of Christ’s Passion are graphically presented:

> Behold then...the cruell executioners begin then with might and maine, to lay on that virginall flesh, fleing the tender skin of that immaculate Lamb, and causing that most sacred blood to issue and spin out of all the parts of his body[.]²⁵

When Christ is mocked, the text keeps Christ’s body in the foreground:

> Behold how he standeth...with the crowne of thornes environing his sacred head; the reede in his tied hands in lue of a scepter, that hard corde about his tender neck, his Divine visage all puft up and sweld with the blowes and stripes he hath received, and abhominable disfigured with filthie blood and spittle, yea from top to toe[.]²⁶

And when Christ is crucified, we read, “And thus his hands and most holie feete being with sharpe nailes fastned to the crosse, they hoist him up on high, hanging most pitifully

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²⁶ Ibid., 30r-30v.
thereon.”

Though Loarte’s text owes much to Jesuit meditative strategies—especially the discourses of bodily and almost eroticized suffering—the fact that the passages were retained verbatim in Protestant adaptations suggests they were not confessionally marked but instead were amenable to Protestant devotional idioms.

Protestant adaptations of pre-Reformation and Jesuit material emphasize the same rhetorical patterns of visual and intimate communion. Thomas Rogers, the highly popular and prolific adaptor of patristic and medieval devotional manuals for a Protestant audience, is the most powerful example. Rogers routinely acknowledges in his translations that he edits texts to eliminate overtly Catholic theology. For instance, in his preface to a popular translation of Pseudo-Augustine’s *S. Augustines Manual* (1591), Rogers in a typical editorial move admits that he has “corrected” certain chapters containing sentences “being contrarie unto the truth, and savoring of a superstitious time.”

As the manuscript title of Alabaster’s sonnet 35, “Upon St. Augustine’s Meditations,” suggests, Alabaster’s sonnets were influenced by the *Meditations* of Pseudo-Augustine (the late medieval *Liber Meditationum*), another well-circulated devotional text among both Catholics and Protestants of the period. Although Alabaster may have relied on a Latin edition, it is possible he was familiar with Rogers’s 1591 translation, called *A Right Christian Treatise, entitled S. Augustines Praiers*, especially in light of his admission that he spent six months in laborious study of controversial

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27 Ibid., 31v.


29 Gardner and Story point out this source in their commentary on the sonnet, in *The Sonnets of William Alabaster*, 54.
religious literature in the mid-1590s.\textsuperscript{30} In any event, Rogers’s translation describes Christ’s pained body in terms identical to Catholic texts and many of Alabaster’s sonnets. In Chapter 6 of \textit{A Right Christian Treatise}, Rogers includes a prayer in highly ekphrastic language:

\begin{quote}
Behold thy sweete son, whose bodie was stretched forth. Behold his harmeles hands distilling fourth godlie bloud...Behold his naked side pierced through with a sharpe speare, and renew me, with the holie fountaine, which I beleve flowed from his side...Behold his undefiled feete...dented through with nailes.

Behold how his brest became white, his side bloudie, his bowels drie; his sighte dimme; his countenance pale; his armes stiffe; how his legs hoong; and the streame of blessed blood watered his pierced feete.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

Repeating the almost incantatory “behold,” the text foregrounds visual rhetoric, itemizing Christ’s blood, his wounds, his naked side, and all the emblematic elements of the Passion we might expect from a Jesuit writer. Even though Rogers is diligent to avoid offending Protestant sensibilities, the passage does not differ from the 1631 English edition of the same text printed in Paris by Nicolas de la Coste for a Catholic audience. Furthermore, Rogers’s 1591 translation of \textit{S. Augustines Manuell} venerates Christ’s Passion and describes his wounds as ports of rest for the sinner, language intimating communion between Christ and sinner through the body:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} Alabaster invested a tidy sum in this endeavor: when he arrived back at Cambridge after his conversion, he writes, “I…furnish[ed] myself with princepall Catholique Authors which I dyd buying so many books as cost me tow or three and twentie powndes” (William Alabaster, “Alabaster’s Conversion,” 121).

\textsuperscript{31} Thomas Rogers, trans., \textit{A Right Christian Treatise, entitled S. Augustines Priaiers} (London, 1591), 25-26, 27. This is an adaptation of the Pseudo-Augustine’s \textit{Meditations}, popular throughout the sixteenth century, along with several other texts attributed to Augustine such as the \textit{Soliloquies}. A roughly contemporary Catholic version of the same text was produced by Nicolas de la Coste, called \textit{The Meditations, Soliloquia, and Manuall of the Glorious Doctour S. Augustine} (Paris, 1631).
In those wounds of our Saviour, sure and safe rest is for weaklinges and sinners. There I dwell without care, his bowells of mercie are laied open to my sight through his wounds.

Whatsoever I lack of my self that I do boldly take out of the bowelles of my Lorde; For his mercies abound, & there want none holes for them to issue out by...

...by these holes I may taste, how gracious the Lord is; for doubtless the Lord is good and mercyful, and of great kindness to all which call uppon him in truth.  

Christ’s “bowells of mercie,” as has been suggested in chapter 1, is a commonplace trope permeating accounts of the period: from Donne’s *Deaths Duell* to Bishop Lancelot Andrewes’s Passion sermons to Richard Crashaw’s translation of the *Dies Irae*, Christ’s wounds reveal his bowels of compassion. Moreover, the language is erotically charged: the sinner “tastes” grace from Christ’s wounds, and hides his own soul within the bloody symbols of Christ’s death. In a mainstream Protestant text, Christ’s dying body is not only vividly presented to the reader through meditation and prayer as one might expect from Jesuit texts, but that same body acts as a channel of grace, a medium that produces intimacy and even identification between Christ and soul.

In addition to Protestant adaptations of this highly visual discourse, mainstream Protestant texts invoke the intimately present Christ to encourage individual, meditative communion. The Elizabethan *Homilies* use this devotional discourse in the “Second Sermon of the Passion”:

32 Thomas Rogers, trans. *S. Augustines Manuel, Containing Special and Piked meditations and godlie praiers*, 55-57. This is also contained in the English Catholic edition printed at Paris in 1631.

33 The bowels were often identified with compassion in early modern physiology, as Michael Schoenfeldt has shown in *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (New York: Cambridge, 1999).
Call to mind, O sinful creature, and set before thine eyes, Christ crucified; think thou seest his body stretched out in length upon the cross, his head crowned with sharp thornes, and his hands and his feet pierced with nails, his heart opened with a long spear, his flesh rent and torn with whips, his brows sweating water and blood; think thou hearest him now crying in an intolerable agony to his Father, and saying, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?\(^{34}\)

The homily privileges visuality in the imperative mood, emphasizing the importance of the eyes, and Christ’s body is subsequently described in detail, with the individual wounds foregrounded in terms scarcely distinct from the most vivid Jesuit meditation. Similarly, William Perkins in his 1596 *A Declaration of the True Manner of Knowing Christ Crucified* occasionally invokes this discourse, admonishing his readers, “If thou wouldest come to God for grace, for comfort, for salvation, for any blessing, come first to Christ hanging, bleeding, dying upon the crosse, without whome there is no hearing God.”\(^{35}\) Likewise, Joseph Hall, generally hesitant to privilege the brutal details of Christ’s suffering, includes the following admonition to his readers in his 1609 *The Passion Sermon*:

Looke up O all ye beholders, looke upon this pretious body, and see what part ye can find free? that head which is adored and trembled at by the Angelicall spirits, is all raked and harrowed with thorns: that face, of whome is said, *Thou art fairer then the children of men*, is all besmeared with the filthy spettle of the Jewes, and furrowed with his teares.\(^{36}\)

Finally, a lesser known treatise by Antoine de La Faye, doctor of theology at Geneva and successor to Beza, was translated into English in 1599. Titled *A breef Treatise Of the* 

\(^{34}\) *Sermons, or Homilies, Appointed to be read in Churches* (London: Prayer-Book and Homily Society, 1833), 294.

\(^{35}\) Perkins, 38.

\(^{36}\) Hall, 34.
virtue of the Crosse, the treatise argues against Catholic veneration of the cross and was translated for and dedicated to one Stephen Soame, Knight, in response to a “verie learned Sermon” given the previous Good Friday at Paul’s Cross. Yet even in an explicitly polemical work such as this, the writer finds no difficulty foregrounding Christ’s wounds as an object of affective meditation and spiritual communion:

[F]or this is to us a most certaine gage, of the mercifull affection of our God, discerned thorow the woundes of his onely Sonne. And the lively contemplating of those woundes, is the balme to heale the hurts of our soules. His feete and handes were pierced, his side opened, and thence issued the price of our redemption, as also the washing away of our filthynesse: bloud (I say) and water always streaming, to deface our sinnes past, present, and to come[.]37

Once again, even in the most staunchly Protestant texts available to Alabaster’s contemporaries, writers are not categorically averse to vividly visual and intimate communion with Christ’s Passion, but instead often use language virtually identical to Catholic works. Locating Alabaster’s own poetry within the contexts of Protestant and Protestant-adapted devotional material shows the tenuousness of Alabaster’s polemically motivated claims in his conversion narrative, and provides an immediate literary context within which Alabaster’s engagement with the Passion and confessional communities can be read more critically.

Despite Alabaster’s attempts to enlist Passion devotion for militant and polemically conceived Catholic community, several of his “Ensigns” sonnets embody intimate communion with Christ in terms commensurate with trans-confessional Passion discourses. For instance, sonnet 32, titled “Upon the Crucifix” (according to manuscripts

37 Antoine de la Faye, A breef Treatise Of the virtue of the Crosse: And the true manner how to honour it. Translated out of French into English (London, 1599), F6v.
B and J), begins by emphasizing the militaristic potential of the crucifix(ion), tentatively appropriating the Passion to a martial vocabulary suggesting both spiritual and perhaps confessional battle:

Behold a cluster to itself a vine,
Behold a vine extended in one cluster,
Whose grapes do swell with grace and heavenly lustre,
Climbing upon a Cross with lovely twine,
Sent down to earth from Canaan divine,
To stir us up unto a warlike muster,
To take that garden where this cluster grew,
Whose nectar sweet the angels doth bedew. (32.1-8)

Though the first eight lines are replete with biblical allusions (Christ as the vine, the cross as the winepress), the martial rhetoric connects the lines with Numbers 13, where Moses sends spies into Canaan who then return with cut grapes—all of which presages the ultimate invasion of Canaan by the Israelites. Here, Christ’s crucifixion represents the trophy signaling the victory of his people over their enemies, suggesting the zealous and confessionally informed Passion piety Alabaster adumbrates in his conversion narrative.

Yet by the end of the second quatrain, the crucified Christ shifts from a strictly military metaphor stirring up his people to warfare to a Eucharistic reference: the pressed grape cluster releases “nectar” which is, in the logic of the metaphor, Christ’s blood. The sestet of the poem heightens the visual rhetoric of the octave, emphasizing the traditional elements of the Passion:

See how the purple blood doth from it drain,
With thorns, and whips, and nails, and spear diffused!
Drink, drink apace, my soul, that sovereign rain
By which heaven is into my spirit infused,
O drink to thirst, and thirst to drink that treasure,
Where the only danger is to keep a measure. (32.9-14)

Christ’s Passion has metamorphosed from an “ensign” or standard of Christ’s warring army to the vir dolorum and to the focus of Holy Communion: whereas the poem initially
drew on Old Testament discourses to forward the crucifixion as the standard around which the Christian (for Alabaster, specifically the Catholic) community rallied, here the discourse of intimate and vivid communion takes over. We are to “see” the wounds draining blood; we are to behold the individual elements of the Passion in tones resonant with any of the Protestant-adapted devotional texts examined above. The poem concludes by emphasizing communion with Christ’s pained body: the poet directs his soul to “drink apace” which “infuses” the soul with divinity, and the only “danger” in such communion is restraint. The poem’s conclusion could be read as a continuation of the militant and confessional implications of the octave: Holy Communion was a flashpoint of Reformation controversy, and Alabaster’s use of “infuse” in line 12 resonates with Catholic theories of infused rather than Calvinist imputed grace (Donne’s Holy Sonnet, “This is my play’s last scene” tellingly contrasts with Alabaster’s sonnet by begging God to “impute me righteous”). Like Southwell, then, Alabaster appears to use Eucharistic metaphor to adumbrate the imagined community of Catholics. However, the discourse of intimate, visual communion, combined with the poem’s final encouragement to commune with Christ’s blood without restraint, free of reference to any particular confession, suggests that the poem has shifted away from the explicitly martial aspects of its opening and the concomitant allusion to confessionalized devotion, and moved toward a more spiritualized, meditative, and even mystical communion not necessarily moored to Alabaster’s professed Catholicism.

38 George Herbert will take up a similar theme several decades later in “The Bunch of Grapes” and “The Agonie,” poems which compare Christ’s crucifixion to Old Testament types and to Holy Communion.
If Alabaster believes his sonnets reflect the “compassion” and “tenderness” that his conversion narrative claims exclusively for Catholicism, his poetic conclusions tend to undermine any unproblematic sense of attained communion. Often a sonnet in the “Ensigns” group will ambiguously or postpone communion with Christ, suggesting a final distance rather than intimacy between Christ, poet, and implied ecclesial community—a poetic feature of many of Southwell’s Passion lyrics. As Michael Spiller has argued in his work on the sonnet, “Desire…is the sense of an absence, or, more exactly, a need to abolish an absence.” Very often Alabaster’s Passion sonnets long for communion with and imitation of Christ’s Passion; yet just as often, the poems’ final desire for Christ suggests the absence or postponement of communion rather than its attainment. Like sonnet 32, sonnet 31 combines Passion discourses of visuality and intimacy with Eucharistic theology to celebrate communion:

Behold a conduit that from heaven doth run,
And at Christ’s side a double stream doth vent,
Water with blood and blood with water went,
Water of solace and blood of passion.
All faithful souls must drink this potion,
Where pain to passion is ingredient,
Comfort not made to cause the pain relent,
But pain to relish contentation;
For our distaste cannot Christ apprehend,
Unless that sufferings first our sense amend.
Since then I long thy joys to entertain,
And that thy joys with passion must combine,
Lord, let me feel the tartness of thy pain,
Or drink mine own heart’s blood to relish thine. (31.1-14)

Titled “Upon St. Paul to the Corinthians” in the manuscript at Oscott College (siglum “O” in Story and Gardner), the poem locates Holy Communion within the Passion itself.

Christ’s wound becomes a conduit between heaven and earth, visually conceived through the opening line’s imperative. In representing pain and comfort, the blood and water become in line 5 the substances of communion that all souls must “drink,” and although pain and comfort seem coequal, by line 6, pain is central to the sacramental “potion,” an ingredient that allows the faithful to “relish contentation.” Indeed, without “tasting” the Passion, communicants “cannot Christ apprehend” at all. Tellingly, the poem ends by begging Christ for the necessary pain to achieve communion through Christ’s side-wound; but the imperative “let” of the prayer suggests that although the poet has envisioned Christ’s wound on the cross and recognizes the direct relationship between the Passion and Holy Communion, communion is not consummated in the poem. Instead, the speaker is left in need of Christ’s Passion in order to amend his “sense”; without an imitative share of this pain, he “cannot Christ apprehend.” Whereas the poem begins by promising communion with Christ through its vividly portrayed sacramental allusions, it concludes with a prayer indicating the postponement of communion: the poet “long[s] [Christ’s] joys to entertain,” but recognizes that those joys “with passion must combine” in a potion that the poet desires but has not yet drunk.

In sonnet 30, also called “Upon the Crucifix” in O, Alabaster constructs intimate communion with Christ through apostrophe, drawing on identificatory and visual discourses found in prose Passion accounts:

Before thy Cross, O Christ, I do present  
My soul and body into love distilled,  
As dewy clouds with equal moisture filled  
Receive the tincture of the rainbow bent;  
And print those wounds which did thy feet torment,  
On my affections which to thee I yield,  
And leave those marks wherewith thy hands were held,  
Upon my works thy works to represent,
And let those thorns that crowned thy head with pain,
Wound all my thoughts to think on thy disdain,
And let my mouth savour of thy distaste,
And love flow from my breast since thine did stream,
And learn my body with thy grief to waste,
And in thy Cross my honour to esteem. (30.1-14)

The first quatrain underlines the identity the poet wishes to achieve by metaphorizing himself into “dewy clouds.” In the metaphor’s logic, the poet prays that Christ will shine on the speaker to create the rainbow; indeed, Christ’s light is the rainbow. In the second quatrain, this longing is compared to the act of inscription. The rest of the poem uses the inscribing metaphor and juxtaposes the elements of the Passion with specific changes in the poet’s spiritual makeup: he asks that Christ’s wounded feet be “printed” on his “affections,” that Christ’s hand-wounds be left on the poet’s “works,” and that the crown of thorns “wound” the poet’s “thoughts.” The rhythmic juxtapositions underline the identificatory dynamic subtending the poem, emphasizing the mutual identity between Christ and soul. However, the final four lines intensify the poem’s desired communion with Christ at the same time that its language heightens distinction and distance between poet and Jesus. The final lines use a series of possessive pronouns that seemingly collapse speaker and Christ into one another: “let my mouth savour of thy distaste, / And love flow from my breast since thine did stream, / And learn my body with thy grief to waste, And in thy Cross mine honour to esteem” (emphasis mine). The relentless reiteration of possessives within single lines undercuts a sense of achieved unity (unlike the fluid identification achieved in many of Southwell’s lyrics). Instead of unity, the incantatory “mine” and “thine” suggests separation between Christ and soul, and the poem’s structure strengthens the desire for communion while underlining the gap between lover and beloved. Finally, the verbs after line 4 could be read in the subjunctive
rather than indicative, suggesting that communion is something the speaker desires and hence something he lacks. Indeed, the final prayer begs that the poet’s body “learn” to feel Christ’s pain, just as the poet must learn to find his honor in Christ’s cross—petitions that foreground the incompleteness of and desire for communion rather than its achievement. If Passion devotion is inherently linked to the Catholic community, then Alabaster’s sonnet suggests through its lexical choices that communion with Christ’s mystical body is something that is longed for and impeded rather than already attained by conversion.

Finally, sonnet 34—again titled “Upon the Crucifix” (in mss. B and J)—presents the most erotic example of communion between Christ and the poet. Once again, however, the poem’s resolution reveals the persistent instability and incompleteness of poetic communion in all its meanings in Alabaster’s Passion poems. The poet begins by beholding Christ as in the previous sonnets, but quickly imagines himself “sucking” and “kissing” Christ’s wounds and body:

Now I have found thee, I will evermore
Embrace this standard where thou sitst above.
Feed greedy eyes and from hence never rove,
Suck hungry soul of this eternal store,
Issue my heart from thy two-leaved door,
And let my lips from kissing not remove. (34.1-6)

Though Alabaster invokes martial language through “standard” and suggests the militant associations of Passion devotion with a particular confessional community, the poem rapidly shifts to words suggesting spiritual and erotic desire: Alabaster wishes not to fight for, but to “feed” on Christ. Such erotic discourse suggests a more promising attempt at consummated communion, yet like the other poems on the crucifix, this one reveals its instability immediately, first through its future tense (the poet “will evermore / Embrace
this standard”), and then through commands to the soul, each of which implies the incompleteness of their requested action: “Feed greedy eyes…/ Suck hungry soul.” Line 7 then provides an optative exclamation, shifting the poem into the subjunctive:

O that I were transformed into love,
And as a plant might spring upon this flower;
Like wandering ivy or sweet honeysuckle,
How would I with my twine about it buckle,
And kiss his feet with my ambitious boughs,
And climb along upon his sacred breast,
And make a garland for his wounded brows.
Lord, so I am if here my thoughts might rest. (34.7-14)

Highly visual, corporeal, and erotic terms strive to consummate communion: the monosyllabic end-rhymes so typical of Alabaster’s poetry here give way to the gentler, polysyllabic rhymes of “suckle” and “buckle,” which in turn resonate with the initial “suck” of line 4. The image heightens desired identification: Alabaster imagines himself twining up Christ’s nailed feet, over his breast, and around his brows, in a sensuous sequence of verbs that foregrounds intimacy and visuality. Yet physical communion is not consummated; the sequence is framed by the optative “O that I were transformed into love” in line 7, and the subjunctive mood throughout the sestet—“how would I,” not “how do I,” the speaker exclaims—reminds us that this intimacy would happen in the future, but has not happened yet. The final line continues this conditional and postponed communion through apostrophe: addressing Christ as “Lord,” the poet predicates all that preceded on a conditional statement, “so I am if here my thoughts might rest.” Alabaster will commune with the intimately and corporeally presented Christ only if his thoughts can “rest” or find peace in the experience.

One might expect, given Alabaster’s unambiguous claim that Catholic Passion devotion produces “tendernes of compassion or desire of imitation,” that Alabaster’s
poems would dramatize communion and consolation, as do so many of Southwell’s poems, including *Saint Peters Complaint*, and many of Herbert’s lyrics, so many of which, like “A True Hymn,” conclude with God’s own consoling entrance into the poem. Yet Alabaster suggests that his “thoughts” do not “rest” on Christ crucified as they should. Rather, communion, consolation, and “rest”—possibly even communal solidarity, given Alabaster’s identification of communion and religious community—are objects of desire, not states already achieved, and, as such, potentially absent objects. Alabaster’s Passion sonnets present both historical and structural complications of his polemical claims regarding Passion devotion and particular ecclesial or confessional communities. On the one hand, his Passion poems in the “Ensigns” group embody a trans-confessional discourse of the Passion that privileges a highly visual, intimate, and corporeal communion with Christ. On the other hand, often the structure of these sonnets reveals the tentativeness and instability of unproblematic communion with Christ in poetry: verbal tenses often signal final ambiguous and postponed communion, and the longing of many of these sonnets indicates a lack rather than an achievement of meditative unity. While Alabaster advocates fiery and intimate communion bolstered with the assurance of his newfound Catholic ecclesial community, his poetry—in its

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40 Cf. Herbert’s “A True Hymn,” which concludes:
Whereas if th’heart be moved,
Although the verse be somewhat scant,
God doth supplie the want.
As when th’heart sayes (sighing to be approved)

ambiguities, its appropriation of the sonnet form, and in its relationship to contemporary Passion discourse—tells a different story.

Martial Rhetoric and Anti-Protestantism in “The Portrait of Christ’s Death”

Even in his most combative and explicitly anti-Protestant Passion sonnets, Alabaster’s verse complicates polemical and confessionalized notions of devotion. The second series of Passion sonnets I will examine are eleven sonnets that form a group on Christ’s agony in Gethsemane and his mocking at the hands of his executioners. These sonnets demonstrate a detailed concern with the confessional and ecclesial identity of Christ’s true followers; several sonnets explicitly denounce individual Reformers and Protestantism generally. As with the sonnets in the “Ensigns” group, however, I would like to show first that the martial rhetoric characterizing the sonnets is not marked by a particular confession despite Alabaster’s explicit denunciation of Luther and Foxe. Second, I will read four of the most explicitly polemical sonnets to show that they often formally resolve in ways that work against their intended polemical projects.

Martial rhetoric provides a powerful mode in which to encode the polemical categories of “friendly” and “enemy” confessional camps; such military language, often used in early modern polemic, sets Catholicism and Protestantism in opposition to one another and serves to constitute and consolidate each confessional community over the other.41 Alabaster’s “Portrait” sonnets employ such martial rhetoric to describe the “true” Christian community that imitates Christ’s Passion and to privilege it over the “false”

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41 See Lander’s Inventing Polemic for a theory of early modern polemic and its social functions, 1-55.
community that forsakes God. Sonnets 1 and 2 exemplify the militant ethos of the entire group, linking devotional poetry itself to the martial, soldierly, and communal imitation of Christ:

The night, the starless night of passion,  
From heaven began, on heaven beneath to fall,  
When Christ did sound the onset martial,  
A sacred hymn, upon his foes to run;  
That with the fiery contemplation  
Of love and joy, his soul and senses all  
Surcharged might not dread the bitter thrall  
Of pain and grief and torments all in one.  
Then since my holy vows have undertook  
To take the portrait of Christ’s death in me,  
Then let my love with sonnets fill this book,  
With hymns to give the onset as did he,  
That thoughts inflamed with such heavenly muse,  
The coldest ice of fear may not refuse. (1.1-14)

Sonnet 1, reflecting on the conclusion of the Last Supper when Christ sang a hymn with the Apostles,\(^42\) links the scriptural moment to an “onset martial” that stirs troops to battle; a Hebrew psalm (traditionally sung after the Seder) here is transformed into a “sacred hymn” to encourage Christ’s troops “upon his foes to run.” Moreover, Alabaster’s own poetry shares in this militaristic ritual, and the poem explicitly links Alabaster’s sonnets to his “holy vows,” suggesting that militant hymnody not only derives from Christ’s Passion, but is also associated with a particular confessional group. Alabaster claimed in his conversion narrative that he wrote poetry to encourage others in their spiritual conversions, and the sestet of this sonnet corroborates that intention: devotional poetry becomes a martial and confessionally oriented hymnody designed to “inflame” its readers with both general spiritual courage, and specifically with the courage for Catholic

\(^{42}\) Cf. Matt 26:30 and Mk 14:26.
martyrdom, as Alabaster’s other sonnets on conversion attest. Sonnet 2 continues this militaristic strain, claiming that Christ’s hymn was “An hymn triumphant for an happy fight, / As if his enemies were put to flight / When yet he was not yet come within the ring” (2.2-4). In the “Portrait” sonnets, poetry is communal and implicitly confessional: his “holy vows” suggest the link between sacred hymnody and recently professed Catholicism, while the sacred hymn of Christ upon which the poetry is modeled serves as a battle cry against Christ’s—and potentially, Catholicism’s—enemies.

Despite the martial rhetoric, though, Alabaster’s attempts to associate fervent Passion devotion with the “holy vows” of militant Catholicism are far from stable in the “Portrait” group. Although Alabaster drew his martial rhetoric directly from Ignatian meditative sources—Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises, for instance, famously identifies the spiritual life as a combat between “two standards,” the one representing Christ’s army and the other the devil’s—associating Christ and the cross with martial language is not

43 For instance, sonnets 46-50 are each devoted to Alabaster’s conversion and the fears of hell and ostracizing associated with it, all suggesting both spiritual and literal martyrdom associated with his conversion.

44 See “A Meditation on Two Standards” in Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises, in which the moral cosmos is compared to two pitched camps:

Preamble 2[:] The composition, seeing the place: here it will be to behold a great plain extending over the entire region around Jerusalem, where the Commander-in-Chief of all the good is Christ Our Lord, and another plain in the region of Babylon, where the enemy leader is Lucifer...[.]  

Point 1[:] This point is to imagine the leader of all the enemy powers as if he were enthroned in that great plain of Babylon, upon something like a throne of fire and smoke, a horrible and fearsome figure.  

Point 2[:] To consider how he calls up innumerable demons, and how he then disperses them, some to one city and others to another, thus covering the entire world...[.]  

On the other hand, we are to apply the imagination to the supreme and true commander, Christ our Lord  

Point 1[:] This is to consider Christ Our Lord taking his stand in a great plain in that region of Jerusalem, in a lowly place. His appearance is comely and gracious.
restricted to Catholic texts. Thomas Rogers’s popular translation of the *Imitation of Christ* uses martial rhetoric to foreground the necessity of imitation:

> Brethren let us proceede together: Jesus wilbe with us; for Jesus sake, we have taken this crosse upon us, let us persevere in the crosse for Jesus sake. He will help us, who is our capitaine, and goeth afore us.

> Lo, our King goeth in before us fighting on our behalfe. Let us followe manfulie, let no man be dismayed; let us even valiantlie appoint to die in battle; never let us straine our honor by flieng from the crosse.⁴⁵

Christ is a captain heading a spiritual army in his Passion, and those who imitate him are soldiers who follow “manfulie” and “valiantlie,” even to “die in battle”—actual as well as spiritual martyrdom permeates this term, given the historical realities of post-Reformation religious disputes. Very similar language appears in *The Enimie of Securitie*, an influential book of daily meditations for Lutherans written in German by the biblical scholar Johann Habermann, and translated into English by Rogers in 1580. In the prayers for Friday, the text subtly alters Hebrews 12:2 (“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith…”)⁴⁶ to foreground Christ’s marital leadership:

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45 Thomas à Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ, Three, both for wisedome, and godliness, most excellent booke; made 170 yeeres since by one THOMAS of KEMPIS, and for the worthines thereof oft since translated out of Latine into sundrie languages by divers godlie and learned men*, trans. Thomas Rogers (London, 1580), 265.

Assist us, that through patience we may run to the battle that is before us looking unto Jesus the captaine, & finisher of our faith, who for the joie that was set before him, endured the most shamefull crosse. (emphasis mine)\textsuperscript{47}

Rather than “author” (the word used in contemporary English New Testament translations), Jesus is a “captaine” of faith, an officer leading troops into battle. Finally, Antoine de la Faye’s \textit{A breefe Treatise of the virtue of the Crosse} also employs the trope:

> Againe, it is to be noted, that our elders speaking of the death and passion of our redeemer, have most spoken of his Crosse, and of the signe thereof together, never meaning what at this day is understood by the woorde signe: but they likewise called it the Standard or Ensigne of the great King and Captaine, who overcame the devil and hell, in bringing thence the spoiles, drinking of the torrent by the way, and lifting up his head, as it said in the 110.Psalme.\textsuperscript{48}

De la Faye continues by quoting Fortunatus’s \textit{Pange lingua gloriosi}. Even the most clearly argumentative and polemical of treatises such as this demonstrate a shared set of rhetorical strategies for describing the martial dimensions of the crucifixion as spiritual combat. Furthermore, spiritual combat in these texts is almost always described in the first person plural, suggesting the communal and ecclesial dimensions of spiritual warfare—whether in polemical texts like Southwell’s \textit{Epistle of Comfort} or in more private meditative works like the \textit{Imitation of Christ}. As even a brief glimpse at the historical material reveals, Alabaster’s martial language is visible across confessional divides, despite the poet’s appropriation of it to more obviously polemical ends in the “Portrait” group.

\textsuperscript{47} Johann Habermann, \textit{The Enemie of Securitie, Or A dailie exercise of godly meditations, drawne out of the pure fountains of the holie Scriptures}, trans. Thomas Rogers (London, 1580), 219.

\textsuperscript{48} Antoine de la Faye, D5r.
Several sonnets in the “Portrait” group also complicate Alabaster’s polemical claims regarding Passion devotion, sometimes through their own formal ambiguities and sometimes through their relationship to companion sonnets in the group. This is true in even the most clearly divisive, anti-Protestant poems. Sonnet 5 argues that only those who truly follow Christ can suffer martyrdom; those who do not “follow Christ aright” suffer just punishment rather than true martyrdom:

Tis not enough over the brook to stride  
By scorn of fear and pleasures put to flight,  
Unless we likewise follow Christ aright,  
Up to Mount Olivet as he did guide;  
For they whose spirits are not deified  
In height of purest love and heaven’s delight,  
For Christ’s dear sake with death to enterfight,  
Go not to die with him, but stray aside. (5.1-8)

The brook of Cedron (as used in other of the “Portrait” sonnets) is the threshold separating this world, a “miry flood” as sonnet 4 has it, from the next. But here the poet claims that simply scorning the world’s pleasures is not enough; the elect must also follow Christ to his agony. More importantly, those who follow Christ must be “deified” with “purest love.” By claiming a soul must be “deified” or made God-like through “purest love,” Alabaster again advocates a theology of infusion rather than imputation, conjuring Catholic and Protestant soteriological controversies over the nature of grace.

The octave’s end-rhymes reinforce the poem’s imitative discourse: we must “stride” with Christ the “guide” and experience “delight” by “enterfight”-ing with Christ against death, a rhyme resonating with the martial cadences that Alabaster enlists in the service of polemically conceived Catholicism. The sestet makes the poem’s allusions to opposed confessional communities more explicit, moving from soteriological to martyrological controversies:
In vain they do that act and monument,
The death of heretics, with rubric red,
Whom just desert cut off by punishment,
As barren branches from the vine are shred:
For though they seem beyond the brook to get,
Yet never come they to Mount Olivet. (5.9-14)

The sonnet advocates an *imitatio Christi*, explicitly calling for public martyrdom. While the saved must follow Christ to his Passion, line 9 implicates the poem in the immediate religio-political disputes surrounding martyrdom: Alabaster alludes to the *Acts and Monuments*, John Foxe’s foundational text of English Protestant church history and a text specifically designed to consolidate the Protestant settlement in England. But Alabaster unsparingly rebukes Foxe’s false martyrs, claiming that those who die for heresy (i.e., those Protestant saints commemorated in Foxe’s work with “rubric red” in a revised Protestant calendar) are not martyrs, but heretics—outcasts from Christ’s mystical body. Alabaster underlines the poem’s polemical edge with the sonnet’s rhyme scheme as well: Protestant martyr-heretics are “shred” like unfruitful branches; those who act and “monument” are audibly identified in the rhyme with “punishment.” And the final couplet dispels any pretensions Foxe’s martyrs might have to sanctification: though they appear to die for the true faith, their martyrdom is illusory and vain. They never come to the Passion for which Olivet is a metonym.

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The “Portrait” series does not sustain this polemical edge longer than the fourteen lines of a sonnet. However, sonnet 6, which follows 5 in all but one of the major manuscripts, is thematically and rhetorically linked to the ascent of Mount Olivet in sonnet 5 and serves as its companion piece. Sonnet 6 blunts the martial rhetoric of the previous sonnet, and, although the poem invokes theological controversy, the sonnet’s conclusion undermines a purely confessionalized and triumphalist reading of the Catholic community:

Up to Mount Olivet my soul ascend,
The mount spiritual, and there supply
Thy fainting lamp with oil of charity,
To make the light of faith more extend.
Go by this tract which thither right doth tend,
Which Christ did first beat forth to walk thereby,
And sixteen ages of posterity
Have gone it over since from end to end.
But strike not down to any new-found balk,
Which hunters have begun of late to chalk. (6.1-10)

Alabaster’s theological vocabulary emerges in an attempt to link Catholic religious identity with effective Passion devotion. If a true believer ascends Olivet, he not only follows Christ aright in his Passion and thus demonstrates his affiliation with Alabaster’s True Church, but he also fills his spiritual lamp with the “oil of charity” in order to “extend” the “light of faith.” Though the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity were important to Catholic and Protestant alike, controversy swirled around the primacy of faith and charity throughout the period: as the polemical dispute between More and Tyndale over the latter’s 1525 New Testament translation of 1 Corinthians 13 illustrates, Catholics generally favored “charity” for the Vulgate’s “caritas,” while Tyndale, who

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50 As Story and Gardner attest, the poems are not “separate ejaculations” but instead fall into “more or less distinct” groups (The Sonnets of William Alabaster, xxxviii).
translated the word as “love,” tended with many reformers to suspect the Catholic connotations of “charity” (i.e., the association of charity with a doctrine of works over faith alone). Moreover, Alabaster’s poem makes charity the virtue upon which faith rests—another subtle theological jab at Protestantism’s sola fidei. The rest of the poem builds on this theological quibbling by troping Christ as a scout beating a path for others, and claiming that only Catholicism has followed the path Christ first walked: “sixteen ages of posterity / Have gone it over since from end to end” is a clear reference to the commonplace Catholic claim that Protestantism did not exist until the sixteenth century, and that Protestants were innovators and new “hunters” veering off the ancient path and thereby fracturing the unified ecclesial community.

Despite its strong privileging of Catholic soteriology and its support of the Catholic claim of antiquity and unbroken ecclesiastical succession, the poem concludes with potential uncertainty and even sympathy.

    For whether ‘twere the glow-worm faith went out,
    Or want of love did pine them in the way,
    Or else the cruel devils rob or slay,
    No news comes back of one of all that rout. (6.11-14)

Whereas before the poem forcefully identified the dangerous innovation of newfound hunters, here the poem queries the possible fate of its errant confessional targets. First the poet wonders if it was their failing faith that led them astray; then he blames the error on a “want of love.” The first two suggestions thereby offer reasons for the defection of Christ’s followers: in claiming that Protestants erred because they lost something extrinsic to their own will, Alabaster subtly exculpates the errant Christians from the charge of self-willed disobedience. Line 13 is almost a lament: not only is the poem uncertain of what forces led them astray, it also posits that cruel devils destroyed them,
suggesting that Protestants are not purely subjects of blame, but victims of external, dark forces. The final line adds a suggestive sense of shared loss by applying the martial term “rout” to Protestants, implying their membership in Christ’s army and lamenting the lack of “news” about their fate. In short, the poem maintains a polemical privileging of Catholic Passion imitation, but laments the spiritual fate of its Protestant enemies, even subtly exonerating them as active agents in the final four lines. Sonnet 6 blunts sonnet 5’s polemical edge and implicitly associates the Protestant community with a lost “rout” of Christ’s army.

Sonnets 9 and 10 in the “Portrait” group act similarly as a poetic diptych. The sonnets appear sequentially in all the major manuscripts, and they are explicitly linked through their discussion of St. Peter as the head of Alabaster’s polemically constructed Catholic Church. Sonnet 9 refers to Christ’s true followers as his “flock” and examines the communal nature of the church:

When all forsake, whose courage dare abide?
Seeing the strength of each particular,
Consisteth in the strength of all which are
Combined, like many shafts together tied. (9.1-4)

Alluding to the apostles’ forsaking of Christ at his arrest, Alabaster searches for an apostle who remains faithful. Apostolic strength consists in unity, as the reference to “many shafts together tied,” a \textit{fasciculus}, implies; what is at stake is communal and ecclesial solidarity. This unity is ruptured in lines 5-11, where the poem offers two choices for unifying spiritual leadership

Yet damned Luther, swollen with hellish pride,
Presumes that he with truth will never jar,
Though all Christ’s Church from him do wander far,
And sixteen centuries of years go wide.
Yet who might more presume than Peter might,
Who for three years enjoyed Christ’s blessed light,
And world and goods and wife for him did shun? (9.5-11)

Ecclesial politics are never far from the Passion in the “Portrait” group. Luther disqualifies himself as a unifier because of his presumption: while Luther, a mere individual, claims he always adheres to the truth (against it he “will never jar”), he also claims that Christ’s Church has “wandered far” from him. Given the vehement Catholicism of sonnet 6, this is obviously a preposterous and blustering error according to the confessional logic of the sonnet group. Peter, on the other hand, serves as the ideal model for ecclesial unity: he has the right to “presume” since he “for three years enjoyed Christ’ blessed light” and forsook his wife and goods to do so. Finally, the poem forcefully reasserts Peter as a synecdoche for the Catholic ecclesia over Luther and his erring presumption:

And who might less [presume] than Luther, that did dwell
In such acquaintance with the fiends of hell,
And married (incest!) with a sacred nun? (9.12-14)

The poem’s structure registers Peter as the rightful head of Christ’s ecclesial community: Luther “dwells” in “hell,” an association certified by the strong end-rhymes, and Luther’s canonically incestuous relationship with the “nun” is juxtaposed against Peter’s self-abrogating “shun” in line 11. The ejaculatory “incest!” adds final zeal to the poem’s polemical vision of ecclesial unity through Christ’s Passion: Luther violates every taboo of churchly relationship, forsaking Christ for the miry flood of the world.

The silence regarding Peter’s denial of Christ in sonnet 9 is striking, of course, and sonnet 10 serves as a correction to the arrogant Catholicism of sonnet 9. If Alison Shell is correct, Alabaster likely was familiar with Southwell’s Saint Peters Complaint, a work that critics have interpreted as a penitential poem implicating the individual as well
as the Catholic Church in human sinfulness, and which could very well lie behind sonnet 10’s more humble presentation of Peter. If this is so, then sonnet 10 implies a more critical perspective on Peter and, by synecdoche, any particular confessional ecclesial community:

Though all forsake thee, lord, yet I will die,  
For I have chained so my will to thine  
That I have no will left my will to untwine,  
But will abide with thee most willingly.  
Though all forsake thee, lord, yet cannot I,  
For love hath wrought in me thy form divine  
That thou art more my heart than heart is mine:  
How can I then from myself, thyself, fly? (10.1-8)

Though these are intended to be Peter’s words at the Last Supper, the octave does not identify them as such; the lines could be voiced by any reader, allowing him to play Peter’s role (much as in Southwell’s poems). This implies that Alabaster’s Passion sonnets encode at least some awareness of the potential for any Christian reader or group of readers to forsake Christ. Moreover, the speaker of these words insists that he cannot forsake Christ, since Christ is already “more my heart than heart is mine”; because Christ and speaker/reader are supposedly already merged, forsaking Christ would be to forsake and even destroy the self. The words are bitterly ironic in light of scripture, for Peter forsakes Christ not once, but three times, and the sestet immediately takes up this reality in an attempt to apply the story morally to all readers:

Thus thought St. Peter and thus thinking fell,  
And by his fall did warn us not to swell,  
Yet still in love I say I would not fall,  
And say in hope I trust I never shall,

But cannot say in faith, what might I do
To learn to say it, by hearing Christ say so! (10.9-14)

Alabaster applies Peter’s words to all Christians, making Peter an example of all prideful self-assurance. The poem ends, however, in a strikingly ambiguous sentence that appropriates the three theological virtues in a tentative and even problematic conclusion. Although the poet, out of love, does not want to fall, and hopes that he will always remain faithful, the tortured syntax of the final couplet seems to mean that the speaker cannot say, in faith, to what extent he would go in order to have assurance from Christ’s own mouth that he will never forsake him. The poem thereby suggests that no one can ever have assurance that she will never forsake Christ: the speaker apparently possesses a limitless desire to “learn to say,” from Christ’s words, that he will never fall away, a desire whose strength intimates the impossibility of such assurance.

Alabaster’s poems often contradict the bald assurances of many of the anti-Protestant “Portrait” sonnets. Sonnet 9 epitomizes Alabaster’s entire project of confessionalized Passion devotion and its link to a particular confessional community: proper devotion means imitating and following Christ, the captain, and remaining faithful to the apostolic and Catholic ecclesia and Christian army that must follow Christ up Mount Olivet. Proper Passion devotion—effective communion with the suffering Christ—is thus communal in nature, and linked directly to Catholicism through the contrasting synecdoches of Saint Peter and Luther. Yet as sonnets 6 and 10 show in their modifications of their respective companion sonnets 5 and 9, Alabaster is not always

52 This reading differs from Story’s and Gardner’s, which paraphrases these lines as follows: “Through love I can say I do not want to fall, and through hope that I trust that I shall not; but I cannot say in faith how far I might learn to say ‘I will not deny thee’ by hearing Christ say the same words to me” (The Sonnets of William Alabaster, 48). Alabaster’s syntax suggests not a degree of learning, but rather a lack of assurance as to what the poet would do to learn.
assured of the exclusivity of redemption through a polemically Catholic devotion. He can still lament and even exonerate—if only momentarily, and perhaps unintentionally—Protestantism from its supposed ecclesial wanderings. Moreover, by making Peter voice all Christians and simultaneously symbolize Catholicism, Alabaster also suggests that even the most devout soul in communion with Christ’s Passion is liable to apostasy and failure; even the True Church that he has found as a fervent Catholic convert in the mid-1590s may not unfailingly foster fervent piety and communion with Christ crucified.

Alabaster and Writing the Passion

Though Alabaster subscribes to a polemical vision of Catholic Passion devotion over the “mere speculations” of Protestant piety, placing his poetry within the broader discourses of prose Passion devotion of the period makes his claim untenable. Additionally, the ambiguous conclusions and rough-hewn structure of some of Alabaster’s poems suggest that the confessionalized Passion devotion Alabaster constructs in his conversion narrative undermines itself in the poetry: though he believes intimate, visual communion and the Catholic ecclesial community are linked, the most intimately conceived sonnets participate in trans-confessional Passion discourses, and subtly express a desire to transcend strictly polemical confessional identities. Furthermore, despite his attempts to enlist imitative Passion discourse in the service of militant Catholicism implied in his “Portrait” sonnets, Alabaster suggests in several of those poems that even the most committed Christian can be led astray from the right path, can fall away from Christ’s Passion just as St. Peter—the synecdoche of the entire Church to which Alabaster had recently converted.
All of this intimates that for Alabaster, conversion between ecclesial communities is no guarantee of faithfulness, despite his desire to link Catholicism with unfailing, intimate communion. This is unsurprising given Alabaster’s own biography of repeated conversion between the confessions. The ideal response to the Passion is not, at least for the Alabaster of the sonnets, confessional conversion but rather the discursive resources of an emergent body of devotional poetry in the late sixteenth century. Indeed, writing and inscription play a crucial role in Alabaster’s sense of poetic Holy Communion, and perhaps as such the sonnets are best read not merely as a record of conversion, but more specifically as the poet’s exercises in devotional self-fashioning through the Passion.

Sonnet 29 demonstrates the centrality of self-fashioning to Passion piety. In that poem, “The Spitting Upon Our Saviour,” Alabaster queries, “What art, what hand can draw the next disgrace, / Whose ground and colour must be contrary?” (29.1-2). Visual art, the poem concedes, is ineffectual: “O do not draw this impropriety, / But with device the meaning interlace, / Or let the shame be guessed by blotting over” (29.7-9). Disgracing Christ can only be conceived as an emblem (i.e., through a “device”) or as a drawing upon the heart of the poet himself, as line 10 proposes: “Or draw my heart or tongue the same to cover.” But what does it mean to “draw” the poet’s heart? Sonnet 30 uses the language of inscription to suggest that the Passion is ideally written over the poet, that the poet should imitate Christ’s self-abnegation: “print those wounds which did thy feet torment, / On my affections which to thee I yield” (30.5-6). To write the poet’s tongue and heart is ultimately to write the Passion, to represent intimate communion between vividly portrayed Christ and the soul.
Sonnet 24, titled “The Sponge” in two principal manuscripts, depicts precisely this inscriptionsal-poetic dynamic. The poem begins with the problem of poetic expression: how shall the poet engage the Passion?

O sweet and bitter monuments of pain,
Bitter to Christ who all the pain endured,
But sweet to me whose death my life procured,
How shall I full express such loss, such gain?
My tongue shall be my pen, mine eyes shall rain
Tears for my ink, the place where I was cured
Shall be my book, where, having all abjured,
And calling heavens to record in that plain,
Thus plainly will I write: no sin like mine.
When I have done, do thou, Jesu divine,
Take up the tart sponge of thy Passion
And blot it forth; then be thy spirit the quill,
Thy blood the ink, and with compassion
Write thus upon my soul: thy Jesu still. (24.1-14)

While the first quatrain poses the question—how shall I represent the Passion, its pain to Christ and sweetness to me, its loss and gain, in verse?—the second quatrain (plus the first line of the sestet) elaborates through a commonplace metaphor a potential solution: contrite tears and the poet’s own words will be the writing instruments, and the place where the Passion should be written is the soul, “the place where I was cured.” The poet can only write “no sin like mine,” can only indicate with his own poetic power his failure adequately to articulate the mystery of grace. The poet then acknowledges that only Christ can complete poetic expression by instigating communion with and forgiveness of the sinful soul: Christ will “blot” out the poet’s sinfulness, and, with the Holy Spirit and the Passion, compassionately inscribe his love on Alabaster. The Passion thus inscribes Christ’s ownership on the devout heart, suggesting that for Alabaster, redemption itself is more than a polemical conversion to one ecclesial community, but an intimate communion with Christ through meditative poetry.
However, as in the other sonnets I have examined, even in this putatively ideal setting, longed-for communion—even communion apparently far removed from the implications of ecclesial community that characterize many of Alabaster’s poems—is still postponed and imperfect. In “The Sponge,” the intimate contrition, blotting, and re-writing of divine love happens only in the future: the poet “shall…full express such loss, such gain”; his tongue “shall be” his pen, his eyes “shall rain / Tears” for his ink. And Christ’s reciprocal erasing and re-inscription will occur only in the future, if at all: Alabaster will be called “thy Jesu still,” but not yet, not in the bounds of this poem—or indeed, not completely within any of the Passion sonnets Alabaster wrote “to shew upp and conserve” his “future affections” in his devotion to Christ’s cross. This postponed communion differs markedly from Herbert’s poetic conclusion in, for example, “The Collar,” a poem in which God’s voice joins the poet’s to complete the rhyme-scheme in the past tense: “But as I rav’d and grew more fierce and wilde / At every word, / Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child: / And I reply’d My Lord.” Composed, like the rest of Alabaster’s sonnets, in a time when the poet claims the unfailing superiority of the Catholic community, the poem longs for a communion that always seems to lie outside its own bounds—perhaps even outside the bounds of confessionialized devotion that Alabaster believes marks his own piety at this juncture of his turbulent life.

As critics like Alison Shell and Molly Murray have claimed, we must attend to the biographical and historical dimensions of Alabaster’s writing, as well as to the formal and discursive structures that give voice and shape to his poetic devotion. When we do

so, the poet’s engagement of the Passion reveals several important characteristics of early modern Passion poetry and its related discourses. First, it enables us to see that despite the very real theological controversies separating English Christianities into opposing camps, the discourses of intimacy, visuality, and imitation are not marked by any one particular confession, despite even the most vehement and polarized claims to the contrary. While the publication history and widespread appeal of Southwell’s poems reveals the adaptability of intimate communion through the Passion to readerships across the religious confessions, Alabaster’s poems show that even when a polemically motivated writer believes that devotional forms are inextricably linked to particular confessions, vividly visual and intimate Passion discourse tends to resist such exclusive confessional identification. Surely the most explicitly polemical of Alabaster’s sonnets—those denouncing Protestantism outright, for instance—invoke controversial points of doctrine to bolster Alabaster’s claims regarding Catholicism in his conversion narrative. Yet even in these more obviously sectarian works, structural ambiguities reveal the persistence of poetic communion with the Passion to slip away from purely polemical categories. Moreover, Alabaster’s consistently postponed communion—a feature often characterizing the sonnet form in this period—suggests his own implicit hesitations regarding the exclusivity of effective Passion devotion to Catholic or Protestant confessions, and serves as a formal instantiation of his own instable and repeated conversions between confessions throughout his life.

Second, though Alabaster’s poetry and the Passion discourses it appropriates shows the difficulty in identifying a particular mode of Passion devotion with either Catholicism or Protestantism, it does reveal that Passion poetry can be used to explore the
meaning of communal formations, to test the boundaries of Catholic and Protestant confessional identities through poetic devotion. Alabaster’s most explicitly polemical sonnets attest to this potential in Passion poetry: in many of the “Portrait” sonnets, what is at stake is the identity of the apostolic and, above all, ecclesial community that ideally follows Christ up Mount Olivet. Hence, while Alabaster’s poetry reveals the tensions and instability involved in polemically marking Passion devotion, it also shows that Passion poetry and its discourses can be used to construct imagined ecclesial and political communities, both Catholic and Protestant, in early modern devotional poetry. Although the lyrics of Southwell and Alabaster lay the foundation for thinking critically about the Passion and confessional communities in early modern English poetry, the relationship between visual, embodied, and intimate identification with the Passion and specifically ecclesiological problems of communion, worship, and identity is most visible in the Passion poetry of John Donne and Sir John Beaumont, the subjects of the next two chapters.
CHAPTER 4:

JOHN DONNE: THE PASSION, COMMUNION, AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY

IN DONNE’S LYRICS AND SERMONS

*The passion of Christ Jesus is rather an amazement, an astonishment, an extasie, a consternation, then an instruction.*

--John Donne, *Sermons*, 2.132¹

*If all the body were eye...here all the body were eye; every pore of his body made an eye by teares of blood, and every inch of his body made an eye by their bloody scourges. And if Christs looking upon Peter, made Peter weep, shall not his looking upon us here, with teares in his eyes, such teares in such eyes, springs of teares, rivers of teares, seas of teares make us weep too?*

--John Donne, *Sermons*, 4.338

While the Passion poems of Southwell and Alabaster present intimate and vivid encounters with the suffering Christ, scholars have tended to read Donne’s poetic engagements of the Passion as far more ambivalent and vexed. Taking “Goodfriday, 1613” as paradigmatic of Donne’s attitude, some critics claim that the poem represents Donne’s inability or unwillingness to participate in the visual and affective piety that characterizes much of early modern English Passion devotion. Michael Schoenfeldt and Richard Strier have both argued that the poem epitomizes Donne’s inability or refusal to

behold the cross. Schoenfeldt attributes the poem’s ostensible movement away from the Passion to a general “difficulty of that act of imagination” stemming from a “Protestant lyric devotion” in the period that “move[s] away from identification with the spectacularly gruesome suffering of the crucified Christ toward the apprehension of the extravagant mercy ensuing from Jesus’ victory over sin and death on the cross.”2 In a more formalist and biographical reading, Strier claims that Donne “will not face Christ, will not allow himself to be known by Christ, until he can be known as perfect.”3 Meanwhile, R.V. Young claims the poem (and several of Donne’s Passion lyrics) represents Donne’s recognition that he “cannot even face the cross.”4 While these readings diagnose the poem’s final distance between Donne and Christ, I would like to challenge and extend their thinking by contextualizing Donne’s engagement with the Passion within the poet-priest’s ecclesial understanding of worship, as well as within the discourses of Bernardine piety that were increasingly popular in the early seventeenth century. Donne appropriates Bernardine-influenced Passion discourses to his sermons and his lyrics, with his later sermons emphasizing deeply meditative and intimate visions of Christ crucified (as suggested in the second epigraph to this chapter), and his earlier lyrics dramatizing the importance of liturgical community to Passion piety. In examining Donne’s highly Bernardine treatment of the Passion in homilies and poetry, this chapter argues that ecclesial community and liturgical worship are vital aspects of Donne’s


understanding of the cross: in short, Donne is most comfortable facing Christ crucified in both poetry and prose when he imagines he is doing so within the public mystical body of the English church.

As critics have long noted, Donne’s Passion poems tend to represent the difficulties, anxieties, and postponements of communion with God rather than an intimate and achieved unity. In “Spit in my face, yee Jewes,” Donne tries to substitute himself for Christ, insisting that Christ’s tormentors “Buffet, and scoffe, scourge, and crucifie mee” (7.2).\(^5\) By the second quatrain, however, Donne recognizes that he cannot substitute himself for Christ; rather, all he can do is marvel at the ineffable gift of Christ’s substitution for his own creatures: “God cloth’d himself in vile mans flesh, that so / Hee might be weake enough to suffer woe” (7.13-14). Donne distances his poem from traditional substitutive discourse in order to show the ineffable paradoxes of the Incarnation and Passion, and the poem concludes with wonder and awe rather than with a prayer to Christ or communion with divinity; Christ, in fact, is not even present in the poem.\(^6\) Similarly, in “What if this present were the worlds last night,” Donne attempts a meditation on Christ’s Passion, and succeeds at first by drawing a “picture of Christ crucified”: “Teares in his eyes quench the amasing light, / Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc’d head fell” (9.5-6). Yet the poem turns away in the sestet from Christ’s

\(^5\) All references to Donne’s *Divine Poems* are cited from John Donne, *John Donne: The Divine Poems, Second Edition*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), and will be cited parenthetically by line number. References to the *Holy Sonnets* will correspond to Gardner’s numbering and will be cited by sonnet and line number in the text. References to the rest of Donne’s poems are from John Donne, *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. C.A. Patrides (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), and will be cited parenthetically by line number.

Passion to anxiety over his own election: Christ’s disposition becomes an expression of the more important matter of Donne’s salvation. The sonnet’s appropriation of Petrarchism in its conclusion reinforces the sense that Donne’s poetic Passion is marked by unstable expressions of self-love, anxiety, and ineffability, rather than by a desire for imitation of and conformity with a suffering Christ—the ideal outcomes of Passion meditation in contemporary texts. Read against the perennial anxieties and deferrals of the Holy Sonnets, “Goodfriday” also demonstrates this tendency: Donne’s attempts to commune with Christ crucified are marked by postponement. If Donne ever turns his face fully and completely to Christ’s, it is in the future, and it is conditional, in terms similar to and even more pointed than Alabaster’s: “Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace, / That thou mayst know mee, and I’ll turne my face” (“Goodfriday, 1613,” 41-42).

Though critics have argued based on such poems that Donne generally engages the Passion only hesitantly and reluctantly, a line of readers including Coleridge has recognized the centrality of the cross to Donne’s writing. In an influential essay, Patrick

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7 Donald Friedman acknowledges the poem’s relationship to Donne’s broader concerns with Christ’s image and identification between Donne and Christ, in “Christ’s Image and Likeness in Donne,” John Donne Journal 15 (1996): 75-94, an article which also analyzes the importance of Petrarchism to the sonnet. R.V. Young has similarly explored the role Petrarchism plays in the poem, as well as the sonnet’s similarities to the works of Continental poets and painters; see R.V. Young, Doctrine and Devotion, 28-30. Kirsten Stirling reads this poem within the contexts of Lutheran iconoclasm, showing that the speaker’s anxiety is over whether Christ is a judge or a savior, and that the sonnet vacillates between these two identities. See Kirsten Stirling, “Lutheran Imagery and Donne’s ‘Picture of Christ Crucified’,” John Donne Journal 26 (2007): 55-71. Ernest B. Gilman has similarly read the poem against the contexts of iconophilia and iconophobia in the period, in Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), 139-40. Gary Kuchar has identified the poem’s conflict between Aristotelian and Augustinian epistemologies, loosely associated with Catholic and Protestant theology, respectively; see Gary Kuchar, The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008), 170-73.

Grant claims that Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* are indebted to the Augustinianism of figures like Pseudo-Bonaventure, whose *Meditations on the Life of Christ* was highly popular in English piety of the late medieval and early modern periods.\(^9\) Similarly, Julia J. Smith argues in an insightful essay that Donne draws heavily on the personal piety of the Middle Ages, tracing its roots to St. Bernard of Clairveaux.\(^10\) Finally, Terry Sherwood’s analysis of “Goodfriday, 1613” has shown the Augustinian influences of conversion psychology on the poem, and also connects this Augustinianism to St. Bernard’s impassioned writings on God’s love through Christ.\(^11\) In light of this critical tradition, I would like to re-contextualize Donne within the popular Passion discourses that privilege Christ’s vividly and intimately constructed, suffering body. This discursive strain stems directly from the pseudonymous writings attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Bonaventure, works which were widely read in Donne’s time by Catholic and Protestant alike. As Chapter 6 will argue, these particular texts played a key role in shaping the poetry of Richard Crashaw and the prose of many other English divines of the period.

Bernardine discourse provides a fresh context through which to read Donne’s engagements with the Passion. After Augustine, Donne quotes St. Bernard more than any other patristic source, and he also refers to St. Bonaventure in several of his sermons, as

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well as in *Pseudo-Martyr*, suggesting his familiarity with both mystics. In contextualizing Donne’s devotion within these discursive trends that permeated contemporary devotional culture, I will explore Donne’s lyric and homiletic instantiations of this event in order to understand both how Donne appropriates the Passion to different devotional modes, as well as how these appropriations are inflected by the ecclesial dimensions of his poetry and sermons. First, I will examine several of Donne’s sermons in order to show that he appropriates to them discourses of the vividly conceived body in pain and of intimate, identificatory communion with Christ that are often more problematically used in his lyrics. Second, I will read two of Donne’s Passion lyrics, “Goodfriday, 1613” and “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion,” in order to show that the poems, written during a period when Donne was preoccupied with problems of Catholic and Protestant ecclesiologies, are deeply invested in communal and ecclesial worship. I hope to show that for Donne the Passion is most clearly constructed in public, liturgically oriented sermons when he draws on discourses found in popular meditative texts, while his clearest articulations of the Passion in his lyrics are grounded in a deep awareness of ecclesial community and liturgical worship.

Before proceeding, I would like to clarify my argument’s relationship to two methodological complications that have characterized some studies of Donne. First, in arguing that Donne’s lyrics, composed mostly in the years before his ordination in 1615, reflect an evolving concern with ecclesial community and worship, I do not advocate a

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vision of Donne’s biography as a journey from an anxious and skeptical youth toward a mature, godly minister in the Protestant English church, a telos which has characterized the poet’s biography since Izaak Walton’s Lives. My interest lies in Donne’s various appropriations of Passion discourse in different literary genres, not in forwarding a coherent picture of Donne’s intellectual or spiritual development. Second, though I begin my analysis with a reading of the Passion in several of Donne’s sermons and then move chronologically backward to his lyrics and forward again to other sermons, I agree with Jeanne Shami’s important arguments that Donne’s sermons (and his lyrics, too) are rhetorically situated texts bound by immediate concerns of audience and occasion, and as such do not merely serve as convenient glosses on Donne’s poetry or theological outlook. Rather, my goal in beginning with Donne’s sermons is to show that despite the hesitancies and postponements of communion with the crucified Christ in his lyrics, Donne appropriates popular, trans-confessional Passion discourses to the sermons (the works for which Donne believed he would be known) and participates in rather than discards traditional crucifixion piety most clearly when he engages the Passion within the real—and in the earlier lyrics, the imagined—community of the English ecclesia.

**Donne’s Passion Devotion and Bernardine Piety**

The Passion devotion inspired by St. Bernard of Clairveaux (and elaborated by his follower, St. Bonaventure) saw a popular resurgence in the early to mid-seventeenth

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century in England among mainstream Protestant readerships. These pseudonymous texts emphasize the humanity of the suffering Christ as a mode of stirring the meditating soul to repentance and communion. Often the meditative text dwells on the vivid wounds of Christ, a devotional tradition that includes the piety of the Five Wounds that pervades pre-Reformation English Passion devotion (but which also continues well into the sixteenth century). As described in the Introduction and chapter 1, in Bernardine piety Christ’s blood issues from his wounds in torrents, or spurts forth like fountains; extra-scriptural details of every nuance of Christ’s physical torment from the agony in the garden, to the scourging, to the crucifixion itself, ground Bernardine Passion narratives in Jesus’ abject, immediately present and intensely corporeal suffering.

Though such vivid and physical devotion seems fairly alien to Donne’s lyrics, and indeed to seventeenth-century English poetry more generally, the publication history of works by Pseudo-Bernard, combined with Donne’s frequent references to the saint, argues that Pseudo-Bernard is an important figure in Donne’s devotional culture. For example, Bernard’s passion meditations were published in a large compendium of late medieval writings, *Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares*, which included the long Passion meditation of the title, as well as *A most zealous and devout lamentation of blessed Anselmus* and Bernard’s *Motives of Mortification* and *A Meditation of S. Bernard, concerning the Passion of Jesus Christ*. This collection was first printed by T. Creede and sold by bookseller Arthur Johnson in 1611. Johnson was a purveyor of numerous popular works on a range of topics, including *A closet for ladies and gentlewomen* (1608, 1611, 1614), a manual on candy making, and anti-Catholic tracts such as Thomas Bell’s *The downfall of poperie* (1604, 1605, 1608), Jean Calvin’s *A commentarie on the whole epistle*
to the Hebrewes (1605), and numerous treatises by Joseph Hall. Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares was published again in 1614 for Francis Burton, who sold Lancelot Andrewes’s Nineteen sermons concerning prayer (1611), the Catholic Philip Howard’s A foure-fould meditation (1606), and George Wither’s popular Abuses stript, and whipt (four printings in 1613, one each in 1614, 1615, and 1617).

In addition, Robert Allot in 1631 sold another edition of this same work alongside Protestant sermons and manuals like The practice of pietie (twelve editions in the 1620s and 30s) and English translations of Italian dramas. Another Bernardine text, a Passion sermon attributed to St. Bernard, was printed in 1613 and 1614 in a collection called The yong mans gleanings, gathered out of diverse, most zealous and Devout Fathers, and now published for the benefit of every Christian Man. This collection was printed for John Beale and Benjamin Lightfoot, both of whom sport solid Protestant credentials in their publishing ventures: while Beale published the Workes of Joseph Hall, The Peace-Maker by King James I, and an edition of John Jewel’s The Apology of the Church of England, Lightfoot (somewhat less prolific) sold works by Thomas Heywood as well as the Protestant John Hull’s Christ his proclamation to salvation. In short, the printing history of Pseudo-Bernard reinforces this study’s claim that such piety appealed to mainstream Protestant readerships and was sold alongside the popular works of influential Protestant figures like Calvin, Hall, and Jewel. It should come as no surprise, then, that St. Bernard figures largely in Donne’s referenced patristic sources: indeed, based on the above
publications, Donne composed “Goodfriday, 1613” in the midst of a surge of interest and publication of Bernardine piety.\textsuperscript{14}

In Pseudo-Bernard’s \textit{Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares} and in his passion sermon, Christ’s body is depicted and dwelt upon in gruesome, vivid fashion; the goal in this tradition is to stir the emotions by beholding Christ’s suffering intimately, as if it were present immediately before the meditator. In \textit{Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares}, Christ’s suffering dominates the text’s visual registers in order to move the affections:

\begin{quote}
Let streames of teares gush out of my melting eyes, let them penetrate into my bosome, that they may mollifie my stonie heart, so that it may be so deepely wounded with sorrowfull compassion, as if I had beene and eye-witnesse of his painfull Passion.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
How firme are thy harmelesse \textit{hands} fixed unto thy Crosse? how hard are thy innocent \textit{feete} nailed unto it? Thou hast onely liberty to move, but (Alas) no where to \textit{lay downe} thy weake, and wearie head.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
View him, powring out plentifull streames of blood, gushing out from the five wounds of his tender hands, feete, and side, pitifully wounded, and cruelly pierced.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
What meaneth this, Oh Lord? Doth he still hang naked and nailed on the Crosse? Are his veines newly lanced, wil his bleeding wounds never be stanched? Shall his side remain evermore pierced, and his skinne alwayes dyed with blood?\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} For an account of the continuing appeal of pre-Reformation devotional works in this period, see Helen C. White, \textit{English Devotional Literature (Prose), 1600-1640} (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1931), 69-88.

\textsuperscript{15} Pseudo-Bernard, \textit{Saint Bernard His Meditations: or Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares, upon our Saviours Passion} (London, 1634), 1.336. There are two series of paginations in this volume, and citations will be to the series and page number.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 1.311.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 2.205.
Bernardine piety emphasizes Christ’s suffering in the present tense: his body always hangs now, before the eyes of the devout soul, and his wounds are always sluices cut open to gush forth his blood, dying his entire body red. This highly corporeal image is typically joined to the desire for compassion, the desire to suffer with Christ and consequently to move the soul to contrition. Bernard’s Passion sermon in *The yong mans gleanings* accomplishes precisely the same devotional effect in similar language:

> Behold him with more attention, how worthy he is of admiration, and most tender contemplation. Looke at him naked, and torne with whips, betwixt two theeves ignominiously nailed upon the Crosse, quenching his thirst with vinegar, and after his death wounded in the side with a speare, sending out plentifull rivers of blood from those woundes in his handes, & feete, and side. O my eies abound with teares, and O my soule bee thou dissolved with the fire of compassion, in condoling so mercifull a man, whom thou seest amidst so great bitternesse to be afflicted with sorrowes.\(^{19}\)

As I have argued, apostrophe, so common to the period’s Passion texts, heightens the presence both of Christ’s body and of the imaginative scene of Calvary to the meditating soul. Here, the apostrophe to the soul underlines the need for compassionate tears while beholding Christ—*O my soule bee thou dissolved with the fire of compassion*—a major characteristic of affective piety. Such affectivity is also grounded in highly vivid nouns and intensely liquid verbs; Christ’s bleeding body becomes a channel for compassion and subsequently, an object of imitation. Indeed, often Bernardine piety issues in commands that the soul take the place of Christ on the cross, to become so completely identified with the Passion that the devotee’s body becomes Christ’s:

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 2.211.

\(^{19}\) Anon., *The yong mans gleanings. Gathered out of divers most zealous and devout fathers* (London, 1613), 74.
Lay (I say) that most divine crosse upon my shoulders, the breadth whereof is charitie, the length eternitie, the height omnipotencie, and the depth inscrutable wisdome, replenished with majestie. Naile my feete and my hands unto it, and conforme thy servant, O Lord, whollie into thy passion.20

The speaker turns the imperative mood to Christ himself, demanding that he let the soul fill Christ’s place in physical terms, longing to become the objects of the action of crucifixion—“Naile my feet and hands unto it.” Though Donne in “Spit in my face yee Jewes” distances himself from such imitation and substitution, concluding that only awe can be a sufficient response to Christ’s Passion, Donne’s sermons often take advantage of very similar rhetorical gestures, encouraging the auditory to meld themselves completely to Christ’s cross.21

Like the works of Pseudo-Bernard, Pseudo-Bonaventure’s Meditations on the Life of Christ, a work whose profound influence on late-medieval piety has long been recognized, was also printed on Catholic and Protestant presses throughout the period, and though it was less widely circulated than the Bernardine material in the seventeenth century, Pseudo-Bonaventure’s affective texts foreground vividly physical and intimately present Passion discourses in order to incite contrition. Nicholas Love’s fourteenth-century English translation of Pseudo-Bonaventure’s Meditations was published in London nine times between 1484 and 1530, and again in 1609 at Douai by C. Boscard.22

20 Ibid., 81.

21 For a reading of “Spit in my face yee Jewes” that emphasizes the inability of the speaker to imitate Christ, see Susannah Brietz Monta, Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005), 139-41.

22 Though there is an obvious gap between the last extant printing and the 1609 printing, the fact that so many copies of the Love translation are extant argues for their continued presence and influence throughout the period. It is possible that the 1609 edition was among the volumes of Catholic literature imported into England and seized by the government in September of 1609; the importation itself of such material also suggests an ongoing market for them. See A.F. Allison and D.M. Rogers, The Contemporary
Another English translation by John Heigham was printed at St. Omer’s in 1622 and 1634. Suggestive of Bonaventure’s appeal outside of Catholic circles is the 1655 publication of *The Soliloquies of Bonaventure* (by H. Twyford and R. Wingate, sellers of popular law textbooks at Middle Temple), which includes the vivid passion meditation *A Bundle of Myrrh* (the trope made famous by Bernard’s *Sermons on the Song of Songs*), written in the affective tradition. In the 1609 printing of Love’s translation, *The Mirrour of the Blessed Life of Our Lorde and Savioure Jesus Christe*, Christ’s Passion is presented to the imagination in vivid and intimate terms. In a passage describing Christ’s scourging, Love writes:

> And so was that moste innocent, faire, and moste beautifull flower of al flesh full of woundes, even from the top of his head to the sole of his foote, his moste princely and pretious blood running out on all sides of his blessed bodie, beinge so longe scourged with wounde upon wound, & bruse upon bruse, untill both the lookers on, & the whippers, were them selves utterly wearie.\(^{23}\)

Throughout Love’s translation the narrative spares no detail, and relies throughout on extra-scriptural traditions in order to underline the abject humanity of Christ and to stir the soul. On the cross, Jesus’ wounds gush abundantly; his limbs are fastened tightly to the wood, completely restricting his movement, and he hangs on the cross by only three nails, heightening the pathos and agony of the scene. Like in Pseudo-Bernard, affectivity is achieved in the *Mirrour* through a diligent visualizing of and communion with Christ’s life and death, as the introduction to the volume indicates:

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Wherefore thou that conveyest to feel truly, the fruit of this presente booke thou must with all thy thoughte & thyne entent procure thee in thy soule present to those thinges that be here written, said, or done of our lorde Jesu.\textsuperscript{24}

Ultimately, the popularity of these Bernardine texts shows that affective, medieval Passion piety does not recede for English Protestants of Donne’s time, but instead finds a market in Catholic and Protestant reading communities. It is a devotional context saturating the printed devotions of Donne’s immediate milieu in the 1610s, the period when Donne writes “Goodfriday” and begins composing his sermons.

Significantly, in his sermons—especially those delivered during Lent—Donne invokes the discourses of Christ’s vivid body in order to stir his audience to contrition, imitation, and communion. In a 1619 sermon possibly delivered at The Hague during a diplomatic mission to the Low Countries, Donne presents the Passion as a vividly physical moment of intimate identification between Christ’s suffering body and the soul. In analyzing Christ’s commands to “follow me,” Donne elaborates the significance of imitating Christ by bearing one’s cross, and does so in strikingly intimate and corporeal terms:

And when I am come to that conformity with my Saviour, as to fulfill his sufferings in my flesh, (as I am, when I glorifie him in a Christian constancy and cheerfulness in my afflictions) then I am crucified with him, carried up to his Crosse: And as Elisha in raisyng the Shunamits dead child, put his mouth upon the childs mouth, his eyes, and his hands, upon the hands, and eyes of the child; so when my crosses have carried me up to my Saviours Crosse, I put my hands into his hands, and hang upon his nailes, I put mine eyes upon his, and wash off all my former unchast looks, and receive a soveraigne tincture, and a lively verdure, and a new life into my dead teares, from his teares. I put my mouth upon his mouth, and it is I that say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? and it is I that recover againe, and say, Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 14.
Thus my afflictions are truly a crosse, when those afflictions doe truely crucifie me, and souple me, and mellow me, and knead me, and roll me out, to a conformity with Christ.\textsuperscript{25}

For readers who read “Goodfriday, 1613” as paradigmatic of Donne’s attitude toward the Passion, this passage is a forceful counterpoint to the poem’s postponed communion. The moral exemplarity of Christ and the Christian’s imitation of his sacrifice here are figured in strikingly vivid, highly physical, and almost erotic terms that echo the rhetoric of Bernardine devotion. Through a series of parallel clauses, Donne merges his own identity, the first person “I,” with Christ: “I put my hands into his hands, and hang upon his nailes, I put mine eyes upon his, and wash off all my former unchast looks....” The merging allows Donne’s tears to merge with Christ’s, and Donne’s mouth to press against Christ’s, both uttering \textit{My God, my God} to the Father. Identification is boldly physical, and the passage’s final corporeal description of Donne made “souple” and “mellow,” and “knead[ed]” into conformity with Jesus, as if the soul were malleable clay, strongly suggests the importance of Christ’s ability to shape humanity into his own image, a spiritual dynamic Paul W. Harland has discussed in his work on the Passion in Donne.\textsuperscript{26}

Like in the Bernardine tradition, then, Donne encourages a highly visual, physical, and intimate encounter with Christ in order to stir his auditors to self-denial, teary contrition, and ultimately, identification.

In an early sermon (February 20, 1617/18) on the first Friday of Lent—Donne’s “old constant day,” in Walton’s words—Donne preached at Whitehall on Luke 23:40, the

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Sermons}, ed. Potter and Simpson, 2.300.

words of the Good Thief to his crucified companion who mocks Christ: “Fearest not thou God, being under the same condemnation?” At the beginning of the sermon Donne urges his auditory to meditate on the Passion throughout Lent, not merely on Good Friday: “I would be loath to think that you never fulfill the sufferings of Christ Jesus in your flesh, but upon Goodfriday, never meditate upon the passion, but upon that day.”27 Donne elaborates his initial reference to Good Friday by invoking the physical elements of the Passion, heightening his sermon’s encouragement of identification with and conformity to Christ’s example:

And, as the whole life of Christ was a passion, so should the whole life (especially the humiliation) of a Christian, be a continual meditation upon that. Christ began with some drops of blood in his infancy, in his Circumcision; though he drowned the sins of all mankinde, in those several channels of Blood, which the whips, and nailes, and spear, cut out of his body in the day of his passion. So though the effects of his passion be to be [sic] presented more fully to you, at the day of his passion, yet it is not unseasonable now, to contemplate thus far the working of it upon this condemned wretch.28

In language resonant with Bernardine discourse, Donne characterizes with only a few verbal strokes the corporeality of Passion piety: Christ’s blood was effusive enough to “drown” all of humanity, running as it did from the “several Channels of Blood.” Applying the crisp verb “cut” to the “whips, nailes, and spear,” Donne underlines the violence of the event in both aural and visual registers, itemizing the elements of torture as do so many Passion writers, including Alabaster and Southwell. Moreover, meditating on the Passion—and in a traditional hyperbole growing out of Bernardine discourse, Christ’s whole life is a Passion—should be a Christian’s central activity, and indeed,

27 Sermons, 1.253.

28 Ibid., 1.254.
Donne admonishes his auditory to contemplate the passion “now,” to ruminate on the merits of the Passion for the Good Thief, and by extension, for all Christians:

For, perchance, we shall lack an example of a notorious Blasphemer, and reviler of Christ, to be effectually converted to salvation (of which example, considering how our times about and overflow with this sin, we stand much in need) except this thief be our example; that though he were execrable to men, and execrated to God, yet Christ Jesus took him into those bowels which he had ripp’d up, and into those wounds which he had opened wider by his execrations, and had mercy upon him, and buried him in them.  

Donne uses Christ’s opened body as a symbol of spiritual comfort closely aligned with Passion discourses of the pained, visualized body: the sinner is “taken” into Christ’s “ripp’d up” bowels, “buried” and sheltered within Christ’s suffering body, words resonating with Southwell’s “Man to the wound in Christs side” and with so many Passion accounts of the period.  

In a homiletic gesture designed to remind his auditory that they are like the mocking thief, Christ’s body becomes an object of identification through its ability to “shelter” or protect the devout soul; Donne appropriates the discourse of imitation to his homiletic goal, showing how the auditor is a sinner and yet potentially conformable to Christ.

Donne describes the moment when the Good Thief “came to declare perfect faith” as a recognition of self-identity in Christ’s wounds:

29 Ibid., 1.258-59.

30 On the range of symbolic meanings, especially of the bowels as the locus for compassion, see Michael Schoenfeldt, Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 1-39.
He came to know those Wounds which were in Christ’s Body, *non esse Christi, sed Latronis, & amare coepit*; then he began to love him perfectly, when he found his own wounds in the body of his Saviour.  

As he gazes upon Christ’s execution, the Thief recognizes his own guilt, the moment giving rise to the utterance that serves as Donne’s text. He recognizes the wounds are not properly Christ’s—*non esse Christi*—but his own; recognition of the self’s image in Christ’s wounded body, in this passage, is the moment of conversion. The sermon encourages its auditors to follow the example of the Good Thief by a constant meditation on the Passion that moves the soul to imitation, and indeed, to recognition of the self in Christ’s suffering. The sermon accomplishes this goal through the trope of Christ’s wounds, imagined as “ripp’d up” “channels of Blood” that “drown” the world in divine love, so that the vividly conceived body becomes the channel through which the sinful soul recognizes his own woundedness, and through which he first experiences divine love. Passion devotion in this text is at least partly the process of recognizing the self in Christ crucified, of seeing one’s own soul in Christ’s sheltering wounds—a highly physical set of tropes which Donne employs comfortably in this context, and which characterize many Passion accounts of the period across Catholic and Protestant lines.

Over a decade later in his final sermon, *Deaths Duell*, Donne’s Passion rhetoric remains charged with Bernardine resonances. As Ramie Targoff observes, in this sermon (preached just weeks before Donne’s death in March of 1631), Donne “stands in the position of Christ, weakened and feeble, but full of God’s grace as he prepares for his

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*Sermons*, 1.259.
own death.”\textsuperscript{32} Donne’s manifest emaciation when delivering this sermon collapses the distance between his text, his auditory, Christ’s Passion, and the preacher himself. Donne had taken seriously ill as early as August of the previous year, and, despite Walton’s habit of embellishing his \textit{Life of Donne} into hagiography, it seems there is truth in his claims that when Donne preached \textit{Deaths Duell}, he was visibly ill:

And, when to the amazement of some beholders he appeared in the Pulpit, many of them thought he presented himself not to preach mortification by a living voice: but, mortally by a decayed body and dying face…his strong desires enabled his weak body to discharge his memory of his preconceived meditations, which were of dying, the Text being, \textit{To God the Lord belong the issues from death.}

Many that then saw his tears, and heard his faint and hollow voice, professing they thought the Text prophetically chosen, and that \textit{Dr. Donne had preach’t his own funeral Sermon}.\textsuperscript{33}

Walton’s account is aimed at canonizing Donne among the English Protestant saints of the seventeenth century; yet it indicates at least some recognition not merely of Donne’s proximity to death in the hindsight of biography, but of the frailty of the preacher during his performance.\textsuperscript{34} In any event, \textit{Deaths Duell} both echoes and exaggerates the thematic commonplaces he deploys in engaging the Passion: death is the natural consequence of life, and indeed, Donne spends much time in this sermon reflecting—often morbidly—on death and dissolution: “Wee have a winding sheete in our Mothers wombe, which growes with us from our conception, and wee come into the world, wound up in that \textit{winding}

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\textsuperscript{33} Izaak Walton, \textit{The Lives of Dr. John Donne; Sir Henry Wotton; Mr. Richard Hooker; Mr. George Herbert; and Dr. Robert Sanderson} (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 62.

\textsuperscript{34} The prefatory note of the 1630 publication of \textit{Deaths Duell} also corroborates this reading: “This sermon was, by Sacred Authoritie, stiled the Authors owne funeral Sermon.… It was preached not many dayes before his death; as if, having done this, there remained nothing for him to doe, but to die,…A dying mans words, if they concern our selves; doe usually make the deepest impression, as being spoken most feelingly and with least affectation” (\textit{Sermons}, 10.229).
sheet, for wee come to seek a grave.” In this passage, (possibly also alluding to Psalm 51, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me”), life itself is identical with death; putrefaction and suffering seep into the text as surely as it inheres in the newborn child.

However, at the conclusion of the sermon, Donne proposes Christ’s Passion as the model of Christian mortality and self-sacrifice, the quintessential object of imitation and identification. The Passion emerges more clearly here than in any other sermon or text Donne has left us, and does so to suggest the resurrection of the dead. “[T]his part of our Sermon must needes be a passion Sermon,” Donne writes, “[S]ince all his life was a continuall passion, all our Lent may well bee a continuall good Fryday.” Donne encourages his audience to apply their own day to Christ’s Passion: “Take in the whole day from the houre that Christ received the passeover upon Thursday, unto the houre in which hee dyed the next day. Make this present day that day in thy devotion, and consider what hee did, and remember what you have done.” Donne’s language suggests a substitutive comparison between the sins of the individual committed every day, and the suffering of Christ during his Passion. But this suggestive substitutive dimension, prevalent in “Spit in my face yee Jewes,” quickly gives way to a climax that emphasizes Christ’s immanently, intimately, and vividly present body on the cross:

There now hangs that sacred Body upon the Crosse, rebaptized in his owne teares and sweat, and embalmed in his owne blood alive. There are those bowells of

35 Sermons, 10.233.
36 Ibid., 10.243.
37 Ibid., 10.245.
compassion, which are so conspicuous, so manifested, as that you may see them through his wounds....

There wee leave you in that blessed dependancy, to hang upon him that hangs upon the Crosse, there bath in his teares, there suck at his woundes, and lye downe in peace in his grave, till hee vouchsafe you a resurrection, and an ascension into that Kingdome, which hee hath purchas’d for you, with the inestimable price of his incorruptible blood. AMEN.\textsuperscript{38}

In this passage lies what Donne has apparent difficulty seeing in “Goodfriday, 1613” and in Holy Sonnets 7 and 9: the brutally and immediately present crucifixion, the central object of Christian imitation. If Donne’s earlier lyrics privilege the stoppages and complications of communion and grace, here the popular and trans-confessional Passion discourses of intimate identification and visuality take control of the sermon. Christ hangs “now,” soaked in tears and sweat; in graphically Bernardine terms, the viewer beholds Jesus’ “bowells of compassion” through his wounds, an image whose proximity to the auditory is heightened by Donne’s repeated deictic marker, “there.” But more than constructing this temporally and spatially present body, Donne’s words urge the audience to imitation through the body—terms reminding us of the sermon on Matthew 4:18-20: the audience must “hang upon him that hangs upon the Crosse,” must “bath in his teares, there suck at his woundes, and lye downe in peace in his grave.” In his final performance Donne thus brings his auditory into a communion with death represented in Christ’s suffering body, and urges them in Bernardine language to assimilate to Christ’s death in order to rise in his resurrection and ascension, both in the listener’s individual body and, because of the rhetorical context of the utterance, in the communal body of Christ, the

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 10.247, 248.
corpus mysticum of the ecclesia. It is in the end a performative and ecclesial utterance that brings the Passion vividly close to the individual and to the church as a listening body.

As the above sermons demonstrate, in the homiletic mode Donne easily appropriates popular Bernardine Passion discourses in ways distinct from his earlier devotional lyrics, which often—though not always—dramatize impeded or postponed communion between the soul and God. The fact that Donne enlists rhetoric characterizing meditative manuals complicates critical claims by scholars like Strier or Schoenfeldt that Donne is unable or unwilling to describe or otherwise “face” the Passion in his imaginative writing. Additionally, that Donne easily invokes the discourses of intimacy and the body in pain in a homiletic mode (and less well in a lyric mode) suggests that for Donne, the ecclesial community is perhaps the best context in which to create an intensely erotic picture of Christ for imitation: what seems more difficult in his earlier poems becomes perfectly natural in an utterance generated for a public, liturgical community. In the next section, I will argue that although Donne’s earlier “Goodfriday, 1613” longs to commune with a visually and intimately represented Christ, his lyric uses the tension between seeing and not seeing Christ in the east to explore the different modes of Passion devotion suggested in this appropriation of meditative, personal language to the homiletic genre—on the one hand, the personal, lyrical devotion of poetry, and on the other, the corporate worship of the ecclesial community.
“Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward” and the Modes of Passion Devotion

“Goodfriday, 1613” dramatizes the paradox of a speaker who achieves tentative communion at the same time that full communion is postponed to the indeterminate future—a poetic dynamic characterizing William Alabaster’s sonnets. In light of the above discussion of Donne’s sermons, texts in which Donne privileges highly visual and intimate communion with Christ, how are we to understand the relationship between the Passion and the speaker of “Goodfriday, 1613,” a poem whose animating conceit is the turning of the speaker’s back to the cross, the inability of the meditator to behold Christ? A.B. Chambers, Donald Friedman, Patrick O’Connell, and Anthony Bellette have maintained that the poem is an exercise in “error correction”: the speaker initially justifies his turn away from Christ through the complex ratiocination of the first lines, only to discover that unaided human reason is false and deceitful, and that Christ is present everywhere, including in the speaker’s memory. In Terry Sherwood’s reading, the speaker ultimately knows he will see Christ face to face after the death symbolized in the rider’s western trajectory. These persuasive readings conflict with the more recent readings of Strier, Schoenfeldt, and Young, all of whom argue that the poem represents failed or imperfect communion between Donne and Christ; both critical traditions, it


40 Sherwood, “Conversion Psychology.”
seems, accurately diagnose aspects of the lyric’s tensions between seeing and not seeing, between communing and turning away from communion.

Taken together, these conflicting critical traditions identify the poem’s difficult directional and devotional paradox: the speaker rides away from the Passion even while meditating upon and describing the very event he claims he will not behold. On the one hand, then, the tradition of “error correction” seems accurate: Donne’s speaker begins riding in the wrong direction, but he also recognizes Christ’s sacrifice and makes it present to the memory. On the other hand, the poem, like so many of Donne’s devotional poems, emphasizes the distance between Christ and speaker and the postponement of communion in its conclusion. In navigating these formidable critical currents, I would like to consider the poem within the immediate contexts of its composition, emphasizing the local and biographical influences on the poem as a way of understanding its directional paradox. As Arthur Marotti and Ted-Larry Pebworth have argued, Donne’s poems are often fully intelligible only with attention to the specific, local, and coterie contexts that shape their individual performances. In attending to the biographical and occasional contexts of the poem, I argue that “Goodfriday” and the earlier “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion” engage the productive tensions and conflicts between various modes of Passion devotion during a period when Donne is preoccupied with liturgical and ecclesiological controversies. The pivotal conflict of “Goodfriday” is the appropriate location or mode of Passion devotion: on the one hand, Donne longs to worship the Passion in an ecclesial setting on Good Friday; on the other, Donne remains

alone on his journey, constructing the Passion in his memory with the resources of
devotional lyric—a set of resources that in the context of this poem seem unable to
produce communion between the Passion and the soul.

The first and broad biographical context for this poem is Donne’s grappling about
the nature of the true church. This was a life-long concern, of course, but according to
most biographers, the period spanning 1600-1615 marks Donne’s most intense
investigation into the controversies that divided the Protestant and Catholic churches.42
As early as Satire 3 (possibly the mid-1590s), Donne reflects on the relationship between
“our Mistresse faire Religion, / As worthy of all our Soules devotion” (5-6) and its
location within the many Christian churches in the post-Reformation period. While Satire
3 is deeply concerned primarily with Truth “on a huge hill, / Cragg’d, and steep” (79-80),
this search is specifically for truth within particular ecclesial bodies and their
concomitant theological traditions: Donne holds out and rejects in turn the churches of
Geneva, Rome, and England, as well as theologians associated with the mainline
Christian churches: the Catholic Mirreus, the Calvinist Crants, the English Protestant
Graius, the Erastian Graccus, and the radical Protestant Phrygius. While Satire 3
represents Donne’s early experimentation both with classical forms and Pyrrhonian
skepticism, and concludes with the suggestion that the individual conscience must search
for truth on its own, the poem also reveals that for Donne, ecclesial community is the
basic vehicle for religious truth. In a later poem “Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so

42 Interpretations of this period of Donne’s life, as does so much biographical material in Donne
studies, go back to Walton’s Lives, but see R.C. Bald, John Donne: A Life (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 200-
36; John Carey, John Donne: Life, Mind and Art (New York: Oxford UP, 1981), 15-36; P.M. Oliver,
also Dennis Flynn, John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995).
bright and cleare,” written after 1617, Donne reveals a similar anxiety over the identity of Christ’s “spouse,” begging that Christ “Betray kind husband thy spouse to our sights” (11). Like Satire 3, the sonnet also poses the available candidates for this true church, Geneva, Rome, and London (the churches that respectively sit on one hill, on seven, and on none). Each city serves as a synecdoche for a particular church, but the poem, though colored by Donne’s own experience as an ordained minister in the English church, evinces a broader importance of ecclesial community in Donne’s religious imagination during this period of his life: truth once again is an ecclesial affair.

Similarly, Donne underlines the significance of the communal and ecclesial dimensions of religious identity in the Preface to *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), in which he writes of this period of his life:

> I used no inordinate hast, nor precipitation in binding my conscience to any locall Religion. I had a longer worke to doe then many other men; for I was first to blot out, certaine impressions of the Romane religion, and to wrestle both against the examples and against the reasons, by which some hold was taken…yet all these respects did not transport me to any violent and sudden determination, till I had, to the measure of my poore wit and judgement, surveyed and digested the whole of body of Divinity, controverted betweene ours and the Romane Church.  

Though Walton’s claim that upon Donne’s death there were found among is books excerpts from 1,400 authors of religious controversy and theology is likely exaggerated, Donne read widely among contemporary controversialists in the 1590s and early 1600s, both to discern his religious and ecclesial views and as research for his early polemical writings; the titles of his personal library also reveal his abiding interest in theological

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controversy. Whether motivated by opportunism or by purely spiritual needs—both elements are present in Donne’s writings of the period—Donne’s thinking on religious truth consistently turns to the embodiment of that truth in ecclesial community.

Furthermore, Donne also associates public forms of devotion with poetry in this period—the period during which he likely composed many of his Divine Poems. In a 1608 letter to Henry Goodere, Donne identifies the recently composed “A Litanie” with older ecclesial traditions of public prayer:

> Since my imprisonment in my bed, I have made a meditation in verse, which I call a Litany; the word you know imports no other then supplication, by that name. Amongst ancient annals I mean some 800 years, I have met two Litanies in Latin verse, which gave me not the reason of my meditations, for in good faith I thought not upon them then, but they give me a defence, if any man; to a Lay man, and a private, impute it as a fault, to take such divine and public names, to his own little thoughts.

During this period Donne reflected upon and experimented with the connections between public forms of prayer and more private literary forms such as lyric poetry during the period when the distinctions between post-Reformation ecclesial communions were foremost on his mind. If, as Ramie Targoff has argued, in the early modern period the distinctions between public and private devotional discourse are porous, then Donne corroborates that claim, implying that liturgical forms of prayer can be adapted into

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45 Helen Gardner’s dating of the Holy Sonnets and La Corona to the period 1608-1611 is highly persuasive; see her “Introduction” to The Divine Poems, pp. xlii-lv, and her commentary in the same volume, 57-58, 64-65, and 77-78. For the dating of La Corona, see David Novarr, The Disinterred Muse: Donne’s Texts and Contexts (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 92-93.

46 Donne, Letters to Several Persons of Honour (London, 1651), 32-33. For the dating of this letter, see Keynes, 137.
poetry, and that lyric poetry can be circulated and used as a prayer text for a body of like-minded believers.\(^{47}\) In short, in the period during which he composed his occasional Passion poems, Donne is also concerned not only about the nature and identity of the Christian ecclesial community, but also with the relationship between liturgical (i.e., ecclesial) and lyrical poetic forms of devotion.

The second and more immediate context surrounding “Goodfriday” is also grounded in Donne’s concern with the importance of ecclesial community in this period of his life, and both the general and specific biographical contexts of the poem clarify the stakes of its directional conflict. As the various manuscript titles suggest, Donne composed this poem riding westward to Montgomery Castle at Polesworth, the home of the family of Donne’s friend, Edward Herbert, on April 2, 1613—Good Friday. Donne may have been riding there from a visit to Henry Goodere, since in a manuscript containing both “Goodfriday” and the “Letter written by Sir H.G. and J.D., alteris vicibus” (a poem written by Goodere and Donne), the Good Friday poem is titled, “Mr. J. Dunn goeing from Sir H.G. on good fryday sent him back this meditation, on the Waye.”\(^{48}\) The evidence thus corroborates the importance of the occasional circumstances to the meaning of the poem. Good Friday was a holy day in the English Church, one requiring the participation of all subjects in divine services, according to the English ecclesiastical canons, the Elizabethan Homilies, and the Book of Common Prayer.\(^{49}\)


\(^{48}\) See Bald, 270; Gardner, *Divine Poems*, 98.

\(^{49}\) Canon 13 of *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical* reads: “All manner of persons within the Church of England shall from henceforth celebrate and keep the Lord’s Day, commonly called Sunday, and other Holy-days, according to God’s holy will and pleasure, and the orders of the Church of England
Donne’s absence from state-mandated services is hence a violation of English ecclesial law, as well as of centuries of liturgical tradition, all of which Donne was perfectly aware. The absence catalyzes the poem’s central conflict. Donne tropes this specific tension between his present “pleasure or businesse” and his ecclesial obligation in the opening’s explicit concern with eastward worship:

Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,
Th’intelligence that moves, devotion is,
And as the other Spheares, by being growne
Subject to forraigne motions, lose their owne,
And being by others hurried every day,
Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:
Pleasure or businesse, so, our Soules admit
For their first mover, and are whirld by it.
Hence is’t, that I am carryed towards the West
This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East. (1-10)

Friedman and Sherwood have argued that the initial dilemma of the poem is between facing Christ in the east or turning westward toward death, and this interpretation captures a vital aspect of the soteriological dimensions of the poem. Yet the

prescribed in that behalf; that is, in hearing the word of God read and taught; in private and public prayers; in acknowledging their offences to God, and amendment of the same; in reconciling themselves charitably to their neighbours, where displeasure hath been; in oftentimes receiving the Communion of the body and blood of Christ; in visiting of the poor and sick; using all godly and sober conversation.” Canon 14 reads in part: “The common Prayer shall be said or sung distinctly and reverently upon such days as are appointed to e kept holy by the Book of Common Prayer, and their Eves, and at convenient and usual times of those days, and in such place of every Church as the Bishop of the diocese, or Ecclesiastical Ordinary of the place, shall think meet off the largeness or straitness of the same, so as the people may be most edified.” See Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, printed in Sermons, or Homilies, Appointed to be read in Churches (London, 1833), 441. The 1559 Book of Common Prayer lists Good Friday as a holy day under the table “Lessons Proper for Holy Days.” See The Book of Common Prayer, 1559, ed. John E. Booty (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 31. The “Second Part of the Homily of Fasting” in the Sermons, or Homilies also argues that all subjects are bound to fasting by their obedience to the Christian church and to their Princes. See Sermons, or Homilies, 197.

fundamental tension here is not only soteriological, nor is it necessarily only about refusing to worship Christ crucified (though Donne obviously uses the occasion to ruminate on such a metaphorical possibility). After all, Donne would not be worshipping Christ any more effectively were he riding eastward, since Christ does not actually hang on a cross in any direction in the English Midlands; indeed, the only object Donne actually turns his back on in the immediate compositional context of the poem is, presumably, Goodere’s estate.

Instead, I would like to read the lines within the more immediate context of Donne’s equestrian travels on April 2, 1613, a circumstance which produces the directional conflict on which the poem is predicated. Donne is riding for “pleasure or business,” and is thus absent from official Good Friday services, where most Englishmen are in church and very likely facing eastward, the direction of corporal, ecclesial worship and the direction in which most Protestant communion tables were aligned within the churches they inherited from medieval Catholicism. Though various Protestant factions disputed where the communion table should be placed in Protestant service, in general Protestant churches retained the table in the choir when not in use, and then moved the table into the chancel for communion—the chancel and choir lying at the east end of the nave. In some circumstances, the table would be moved into the nave for communion with the laity kneeling around it, but the traditional east-west alignment of the communion table (or altar) itself was as a rule maintained whether the table was moved into the nave or the chancel.51 Disputes over the nature of the table/altar and its

orientation would culminate in the later Laudian church in the altar controversies of the
1630s and 40s. Understood within the historical and biographical contexts informing
the poem, the problem of whether Donne is facing west or east suggests the poem’s
engagement not only with the soteriological consequences of devotion, but also with
problems of ecclesial worship, the poet’s absence from which shapes his directional
conflict: Donne is not facing ad orientem because he is not in church with the Christian
community on the holy day as he should be. The governing trope of the poem is produced
by the text’s immediate relationship to Donne’s itinerary “this day.”

Despite the poem’s ostensible directional difficulty and the rider’s inability or
unwillingness to be in church, the midsection of the poem constructs a picture of Christ,
complete with suggestions of Christ’s flesh “rag’d, and torne.” Given that Christ,
however ambiguously, is present to the speaker, and that the poem’s directional conflict
is motivated by Donne’s absence from church, from the ad orientem of ecclesial worship,
the east-west conflict is interpretable as a conflict between the most appropriate mode of
Passion devotion. The conflict between east and west operates in part as a distinction
between such modes: east represents ecclesial devotion, the obligatory direction of
communal worship from which Donne is absent. Donne proposes, though, what will
become the poem’s tentative solution to his absence: a personal, meditative, lyric
devotion to the Passion, wherein his soul’s form “bends toward the East.” Recognizing
that he is not in the mandated setting for Passion worship, Donne turns the midsection of

165-254.

52 For a discussion of this later ceremonial controversy in relationship to English devotional
poetry, see Achsah Guibbory, Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton (New York: Cambridge
the poem to a lyrical representation of the Passion as a substitute for his ecclesial obligation, as a temporary replacement for the literal *ad orientem* of the *ecclesia*.

Friedman, Sicherman, and Strier characterize much of the verse in this midsection as inferior to Donne’s usual poetry; the next four lines they characterize variously as “a catechetical jingle” (Friedman), “jerking toward doggerel,” (Sicherman), and “painfully dutiful” (Strier): 53

> There I should see a Sunne, by rising, set,
> And by that setting endlesse day beget;
> But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
> Sinne had eternally benighted all. (11-14)

The above critics seem accurate in their judgment of the aesthetics of this passage: it grasps for the most commonplace and banal of metaphors to describe the Passion.

Though the more formalist-theological analyses of Sicherman, Friedman, and Strier can be a helpful aid in hypothesizing Donne’s attitude toward aspects of his given subject, such analyses on their own can be inadequate foundations upon which to build an account of a poet’s soteriology or theology. 54 After all, Donne’s “The Crosse” has been regarded as an early poem both because of the ecclesial controversy surrounding baptismal ritual in 1603, and because its verse is often comparatively inept and trite, especially as it falls flat in its final lines (the poem’s final turn to “more care / That Crosses children, which our Crosses are” is a weak attempt at a witty conceit, combined with a jangling and

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53 Strier conveniently summarizes these evaluations, “Going in the Wrong Direction,” 20; cf. Friedman, “Memory and the Art of Salvation,” 429; Sicherman, 72.

54 Strier relies on aesthetic and formal analysis in his reading of “Goodfriday” in order to argue that Donne does not believe what he says in these lines; Strier also uses the formal-theological approach to argue for the turbulent Calvinism of the Holy Sonnets, in “Awry and Squint: the ‘Holy Sonnets’,” *Modern Philology* 86.4 (1989): 357-84.
disappointing sight-rhyme).\textsuperscript{55} Yet it would be difficult to claim that because the verse of “The Crosse” is aesthetically weak that Donne rejects the sign of the cross or children or sacramental theology, and indeed when critics do point out the weak aesthetics in reading “The Crosse,” it is in conjunction with its relatively early composition date, not in relation to the theological positions the aesthetics may or may not disclose.

While Sicherman, Strier, and Friedman alert readers to the relative aesthetic weakness of this passage, when placed against broader discourses of the Passion, the lines suggest that Donne’s “problem” in poeticizing the Passion at this juncture is not a lack of devotion to the event, or a willful refusal to behold Christ, but rather a highly sensitive devotion to this event. A devotion that is aware of the limits of language to communicate the Passion and that insists on the importance of a deep rather than superficial understanding of the event characterizes many of the Passion accounts of the period. John Foxe in his \textit{Sermon of Christ Crucifyed}, John Andrewes in \textit{Christ His Cross}, William Perkins in \textit{A Declaration of the True Manner of Knowing Christ Crucified}, and Bartholomew Chamberlain in his \textit{Sermon Preached at S. James}, all warn against superficial, formulaic, and merely physical or outward worship of Christ’s Passion, a commonplace warning against misguided Catholic devotion. The claim in Foxe’s dedicatory epistle in his \textit{Sermon} can be taken paradigmatically:

\begin{quote}
albeit they [i.e., the papists] professe the whole historie of Christs passion as we do, yet by their doctrine it seemeth, they go no further, than the outward historie. They make much adoe about the crosse of Christ, and have sought these 500 yeares for his crosse: and yet they knowe not his crosse, neither do they see much
\end{quote}

more in the passion of Christ, than *Animalis homo*, that is the sensible man may do.\textsuperscript{56}

For Protestant writers, especially when dealing with controversial points of theology, the goal of Passion meditation is the apprehension, through faith, of the spiritual meaning of Christ’s death, which they often accuse Catholics of misapprehending through an over-devotion to the outward or physical elements of the Passion. However, in each of these Protestant accounts, visual rhetoric is still key to Passion devotion; the soul is to see Christ’s wounds, scourging, and death as visible signs of his love and his substitution for humanity’s sins. In such texts, writers underline the ineffability of Christ’s redemptive work at Calvary rather than reject intimate communion through meditative prayer. In like fashion, in a sermon delivered at Lincoln’s Inn only a few years after “Goodfriday, 1613,” Donne expresses a similar homiletic warning against a merely pedagogical and overly simple articulation of the Passion

I shall be short, and rather leave you to *walke with God in the cool of the Evening*, to meditate of the sufferings of Christ, when you are gone, then to pretend to express them here. The *passion* of Christ Jesus is rather an amazement, an astonishment, an extasie, a consternation, then an instruction.\textsuperscript{57}

Such a passage should not serve as a gloss on a poem written years earlier: obviously, Donne is quite capable of using the Passion as a matter for instruction throughout his homilies and his devotional lyrics, and these lines are easily read as a rhetorically convenient way of shifting Donne’s argument to the more immediate circumstances of the sermon. Yet the passage emphasizes that the primary importance of the Passion is its


\textsuperscript{57} *Sermons*, 2.132.
ability to stir the emotions of a reader or audience; the Passion is not a theological object, but rather an affective and perhaps even mystical one, as the telling nouns “amazement,” “astonishment,” and “extasie” suggest. Read as an example of Donne’s rhetorical facility, the passage does not claim that meditating on the Passion is inappropriate or spiritually dangerous, but rather it intimates the centrality, the sublimity, and the awesomeness of the Passion: it is paradoxically an apophatic event as well as an affective focus of narrative and meditation. Similarly, when Donne writes, “Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see / That spectacle of too much weight for mee” (15-16), he might not be expressing true happiness that he does not see Christ in the east (again, Christ is in the east only metaphorically and liturgically), but rather astonishment and amazement in the face of the spiritual reality of the event he will immediately proceed to visualize and meditate upon, a strategy typical of so many Passion accounts.

The jangling introduction to the midsection of the poem, then, is interpretable as Donne’s attempt to express the ineffable profundity of the Passion at the same time that he proceeds to visualize it. Despite his qualifications and hesitancies in lines 15-17, Donne describes Christ in graphic, visual detail similar to his Lenten sermons, enumerating the individual aspects of Jesus’ suffering in ways similar to so many Passion narratives:

Could I behold those hands which span the Poles, And tune all spheraes at once, pierc’d with those holes? Could I behold that endlessse height which is Zenith to us, and to’our Antipodes, Humbled below us? or that blood which is

The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
Make durt of dust, or that flesh which was wore
By God, for his apparel, rag’d, and torne?
If on these things I durst not looke, durst I
Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
Who was Gods partner here, and furnish’d thus
Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom’d us? (21-32)

Donne’s questions are an exercise in *occupatio*, of affirming the truth of an object or claim while pretending to suppress or deny it. The gesture allows the poem deftly to include a traditional depiction, colored by Bernardine piety, of the crucified Christ, while simultaneously heightening the vivid horror and spiritual weight of the event. Even as the poem denies the presence of Christ’s suffering, vivid details are catalogued according to traditional foci of late-medieval and early modern Passion piety: Donne sees Christ’s wounded hands, pierced through by the nails; he sees Christ’s blood mingling with the dust at the foot of the cross; and he sees Christ’s flesh brutalized, “rag’d and torne.”

Finally, in lines that one of Donne’s editors claims are “one of the most explicit statements of Mariolatry in Donne’s poetry,”
59 Donne visualizes Christ’s “miserable mother,” emphasizing her intimate role in the Incarnation and stirring the soul to compassion, a devotional strategy further linking the poem with the affective piety characterizing popular Bernardine texts, where the soul, beholding the crucifixion, turns its thoughts to Mary at the foot of the cross:

Meditate a while on the Lamentation of his blessed Mother, whose heart was wounded with sorrow, to see her Sonne so cruelly tormented…How sharpe was

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the sting of dolour to wound her heart? How intolerable was the griefe that did trouble her minde, when shee saw his body bleeding with so manie wounds…?\textsuperscript{60}

In Mary’s later first-person complaint in this meditation (the translator of \textit{Sighes, Sobbes, and Tears} leaves this traditional lament intact), Mary calls herself God’s “faithful Handmaide.” Though neither the Bernardine text nor other Protestants explicitly call Mary the furnisher of “half of that sacrifice,” it is clear that the Protestant adaptor of \textit{Sighes, Sobbes, and Tears}, as well as Passion writers such as Thomas Ailesbury, are comfortable with language apotheosizing Mary’s role in Christ’s sacrifice in order to move the devout soul to sorrow. Ailesbury, for instance, admonishes the reader to behold

\begin{quote}
chiefe mourner…the \textit{Blessed virgin: Nature & Grace} are the wellsprings whence flow such rivers of teares for her innocent sonne; now \textit{Simeons Prophesie} is made good: A sword of compassion doth pierce her heart; Can such a mother forget such a sonne? by a reflect act her hands and feet with his are pierced, her side wounded and head bruised with thornes, as if but one soule in two bodies.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

Ailesbury’s language suggests the absolute unity of Christ and Mary in terms similar to Donne’s assertion regarding Mary in the poem: while Ailesbury rhetorically conflates the identities of Christ and Mary to make them “one soule,” Donne explicitly claims that Christ’s human nature is derived from Mary, who thereby “furnished” half of Christ’s sacrifice. The treatment of Mary by the two Protestant divines should qualify claims made by Donne’s editors (Gardner and Patrides, for instance) that only a former Catholic could venerate the Virgin in apotheosizing terms. In short, though the lines prefacing the

\textsuperscript{60} Pseudo-Bernard, \textit{Sighes, Sobbes, and Tears}, 1.348.

\textsuperscript{61} Thomas Ailesbury, \textit{The Passion Sermon at Pauls-Crosse, Upon Good-Friday last, Aprill 7.1626} (London: 1626), 26.
midsection of the lyric express hesitancy and reluctance, Donne’s poem imagines the Passion through *occupatio*, relying on trans-confessional rhetorics of Christ’s torture and of Mary’s compassion for her suffering son.

In this section of the poem, though, something else has happened: Donne has discovered the true *primum mobile* of the spheres.62 Whereas at the outset of the poem the soul’s devotion is whirled in the wrong direction by pleasure or business, in lines 21-22, it is Christ’s pierced hands that “tune,” or, in a reading from other manuscripts, “turne all spheares at once.”63 The suffering Christ is the prime mover of the entire cosmos. As Friedman describes this dynamic, Donne, in describing Christ, experiences the “sympathy” and “compassion” one should properly feel when meditating on the Passion; in Harland’s formulation, this compassion is ultimately what allows the devotee to identify with Christ’s image.64 The last ten lines of the poem begin by revealing the reality that Donne has discovered: that Christ’s Passion, though “absent” from the poet as he rides away from the ecclesial obligation of this holy day, is present in the imaginative terrain of individual memory. The lines are perhaps the most beautiful in the poem and they suggest the ultimate goal of effective Passion meditation:

> Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,  
> They’re present yet unto my memory,  
> For that looks towards them; and thou look’st towards mee,  
> O Saviour, as thou hang’st upon the tree. (33-36)

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62 For the centrality of lines 21-22, see Patrick O’Connell, 22, and Bellette, 343-44.

63 For the discussion of the manuscript readings of this word, see Gardner’s edition, 99; readings of “turne” and “tune” are fairly evenly divided in the manuscript and printed evidence.

64 Friedman, “Memory,” 431; Harland, 173.
Donne realizes that even though he is not in church worshipped Christ on Good Friday, the crucifixion can be present to the memory, the most important part of the Augustinian and Trinitarian soul. Finally, these lines forge an intimate relationship between the crucified Christ and the devout soul who bends toward the Passion, a relationship that is, as Lancelot Andrewes’s Passion sermons insist, based on mutual regard: not only does the human soul look (inwardly in the memory) toward Christ, but Christ, from the cross, gazes at the meditator. Hence, unlike many of Donne’s lyrics, this poem achieves, if only for a few lines, a tentative communion: the mind looks toward Christ as Christ looks toward the poet who disobeys ecclesial regulations. Tellingly, line 35 is metrically unstable, perhaps suggesting a similar instability of communion, the “extasie” or “astonishment” involved in Passion discourse in visualizing and communing with Christ: the caesura permits the line to be scanned as a pentameter, hexameter, or tetrameter, depending on division and rhetorical emphasis.

Despite the unstable but striking communion in line 35, the gap at the poem’s end, the distance between Christ’s viewing the speaker in the meditation and the worldly reality of the speaker’s turned back, complicates any complete resolution of the poem’s tensions between ecclesial and personal meditation, between eastward and westward devotion, between communion with God in the present or after death. For even if one concedes that “[t]he poem…succeeds…in capturing the redemptive experience of the

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"soul’s meditation on the Passion of Christ,” as Helen Brooks claims, the conclusion proposes a series of pleas for purification and grace:

O think mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may’st know mee, and I’l turne my face. (39-42)

The implication is stunning: Donne issues a series of demands that God cleanse his soul and restore the divine image, and in return Donne shall “turne” his “face.” That “face” completes a strong rhyme ending the entire lyric emphasizes its importance and seriousness; as Strier notes, Donne attempts to bargain with God. Despite the poem’s hesitant development of the Passion through visuality and intimate communion, these lines suggest that even if Donne can portray Christ through trans-confessional Passion discourses, full communion with Christ and conformity to him lies beyond the limits of the poem, in a way quite congruent with Alabaster’s sonnets and with Donne’s *Holy Sonnets*. In “Goodfriday,” communion is simultaneously described quite vividly, and not fulfilled; Passion devotion culminates in subtly deferred and postponed union with the God-man Donne claims hangs in his memory “upon the tree.” Absent from the Good Friday services of the ecclesial community, Donne’s speaker seems unable or unwilling to face Christ in the space of this lyric poem.

At the soteriological level, Chambers and Sherwood have shown that the poem acknowledges that the full vision of God cannot be achieved in this life; this reading is commensurate with Donne’s own treatment of spiritual vision in his sermons on 1

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66 Brooks, 300.

Corinthians 13:12 and 2 Corinthians 4:6. It is also possible that the poem’s final reluctance or inability to face Christ stems from Donne’s anxieties regarding Calvinist soteriology during this period of his life, as Strier has claimed in a seminal essay on the sonnets. However, the ending must be read against the initial division in the poem over the modes of Passion devotion. Donne begins the poem by identifying a tension between his absence from ecclesial worship of the Passion on Good Friday, and his desire to behold Christ crucified alone in the Midlands. The poem subsequently attempts to make the Passion “present unto” Donne’s “memory” as an alternative to ecclesial, corporate worship, but concludes by suggesting the complications and postponements of communion with Christ in this lyric exercise, a deferral that often characterizes Donne in his lyrics, though not Donne in his later Lenten sermons (or in other of his Divine Poems). Despite its implied, longing deferral of communion, “Goodfriday” not only shows that Donne appropriates trans-confessional and Bernardine discourses of the Passion to his lyric, but also intimates, through its central directional dilemma, the

68 In the sermon on 1 Cor 13:12, Donne writes, “So then [by seeing God face to face], I shall know God so, as that there shall be nothing in me, to hinder me from knowing God; which cannot be said of the nature of man, though regenerate, upon earth, no, nor of the nature of an Angell in heaven, left to it selfe, till both have received a super-illustration from the light of Glory….And so it shall be a knowledge so like his knowledge, as it shall produce a love, like his love, and we shall love him, as he loves us” (8.235). In the sermon on 2 Cor 4:6, Donne writes, “And we shall see, and see for ever, Christ in that flesh, which hath done enough for his Friends, and is safe enough from his Enemies. We shall see him in a transfiguration, all clouds of sadness remov’d; and a transubstantiation, all his tears changed to Pearls, all his Blood-drops into Rubies, all the Thorns of his Crown into Diamonds” (4.129).

extreme importance of ecclesial and communal worship of the Passion to Donne’s devotional poetry.

“Upon the Annunciation and the Passion” and the Church as Exchequer

If “Goodfriday” embodies a tension between lyric meditation and ecclesial Passion worship, then “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion Falling on the Same Day. 1608” explicitly foregrounds the interpenetration of lyrical and ecclesial devotion. Since the poem more fully engages Donne’s theory of the ecclesia in relationship to lyric devotion, in this section I will first analyze Donne’s ecclesiology in two significant sermons in order to develop terms for analyzing Donne’s evolving understanding of ecclesial worship in the earlier occasional poem. In doing so, I do not claim that Donne’s ecclesiology remains a fixed entity throughout his poetic and homiletic development and that Donne merely turns an unchanging ecclesiology into a lyric poem. Rather, because “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion” deals clearly with the role of ecclesial authority in Passion devotion, and thereby suggests Donne’s grappling with ecclesiological and communal concerns, reading Donne’s later homiletic statements about the nature of the ecclesia can provide a helpful discursive context against which to compare Donne’s earlier poetic handling of similar questions. Though Donne’s earlier poem does not merely encapsulate in different form Donne’s thinking fifteen years later, it provides, along with poems like sonnet 17, an index of Donne’s various formulations of what it means to be a member of an ecclesial body.

For Donne the fundamental spiritual authority of all Christians is the church itself, the body of Christ on earth, which in Donne’s mature thought (influenced in part by
Hooker’s *Laws*) is visible in the several national churches. Moreover, the Christian soul comes into existence through the authority of the church, through its power to “breed” the individual through homiletic catechesis and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Donne’s later attitude toward this relationship between grace, the church, and the individual soul is evident in two sermons that identify the church as distributor of Christ’s grace through preaching and the sacraments. In a sermon preached at St. Paul’s on Christmas Day, 1622, Donne relies on the rhetoric of economic substitution to articulate the relationship between Christ’s redemption on the cross and the church. When a man owes a debt, Donne asks, how is it to be paid?

First, he must pay it in such money as was lent; in the nature and flesh of man; for man had sinned, and man must pay. And then it was lent in such money as was coined even with the Image of God; man was made according to his Image: That Image being defaced, in a new Mint, in the wombe of the Blessed Virgin, there was new money coined; The Image of the invisible God, the second person in the Trinity, was imprinted into the humane nature. And then, that there might be *omnis plentitudo*, all fulnesse, as God, for the payment of this debt, sent downe the Bullion, and the stamp, that is, God to be conceived in man, and as he provided the Mint, the womb of the Blessed Virgin, so hath he provided an Exchequer, where this mony is issued; that is his Church, where his merits should be applied to the discharge of particular consciences.

First, this instructive passage relies on the substitutive discourse prevalent in so many Passion accounts of the period to make its claims about grace. Second, the passage’s economic language organically connects the individual conscience to the church as the

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71 *Sermons*, 4.288.
dispensary of divine merit: the church is the entity that issues the money God minted in Christ, and these funds—which the individual has no natural right to, in the Anselmian theology underpinning this passage—are applied to the debts of “particular consciences” in the church. \(^72\) Donne makes this relationship between individual and ecclesial body clear a few sentences later:

And then there is a third fulnesse, the Church, (which is his body, the fulnesse of him, that filleth all in all) perfit God, there is the fulnesse of his dignity; perfit man, there is the fulnesse of his passibility; and a perfit Church, there is the fulnesse of the distribution of his mercies, and merits to us.\(^73\)

The Church is the “third fulnesse” of Christ, his mystical body. In rhetoric that would likely make a Lutheran or Calvinist uncomfortable, Donne also claims the church is “perfit,” and that it explicitly distributes Christ’s mercies and merits to the faithful. The clearest explanation of the mode of economic distribution occurs when Donne claims

This [the hypostatic union] was a strange fulnesse, for it was a fulnesse of emptinesse; It was all Humiliation, all exinanition, all evacuation of himselfe, by his obedience to the death of the Crosse. But when it was done, *Ne evacuaretur Crux Christi*, (as the Apostle speaks in another case) lest the Crosse of Christ should be evacuated, and made of none effect, he came to make this fulnesse perfit, by instituting and establishing a Church; *The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him*, saies the Prophet, of Christ....So that this is Christs fulnesse, that he is in a continuall administration of his Church; in which he flowes over upon us his Ministers; (for, *of his fulnesse have all we received, and grace for grace*: that is, power by his grace, to derive grace upon the Congregation;) And so, of his fulnesse, all the Congregation receives too; and receives in that full measure, *That they are filled with all the fulnesse of God*: that is, all the fulnesse that was in both his natures, united in one person, when the fulnesse of the Deity dwelt in him bodily, all the merits of that person, are derived upon us, in his Word, Sacraments,


\(^73\) *Sermons*, 4.288.
in his Church; which Church being to continue to the end, it is most properly said
_habitavit_, in him, (in him, as head of the Church) all fulnesse, all means
of salvation, dwell, and are to be had permanently, constantly, infallibly.  

The perfection of Christ’s “exinanition” of himself on the cross is the church; “lest the
Crosse of Christ should be evacuated,” Christ is in “continuall administration of his
Church,” in which he “flowes upon his ministers” and fills the individuals within the
church with the fullness of divinity that dwells in the hypostatic union. Finally, the main
modes of economic payment are the “Word” (i.e., preaching) and the sacraments; perhaps
most striking is Donne’s conclusion that the church is permanent and infallible, language
that elevates the church as the divine authority in spiritual matters for all Christians.

In another sermon, “Preached at Denmark house, some few days before the body
of King James, was removed from thence, to his burial, Apr. 26.1625,” Donne
emphasizes an absolutist ecclesiology that makes the _ecclesia_ sovereign in all spiritual
welfare. Donne describes the state of souls after Christ’s Ascension, claiming that the
church provides the authorizing power of the Gospel:

When he was gone out of this world, men needed a more particular solicitation to
heare him; for, _how_, and _where_, and _in whom_ should they heare him, when he was
gone? In the _Church_, for the same testimony that _God_ gave of _Christ_, to authorize
and justifie his preaching, hath _Christ_ given of the _Church_, to justifie her power:
The _holy Ghost_ fell upon _Christ_, at his _Baptisme_, and the _holy Ghost_ fell upon the
_Apostles_, (who were the _representative Church_) at _Whitson tide_: The holy Ghost
tarried upon Christ then, and the holy Ghost shall tarry with the Church, _usque ad
consummationem_, _till the end of the world_.

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74 Ibid., 4.289.
75 Ibid., 6.282.
Donne equates the church with Christ’s “testimony,” and is hence authorized by Christ to preach. Indeed, the same Spirit that descended on Christ at his baptism is in the church. Later Donne asserts the church’s permanent authority, using paternal language to suggest that the church has the authority to “conceive” the individual. This authority is absolute:

In your baptism, your souls became daughters of the Church; and they must continue so, as long as they continue in you; you cannot devest your allegiance to the Church, though you would; no more then you can to the State, to whom you cannot say, I will be no subject. A father may dis-inherit his son, upon reasons, but even that dis-inherited childe cannot renounce his father. That Church which conceived thee, in the Covenant of God, made to Christians, and their seed, and brought thee forth in baptism, and brought thee up in catechizing, and preaching, may yet, for thy misdemeanor to God in her, separate thee, a Mensa & Toro, from bed and board; from that sanctuary of the soul, the Communion Table, and from that Sanctuary of the body, Christian burial, and even that Christian burial gives a man a good rise, a good helpe, a good advantage, even at the last resurrection, to be laid down in expectation of the Resurrection.76

Donne manipulates patriarchal language to apotheosize the church: the church is father by its power to disinherit a wayward “son” or Christian, and the individual cannot renounce his or her father.77 The church’s masculine authority is asserted through its power to conceive the individual through the sacraments, but the church is also a mother: if the soul is “conceived,” it is done so in the Church, who may “separate” the soul “for thy misdemeanor to God in her.” And the church is the domus of the spiritual life, offering bed, board, and sanctuary to the soul. Elena Levy-Navarro has helpfully interpreted this sermon for its bold assertion of ecclesial authority over Stuart absolutism, showing that for Donne “all human identity is defined by membership in the Church of

76 Ibid., 6.283-84.
God; as a result, the individual becomes literally “nothing” when exiled from this heavenly Church.” 78 Donne seems to forward an implicit counterargument to Stuart absolutism, appropriating the patriarchal language characterizing King James’s absolutist rhetoric to the *ecclesia* in a way similar to the Catholic Stuart court poet, Sir John Beaumont—a figure who, as the next chapter argues, also critiques Stuart absolutism in the 1620s, asserting in his unpublished epic *The Crowne of Thornes* the supremacy of the (particularly Roman) ecclesial body over the English sovereign. Furthermore, Donne’s sermon is also a highly contextualized performance which heightens the rhetorical effectiveness of his assertion of ecclesial authority: he preaches the absolute authority of the church over the dead body of the king who in life asserted his absolute and divine authority, an irony that could have hardly been missed in light of James I’s well-known positions on royal supremacy over the English Church. The state, embodied in the king’s actual corpse lying before the sanctuary, is for this moment subordinated to the listening congregation and to the *ecclesia* that Donne constructs homiletically.

As this performative situation suggests, the soul is *subject* to the church in these sermons: it is both produced and governed by the church which is the “exchequer” of Christ’s merits through the passion. Jeffrey Johnson has adroitly characterized Donne’s communal theology (though Johnson does not emphasize the authorizing power I have sketched):

Donne cannot conceive of God outside of community and the creative and redemptive acts of God that enfold humankind within the divine relationship.

It is in response to the Incarnation and Crucifixion that the individual believer, within the Church and through the workings of the Holy Spirit, shares in the sufferings of Christ and, as a result, finds a place in the enlarged community of God....

In Donne, not only does the ecclesial community precede the individual, but it is also the locus in which God is best known to Christians. Donne’s ecclesiology as represented in these sermons can be summarized thus: Christ’s Incarnation and Passion produce the currency (merit) necessary to pay mankind’s debt of sin to God. Christ ascends to the Father, leaving behind his mystical body, the church, as the exchequer or treasurer of this merit, this “coin.” By extension of Donne’s logic, the church pays this coinage through its sacraments to the faithful. Through preaching and the sacraments, authorized directly by Christ, the church “owns” the Christian soul, and the soul cannot renounce the church, since it “owes” its very being as a Christian. Hence, though the Passion produces Christ’s merits, the church is the entity that imbues its members with the currency of grace that flows from the Passion; in a paradoxical twist, the Passion is subsumed within the authority of the church through its divinely sanctioned power to mint and pay.

This authority ramifies Donne’s understanding of the modes of Passion devotion. Johnson claims that in Donne the highest form of prayer is common, public, ecclesial: “Prayer exists for Donne, when properly exercised within its higher common expression, as a manifestation of the unity of the Church.” This is not to say that Donne rejects private devotion. Rather, it is to emphasize that for the Donne of the sermons, ecclesial prayer is very often the “higher common expression” of prayer, the devotional mode that

80 Ibid., 43.
manifests Christ’s body in the world. Prayer also “brings the individual into community, not only with God, but also with the Church, both Militant and Triumphant,” a dynamic suggesting Donne’s teleology of prayer: private devotion or prayer should ultimately lead the individual to the ecclesia, to the community that is Christ’s body.\(^{81}\) In this dynamic, the modes of devotion required for certain forms of prayer (such as Passion devotion) are intrinsically related to the connections between individual, God, and ecclesia. Above all, as Johnson argues,

Donne’s theology is based on the communal interplay of the Trinity and the commerce the godhead desires with the Church. From this theological foundation, Donne propagates the use of a whole range of visual representation, from the tangible to the imagined, as a means for fostering the redemptive relationship with God that Donne believes is completed through participating in the sufferings of Christ.\(^{82}\)

Christ’s sufferings form a crucial role in Donne’s dynamic Trinitarian ecclesiology in the 1620s: by conforming to Christ’s sufferings in the way Donne urges in Lenten sermons, the individual enters into relationship with God “in communal interplay” with the church. Donne’s representational strategies are colored by this dynamic ecclesiology, suggesting that Passion devotion can speak both to the individual’s conformity to Christ crucified and to the individual’s consequent membership in the ecclesial body which is in communion with God. Readers can see an earlier suggestion of this developing representational strategy, for instance, in La Corona, an underrated sonnet sequence that appropriates liturgical prayer to lyric devotion through a priestly speaker, and does so in a

\(^{81}\) This would suggest that Donne’s thought is quite similar to that of the English Church’s more generally, according to Ramie Targoff’s analysis of public and private devotion in Common Prayer, 14-35.

\(^{82}\) Johnson, 64.
mode quite distinct from Donne’s anxious yearning for communion in many of the other devotional poems. More generally, although much of Donne’s earlier devotional poetry, including “Goodfriday” and the Holy Sonnets, often dramatizes anxiety and tension over potential communion with God, poems like La Corona, but more particularly, “Goodfriday” and “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion,” suggest that the more evolved ecclesial dimensions of worship in Donne’s later homilies play a role in the poet’s representational strategies in his lyrics. Though “Goodfriday” only alludes to the urgency of ecclesial, communal worship of Christ’s Passion, “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion” dramatizes, in language often similar to the more developed rhetoric of the sermons, the communal dimensions of piety that emphasize communion with Christ within the liturgical dominion of the ecclesia.

“Upon the Annunciation and the Passion Falling on the Same Day. 1608” insists that Passion meditation—and even knowledge of the events of Christ’s life and death—is inspired by the liturgical confluence of feast and fast days. The opening lines contextualize the meditation within liturgical time:

Tamely fraile body’ abstaine to day; to day  
My soule eates twice, Christ hither and away.  
Shee sees him man, so like God made in this,  
That of them both a circle embleme is,  
Whose first and last concurre; this doubtfull day  
Of feast or fast, Christ came, and went away. (1-6)

The poem immediately underlines liturgical disciplines: “to day” is a day on which the “fraile body” abstains (or fasts), a sense paradoxically emphasized by the second line’s

reference to eating. Fasting is the prescribed discipline for Good Friday, a practice defined, authorized, and regulated by the English Church’s constitutions and canons as well as in the official homily on good works. But while La Corona ruminates on the paradoxes of the Annunciation being the occasion when Mary became her “Makers maker, and [her] Fathers mother” (“Annunciation,” 12), in this poem it is the liturgical confluence that “makes” Christ's life for the devout soul: Christ’s first and last concur in part because “to day” has made them concur. Line 6 suggests this by framing the lines on Christ as a circle with the statement that “to day” is a day of both feast and fast, two types of liturgical observation that cause Christ to come “hither and away” (2). “Day” establishes the rhyme of lines 5 and 6, emphasizing that the contents of the poem are located on a particular occasion, since it completes and temporally locates the coming and going of Christ at the end of line 6: “Christ came, and went away” today.

Lines 7-22 ruminate on the paradoxes foregrounded by the liturgical occasion, suggesting that the paradoxes are created by liturgy:

Shee sees him nothing twice at once, who’s all;  
Shee sees a Cedar plant it selfe, and fall,  
Her Maker put to making, and the head  
Of life, at once, not yet alive, and dead;  
She sees at once the virgin mother stay  
Reclus’d at home, Publique at Golgotha.  
Sad and rejoyc’d shee’s seen at once, and seen  
At almost fiftie, and at scarce fiftene.  
At once a Sonne is promis’d her, and gone,  
Gabriell gives Christ to her, He her to John;  
Not fully’a mother, Shee’s in Orbitie,  
At once receiver and the legacie;  
All this, and all betweene, this day hath showne,  
Th’Abridgement of Christ’s story, which makes one

84 Though characteristically the English Church modifies the discipline from traditional Catholic proscriptions—see note 46 above.
The poem explores the significances of the “circle emblem,” and lines 7-10 compress the polarities of each paradox: the soul sees Christ both as “nothing” and as “all,” a planted and felled cedar, a maker put to making. Prominent in the paradoxically simultaneous events is their temporal fluidity, their ever-present now-ness. The events are seen in the present despite their separation by three decades of Christ’s life and by 1600 years between Christ and Donne: Christ is both alive and dead now; Mary conceives and mourns now. After celebrating the commonplace paradoxes, lines 19-22 underline the occasion’s liturgical roots: all of the polarities of the previous line are “Th’ Abridgement of Christ’s story,” and “All this” is “shown” “this day.” The liturgical day acts as a map of Christian history, compressing the entire “story” or written narrative of Christ’s life and death into one line, one span, where east meets west: “the’ Angels Ave,’ and Consummatum est.” the scriptural and verbal markers of Christ’s earthly life, are visibly folded into a single line.

The last section of the poem reveals one of Donne’s most important contributions to Passion poetry of the period, for in it, the church explicitly emerges as the source of all meditation on Christ’s life and death. Theresa DiPasquale has recently shown the importance of the “feminine trinity” of soul, Mary, and church in this poem, a feminine analogy to the masculine trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though I agree with this analysis of the importance of femininity in this poem, I think the poem’s emphasis on the

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85 A.B. Chambers has documented the importance of liturgical temporality in devotional poetry in the period, showing the flexibility and creative richness liturgical temporality afforded poets like Donne. See Chambers, Transfigured Rites in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1992), 85-141.
liturgical church subsumes the other two terms: the church has created the occasion for
lyric devotion. The conclusion is unequivocal in its apotheosis of the church. The first ten
lines of the conclusion read:

How well the Church, God’s Court of faculties
Deales, in some times, and seldom joining these;
As by the selfe-fix’d Pole wee never doe
Direct our course, but the next starre thereto,
Which showes where th’other is, and which we say
(Because it strayes not farre) doth never stray:
So God by’his Church, nearest to him, wee know,
And stand firme, if wee by her motion goe;
His Spirit, as his fiery Pillar doth
Leade, and his Church, as cloud; to one end both. (23-32)

Lines 23 and 24 elevate the church by appropriating a similar substitutive and economic
rhetoric used in Donne’s later sermons and found more broadly in many of the period’s
Passion accounts. Here, the church is God’s “court of faculties,” the tribunal of the
Archbishop of Canterbury responsible for making ecclesial appointments, an allusion to
the church’s administrative and executive powers. Line 24 invokes an economics of
scarcity (the confluence is valuable because the church rarely allows it) further
suggesting the church’s role as exchequer. Meanwhile, lines 25-32 apotheosize the
church as the embodiment of grace in the world, comparing it to Polaris. The roles of the
individual and of the ecclesia in these lines are telling: the individual follows the church
as a guide, making explicit what section two implies, the reliance of the individual on
liturgy to establish the proper objects of devotion—Christ’s Incarnation and Passion. The

86 So Theresa M. DiPiasquale, Refiguring the Sacred Feminine: The Poems of John Donne,
Aemilia Lanyer, and John Milton (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2008), 34; see also OED, “faculty,” def. 11b,
which cites the 1533-34 Tudor ecclesiastical laws regarding the Archbishop of Canterbury’s powers to
grant certain church appointments.
church-as-pillar-of-cloud (drawing on the logic of the Exodus material)\textsuperscript{87} strengthens this navigational role of the church, emphasizing humanity’s absolute reliance on the \textit{ecclesia} as a guide to the central mysteries of Christian history and the cycle of birth, death, and resurrection characterizing Christian anthropology. The church, though not God, is virtually identical with Him: it serves the same role as the Holy Spirit and is the only guide on earth to the narratives and meanings of Christ’s life and death.

“Upon the Annunciation and the Passion” is a Passion poem that dramatizes a speaker recognizing the importance and even the necessity of liturgy and communal worship to the major events of Christ’s life. Its insistence on the liturgical nature of the occasion and on the ecclesial and pedagogical source of the narratives of the gospels points the reader toward the practices of the larger ecclesial body, to the church where the preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments play a central role in dispensing Christ’s grace, merited by the Passion. By pointing toward the liturgical practices of the ecclesial body, both “Goodfriday, 1613” and “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion” suggest that lyric devotion is not closed off from broader concerns of ecclesial community and worship, but rather occupies a significant space in larger questions of religious identity and ecclesial membership, especially during the period of reflection in which he composed so many of his religious lyrics. At the same time,

\textsuperscript{87} Though DiPasquale in \textit{Refiguring the Sacred Feminine}, 27-35, has read this distinction between Church and Holy Spirit as Donne’s emphasis on the feminine quality of the Church (the air/cloud as feminine, and fire as masculine), and Helen Gardner (Donne, \textit{Divine Poems}, 97) glosses the cloud as a sign of “flesh” and hence the Church as Christ’s body, both readings seem to misapprehend the immediate purpose of the metaphor, as well as the logic of the biblical account. For in the biblical account, both pillars, cloud and fire, are equally God—they are the same substance and serve the same end. I think Donne has done something far less esoteric in these lines: he has, as is typical of his poetry, taken a rich symbolic object and used its multiple and sometimes contradictory signifying capacities to articulate a deeper truth, rather than neatly developed an intial metaphor with consistent logic.
Donne’s later homiletic appropriations of Bernardine spirituality suggest that the later Donne could combine the discourse of intensely intimate and visual Passion devotion with a public and communal genre whose purpose was the consolidation, edification, and sanctification of the English church, the spiritual community of Christ’s body.

For Donne, then, the Passion is deeply grounded both in the intensely intimate communion with Christ characterizing trans-confessional Passion discourse, and in the liturgical practices that govern the English ecclesial community and that authorize the various foci of personal devotion. Studying Donne’s Lenten sermons and his earlier Passion lyrics reveals the interpenetration of Passion discourses and of public forms of worship. If the ultimate goal of Passion devotion is communion with the suffering Christ, a stirring of the affections toward love of God, and a recognition of Christ’s love for humanity, then Donne’s earlier lyrics dramatize the relationship of this ideal meditative goal to broader questions of religious community and liturgical worship that concerned him during this period of his life. Conversely, his sermons suggest the importance of intensely meditative Passion discourse to preaching in the ecclesial body, which, in Donne’s later thought, authorizes not only devotion, but the Christian soul. Donne’s various appropriations of Passion discourse point not only toward Donne’s own evolving representations of ecclesial worship, but also toward the flexibility and cross-fertilization of Passion devotion across literary genres and rhetorical contexts.

Most importantly, contextualizing Donne’s engagements of the Passion within his larger concerns over the nature of ecclesial community and liturgical worship allows readers to recover an important strain of Donne’s Passion piety that critics like Strier and
Schoenfeldt have overlooked. In many of Donne’s finest lyrics, his speakers grapple with God, often concluding their poetic cries in anxiety and fear over their inability to commune with Christ or to find redemption. This is the ostensible resolution of “Good Friday, 1613.” However, when readers recognize the significance of ecclesial community and corporate worship to Donne’s treatment of the Passion in both poetry and prose, his participation in trans-confessional discourses of intimacy and visuality becomes much clearer. Donne articulates communion with the crucified Christ most vividly when as a preacher he speaks to and for the ecclesial community that is Christ’s public body on earth, and when as a poet he imagines himself as a member of the worshiping ecclesia facing eastward on Good Friday as one liturgical body.

As the work of Southwell, Alabaster, and Donne demonstrates, Passion devotion can be enlisted not only into the service of ecclesial communities and liturgical worship in a variety of genres, but also into the service of particular ecclesial and political bodies, into the rhetorical task of privileging one confession or liturgical tradition over another. As I argue in the next chapter, writers adopt Passion discourses to other genres such as the epic or the political treatise in order to interrogate ecclesial identities in the midst of the politically turbulent seventeenth century, in order to speak not merely about the importance of the Passion to the Christian ecclesia, but specifically to the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and English political history. In this sense, Sir John Beaumont, the writer of the longest poem in English on the Passion, attempts explicitly and militantly what is only nascent and generalized in Donne: the enlisting of the Passion to argue for the supremacy of a particular Christian ecclesial community over the individual and the state.
CHAPTER 5:
SIR JOHN BEAUMONT: *THE CROWNE OF THORNES* AND THE ECCLESIAL POLITICS OF THE PASSION

Yet in the lands that honour’d learnings name,
Were always some, that kept the vestall flame
Of pow’rful Verse, on whose increase or end,
The periods of the soules chiefe raigne depend.
Now in this Realme I see the golden age
Returne to us, whose coming shall asswage
Distracting strife, and many hearts inspire,
To gather fewell for this sacred fire:
On which, if you, great Prince, your eyes will cast;
And like Favonius, give a gentle blast:
The lively flame shall never yield to death,
But gaine immortall spirit by your breath.

--Sir John Beaumont, “To the most illustrious Prince Charles, of the excellent use of Poems”\(^1\)

... though with us material churches faile,
Devotion lives and shall, at last, prevaile.

--Sir John Beaumont, *The Crowne of Thornes*\(^2\)


While John Donne writes much of his poetry and all of his sermons from a social position central to English religious and political culture, Sir John Beaumont occupies a more conflicted position in that milieu. Like Donne, Beaumont uses the Passion as a means by which to reflect on ecclesial community. But Beaumont also engages mainstream politics through the Passion from a marginal religious position. Beaumont was a life-long recusant Catholic who was penalized in the early 1600s for his recusancy, and yet who was a Stuart court poet by the 1620s, dying in 1627 with the rank of “baronet.” In an irony of literary history, Beaumont’s epic, *The Crowne of Thornes*, is the longest poem in English on Christ’s Passion, and yet at twelve books and 11,000 lines, the poem exists in only one extant manuscript, held at the British Library (MS 33,392), and has never been printed. Though Roger Sell, Ruth Wallerstein, and A.D. Cousins have argued that the epic is characterized by firmly “Counter-Reformation” or baroque Catholic devotion, this chapter will challenge claims that the content of the epic is marginal to mainstream English Passion devotion and politics. I will first show that

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3) indicate words or phrases that are impossible to decipher in the microfilm image because of manuscript deterioration, bleed-through, spilled ink, or poor microfilm imaging. My hope is to work with the manuscript in the near future in order to clarify my transcription.

3 A printed edition of the *Complete Works of Sir John Beaumont* is currently being developed by Roger Sell, whose work on Beaumont is invaluable to this chapter.


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Beaumont’s epic appropriates the trans-confessional discourses of vivid and intimate communion with Christ in order to explore questions of political and ecclesial community. Second, I will argue that Beaumont uses the Passion both to celebrate King James and to challenge Stuart absolutism by asserting a distinctly Roman Catholic ecclesiology in the last books of the epic.

Only a few critics have written on Beaumont, but their work has been immensely helpful in establishing Beaumont’s authorship of the manuscript epic and in thinking through the significances of this poem and the shorter lyrics. These readings often assume that the poem’s explicitly Catholic markings—its celebration of Mary, Queen of Scots, in book 12, its veneration of the twelve apostles, the sacramental system, the Roman Church, and its denunciation of ancient heresies (including proto-Protestant ones)—mean that the poem lies outside mainstream English sensibilities and contemporary political concerns. For instance, Wallerstein claims that the poem is influenced by “contemporary Jesuit books of elegies and emblem verse,” and that Beaumont “is akin in manner to some of the Spanish writers, to Marini, and to Crashaw, though without any of the subtle sensibility of the Italian and English poets.” Wallerstein concludes that the epic’s significance lies in its illumination of the more canonical texts of Donne and Milton:

The power of Beaumont’s poem, in its own limited degree, for those who have a religious sympathy with him, whether in common faith or only by imagination, lies in no personal intensity of vision or art. It lies rather in his concentration of themes and concepts of far-reaching tradition and association, his iteration of the

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5 Wallerstein, “*The Crown of Thornes: A Report,*” 415
strange light that he finds lying upon the inert face of matter and circumstances and giving them life.\(^6\)

Though Wallerstein acknowledges that the epic shares a common set of philosophical interests that inform other poetry of the period, she claims that Beaumont’s importance is limited to those readers who are sympathetic to the poet’s Catholicism, and that the epic is essentially a foil against which to view more important English poetry. Three decades later, A.D. Cousins claims that the major influences of the poem are Ignatian meditative techniques and the rhetorical “grand style” theorized by Jesuits in the sixteenth century. Wallerstein and Cousins have astutely shown the vivid meditative characteristics of Beaumont’s verse, its emphasis on personal communion with Christ. But they also insist on Beaumont’s religious and aesthetic marginality, and on a narrow understanding of canonical English poetry—a perspective I would like both to complement and to challenge.

In an insightful analysis of Beaumont’s seventeenth-century audiences, Roger Sell has argued for the Catholic aesthetic markings of the poem, claiming,

the discourse he was offering his Catholic contemporaries was in effect an extension of modes of prayer and prayerfulness with which they were familiar. Here was a sheer time-filling continuum of Catholic devotion, thought, and feeling, and above all, fellowship. Not exactly telling a story, not exactly making an argument, he was inviting his readers to share a whole universe of Catholic memory, learning, ideas, sensibility, experience. His main hope was that co-religionists would join him in his love and worship of a Jesus who was persecuted for the sake of all true believers. All subsequent trials and tribulations endured for the sake of religion merely mirrored that first and far more grievous agony, but would in a future time be superseded, in a new state of purest joy.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) Ibid., 433.

\(^7\) Sell, “Beaumont’s Three Audiences,” 209.
Sell has alerted readers to the social dimensions of the epic, showing that the poem’s affective Catholic devotion was intended to consolidate and console recusant Catholic readers, a point which is central to my own interpretation of the epic. Sell’s work—his is the sole critical edition of Beaumont’s shorter poetry, for example—is indispensable to Beaumont scholarship, and without it scholars would have little knowledge of this poet. Yet while Sell engages the social potential of the epic and shows Beaumont’s abilities to flatter and engage various readerships, he also reads the poem as an example of counter-Reformation aesthetics, especially in its focus on “Christ, his physical beauty, his blood, sweat and tears, his crown of thorns.” Sell’s reading further suggests that Beaumont’s goal is to transcend problems of political community in favor of spiritual consolation. Reading Beaumont’s funeral elegy for the Duke of Buckingham’s dead son, for instance, Sell hypothesizes that in the lyric Beaumont turns his sights toward the spiritual community of heaven:

[G]iven [Beaumont’s] own track record, if his mind really was turning in that direction, then the prospect of singing in a true dialogue of different voices, in a choir that was its own audience, single but all-embracing, would surely have been a very restful one. The art of persuasion, so arduous here on earth, in heaven would not be needed. Community, instead of having to be made, would at last just be: a communion perfected and eternal.

Sell’s argument suggests that though Beaumont’s writing is constantly aware of its rhetorical situation and its anticipated Catholic or Protestant audiences, Beaumont’s poetry aims at converting readers to his own “primary, Catholic readership,” which is in turn, at least implicitly, a spiritual community that transcends earthly politics.

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8 Ibid., 212.
9 Ibid., 221.
Overall, Sell’s interpretation helpfully points out Beaumont’s investment in spiritual transcendence and the importance of his own recusant Catholicism to the consolatory aims of much of his poetry. However, I would like to extend Sell’s analysis, as well as the earlier readings of Cousins and Wallerstein, by showing how *The Crowne of Thornes* engages trans-confessional Passion discourses and as such is not restricted to a Counter-Reformation or baroque aesthetics aimed only at transcending politics, and also that the epic is deeply engaged with contemporary problems of political and especially ecclesiological communities in seventeenth-century England. In the first part of this chapter, I will show that the epic draws on the discursive strategies this study has uncovered, and that Beaumont often uses these strategies common to other poets to suggest his concerns about the nature of the English ecclesial community. In the second part of the chapter, I will examine King James’s absolutist political theology as instantiated primarily in his *A Meditation Upon the 27.28.29 Verses of the XXVII Chapter of Saint Matthew*, showing how this last of James’s meditations links and then subordinates Christ’s Passion to secular kingship. I will then argue that *The Crowne of Thornes* both draws on James’s absolutist political rhetoric at the same time that it radically critiques it by privileging the Roman Church (and the Passion that authorizes it) as the supreme authority in all matters secular and sacred. While both James and Beaumont develop a “Passion politics” that structures church-state relations, Beaumont inverts James’s conclusions and does so through a firmly Catholic ecclesiology. Ultimately, my reading of *The Crowne of Thornes* reveals the problems inherent to demarcating “mainstream” and “marginal” devotional texts in early modern English writing, showing that even a recusant Catholic like Beaumont can appropriate popular
Passion discourses to engage and challenge ecclesial politics, to reflect on the meaning of religious community within mainstream English political thought.

**Beaumont and The Crowne of Thornes**

Despite the marginalization of Beaumont in English studies, his biography shows both his resistance to and engagement with contemporary politics and with the Stuart court. John Beaumont, older brother to the dramatist Francis Beaumont, was born in 1583 to a family with strong Catholic recusant ties: Beaumont’s uncle, Gervase Pierrepont, was imprisoned for aiding Edmund Campion in 1581, and Beaumont himself was indicted repeatedly for recusancy; when suspected of harboring a Catholic priest, Beaumont paid a potential informant one hundred pounds in protection money. When Beaumont’s oldest brother, Henry, died in 1605, he inherited Grace Dieu, the family’s estate in the midlands. Beaumont lived in London from the late 1590s until 1605, developing relationships with Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson. He was prosecuted for recusancy, and in 1607 two-thirds of his possessions were confiscated as penalty; he was commanded to remain within five miles of Grace Dieu so long as his recusancy continued. During this long house arrest, lasting from 1605-1620 (though it was not strictly enforced), Beaumont composed much of his poetry, including devotional lyrics, translations, and likely *Bosworth-Field*, a brief epic celebrating the Tudors’ defeat of Richard III.

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In 1620 he came into favor with George Villiers, later Duke of Buckingham. Beaumont remained at court from 1620 onward, and during this time wrote occasional poems as well as some of his devotional verse. He was awarded a Baronet in 1627, three months before his death. His collected poems were published as *Bosworth-Field* by his oldest son, John, in 1629. The volume includes most of Beaumont’s courtly and devotional lyrics, several translations from Virgil and Horace (among other Latin poets), and the brief epic of the volume’s title. Also included are dedicatory verses by figures like Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, and Thomas Hawkins. Hawkins, also a Catholic, praises *The Crowne of Thornes* explicitly in one of his dedicatory poems, a reference revealing the epic’s manuscript circulation. All the biographical facts argue that Beaumont was favored at the Stuart court even while he remained a professed Roman Catholic. Just as importantly, the publication of his collected poems in 1629, dedicated to King James and printed by Felix Kyngston (publisher of numerous devotional and liturgical books, as well as works of biblical commentary, including texts by Lancelot Andrewes), suggests that Beaumont’s son believed that his father’s poetry would appeal to a wide readership. Indeed, Beaumont’s biography and the publication of his shorter poetry illustrates his paradoxical position as a penalized Catholic and a poet privileged in the Stuart court—a position that bears crucially on the longer epic on the Passion that similarly engages contemporary Stuart politics from a marginalized religious position.

11 There is important evidence that the rank of “baronet” served as a convenient way of levying a tax on a Catholic’s recusancy, while giving social distinction in return. See Pauline Croft, “The Catholic Gentry, the Early of Salisbury and the Baronets of 1611,” in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560-1660*, ed. Peter Lake and Michael Questier (London: Boydell, 2000): 262-81.

12 It is pertinent to note that Beaumont composed at least one mask, *The Theatre of Apollo*, in which King James had a non-speaking part (the mask was not performed—James died before it was produced), and that Edmund Bolton proposed Beaumont as an “essential” of Bolton’s failed project to
The Crowne of Thornes was composed and revised in the 1620s, and its political content—its mention of Henrietta Maria as a godly queen (book 12), its mourning the death of James (who died in 1625 while Beaumont was revising), its general longing for a unified Christendom—tends to support this dating. The poem occupies over one half of MS 33,392 in the British Library; the second part of the manuscript contains various anti-Protestant lyrics, including “Epigrams against Luther” and “Motiva humilitatis, ex S. Christi martyre R.P. Rob. Southwell,” which argues for the poem’s association with militant Roman Catholicism and with the English Catholic community. The epic is written in two hands: the first is a neat italic which transcribes the poem through the first half of book 7; the second hand is a fairly legible secretary’s hand, and it begins in book 7 and completes the epic. While both Wallerstein and B.H. Newdigate suppose that one of the hands is holograph, Roger Sell has shown that neither hand is Beaumont’s, and hypothesizes that the poem is written by two different copyists, a theory that, if true, suggests the poem was more widely read than previously believed. It also intimates that the epic’s overtly Catholic politics, though it prevented the poem’s printing, did not necessarily impede its circulation in manuscript; the poem’s repeated addresses to King


14 According to the Catalogue of Additional MSS at the British Library, qtd. in B.H. Newdigate, 286.

15 See Sell’s “The Handwriting of Sir John Beaumont.”
James (and to Charles and Henrietta Maria) also suggest the poem might have been intended for reading by members of the court.

The long epic can be summarized as follows. Book 1 takes up the epic invocation, explains the poem’s goal of singing about Christ’s Passion, and meditates on Christ’s crown, his clothes, the reed placed in his hand, and the mocking of the crowd. Book 2 is a lengthy apostrophe to the Roman soldiers in which the poet tells them that Rome will be renewed by the apostles and become home to the future church. Book 3 is a vitriolic screed against the Jews. Book 4 ruminates on the numeral four and its symbolic properties, and book 5 reflects on the emblematic qualities of the crown of thorns. Book 6 is a contest between the sea and the earth to discover which deserves more praise: the sea for producing Christ’s reed, or the earth for producing the thorns. Book 7 describes theological disputes regarding free will and the problem of evil, and denounces heresies of the ancient church as well as of the Reformation. Book 8 explores Old Testament types of Christ, while book 9 presents a history of the church through the symbolic qualities of the twelve apostles. Book 10 emphasizes suffering and the importance of eternal over earthly reward. Book 11 celebrates English kings and monarchies in general, while book 12 sings of the Roman Church and its martyrs.

As this summary shows, the specific events of Christ’s Passion are not explicit focal points of the epic, a work which spans dissimilar topics and ranges across historical periods. For Beaumont, though, the Passion imbues the whole of reality, spiritual and political, with meaning; it is the central event undergirding the entire epic, whose title

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suggests its own relationship to Christ’s death: a crown of verses the center of which is Christ himself. Beaumont acknowledges this potential criticism of his diffuse epic in the beginning of book 1. Ruminating on Christ’s robe, reed, and crown, the speaker adduces the symbolic potentials of these objects. After cataloguing the loosely related symbols, the speaker recognizes that readers might find his free-ranging meditation aesthetically confused:

Me thinks I heare vaine worldlings much admire
Or carpe my Muse, which finds in this attire [i.e., Christ’s bloody robes]
Such different workes, and opposite effects
To God’s high essence: Sometimes she directs
Her flight, and sometimes on the ground she creepes,
And in our Saviours wounds her verses steepes.
But they would cease to wander, did they know
His glorious force who joynes high things to low
And joyes in every action to unite
His manhoods weakenesse with his God-heads might.
This guides my Clio, which to his renowne
Presents a varied robe and varied crowne. (f. 7r)

Skeptical readers, the poet acknowledges, will criticize the poem for finding such “different workes” and “opposite effects” in the Passion. But Beaumont quickly preempts such attacks, claiming that only “vaine worldlings” would make such critiques: for Christ’s existence as the Incarnate God “joynes high things to low / And joyes in every action to unite / His manhoods weakenesse with his God-heads might.” Because the hypostatic union implicitly justifies the yoking together of dissimilar objects, to criticize the poet’s seemingly arbitrary catalogue of symbols encoded in the robe, reed, and crown, is by extension to deny the Incarnation itself.

Besides providing an aggressive defense of the epic’s diffuse texture, the passage also demonstrates two crucial characteristics of the poem—the first formal, the second historical. First, although the Passion emerges in the poem only sporadically as an object
of narration or meditation (unlike the more focused Passion lyrics of Southwell, Alabaster, and Donne), Beaumont claims the entire poem is “steeped” in Christ’s wounds—that it is an embodiment of the Passion. The metaphor is apt, for Beaumont’s poetizing of the Passion is similar to the process of dyeing, wherein the dye itself becomes a part of the garment, a complement to it rather than an independent focal point. Hence, the Passion permeates *The Crowne of Thornes* without becoming its sole meditative object, being instead an event through which the epic views the world, a network of symbols yoking together the disparate objects of the cosmos. Second, in this passage Beaumont invokes Clio, the muse of history, explicitly connecting the epic to the historical world of politics and arguing for the overlap of devotion and political engagement in the poem. Edmund Spenser similarly invokes Clio in the Proem of Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* (“Helpe then, O holy virgin chiefe of nyne, / Thy weaker Novice to perform thy will, / Lay forth out of thine everlastinc scryne / The antique rolles, which there lye hidden still....” (*FQ*, Book 1, Proem, 2.1-4). *The Faerie Queene* is—among other things—an attempt to make English poetry speak directly to Elizabethan politics, to “fashion a gentleman” through literary example. By invoking Clio, Spenser’s poem enters the realm of political history; the epic is an attempt to mythologize England’s past in order to effect action in the present. Similarly, Beaumont’s invocation of Clio suggests that *The Crowne of Thornes* is not merely a spiritual meditation on Christ’s Passion, but also that the epic engages the English political landscape. *The Crowne of Thornes* will not only analogically “joyne high things to low” as it ranges through the emblematic meanings of Christ’s Passion, but will also speak to the world of history.
More pointedly than in any other work considered in this dissertation, the relationship between Passion discourses in the poem and the political dimensions of the epic genre suggests the flexible interplay between Passion devotion and questions of ecclesial and political community. Communion with the Passion can be appropriated, the epic argues, to explicit, detailed visions of the religious and political order. Because the political connotations of the epic are inextricably related to the poem’s appropriation of Passion discourse, and because the epic has been treated as marginal to mainstream English writing and contemporary politics, I will first show that the poem appropriates poetic strategies of vivid and intimate communion, as well as analogical habits of thought characterizing much of what is considered canonical (and especially Protestant) seventeenth-century poetry. Then I will discuss Beaumont’s treatment of James’s political theology, his engagement of Catholic ecclesiology, and his attempt to use the Passion to console the English Catholic community, the subjects of the last half of the chapter. Implied throughout this reading is a relationship between Passion discourses and poetic strategies on the one hand, and contemporary politics on the other: Passion devotion allows Beaumont to engage mainstream political theories and to apotheosize King James even as he enlists the Passion for a marginalized English Catholicism.  

**Passion Poetics in The Crowne of Thornes**

Though Beaumont does not sustain a narrative of the Passion throughout the epic, the Passion textures the poem. Throughout the epic, Beaumont develops lyrical units that

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17 Part of my thinking in this respect is informed by Susanne Woffard’s theories of epic figure, narrative, and ideology, in *The Choice of Achilles: The Ideology of Figure in the Epic* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992), 1-26.
produce communion between Christ, poet, and reading community through visual language—the same kind of language that characterizes so many contemporary Passion accounts. Book 1 frequently emphasizes visualized and embodied pain:

His mangled flesh, as scarlet, shines more cleare,
Foreshew’d in skinnes of rammes, which painted red
Were on the holy tabernacle spred.
His body fram’d of purest virgins blood
Is deeply coloured in his sanguine flood. (f. 9v)

A few pages later in the manuscript, Beaumont ruminates on Christ’s suffering:

Now like a prince, who by the peoples choyce
Is rais’d to regall state, whom every voice
Applauds, while he in kingly garments deckt,
Doth sitting in his throne the crowne expect.
Our Saviour sits, when straight his hatefull foes
With platted thornes his sacred brows enclose,
And that they may more deeply pierce his braine
With all their force this flowing wine-presse straine.

Hence flow the streames which never shall be dry,
Which still with Abels blood for vengeance cry:
And like the teares, which wronged widdowes spend
Fall on the cheeke, and thence to heaven ascend.
O bruised head, the horrour of whose paines
Like deaths cold finger gripes my stopped veines.
O swelling eyes, whose strain’d and bloody teares
Enforce my eye-balls to foresake their spheraes,
Because this starre is dim’d with bloody streames,
Who to the blind hath given lightsome beames. (f. 7v)

Such passages vividly detail Christ’s torture; they also, through the apostrophe of “O bruised head…” and “O swelling eyes…,” heighten the sense of spatial intimacy between Christ and poet in terms familiar to the poets of the previous chapters. Elsewhere, Beaumont uses the elements of torture to underline the self’s conformity to Christ. In a passage from book 7 Beaumont compares sin to brambles and weeds, which are analogous to Christ’s thorns:

Those hatefull plantings all in thee are bred,
Yet thou their foulnesse seest not, till his head
In whom all beauties joyne, theire gatherd summes
Those brambles weares, by which he now becomes
Like one whose shape, and hue in pains are drowned;
From head to foote no part is free, and sound;
Thinke then how great a plague to those they bring,
If they can thus corrupt soe cleare a spring. (f. 85v)

Beaumont incorporates a traditional, typological reading of Isaiah 53, the fourth speech of the suffering servant, in order to foreground both the ugliness of Christ’s “shape” and the substitutive and simultaneously unifying function of the crown of thorns: by equating the thorns with humanity’s sins, Beaumont shows the potential identification of Christ and soul and limns the former’s substitution for the latter’s sins. Finally, in another paradigmatic passage, Beaumont foregrounds the vividly conceived body and the need for Passion devotion to stir the affections through apostrophe:

Our Saviour, pearct in everie vital part,
Lets lively streames flow from his braine, and hart.
His heavenly wisdome, and deepe love appeare,
In sharpe impressions, of the thornes, and speare.
His opened side my dull affections moves;
His wounded head my wounded though reproves;
And with that prudence brings them home again,
Which like Minerva issues from his braine. (f. 121r-121v)

Presenting Christ as an emblem, Beaumont claims that Christ’s wounds are channels of wisdom and love which “reprove” the speaker’s “wounded thoughts” and “move” his “dull affections.” The streams of blood flowing from the “braine” and “hart” also suggest the potential influence of Bernardine piety. However, if Beaumont draws on Bernardine piety, he also tends to contain the extravagances of affective piety: he claims that Christ, Minerva-like, also produces “prudence” to bring thoughts and affections “home again.” This illustrates both Beaumont’s classical learning, as well as his aim to restrain affection within the bounds of reason. It also intimates a productive tension between the
expectations of epic form, which privileges heroic deeds and perseverance, and Passion
devotion, which often foregrounds affectivity, abjectness, and individual meditation.
Such a tension between ethical moderation and excessive emotion in turn suggests the
epic’s participation in broadly Christian traditions of spiritual affectivity recently
described by Gary Kuchar in his work on seventeenth-century English poetry.\textsuperscript{18}

Though critics have attributed the epic’s uneven texture as well as its
“meandering, circling, and swerving” quality to Beaumont’s appropriation of Jesuit
emblem traditions,\textsuperscript{19} the analogical, anagogical, and associative character of \textit{The Crowne
of Thornes}, its privileging of didactic lyrical analogies, is not uniquely Jesuit or medieval.
Much of the devotional poetry of the seventeenth century—a body of work that was
somewhat erroneously called “metaphysical” for two centuries after Johnson coined the
term in his \textit{Life of Cowley}—is characterized by pervasive analogy between seemingly
dissimilar objects. In \textit{The Crowne of Thornes}, Christ’s Passion is the fountainhead of
analogy for the natural world; it is the event and image that joins all objects in the
universe to all others. Such a representational strategy in turn reveals Beaumont’s
similarity to the canonical and generally Protestant poets of the period. John Donne’s
“The Crosse,” for example, provides an apt illustration of this analogical imagination in
the seventeenth-century religious lyric. Likely written in 1603 in response to a
controversy over the sign of the cross used in baptism, the poem playfully shows that

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} Gary Kuchar, \textit{Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern
England} (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2005), 1-35.
\end{flushright}
even if sacramental crosses were banned by the state church, the cross is visible throughout nature:

Who can blot out the Crosse, which th’instrument
Of God, dew’d on mee in the Sacrament?
Who can deny mee power, and liberty
To stretch mine armes, and mine owne Crosse to be?
Swimme, and at every stroake, thou art thy Crosse,
The Mast and yard make one, where seas do tosse.
Looke downe, thou spiest out Crosses in small things:
Looke up, thou seest birds rais’d on crossed wings;
All the Globes frame, and spheraes, is nothing else
But the Meridians crossing Parallels. (15-24)

Though an ecclesial discipline like the sign of the cross can be banned, Donne takes comfort in the crosses manifested in the natural and man-made worlds: even birds’ spread wings or a map embody the cross, reminding the beholder of the interconnectedness of the supernatural and natural orders. Though the poem warns against overindulging in “concupiscence of wit” and claims that “Materiall Crosses, then, good physicke bee, / But yet spirituall have chiefe dignity” (25-26), it nonetheless epitomizes Donne’s poetics of analogical wit—especially his use of the popular “book of creatures” tradition, which held that all of creation reveals Christian theological truth.

In addition to its widespread occurrence in the period’s devotional poetry, the analogical character of Beaumont’s epic is directly related to the emblem tradition. Like the analogical tradition more generally, the emblem tradition is also a component of seventeenth-century poetry across the confessional spectrum, as critics such as Barbara Lewalski, Peter Daly, and Alastair Fowler have shown.20 In this tradition, the highly

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symbolic, visual emblem is depicted with a short verse or inscription that reveals the image’s moral meanings. Fowler has argued that emblems were an important pedagogical literary form throughout the early modern period in Catholic and Protestant literary traditions. Emblems “could facilitate immediacy of uptake, while promoting complexity and compression,” and hence served as literary vehicles of moral instruction.  

21 Though emblems grew out of humanist rhetorical traditions intended to teach virtue, “the great majority of later [emblem] collections were religious, and either pursued divine love, or attended to the hidden meanings or “signatures” of the natural world.” 22 In an important study of emblems in English and German literature, Peter Daly has shown that seventeenth-century poets used the emblem as a didactic device revealing the connections between divinity, virtue, and the natural world, an allegorical and analogical habit of thought profoundly influential in both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.  

23 Though Richard Dimler has shown the Jesuit influences of emblem literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, emblematic poetry is not confessionally marked. 24 As is intimated in Donne’s “The Crosse,” limned in many of George Herbert’s poems (for instance, “The Altar” and “Easter Wings”), and demonstrated clearly in the emblem books of the fervently Protestant Francis Quarles, Protestant writers drew on the emblem tradition of analogy and instruction, using a combination of visual emblem and


21 Fowler, 18.

22 Ibid., 17.

23 Daly, 102.

poetry to inculcate moral and theological truths. Quarles’s *Emblemes*, printed 13 times between 1635 and 1696,\(^{25}\) presents a series of visual images, often esoteric and highly allegorical, each of which is followed by a lyric that elaborates the emblem’s meaning. Indeed, Quarles views his literary task as analogous to Christ’s parabolic teaching: “An Embleme,” he writes, “is but a silent Parable. Let not the tender eye checke, to see the allusion to our blessed Saviour figured, in these types. In holy Scripture, He is sometimes called a Sower; sometimes, a Fisher; sometimes, a Physitian; And why not presented so, as to the ear?\(^{26}\) Emblematic poetry functions like scriptural parables in which moral teachings are shrouded in allegory; the emblematist, on this view, imitates Christ-as-teacher, using poetry and visual art to preach virtue. Because of the ekphrastic potential of poetry, emblem poems do not need to be attached to a visual illustration as Quarles links them.\(^{27}\) Rather, both Catholic and Protestant writers often produce poems governed by an emblem without an accompanying picture, using *ekphrasis* to create “a speaking picture,” as the Catholic John Davies claims to do in his Passion poem, *The Holy Roode* (1609).\(^{28}\) The analogical nature of emblem poetry allows a poet to develop a long conceit comparing vastly dissimilar objects. It can also allow a poet to shift attention rapidly through a series of analogues, a poetic strategy visible in many so-called “metaphysical” lyrics.

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\(^{25}\) Another example of the popularity of the emblematic tradition is the Protestant clergyman Christopher Harvey’s *Schola cordis*, a collection of 47 emblems on the journey of the soul to God, written in the tradition of Francis Quarles’s *Emblemes*, and published five times between 1647 and 1674.

\(^{26}\) Francis Quarles, *Emblemes* (London, 1635), A3r.

\(^{27}\) Daly, 106, 132.

Though Beaumont’s speaker lacks Donne’s irony or Herbert’s ingenuity, The Crowne of Thorne uses this mainstream analogical and emblematic tradition to explore Christ’s Passion in epic form, allowing the poet to string together long sequences of analogies to make didactic and often confessionally grounded claims. Significantly, the didacticism often hints at the political and ecclesial dimensions of the poem that become most explicit in the work’s final two books. For instance, the opening of book 4 examines the cross as an embodiment of the number “4,” and then explores the number’s anagogical and theological resonances:

The height of knowledge crownes his servants heads,
Where sacred truth her splendour largely spreads.
Where God in his triumphant chariot rides,
And plac’d above mens thoughts their motion guides:
On them the light of his cleare face is sign’d.
They in the crosses figure safely find,
When on their foreheads these foure corners frame
Th’ineffable divine, four-lettered name.
This is the marke of Christs peculiar flocke,
As circumcision signe’d out Israels stocke.
This sacred booke to meditation brings
That length, breadth, height and depth of heavenly things.
With long perseverance spacious love is mixt,
High skill and deep humility is fixt.
Foure nimble wings, faith, knowledge, hope and feare
To God, t’ourselves, to heaven, to hell can beare.
See on the Crosse his kingly title borne;
Above his Crowne this coronet is worne.
Four sacred words his Royall stile containes,
Which shew his saving, flowry, glorious raigne.
Who his foure-parted robe, his glory sends
To earth, foure parts and foure imagined ends.
And through the world his crowned altar brings,
Borne on his gospels, those foure golden wings.
Foure wheeles, whose motion we shall ever feele,
While restlesse time shall turne his running wheele.
He stretches his square crosse and circled wreath
To east and west, both poles, above, beneath.
So was the Arke compos’d of timber square,
In which all sorts of creatures harboured are[.]. (f. 36r-36v)
The cross is a “sacred booke” that illuminates the “length, height and deapth of heavenly things.” Standing for the number “4,” it becomes a proliferating sign. Four is the number of theological virtues (faith, love, and hope) plus “fear”; it is the number of letters written above Christ’s head (*Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*) in traditional crucifixion iconography; it is the number of the earth’s imagined corners and of the canonical gospels. Finally, the four-beamed cross not only symbolizes the Tetragrammaton, but also the sign of the cross that marks the foreheads of Christ’s “peculiar flock” of Christians. This last point suggests that Beaumont’s analogical imagination gestures toward ecclesial concerns: tellingly, the cross signs a “peculiar” flock, a word that can mean “distinct” but also indicate, in the Church of England’s administrative language, the exemption of a person or group from diocesan authority. Such a potential meaning intimates Beaumont’s conception of the Christian and particularly Catholic “flock” as a group distinct from others, and perhaps even “exempt” from the authority of the English Protestant community. Overall, the poem follows the basic pattern of this passage: an object like the cross is abstracted or metonymized into a figure such as a number or shape or color; that abstracted figure’s spiritual or moral meaning is analyzed; and then the poet applies that meaning to a list of loosely related ideas, showing the interconnectedness of the natural world of politics, history, and the supernatural realm of theology. And as in the above passage, often an analogical cluster will underline the importance of Christ’s “peculiar flock,” showing that beneath Beaumont’s analogical habits of mind lies a

29 Cf. the *OED*, definition 4, which cites a 1525 letter from Archbishop Warham to Cardinal Wolsey as the first instance of “peculiar” in this sense.
deeper concern with the nature of the ecclesial community, and particularly the Catholic ecclesial community of which he is a part.

Beaumont’s epic uses another representational discourse that allows him to make the Passion address questions of ecclesial community: a Christian understanding of liturgical and fluid temporality that blends past and future into the eternal present. Just as *The Crowne of Thornes* combines epic form with lyrical reflection, liturgical time can combine narrative and lyric in a way commensurate with the recent theories of Susan Stewart and Heather Dubrow, who have argued that lyric and narrative are not inimical to one another, but are instead interdependent.\(^{30}\) In a similar way, liturgical worship has the ability to meld the narratives of salvation history—and especially the Passion and death of Christ—with a lyrical re-presentation of those events in the present, just as epic form permits a certain degree of temporal shifting between past, present, and future. Liturgical temporality tends to emphasize cyclicality rather than linearity: for example, the liturgical calendar repeats itself and presents the same events of Christ’s life and the lives of the saints to the faithful, making such events, in the words of Donne’s equestrian speaker on Good Friday, “present unto [the] memory” of the community. Yet liturgical cyclicality is also intended to reveal the teleological fulfillment of all times in the divine, to show that past, present, and future all ultimately partake of the same eschatological end, the ever-present “now-ness” of eternity.

Hence, liturgical cyclicality imbues the linear narratives of sacred history with timelessness, and does so in part through the rhythmic, lyrical re-presentation of past

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events in the present. Such a concept of liturgical time, an understanding of the ever-present “now-ness” of salvation history, is rooted in the Old and New Testaments, as John Spencer Hill has discussed in a study of Renaissance conceptions of time:

In contrast, then, to the view of Greek philosophy, where time is *chronos*, a quantitative and pseudo-spatial correlate of physical motion that, in its action, is cyclical, stripped of a meaningful future, and essentially destructive (*tempus edax*), time in the Old and New Testaments is *kairos*—an existential reality, qualitative and teleological, experienced as occasion or event and always pointing beyond itself, always gather up the significance of past and present into the generative *fiat* of a providential whole to be fully realized only when the succession of past, present, and future are subsumed into the simultaneity of an eternal now.\(^\text{31}\)

A liturgical vision of temporality is the product of the *ecclesia*, the church that regulates Christian ritual time and imbues sacred historical narratives with eternal presence—the argument Donne makes in his lyric “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion Falling on the Same Day.” The consequences of this relationship between liturgy and temporality is that the eternal and fluid “now-ness” of liturgical time that characterizes much of Beaumont’s epic is implicitly a function of the church, the “peculiar” ecclesial flock whose communal identity is paramount to Beaumont’s understanding of English history. Additionally, liturgical temporality as structured by the church has much in common with epic time: for although epic traditionally narrates a sequence of events vital to a community’s history, epic also freely ranges across its own narrated timeline, often beginning in the midst of its narrated action, backtracking through lengthy, embedded narratives, and projecting itself into the future. In short, liturgical temporality and epic

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time are not only potentially complementary; they are also both deeply imbricated in the history of the communities that produce and live by them.

Like the emblem tradition, the discourse of liturgical temporality characterizes much of the canonical poetry of the seventeenth century, as scholars such as A.B. Chambers and Timothy Rosendale have shown. Thus, though Beaumont aligns epic and liturgical time in *The Crowne of Thornes* with a particularly Catholic ecclesiology, it would be a mistake to attribute the poem’s temporal characteristics as evidence of a marginal, recusant Catholic aesthetics, even though Beaumont turns this strategy to partisan ends. Donne’s “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion,” examined in the previous chapter, provides an illustration of the importance of liturgical temporality to mainstream devotional discourse. In that poem, Donne meditates on the conception and death of Christ in the present tense, suggesting the immediate temporal presence of both liturgical events: *today* is the day when both mysteries happen. Beaumont celebrates another liturgical confluence in a poem clearly influenced by Donne’s earlier lyric, “Upon the two great Feasts of the Annunciation and Resurrection falling on the same day, March 25, 1627,” which begins:

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Thrice happy day, which sweetly do’st combine
Two Hemispheres in th’Equinoctiall line:
The one debasing God to earthly paine,
The other raising man to endless raigne.
Christ’s humble steps declining to the wombe,
Touch heav’nly scales erected on his Tombe:
We first with Gabriel must this Prince convey
Into his chamber on the marriage day,
Then with the other Angels cloth’d in white,
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We will adore him in this conqu’ring Night;
The Sonne of God assuming humane breath,
Becomes a subject to his vassall Death,
That Graves and Hell laid open by his strife,
May give us passage to a better life. (1-14)\(^{33}\)

Echoing Donne’s diction and poetic structure, Beaumont celebrates the paradoxes of the liturgically coalescing feasts. Donne’s Christ is emblematized as a circle; here Beaumont’s temporal confluence is an occasion for exploring the soteriological paradoxes symbolized in upward-downward movement, directions which express both God’s self-emptying and humanity’s resurrection with Christ, and which characterize Southwell’s “Sinnes heavy loade.” Like Donne’s poem, Beaumont’s lyric presents the historical events commemorated liturgically in the present tense, as if his reader can partake of the events personally. Beaumont’s liturgical temporality in his epic, then, has ample precedent in Donne and in his own shorter poems, as well as in the liturgically influenced poetry of the seventeenth century, from Donne’s “Upon the Annunciation and the Passion” to Milton’s “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity,” from Herbert’s *The Temple* to Crashaw’s translations of Latin hymns.

Liturgical temporality in *The Crowne of Thornes* reveals Beaumont’s participation in trans-confessional poetic traditions. It is also central to Beaumont’s idealizing of a particularly Catholic English ecclesial history. Book 1 opens with a brief allusion to Christ’s wounded head—“I sing of thornes transformed in bloody springs” (line 1)—and then ruminates on Jewish ritual time.

The Jewes observed their fittest time to pray,
The third, the sixth, the ninth houre of the day.
The third surpast the rest in this respect,

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\(^{33}\) Cited from *The Shorter Poems of Sir John Beaumont*.  

269
That fervent prayers with abstinence were deckt:
For they each morning strictly used to fast,
And till mid-day no meate or drinke would tast.
A time most apt to entertaine this guest
The Holy Ghost, whose gracious blessings rest
On sober minds, which early thoughts renew
And bring their fruits moist with the morning dew.
They happy are, who thus beginne the dayes
And with the sunne their warm’d devotion raise.
O blest third hour, most eminent of all
Those houres, which Christians to their duty call;
Since this third Person hath declared to thee,
The heights and truth, that God is one and three
T’accomplish natures law, and to deface
The rites of [               ] by the law of grace. (f. 1v-2r)

The epic begins In medias res, in the early morning hours of Good Friday, and in
foregrounding the canonical hours of prayer (the poem begins at terce), Beaumont links
Jewish ritual time with Catholic liturgical practice: while the Book of Common Prayer
reduced the canonical hours of prayer to matins and evensong, Catholics retained the
eight medieval hours, commemorated (among other times) at the “third, the sixth, the
ninth houre[s] of the day.” This suggests that the poem’s temporal discourse is bound up
in the idealization of a particularly Catholic English ecclesial history and communal
practice. Throughout the epic, Beaumont expands and contracts liturgical-temporal
frames of reference, from Good Friday to an entire lifetime, from the liturgical hours of a
single day to the twelve months of the year and to the epicycles of ecclesiastical history,
all in order to idealize that history and suggest its Catholic character. For example, book
9 collapses the ages of ecclesiastical history into the months of the year: each of the 12
apostles represents a particular month, beginning with St. Andrew in March, the month
that begins the English liturgical and fiscal year. Progressing through the calendar, the
poet takes each month, identifies that month with an Apostle and a birthstone (the latter
of which is given didactic, symbolic properties), and ruminates on the significance of that
month’s climate and season to the course of ecclesiastical history.\textsuperscript{34} By invoking the Apostles as the symbolic units of history, and opening the epic with a confessionally marked understanding of liturgy, Beaumont suggests that England’s ecclesial history is necessarily Catholic.

Beaumont’s idealized history reaches its zenith in the summer months, in a passage which signals the poet’s participation in contemporary Stuart politics in the midst of Catholicizing English history. After reflecting on May and June, the poet celebrates the golden plenty of July and August:

\begin{verse}
There in the zenith was describ’d the sunne,
Which at the sixth howre to the eight had runne;
And while his beams directly downe he throwes,
The poynte of noone the [cestned] shadow showes
Upon a circled dials middle line[.]
And now Apollo, in the virgine signe,
Makes glad the summer with his goulden rayes,
And brings againe Astreas plentious dayes.
A new, a better aige to be appears,
For in her head the wheaten eare shee beares;
Soe August, when the corne to ripeness swells,
The peacefull raigne of our Augustus tells. (f. 112r)
\end{verse}

Beaumont alludes to King James, the “Augustus” who promises to bring justice (“Astrea”) and a new Golden Age to England—a popular image sponsored by the Stuart monarch.\textsuperscript{35} Significantly, Spenser also compares Elizabeth to Astrea and the coming of

\textsuperscript{34} Beaumont’s fascination with stones/minerals and their symbolic properties in Book 9 suggests his familiarity with early modern geology, and perhaps with the work of Albertus Magnus, whose \textit{Book of Minerals} was included in \textit{The boke of secrets}, a collection of his works on herbs, stones, and animals. This volume went through nine English editions between 1560 and 1681.

\textsuperscript{35} The image of James as a peacemaker is not purely propagandistic, as W. B. Patterson has persuasively argued. James advocated a broad European consensus among national churches, and had personally hoped for a reunified Christendom with nation-states participating in a trans-confessional council. For James’s role in this plan and for the turbulent politics of the 1620s, when this ideal was fading further and further away, see W.B. Patterson, \textit{King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom} (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997).
the Golden Age in book 5 of *The Faerie Queene*, where he claims that Artegaill “in justice was upbrought / Even from the cradle of his infancie / …By faire *Astraea*, with great industrie” (V.i.5.1-2, 4). At this moment in *The Crowne of Thornes*, then, Beaumont’s idealized ecclesial history coalesces with contemporary political realities in a remarkable paean to the English king: Beaumont speaks a panegyric one would expect from an establishment courtier poet like Spenser, and does so in the context of a celebration of the Catholic past. However, the idealized Golden Age with King James at its center is fraught with tension. As Beaumont unfolds idealized ecclesial history, the religious conflicts of his historical moment, a period when his fellow Catholics were still penalized and when Europe was in the throes of the Thirty Years War, produce a lengthening shadow beneath the noonday sun. After claiming that November is the month celebrating the church’s “never broken line of pastors” (manifesting an explicitly Catholic ecclesiology), the speaker describes the fragility of the faith: “faith, like her type the mustard seede, is round; / One disproportion will the whole confound” (f. 112v).

Church history is fraught with heresy and “sects” that confound the faith. For instance, the church is persecuted under Julian the Apostate: “The Galileans shall not long remaine, / But to theire small begining turne againe. / How base are our new sects; whose fickle ground / Agrees with this fond wiszards lying sound” (f. 113r). Though the church is governed by apostolic succession, book 9 digresses between November and December into a list of ancient heresies, including Marcionism and Gnosticism, as well as the movements of Cerdo, Aximanius, and Manechaeus. This church history gone wrong culminates in the Schism of 1054; then the book shifts to December and January, the barren months that signify malaise and barrenness in the church—an indirect reference to
contemporary Europe and England: “[the sun] drawes my flight into neglected feelds, / Unpleasant fruite a brierie thicket yeelds. Yet I perceiv’d, though they were lay’d soe waist, / How beautious they had beene in ages past” (f. 115v). If Beaumont celebrates James as Augustus, he also recognizes that ecclesial history is fraught with dissent and that the present is far from ideal or “beautious.”

Thus, Beaumont has adapted a liturgical temporality grounded in the hours of Good Friday and has confessionally marked it as Catholic in order to idealize and to critique ecclesial history and contemporary politics. While characterizing King James as an “Augustus” ushering in a *pax Britannicae*, the epic also recognizes and engages the tenuousness and messiness of ecclesial history and of the fraught present in post-Reformation England. As the next section will show, Beaumont not only acknowledges the ways in which English politics conflict with his idealized ecclesiastical history, but also challenges contemporary Stuart politics by advocating an explicitly Catholic ecclesiology and by consolidating the English Catholic community through the Passion devotion of his epic.

*The Crowne of Thornes* and Passion Politics

Like Beaumont himself, *The Crowne of Thornes* straddles the discursive and confessional boundaries between the center of contemporary Stuart politics and the margins of recusant Catholicism. On the one hand, the epic advocates a picture of James as Augustus Caesar, with Beaumont as Virgil, the poet of the Empire, a literary trope Donna B. Hamilton has argued characterizes a major strain of English Renaissance
literary imitation.  

James himself explicitly invokes the Virgilian-Augustan context at the conclusion of *Basilicon Doron*, where he quotes book 6 of *The Aeneid*, a passage in which Anchises tells Aeneas:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Tu, regere imperio populos, Romane, memento} \\
&(\text{Hae tibi erunt artes}) \text{ pacique imponere morem,} \\
&\text{`Parcere suiectis, \& debellare superbos.} \\
&\text{[Roman, remember by your strength to rule} \\
&\text{Earth’s peoples—for your arts are to be these:} \\
&\text{To pacify, to impose the rule of law,} \\
&\text{To spare the conquered, battle down the proud.]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Beaumont’s appropriation of James’s Augustan mythos argues that even a recusant Catholic could use contemporary political rhetoric to celebrate the king. We see this Virgilian allusiveness in the explicit reference to James as Augustus in book 9, and also in the poem’s epic sweep of history culminating in the promise of ecclesial renewal under James (and Charles).  


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38 Beaumont undertook revision of the epic throughout the mid-1620s, but likely did not finish; in book 11, immediately following a paean to James, Beaumont adds the following lines that explicitly catalogue James’s death in 1625 and Charles’s accession:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{But while this booke lyes hidden from the day,} \\
&\text{Imperious time steales minuts fast away;} \\
&\text{And death, who never yields to kings comands,} \\
&\text{Uncrows theire heads, takes scepters from theire hands;} \\
&\text{[Death] hath tryd the sharpest of his speares} \\
&\text{To kill my lord, the subject of my teares;} \\
&\text{And staid the motion of his active braine,} \\
&\text{The high tribunall of the muses raigne.} \\
&\text{Shall then this infant, strangeld in the womb;} \\
&\text{Be dead, unborne, and buried in his tomb?} \\
&\text{Noe[,] theire remaines beyond his funerall flame} \\
&\text{New life infus’d from his surviveing fame.} \\
&\text{Thus setts the sunne, yet to prevent the night,} \\
&\text{Our secound Phebus Charles arising bright,}
\end{align*}
\]
his policies in books 11 and 12, the most stridently political books of the entire epic. As Thomas Cogswell has shown, the “Spanish match” of the early 1620s marked a period of heightened anxiety in print and spoken word between Calvinist and anti-Calvinist factions in Stuart England.\(^{39}\) Beaumont’s praise of James suggests that the epic is influenced by the potential for renewed ecumenism with Catholicism both at home and abroad, goals which, as W.B. Patterson argues, characterized James’s policies throughout this period.\(^{40}\)

However, *The Crowne of Thornes* uses Passion discourse to argue against Stuart absolutism, a political theology that subordinated all legislative, executive, and ecclesiastical power to the sovereign, who was himself God’s sacralized viceroy. While James’s political writings unswervingly support this theologized politics and subordinate all church authority to the king, Beaumont’s epic argues that the state is unambiguously subordinate to the Roman Church, and ultimately to Christ’s Passion as a model of suffering, service, and martyrdom. This section will demonstrate that at the same time that he plays Virgil to James’s Augustus, Beaumont expresses a counter-politics to Jacobean political theology that shares much in common with the widely known Jesuit political theories of Robert Bellarmine and Francisco Suarez.

King James’s absolutist politics characterized his writings before and after he was anointed James I in 1603. In James’s theory, shaped by the controversies surrounding the

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Earth’s shadow to th’Antipodes confines,  
And sparkles radiant lustre to my lines. (f.135r)


\(^{40}\) Patterson, *King James VI and I*, 293-364.
supposed deposing power of the papacy, kings derived their political power directly from God and were answerable only to God, not to the people or to the church. Because the king only received his “title” from the people and not his sovereignty, the people retained no power to depose even a tyrannical king. In *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (first published 1598, but reprinted in England four times in 1603), James claims that “Monarchie is the trew paterne of Divinitie,” and that “Kings are called Gods by the propheticall King David, because they sit upon GOD his Throne in the earth, and have the count of their administration to give unto him.” Though James acknowledges that kings often uphold the laws of their predecessors and of the land, “the King is above the law, as both the author and giver of strength thereto,” and he reminds his readers that the power of the law “flowes alwaies from him selfe,” and not from the people. The people may resist a tyrant only by prayer and supplication:

> [T]he duetie, and alleageance of the people to their lawfull king, their obedience, I say, ought to be to him, as to Gods Lieutenant in earth, obeying his commands in all things, except directly against God, as the commands of Gods Minister, acknowledging him a Judge set by GOD over them, having power to judge them, but to be judged onely by GOD, whom to onely hee must give count of his judgement; fearing him as their Judge, loving him as their father; praying for him as their protectour; for his continuance, if he be good; for his amendement, if he be wicked; following and obeying his lawfull commands, eschewing and flying his fury in his unlawfull, without resistance, but by sobbes and teares to God[.]"  

James permits only passive resistance to a tyrant, and argues that a subject may only resist a law that contradicts God’s law, not a king; he implicitly denies that any ecclesial directive from either Protestant council or Roman pope can abrogate the people’s


42 James VI and I, *Political Writings*, 64, 75, 72.
obedience to the king. In this view, the (sacralized) state is the ultimate unit of governance; all other powers, including the church, fall under the king’s sphere of power and in fact derive from it.

The Oath of Allegiance controversy in the wake of the 1605 Gunpowder plot only bolstered James’s assertion of royal power over the church. In this controversy, Bellarmine and Suarez argued against James and his bishops and theologians that the (Roman) church derived its power directly from God, through Christ’s commission to the twelve apostles, and, as such, had absolute supremacy in all spiritual matters. The state, on the other hand, derived its power indirectly from God, through the people. This was so because civil government developed from the natural law (as propounded by Aristotle and elaborated by medieval thinkers); government was produced through nature by God as the way to secure humanity’s temporal well-being. Because spiritual matters were supernatural (literally above the natural law), it follows that the church can influence civil laws to secure the spiritual good of Christians when civil law threatens that good. Hence, though the church had nominally only spiritual jurisdiction, it could in effect manipulate secular politics and urge disobedience to secular laws it determined were inimical to Christians’ spiritual state. This reasoning was the standard defense of Roman political moves such as the publication of Regnans in Excelsis (1570) and the later prohibition of Catholics from taking the Oath of Allegiance. Roman ecclesial supremacy is advocated in varying degrees in Bellarmine’s Apologia Roberti S.R.E. Cardinalis Bellarmini pro responsione sua ad librum Jacobi Magnae Britanniae Regis (1610) and Francisco Suarez’s Defensio fidei Catholicae (1613), both of which responded to James’s defense
of the Oath of Allegiance, *Triplici nodo* (1608), which argued that Catholics could and should deny that the pope retained the power to depose a lawful king.  

James forcefully denies the Jesuit position in his writings, in which he consistently subordinates the church and upstart radicals to royal power. In *Basilicon Doron* James denies church supremacy: “Beware therefore in this case with two extremities: the one, to beleve with the Papists, the Churches authority, better then your owne knowledge; the other, to leane with the Anabaptists, to your owne conceits and dreamed revelations.”  

James was no friend either of papists or Puritans because of their rejection of the establishment church and concomitant threat to the absolute sovereignty of the king. As Lori Anne Ferrell has argued, in order to combat the perceived threats of both Puritans and papists, the Jacobean court used polemical treatises and sermons to argue that the church and all clergy and ordinances are subsumed into the sovereign’s paternal care, a recurring point summarized in James’s advice to Prince Henry:

> And to end my advice anent the Church estate, cherish no man more then a good Pastor, hate no man more then a proude Puritane; thinking it one of your fairest styles, to be called a loving nourishing father to the Church, seeing all the Churches within your dominions planted with good Pastors, the Schooles (the seminarie of the Church) maintained, the doctrine and discipline preserved in puritie, according to Gods word...as the flourishing of your Church in pietie, peace, and learning, may be one of the chiefe points of your earthly glory[.]

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43 For a summary of natural law principles and early modern theories of consent, see Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 55-104.


46 Ibid., 27.
James aggressively supports royal supremacy, claiming that the king has power over all ecclesial matters, from clerical appointments to the promulgation of doctrine. Despite the theoretical nuances of the supremacy—for instance, the tradition that the church has a degree of autonomy in spiritual matters without explicit approval from the throne—James claims the church and its government belong to the king as absolutely as children belong to their father: it is “your Church” he tells Henry, not just the church, language which underlines the fundamentally Erastian vision upon which English absolutism in the period depends. James’s writings virtually deify the monarch, imbuing the sovereign with power traditionally assigned the ecclesia and the papacy. As Deborah Shuger has shown in her compelling work on Stuart political theology, for James “[t]he events of the Jacobean court belong[ed] to sacred history—not to the history of European power politics.”

James essentially appropriates medieval canon law regarding papal power to his own theories of kingship, translating the arcana ecclesiae into the arcana imperii of the sovereign, turning any questioning of the king’s authority into sacrilege. James makes the logical consequences of such a politics manifest in his speech to Parliament in March of 1610: “Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth: For if you will consider the Attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a King.”


49 James VI and I, Political Writings, 181.
in contemporary political imagery. Instead, God is an image or analogy of the king, a
telling reversal of traditional political theology with consequences for James’s conception
of the Passion.

James’s *A Meditation upon the 27.28.29 Verses of the XXVII. Chapter of Saint
Matthew* develops his politics through a reading of Christ’s Passion. For James, the
mocked Christ—surprisingly, given contemporary Passion accounts’ emphasis on
Christ’s kenotic love—becomes a model of aggressive, temporal sovereignty. In the
meditation, James claims that Christ’s mocking by the Roman soldiers is a “Patern for a
kings inaguration.” He begins by distinguishing Christ’s Passion as a model for all
Christians from his Passion as a model for kingship: while the “person” of Christ belongs
to all Christians as a model, the “Passion” of Christ is a model specifically for kingship.50
James then analyzes the three verses from Matthew’s gospel. Christ was mocked in the
“common hall,” the place where the Roman Emperors were crowned, showing that the
king receives his crown from the people, although only ceremonially (since kings derive
power directly from God). Christ died when Rome became a monarchy under Augustus,
a coincidence James believes justifies absolutism.51 Christ’s crown of thorns represents
the weight of kingly responsibility to the people, the thorns revealing how the king is
always surrounded by woe and “pricking cares,” since the king “weares not that croune
for himselfe, but for others”—phrases that resonate with many passages regarding thorny,
earthly cares in *The Crowne of Thornes*.52 Christ is dressed in a purple robe, signifying

50 Ibid, 233.
51 Ibid., 235, 234.
52 Ibid., 238-39.
the king’s power to judge his people, since “robes or long gownes are fittest to sit withall, and sitting is the fittest posture for expressing of gravitie in judgment.” The reed represents the “Kingly scepter, which is the pastorall rod of a King; and the straightnesse of the reed, his righteousness in the administration of justice.”

Similarly, the mocking veneration the Roman soldiers give to Christ and the sign Pilate places above his head are examples of how the Christian king is venerated among his people, so that the Passion is a pattern of secular power. Just as James inverts the analogy between God and king in his 1610 speech to Parliament, in his Meditation he deemphasizes Christ’s sacrificial suffering and makes him a model of earthly power.

Thus, in politicizing the Passion James has inverted traditional interpretations of the event: whereas imitating Christ is supposed to lead to repentance, sacrifice, and redemption, for James Christ’s Passion justifies absolute secular power. In anticipating the charge of a blasphemous reversal of Christ’s spiritual triumph through temporal suffering, James claims that Christ’s majesty was always evident in his life, from the moment he was proclaimed Son of God at the Annunciation, to the veneration paid him at the Epiphany, from his baptism in the Jordan to his unchallenged commands to the apostles. Indeed, James concludes his meditation by adducing evidence from the gospels of Christ’s earthly glory, power, and sovereignty. In ignoring Christ’s humiliation and suffering, topics so central to contemporary discourses of intimate and vivid communion with Christ, James has produced a Passion politics that supports absolutist principles and theologizes royalty: for James, the Passion illustrates his temporal power, not his spiritual

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53 Ibid., 237, 240.
54 Ibid., 245-49.
dominion and sacrificial, kenotic love. As in his Parliamentary speech and *Basilicon Doron*, as well as in his *Trew Law*, James privileges the king over the church; but more importantly, James’s political rhetoric also tends to subordinate God and Christ as examples of temporal power, so that rhetorically speaking, divinity serves political ends.

*The Crowne of Thores* reveals Beaumont had James and his theories, and perhaps even James’s *Meditation* itself, in mind when composing his celebration of English ecclesiastical history in books 11 and 12. *A Meditation*, after all, was published the year that Beaumont likely began writing his epic (1620), and the poet’s engagement of politics through the Passion, combined with lines very similar to James’s language of “pricking cares,” suggests that the long poem responds specifically to Jacobean political theory both supportively and critically. On the one hand, Beaumont could appropriate without guile some of James’s absolutist and idealizing political rhetoric, as he does when he writes:

> And cheefly thou, greate James, before whose feete  
> My life, and all my labours prostrate meete;  
> Thou, borne for peace two realmes to one couldst draw,  
> While nature joyes that thou confirmst her law.  
> Whose voyce to union all thy brittans calls,  
> And parts them from the world with waterie walls;  
> Thy kingdomes which with various circles bend,  
> To thee theire lines as to theire circles tend.  
> Thou scotland knits to England, that noe foes  
> Daire touch her thistle, or our thornie rose.  
> To greater workes prepaire thy glorious hand,  
> Of which these pleges and invitments stand.  
> Pull up these rootes of schisme, let none divide  
> The maried realmes, from Christs unspoted bride.  
> Behould the name of Christ in peeces torne,  
> With errours, which daire chalenge to be borne  
> From ventrous sailing into scepters flood  
> And are not quencht, but fedd with christian bloud.  
> To thee theire peacfull eyes all good men raise,  
> And pray thee to restore those goulden dayes
When faith, and practice of religious ground
Was generall, and not fastned to the bounds
Of severall staites; then charitie shall heale
Our mutual rainge, and wee, possest with zeale,
Shall whet our swords against the faithlesse Turkes,
And fill all Asia with our glorious workes. (f. 134v)

The Thirty Years War began in 1618 and had marked a serious blow to James’s hopes for
a unified Christian Europe based on the conciliar model (though James continued to
jockey for political position, as the Spanish marriage negotiations attest). Perhaps
Beaumont alludes to this cataclysmic event when he refers to the “name of Christ in
peeces torne.” In any case, Beaumont celebrates James as a unifier, one to whom “all
good men raise” their eyes, one who can restore the Golden Age (or “dayes”) of justice to
the Christian world. In longing for a unified Christianity against the “faithlesse Turkes,”
Beaumont also echoes one of the concerns of many European principalities, the threat of
the Ottoman Empire, which could temporarily unite Catholics and Protestants against a
common enemy. Finally, the poet advocates a Christianity that transcends national
boundaries, a hope that, although formulated in different terms than James’s,
approximates the basic conciliar politics James advocated. Indeed, Beaumont can be
strikingly ecumenical and laudatory, arguing for a “charitie” that allows the faith to
transcend nations, and holding up James as a “paterne” of an ideal king, the peacemaking
head of the English political community.

On the other hand, Beaumont’s engagement of Jacobean rhetoric is far from
unqualified. Books 11 and 12 unapologetically invert James’s political theology by

55 For early modern English attitudes and representations of Islam, see Daniel Vitkus, Turning
broader analysis of Christian-Muslim relations in the period, see Hugh Goddard, A History of Christian-
reasserting a Jesuit vision of church-state relations in which the state is subordinated to the divinely sanctioned spiritual authority of the church. In the opening of book 11, the section of the poem most directly concerned with English royalty, the poet writes:

At anchient feasts were flowerie chaplets used,  
Where on delicious oyntments were infusd.  
Behould, my soule, how thee thy lord invites,  
To banquets filld with sorrowes and delights;  
When pleasant streames baith his triumphant crowne,  
Which from the mangled forehead trickel downe;  
T’anoynt, and wash, with this perpetual spring,  
The beard, and garments of our priest, and king.  
Hence comes that sacred, and religious awe,  
That yoake, in which obedient christians draw.  
Wee taught a due respect to prie  
Whose hands dispense the bread by which we live;  
Must alsole yeeld to Cesar, Cesars right;  
Adoring kings, as armd with thundering might;  
As sacred persons of celestial race,  
Whose reverend crownes the Gretian rites imbrace,  
As equall with the garments which adorne 
Gods holy house, and are by deacons worne[..] (f. 128r)

Christ’s Passion, evoked in the “streams” of blood bathing Christ’s head, governs the passage, and although the ensuing book venerates kings, in these lines it is priests, those who dispense the “bread by which we live,” who are the closest analogues of Christ. The poet then admits that we must give homage to kings (to “Cesar”), and that in fact in the Eastern Church, kings are hailed as “sacred persons” “embraced” by “Gretian rites”: secular rulers in the east are deemed “equall” with “deacons,” or with clergy more generally. Even though in the East kings are sacred, though, the book subordinates secular rule to Christ within the church:

When emperours coming to the sacred board  
Resigne theire diadems to christ our lord,  
And at the churches entrance lay aside  
Theire kingly notes, least prayer should harbor pride,  
More honour crownes them then they had before,  
Since hee whom all the earthly kings adore,
Who maide the eastern princes, att his birth  
Grave witnesses, and filld theire soules with mirth;  
Who, that hee might the [doffan] ruler grace,  
Sent him the wondrous picture of his face.  
Now since his browes this thornie wreath enrich,  
Hath raised his kingdome to soe high a pitch,  
That mightie monarkes count it greatest fame,  
From his pure church to take some happie name,  
Which may to theire eternall glorie show,  
What firme subjection to his spouse they owe.  
Theire unction must be hallowed by her hand[.]  
The crosse must on theire crownes, and sceptres stand;  
And as to priests it sacred glorie brings,  
Soe is it maide the crowne of christian kings;  
Who can not thinke theire palaces secure,  
Unlesse this signe the loftie towers assure. (f. 128r-128v)

Beaumont develops his own Passion politics: kings are most powerful when they submit themselves (or resign their diadems—an object and word King James emphasizes in the last half of his Meditation when he speaks of Christ’s crowning) to the church and to the “board” of the altar. The magi from the East in the Christmas narrative model proper subordination to Christ, correcting the example of the “Gretian rites” a few lines earlier. The poet aggressively fortifies his politics: kings take their name and power from “[Christ’s] pure church,” and must subject themselves to Christ’s spouse; any theory of arcana imperii over the ecclesia in this book would simply be unintelligible. Challenging the Erastian model of the Eastern Church, Beaumont claims that the king derives authority from the church through sacramental coronation, a view that shares much in common with late-medieval theories of sacramental kingship that were later appropriated to royal absolutism:56 the king is consecrated by bishops, and the cross must similarly sanctify kings’ scepters and crowns. Indeed, whereas the Jacobean court apotheosized

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James as a Constantine with power over the *ecclesia*, in Beaumont’s vision, Constantine derives his power from his submission to the *signum crucis*, which protects and glorifies the “loftie towers” of the secular state.\textsuperscript{57} Beaumont has subordinated the king’s scepter and crown to Christ’s Passion, inverting the relationship between those signs in James’s *Meditation*, where the symbols serve secular power.

After celebrating the faithful martyr kings of the island nation, book 11 concludes with a further inversion of Jacobean absolutism, admonishing Christian kings—James is always the implicit target here—to recognize their debt to the church. Book 11 concludes:

> Learne allsoe those divine directions here,  
> Which in the churches earthly rule appeare;  
> Shee guides her flockes according to her state,  
> And thus avoyds confusion and debaite;  
> Shee carefull pilots to the stearn preferrs,  
> Who follows not her counsell proudly errs.  
> Then in your harts this humble lesson keepe,  
> You are not shephards, be obedient sheepe.  
> One day, one hower spent in our Saviours schooles,  
> Shall teach you more, then selfconceipted fooles  
> Learne in an aige, who theire direction place  
> In subtill knowledge or peculiar grace.  
> And you on whom the signes of gentrie rest,  
> Who wear wreath’d toarches on your helmets crest,  
> Observe the type, and to this crowne submitt  
> Your strength, your welth, your honour, and your witt. (f. 136r)

In continuing the political theology of the book’s opening lines, Beaumont works against the Jacobean assertion that the king has administrative power over the church. Whereas James in *Basilicon Doron* had claimed the right to name bishops, to fill university appointments, and to call councils, here kings are not “shephards,” but “sheepe” of the

\textsuperscript{57} On the rhetoric of James as Constantine, see Ferrell, 113-39.
church and students of Christ’s “schooles.”\textsuperscript{58} The church rather than the sovereign is responsible for “avoyd[ing] confusion and debaite,” and, drawing on the patristic tradition that describes the church as a ship, Beaumont relegates kings to the role of pilot—he who sits in the “stearn” of that ship and steers the church according to the church’s “divine directions.” The poet even warns James against courtly flatterers (a political vice for which James was known), claiming that a good king must listen to Christ and not to the “subtill knowledge” or “peculiar grace” of sycophants (one cannot help but wonder if Milton ever read this line).\textsuperscript{59} Unlike James’s absolute lieutenant of God, Beaumont’s ideal king is a type of Christ, his crown a shadow of Christ’s crown of thorns.

Book 12 concludes the entire epic by explicitly defining the church as Roman, and by showing that the church derives its power from the Passion, the source of the entire cosmic order. Book 12 celebrates the pope in its opening lines, and by doing so fully discloses Beaumont’s recusant Catholic ecclesiology:

\begin{quote}
Now by thy grace, deare lord, I touch the grownd,  
And graspe the shore, to which my barke was bound.  
Now having crownd the[e] with selected boughes,  
Myne onely worke remaines, to crowne thy spouse.  
But how shall I adore her when mine eye  
Could never yett that glorious staite espie,  
Which shee enioyes, in nations where shee raignes;  
Nor ever felt her sweetnesse but her paines.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{59} Interestingly, here Beaumont uses “peculiar” specifically to mean “exempt from normal ecclesial or secular jurisdiction,” corroborating my reading above of Beaumont’s “peculiar flock” as a recusant community exempted, presumably by divine or ecclesial law, from the English Church’s spiritual jurisdiction.
This Benjamin, this my twelfth sonne, is torne  
From Rachels throwes, and in her sorrowes borne.  
While oft our fainting soules crye out, how long  
Shall wee, in Babel, sing a mourneful song?  
When shall we vew againe our land of peace,  
Where Altars coole, and sacrifices sease;  
And flocking to thy temple voyde of feares,  
Shall strew the pavement with our joyfull teares.  
Then should these lines with easie stepps ascend,  
Aspiring bouldly to theire glorious end;  
Where now the staines, by which they slowly clime,  
Are cutt, and broken in this stormie time.  
O! might the church, for whose deare sake I write,  
Gaine, with my muse, her periods of delight.  
The highest ensigne of her faire renowne,  
Consisteth in the Papal triple crowne. (f. 136r-136v)

Beaumont identifies book 12 with Benjamin, Jacob’s twelfth son (by Rachel), but the passage also associates the book with the church, the beloved “son” of the entire poem. Beaumont ends his epic by “adoring” the church, a term that indicates a form of worship due to God alone, and that consequently reinforces the final book’s assertion of Catholic ecclesiology against Stuart absolutism: divinizing the church, Beaumont preempts absolutist claims that apotheosize secular kingship above the ecclesia. In adapting the psalmic refrain, “how long, O Lord?,” Beaumont not only aligns Catholicism with the Jewish Babylonian exile (just as he identifies Catholic liturgical time with Jewish ritual time in book 1), but he also recognizes the church’s “captivity” in England. Like captive Israel, Catholicism cries out for freedom from bondage—a trope inverting the Protestant polemical commonplace of true Reformed Christianity in bondage to Rome, the Babylonian Whore. More importantly, the entire opening verse

60 Adoration carries this theological meaning in both Catholic and Protestant texts: cf. The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, trans. H.J. Schroeder (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1978), 76 (Thirteenth Session, Chapter 5); and Jean Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke, 1949), volume 1, 328 (Book 2, Chapter 8).
paragraph concludes with a couplet specifying Beaumont’s understanding of ecclesial and secular authority: the highest sign of power is the papacy, the “triple crown” of Rome. In short, while Beaumont does not balk at using King James’s self-aggrandizing political imagery and thereby demonstrates his ability to speak to controversies at England’s political center, book 12 is shaped entirely by Beaumont’s marginalized, recusant Catholic ecclesiology: the poet is both Virgil singing the praises of Augustus as well as the captive Hebrew psalmist languishing in Babylon.

Finally, in his most powerful critique of Stuart absolutism, Beaumont asserts that communion with Christ’s Passion is the source of the church’s authority, and that Christ’s suffering body is the Roman Church, a hierarchical community of martyrs and saints, all of whom derive their authority from their conformity to the Passion. While James’s Passion politics in *A Meditation* makes Christ a model of the absolute monarch, Beaumont’s poem uses the Passion to assert the corporate and communal nature of the church and its history—its ecclesial and especially sacerdotal members—over and against the English settlement. The poet identifies the (specifically Roman) church with Christ’s Passion, using the elements of Christ’s suffering to allow his physical and ecclesial bodies to bleed into one another:

The church of Christ, which ever much delights,  
To paint his passion in her sacred rites,  
On her anoynted servants heade ordaines  
The picture of this coronet of paines;  
To teach good priests, by this religious crowne,  
To be true kings, and keepe their passions downe,  
Content, for their redeemers sake, to beare,  
Sharpe paines, and scornes not overcomme with feare. (f. 136v-137r)

And thus the church her governours inclines,  
To seeke true blisse, instructed by these lines;  
But when the heads of people loose theire crownes,
The starrs grow dimm, and heaven offended frowns.
That pope was mindfull of the bloudy wreath,
Who to his cardinals did first bequeath
Theire scarlet hatts; and taught them by this note,
That they theire lives must to the church devote.
An other, to increase theire zealous fire,
Clothed theire whole bodies in a red attire.
On sacred miters, which our bishops weare,
Ingrand in lively caracters appeare
Our Saviours brow besett with pearcing thornes:
The face of Moyses deckt with splendent hornes.
Two poynted tops rise like the muses hill;
The one shewes virtuous life, the other skill.
The streames which from the head of Christ descend,
Are figuring in the tonges, which thence depend. (f. 136v)

Catholicism’s communal “rites” are analogues of the visual, painted “pictures” of the Passion, while the scarlet of the cardinals’ regalia and the shape and decorations of the bishops’ miters represent the crown of thorns and Christ’s dripping blood. This metaphorical link between the Passion, martyrdom, and the Roman hierarchy suggests that the Passion authorizes the visible church, imbuing ecclesial rites, sacerdotal offices, and the corpus mysticum itself with its power. Just as the visible church community learns self-sacrifice from the visual and sacramental dimensions of its own rituals and priestly garb, “true kings” must learn to “keepe their passions downe” and instead “beare / Sharpe paines.” While the didacticism could be interpreted as an encouragement of James as a martyr for the English cause (another appropriation of Jacobean political rhetoric), it is far more likely that Beaumont, in foregrounding the role of the hierarchical Roman ecclesial community and juxtaposing it with English politics in book 11, is challenging and reordering Jacobean claims. Christ’s Passion models suffering, self-restraint, and service for kings, just as it teaches martyrdom and zeal to the prelates who don the symbols of Christ in their official garments. If James apotheosizes his rule over the church through Christ’s Passion, Beaumont subordinates all kingly authority to the
sacerdotal authority of the church—the ecclesial community that is enabled and empowered by Christ’s Passion directly and that confers authority on monarchs.

Christ’s body in this view is more than priests and bishops. History is replete with ideal kings and saints who are part of Christ’s spiritual and ecclesial corpus, as books 11 and 12 make clear. Book 11 lists and ruminates upon England’s martyr-kings, including Edmund, Oswald, Sigebert, Fremund, Harold, Ethelbert, and Edward. Beaumont even associates James with this self-denying line of martyr-kings by claiming that James “forsakes the Baliarick Iles, / And with his feete escapes the worlds proud guiles,” doubtlessly a reference to previous assassination attempts on him as James VI of Scotland. Including James in this catalogue of saint-kings suggests Beaumont holds out the possibility of James’s returning to the Catholic fold or at least allowing religious tolerance, a view (or fear) of James’s polity held throughout his reign, but most intensely in the controversial “Spanish Match” of the early 1620s, as Cogswell has shown. Such a gesture also subordinates James’s politics to the poet’s idealized English and Catholic ecclesial history, a history which justifies kings’ reigns through each king’s adherence to Christ’s Passion and the church. Though the epic places hope in James, Beaumont also recognizes that England will likely never revert to Catholicism—a resignation that is highly visible in the close of book 12, where a catalogue of queens and female English saints, all examples of Christ’s ecclesial corpus and all modeled on the Virgin Mary, culminates in a celebration of Mary, Queen of Scots:

Among those queenes who deck theire royall stemmes
On earth with pearles, in heaven with richer gemms,
Shall wee forget our glorie of the north,
Triumphant Marye, who dispersing forth
Her beames from snowie Calidonian hills,
This happie Ile with princly offspring fills;
While two large realmes, united in her sonne,
Laments the wrongs which they to her have done;
When Scotland closed in walls her freeborne breath,
And England stood astonishd att her death.
The bloud which shee from kingly vaines received
Confirmed that faith, to which her parents cleaved.
The miners of Gods house distroyed this wall;
And joyned her murder to our churches fall;
But hee who firmnesse to his rocke imparts,
Erects new temples in religious harts;
As hee hath changed her short, and eartly raigne,
For heavenly crownes, which noe foule hand can staine,
Soe though with us material churches faile,
Devotion lives and shall, at last, prevaile. (f. 143r)

Beaumont had at various times in the long and unfinished revision of the epic celebrated
James, Charles, and Henrietta Maria as examples of tolerant and faithful monarchs. But
this passage is unequivocal in its positioning of Beaumont as a firmly recusant Roman
Catholic mourning the overturning of his idealized political order. Mary is triumphant
because she has given the state “princely offspring,” including James, who unites
Scotland and England in his own blood (an oft-repeated theme in James’s early attempts
at unification). Yet Beaumont turns immediately to the spiritual, confessional
symbolizations of Mary: her royal blood confirms her martyrdom and her faithfulness to
the Roman ecclesial community, Christ’s suffering spiritual body. Thus, as in
Southwell’s “Decease release,” her “murder” signifies the fall of the English Catholic
community as a whole, brought by Protestant political “miners,” and also suggests
spiritual triumph through a communal identification with spiritual martyrdom. Mary’s

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61 For instance, in James’s speech to parliament on March 19, 1604: “And here I must crave your
patiences for a little space, to give me leave to discourse more particularly of the benefits that doe arise of
that Union which is made in my blood, being a matter that most properly belongeth to me to speake of, as
the head wherein that great Body [of England and Scotland] is united” (James VI and I, Political Writings,
135); see also Francis Bacon, A Breife Discourse, Touching The Happie Union of the Kingdomes of
England and Scotland (London, 1603), a short treatise in which Bacon argues for the union of Scotland and
England through analogy, political theology, and the natural law.
execution and the fall of the political Catholic community stand in striking contrast to the idealized ecclesial history and political hopes Beaumont entertained in book 11, where James is a peace-loving Augustus. As the final movement of book 12 shows, even if Beaumont engages mainstream Stuart political imagery in book 11, he does so from the confessional margins of English culture, as a Catholic convinced that the forces of English history have undermined an idealized political body and forced it into a more exclusively spiritual, extra-temporal realm.

Beaumont’s treatment of Mary, Queen of Scots also provides a different vision of Catholic continuity in the face of contemporary politics. Mary is now a martyr, one who has exchanged temporal rule for eternal glory that temporal politics cannot stain or remove. Likewise, even in the wake of political persecution, Catholicism, if it “firmnesse to [Christ’s] rocke imparts,” can erect “new temples in religious harts,” creating an internalized and non-material (though not necessarily non-political) expression of the church: “Soe though with us material churches faile, / Devotion lives and shall, at last prevaille.” Beaumont has, at least temporarily, resolved the tension between political reality and ecclesial idealization by privileging “devotion”; moreover, Beaumont’s privileging of devotion is directly related to the epic genre, a genre in which collective mourning consolidates the community whose history the epic narrates. In a historical moment in which material worship is no longer possible, The Crowne of Thornes consolidates and constructs a Catholic polity through lamenting the loss of ideal Catholic history. As an epic, The Crowne of Thornes privileges the Passion as the central heroic

act of Christian history, the deed imbuing the moral, natural, and political universes with meaning despite the losses of the past. Devotion to that event is consequently the action which demonstrates one’s ongoing membership in Christ’s body, in the community of the faithful, which for Beaumont is “peculiarly” Catholic. Indeed, as book 12 argues, the true hero of the epic is not only Christ, but all Catholics who suffer the “martyrdom” of religious persecution and who lament “our churches fall”; as such, the epic instantiates at the level of the ecclesial history the kind of militant and community-building self-sacrifice that martyrdom performs in early modern religious culture.63

Finally, Beaumont holds up his epic as central to consolidating the Catholic ecclesial community. The entire epic is identified with Christ’s crown of thorns, as the poem’s title and its repeated assertion that its lines derive from the Passion contend, suggesting that the epic poet plays a crucial role in consolidating the Catholic community after the failure of “material churches.” Beaumont has, in a pattern that Milton will later appropriate to his own historical circumstances, turned the political discourses of his poem, the explicit inversions of contemporary political theology and advocacy of a particular confessional community, toward the inward and ethical realms of self-denial and metaphorical martyrdom. The conclusion of the epic turns, in the face of a collapsing political ideal, toward Christ’s Passion, toward the poetry it has inspired, and toward the virtue it models:

My words thus raisd, with more then mortall art,
May leave sharpe stings in some relenting hart.
To him these trembling lines I humbly bring,

Beseeking him that if the ambitious sting
Of human nature, shall my thoughts incite,
In these slight workes, to take a falce delight;
Hee on my head his thornie crowne would presse,
To stoppe my folly with his sad distresse.
In vaine wee others strive to heale, and moove,
If in our selves vaine glorie, and self love
Erect theire bristles, and such errours breed,
Whose thornie stings choke our intended seede.
Wee buylde our fame upon uncertaine sands,
If hells best champion, pride (whose hundred hands,
Like Briarus, could pull the angels downe)
Plucke all the leaves from our expected crowne.
If any beauties in the garden be,
They issue from the subject, not from mee.
It is not hard to pollish silver bright;
To make gould rich, pearles smooth, or ivrie white.
Well may these lines like plenteous currents runne,
Which praise the air, the water, and the sunne.
Wee feele noe dullnesse, nor laborious strife,
When wee describe the things that give us life.
These are like branches of the Velian thorne;
Upon whose toppe an oylie fruit is borne;
And hee that with this juyce his limbs anoynts,
Is free from could, and stiffnesse in his ioyntes.
These songs, while I in earthly toyle remaine,
Must ease my burthen, and refresh my paine.
My Saviours death to mee this musike gave,
Soe nightingailes which buylde neare Orpheus grave
Are by the Thratians thought more sweete, and shrill,
Then those that sing on anie other hill.
Soe from his bloud an hearbe was said to rise,
Which at the feast of Baccus, still supplies
The office of his harpe, in Hebrus drown’d;
And fills the valleys with delightfull sound. (f. 144v-145r)

Whereas the epic has spoken directly to contemporary political theology and challenged
the English religious settlement through its idealization of English ecclesial history and
its invocation of Catholic ecclesiology, here Beaumont apotheosizes Passion devotion
and its significance for interior virtue, epic poetry, and the Catholic community that this
epic celebrates and mourns. The ideal epic poet brings readers to contrition (his words
may “leave sharpe stin gs in some relenting hart”) and reminds them that if they strive to
“heale” others, they must free themselves from vainglory and self-love. Moreover, the poem itself is merely a reflection of the Passion; any beauty in the epic comes from “the subject, not from mee.” Ideally, the epic poet manifests the Passion in order to create Christ’s body as a community of readers, in order to show others that martyrdom, both metaphorical and actual, is the preeminent way to continue the English Catholic community even after idealized Catholic ecclesiastical history has failed to stand against the onslaught of contemporary religious politics.

Ultimately, *The Crowne of Thornes* is significant to a study of the period’s Passion devotion for two major reasons. First, it forcefully demonstrates the potential for the Passion to serve as an epic locus for engaging contemporary problems of confessional, ecclesial, and political communities. By appropriating Passion discourses common to Catholics and Protestants, and by participating in the analogical and emblematic thought so characteristic of mainstream and generally Protestant seventeenth-century English poetry, the poem suggests that even a strongly expressed confessional identity is not a reliable indicator of a poem’s representational strategies, or of its participation in or marginality to broader devotional strategies in early modern England. This leads directly to the second, related insight afforded by this long-neglected epic: like Beaumont himself, a figure who straddled the bounds between the Stuart court and recusant Catholicism, *The Crowne of Thornes* revises our understanding of mainstream (that is, generally Protestant) and marginal poetry in the period. Though Beaumont draws on common discourses to forge his epic and uses that epic to celebrate the current English monarchy, he also does so in order to challenge Stuart absolutism and to critique
dominant perspectives on ecclesial politics. Beaumont furthermore uses the epic to consolidate a Catholic readership whose idealized religious community has been overcome by post-Reformation politics, and yet which still exists in a nation no longer structured by Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Hence, while English political and recusant Catholic communities exist side-by-side in the epic, Beaumont uses the Passion as the model for an ideal political, ecclesial, and literary community, the members of which should strive to imitate Christ and submit themselves to the (Roman) ecclesia that is authorized by the Passion.

Like Beaumont himself, a figure at the heart of court culture and simultaneously a member of a minority religious community, *The Crowne of Thornes* challenges critical constructions of mainstream and marginal literature in the period through its engagements with Stuart politics from the confessional margins. Though the subject of the next chapter, Richard Crashaw, died in exile from England, his poetry, like Beaumont’s, demonstrates—perhaps more clearly than any other poet in this dissertation—the need to rethink our critical accounts of literary canonicity by broadening the devotional and generic contexts we bring to bear on the poetry of the seventeenth century.
CHAPTER 6:
RICHARD CRASHAW: THE CONTEXTS AND CANONS OF PASSION DEVOTION

So maist thou take a Poem hence, and tune thy soule by it, into a heavenly pitch; and thus refined and borne up upon the wings of meditation, in these Poems thou maist talke freely of God, and of that other state.

--“Preface to the Reader,” from Steps to the Temple

Live Jesus, Live, and let it bee
My life to dye, for love of thee.

--Richard Crashaw, “The Author’s Motto

Bloody, unsparing in its brutality, and obsessed with Christ’s suffering body, The Passion of the Christ is the most controversial religious film in recent memory. In a representative review for Channel 4 Film, Jamie Russell claimed that “The Passion of the Christ’s barrage of physical sensation is the equal of that found in any horror movie,” and that Mel Gibson had “reduc[ed] the complexities of political-religious history to blockbuster simplicity.” For Russell, as for many critics, the film’s emphasis on Jesus’ brutal, vivid suffering lacks the “theological, political or philosophical depth to back up

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2 Richard Crashaw, “The Authors Motto,” in Steps to the Temple (1646 version). Cited from The Complete Poetry, ed. Williams, 4. All references to Crashaw’s poetry are from the Williams edition and will be cited parenthetically by line number.
these tortures,” so that “the film is reduced to the level of the sensational.”

The evaluation reveals not only an implicit separation of intellect and “sensation” (and all its meanings), but a privileging of the former over the latter: intellect is aligned with a higher-minded artistic subtlety, while “sensation” is associated with tastelessness and a generally simplistic popular culture. This response to depictions of Christ’s erotic suffering is, of course, not new. Indeed, Russell’s commentary reads remarkably like much criticism of Richard Crashaw’s poetry, a body of work which has for three centuries garnered a range of derogatory evaluations. T.S. Eliot, though sensitive to Crashaw’s skill as a devotional poet, claimed Crashaw lacked John Donne’s “theological intellect” and that he was governed by a “feminine” nature more in keeping with Spanish and Italian literature. Similarly, in identifying Crashaw with European baroque style or alternatively with Counter-Reformation affective devotion, critics from Mario Praz to Austin Warren to Barbara Lewalski claim that Crashaw’s poetry is sensuous rather than intellectual, affective rather than deeply spiritual, and Roman Catholic rather than natively English (i.e., Protestant)—with prejudice always directed against the former term of each binary.

Lewalski epitomizes the situation succinctly when she writes, “Crashaw writes out of a very different aesthetics emanating from Trent and the

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continental Counter Reformation, which stresses sensory stimulation and church ritual (rather than scripture) as means to devotion and to mystical transcendence."

Yet Crashaw was not Catholic when he wrote his poetry; he converted from Protestantism to Catholicism only a few years before he died in exile in Rome. Moreover, as the title to his 1646 and 1648 devotional poems suggests—Steps to the Temple—Crashaw was perceived as an English devotional poet comparable with Herbert (whose 1633 The Temple was immensely popular), a fact Crashaw’s original editor records by calling the poet “Herbert’s second.” Drawing on the revisionist reading of Alison Shell and augmenting this work by interpreting Crashaw’s debt to trans-confessional Passion devotion, this chapter will argue that Richard Crashaw’s Passion poetry is not alien or marginal to English literary culture, but immersed in the Bernardine tradition that emphasizes the liquefied, erotic, and suffering body of Christ—the devotional tradition that was highly influential in John Donne’s treatment of the Passion in his sermons and that characterized mainly prose texts before Robert Southwell’s seminal lyrics. As this dissertation has argued, Bernardine piety was a highly influential strain of late-medieval Passion devotion, giving shape to the trans-confessional discourses of spatial intimacy and visuality, which privilege Christ’s flowing, open wounds and often eroticized, suffering body. In showing Crashaw’s connection to non-poetic English devotional forms

5 Lewalski, 12.


7 In one of the more compelling readings of Crashaw in recent criticism, Shell identifies what she calls an “English baroque” that emphasizes a “poetry of tears” and repentance in English poetry, a trend that begins with Robert Southwell and culminates in Crashaw. Shell does not, however, engage the Passion as a context for Crashavian devotion. See Alison Shell, Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 56-106.
rather than contrasting him to traditionally canonical poets, this chapter will also rethink
the generic and poetic contexts in which we read English devotional lyric: for if critics
assume that the poetics of Donne or Herbert are exclusively normative, Crashaw looks as
strange and foreign as Gibson’s film looks to many film-goers. Conversely, when we
read Crashaw’s verse against broader, trans-confessional discourses of the Passion, the
poet emerges as an embodiment of a broad, English Passion piety, as native to English
literary culture as Donne and Herbert.

Though critics have contextualized Crashaw’s poetry in a number of ways, often
with great insight, no one has read Crashaw’s poetry in a sustained and focused way
within the influential piety of St. Bernard found in the period’s devotional prose. This is
unfortunate, since interpreting Crashaw within this context synthesizes two fruitful
strains of Crashavian criticism which have tried to rehabilitate Crashaw’s erotic and
bloody Passion poetry: psychoanalysis and revisionist historicism. Scholars writing from
psychoanalytical perspectives—Gary Kuchar, Vera Camden, Susannah B. Mintz, and
Maureen Sabine, for instance—have revealed the importance of the abject, suffering

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8 The importance of the specific literary and historical contexts critics bring to bear in reading
English poetry has been eloquently discussed by Paul Alpers, in “Renaissance Lyrics and Their Situations,”

9 Several studies have attempted to contextualize Crashaw within other devotional traditions,
especially those of Continental Europe. See, for instance, R.V. Young, Richard Crashaw and the Spanish
Golden Age (New Haven: Yale, 1982); and Ruth Wallerstein, Richard Crashaw: A Study in Style and
Poetic Development (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1935). Eugene Cunnar has shown Crashaw’s
relationship to ritual and liturgy, in “Opening the Religious Lyric,” in New Perspectives on the
67. For insightful summaries of Crashaw’s reception history and criticism, see Lorraine M. Roberts and
John R. Roberts, “Crashavian Criticism: A Brief Interpretive History,” in New Perspectives on the Life
and Art of Richard Crashaw, ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1990), 1-29. For another
summary of Crashaw’s reception history emphasizing the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, see
Lowell Gallagher’s “Crashaw and Religious Bias in the Literary Canon,” in Early Modern English Poetry:
A Critical Companion, ed. Patrick Cheney, Andrew Hadfield, and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (New York:
body to Christian devotion in an attempt to mitigate Crashaw’s apparent strangeness. 10 Similarly, Richard Rambuss has appealed to a postmodern account of Christian eros to claim that Crashaw exemplifies a Christian devotional mode that transgresses categories of the sacred and profane. 11 Though such analyses have reminded us of the importance of the sacred and eroticized body in Christian tradition, their reliance on anachronistic theories of the psychoanalytical subject as well as on Crashaw’s presumed relationship to his profoundly anti-Catholic father tends to intensify the poet’s apparent strangeness rather than engage his relationship to the literary canon. Meanwhile, Alison Shell and Thomas Healy, both of whom rely on various modes of revisionist historicism, have rehabilitated Crashaw either by showing Crashaw’s affinity with an English Catholic “tears tradition,” or by showing the local influence of Laudian piety at Crashaw’s Cambridge. 12 Partly as a complement to these scholarly traditions, and partly as a corrective to a lingering tendency in Crashaw criticism to perceive him as strange despite advances in our understanding of his cultural context, I will examine Crashaw’s Passion poetry in light of Bernardine piety that synthesizes eros and agape through Christ’s pained, crucified body, and that animates Christ’s abject and corporeal suffering into spiritual meaning without denigrating physicality. Such piety undergirds Crashaw’s


12 Shell, Catholicism, Controversy, chapter 2; Thomas Healy, Richard Crashaw (Leiden: Brill, 1986). Healy discusses the potential influences of St. Bernard on Crashaw on pp. 19-25, but does not sustain a Bernardine analysis of the poetry in his otherwise immensely helpful biography.
Passion poetry as well as contemporary English crucifixion piety more generally. As I have argued, the Passion is significant not only to English poets beginning with Southwell, but to prose Passion accounts throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Extending our consideration of genres beyond strictly lyric poetry allows us to see the broader contexts in which Passion devotion flourished for Catholics and Protestants alike. Within this broader and generically diverse devotional context, we can interpret Crashaw as a mainstream and canonical English poet for whom the Passion is the ultimate source of all Christian identity.  

Bernardine Piety and “Upon the Bleeding Crucifix: A Song”

Similar to the Jesuit devotional strategies of Southwell and Alabaster, Bernardine crucifixion piety emphasizes with even greater detail and affectivity the bleeding and eroticized body of Christ. Bernardine texts were widely popular in the early to mid-seventeenth century, informing Jesuit meditative traditions and Protestant representational strategies. We find evidence of the Bernardine tradition, for example, in the Jesuit perspective of John Falconer in his Fasciculus Myrrhae (1633), the popular Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares (1631) of Pseudo-Bernard, translated for a mainstream English print market and published in four London editions between 1611 and 1631, as well as in the variously Protestant writings of Bishop Andrewes, Thomas Ailesbury, 

13 Indeed, it is difficult even in more recent historicist criticism to get away from Baroque readings of Crashaw that too easily align the baroque with continental Catholicism: see, for instance, Louis Martz, From Renaissance to Baroque (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1991), “Richard Crashaw: Love’s Architecture.” Martz’s argument is, as usual, intelligent and adroit, but nonetheless shows the tendency to seek for Crashavian analogues outside of native English religious perspectives.
Anthony Stafford, and Daniel Heinsius. These (often little-known) figures range in their confessional affiliations across Catholic and Protestant spectrums: Falconer was an English Jesuit who after banishment returned to England to serve recusant families; Bishop Andrewes was a supporter of the established English Church, though he remained prudently silent on specific issues of Calvinist doctrine; Thomas Ailesbury, Church of England clergyman who wrote the anti-Catholic *Paganisme and Papisme Parallel'd* (1624), advocated a more stringent Calvinist soteriology, as did Daniel Heinsius, the Dutch theologian and key figure at the Calvinist Synod of Dort in 1619; and Anthony Stafford was for the most part a conservative Laudian sympathizer, whose *The Femall Glory* (1635) venerated the Virgin Mary in ways quite alien to Calvinist piety. One thing that each of these authors has in common, however, is St. Bernard—each references Bernard explicitly in his Passion account, and each of their Passion devotions tends to imitate Bernardine piety by emphasizing Christ’s eroticized, suffering, and liquefying body. Perhaps the most striking evidence of Bernard’s appeal to both Catholic and Protestant sensibilities comes from Crashaw’s own biography: though William Crashaw, Richard’s father, was a vehement anti-Catholic who wrote polemics like *The Jesuit Gospel* (1610), he also translated St. Bernard’s texts, and, according to Austin Warren,

owned one of the largest theological libraries of the period, containing St. Bernard’s *Sermons on the Song of Songs* as well as the writings of English mystic Richard Rolle.¹⁵

Though the liquefied body of Christ so characteristic of Crashaw’s verse would hardly have been strange to seventeenth-century English prose writers, no image is more problematic to scholars than the bleeding, running, liquefying wounds found in poems like “Upon the Bleeding Crucifix: A Song,” where Christ’s running blood is compared to “channells” flowing into “rivers” and ultimately into the “General floud”:

No hair so small, but payes his river  
To this red sea of thy blood  
Their little channells can deliver  
Something to the Generall floud. (stanza 6)

But such images are common in contemporary Passion accounts. Indeed, prose writers privileged the devotional discourse of the visualized, pained, and eroticized body resonating with Crashaw’s “Upon the Bleeding Crucifix” and “Upon the Wounds of Our Saviour.” As demonstrated in chapter 4, in the popular Bernardine *Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares* Christ’s Passion is imaged in vivid detail that highlights Christ’s individual wounds. Pseudo-Bernard organizes meditation 14 around Christ’s bleeding extremities:

“View here the wounds of Christ / upon the Crosse, / His head, his hands, his feet, / also his side, / bleeding amaine.”¹⁶ By inventorying Christ’s wounds, a strategy used by every Passion poet this dissertation has examined, Pseudo-Bernard suggests the traditional five

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¹⁵ See Austin Warren, 210-11, n2. In addition to his library holdings, William Crashaw seems to have had a role in a translation of a work attributed to St. Bernard: see William Crashaw, *The complaint or dialogue, betwixt the soule and the body of a damned man, each laying the fault upon the other / [s]upposed to be written by St. Bernard from a nightly vision of his, and now published out of an ancient manuscript coppy by William Crashaw*, printed by Leonard Becket (London, 1632, STC. 6026).

¹⁶ Pseudo-Bernard, *Sighes, Sobbes and Teares*, 1.299. Since this volume includes two series of paginations, the first number in its citation will refer to the first or second pagination, and the second number to the page.
wounds of Christ (as well as his head), admonishing us to behold the flowing blood (“bleeding amaine”) producing salvation. He also emphasizes the fountain-like dimension of the wounds:

How unfit are thy impure thoughts to entertaine any worthy meditation concerning the admirable Passion of thy sweete Saviour, who powring forth streames of his precious blood, paide the price of thy ransome....

Neither have I found any comfort in the pure streames of thy innocent bloud, powred out to wash away my sinnes.

[The soldiers untie his hands] to scourge his naked body with their tormenting whips, and to make his veines spout out blood with their cruell stripes.

They nailed his innocent hands, and after his blessed feet ... So that the streames of blood, spouting out of his veines, changed the hiew of his Crosse, into a crimson colour.

Though substitutive discourse is evident here, the writer relentlessly foregrounds Christ’s pouring blood, so that the crucifixion itself is identified with liquefaction. Active verbs like “spout,” “streams,” and “powred” give the account corporeal shading, almost exaggerating the physicality of Jesus’ wounding. Moreover, Pseudo-Bernard’s meditation often compares the bleeding Christ to a fountain of living water, using metaphor to underline the saving power of the water and blood that issued out of Christ’s dead side after it was pierced with a spear (John 19:34):

17 Ibid., 1.8.
18 Ibid., 1.77-78.
19 Ibid., 1.231.
20 Ibid., 1.304.
They [the soldiers] saw with their eyes (and yet alas they would not pittie his woefull case) how the blood ran out of his veines, as water floweth out of a fountain.21

Oh my drie head, why doest thou not draw water with joy out of the fountaines of thy Saviour, for he is a well of living water?

Art not thou He my loving Saviour, which said to the woman of Samaria, that thou hadst the water of life ... for thou art most willing to refresh our thirsty soules with this blessed water, if we will resort to drinke of thy pure and Christall fountain.22

Quench thou my thirst, oh my sweet Jesu, with this living Water, for thou onely art able to quench my thirst, because with thee there is the fountaine of life.23

Pseudo-Bernard invokes images very similar to those critics often associate with Crashaw’s poetry: here, Christ’s suffering body is a fountain of blood that overflows the bounds of his cross and dyes red all it touches. This blood then mingles metaphorically with the “water of life” motif found in the gospel account of the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:6-30), so that Pseudo-Bernard equates grace (as Crashaw so often does) with the sacramental effusion of blood and water flowing from Christ’s pierced side. The text suggests that whether or not Crashaw was familiar with his meditations—though it would be virtually impossible for Crashaw not to be aware of this popular devotional work given its wide popularity and William Crashaw’s collection of Bernardine texts—Crashaw’s Passion poetry is not isolated, at least among prose devotion, in visualizing Christ’s suffering and opened body as a staple of meditation.

21 Ibid., 1.235.
22 Ibid., 1.380.
23 Ibid., 1.381.
In fact, the much-reprinted *Sighes, Sobbes and Teares* (and other Bernardine texts like the popular “Golden Epistle” of Pseudo-Bernard, often appended to English translations of a Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*) brought to the early seventeenth century an affective emphasis on Christ’s bleeding wounds. Significantly, although *Sighes, Sobbes and Teares* was first printed for Francis Burton (who also printed the Catholic Philip Howard’s *A foure-fould meditation* (1606)), the same Bernardine meditations were later printed for Robert Allot, purveyor of a variety of marketable and popular English books ranging from Protestant sermons and manuals like *The practice of pietie* (more than twelve editions through the 1620s and 30s) to Italian dramas in English translation. As the publication histories of Bernardine texts in the first half of the seventeenth century suggest (outlined in more detail in chapter 4), Bernardine devotion was popular and evidently highly marketable in the period: relatively successful booksellers and publishers like Allot would have been interested in works that appealed to a broad market rather than in more antagonizing and controversial texts. To dismiss such images as foreign or baroque as so many critics have done is to presuppose an English devotional tradition that is narrowly defined by the lyric poetry of Donne and Herbert, and consequently to distort the broader devotional traditions of the Passion so popular in prose works throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Not only is Bernardine Passion devotion amenable to mainstream English devotion of the seventeenth century, but both Catholic and Protestant writers influenced by this tradition use images that often parallel Crashaw’s poetry. For instance, John
Falconer—who references St. Bernard in his Bernardine-titled *Fasciculus Myrrhae*—describes the flow of Christ’s blood in Gethsemane in visual, erotic terms:

> So when his bloud, did naturally runne, from the exterioiur partes of his body, to comfort his hart ... he repelled it back againe, with such a violent force, as he would rather open the pores of his body, to let it gush forth through his garments, on the ground, then receive any refreshing from it.

Falconer’s text emphasizes Jesus’ kenotic, self-sacrificing love through the trope of the circulatory system (perhaps informed by William Harvey’s 1628 publication of *De Motu Cordis*): Christ “repelled” blood from his body and heart, violently denying himself any succor, a dynamic foregrounding the fleshliness of Falconer’s images. Falconer also uses the fountain trope animating *Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares*, likening effusing blood to a spouting stream, conflating Christ’s pouring blood with the saving power of divine grace:

> And the foure streames, flowing from his sacred woundes were as foure springs, rising from the depth of this earthly Paradise, to water, cleanse, and make fruitfull holy soules, humbly and penitently approaching him.

> He is ever ready to communicate graces, unto us, as a full and flowing fountayne of them.

Streaming blood becomes a cleansing bath to “fruitfull holy soules” by the end of the passage, and as in Pseudo-Bernard’s passages above, Jesus’ blood quickly transforms into a sacramental fountain, thus underlining the divine aspect of Christ’s brutal death

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24 Falconer, 16.
25 Ibid., 28.
26 Ibid., 76.
27 Ibid., 113.
made available through corporeal representation. At the end of Falconer’s piece, Christ’s wounds become large ports of refuge, and his body becomes a cleft rock producing an “inundation” of grace:

This Cleft of our Heavenly Rocke, was widely, and deeply made, that holy soules might easily enter, and hide themselves in it, to contemplate therein, his wounded hart, with human love and divine mercy graciously stored, and inundations of heavenly graces issuing from it.  

Christ’s pierced side is not only a refuge for sinners (something which we see in Southwell’s “Man to the wound in Christs side” and in the sermons of Donne and Andrewes), but a well and river of blood, love, and heavenly grace, all combined into one flood issuing from the wounded body. “Inundation” is provocative and resonates with Crashaw’s language elsewhere in his Passion poetry—in “Upon the Bleeding Crucifix”’s description of Christ’s blood as “a deluge of deliverance,” for instance (IX.3, 1652 version). Not only the Jesuit Falconer, but also the Dutch Calvinist Daniel Heinsius uses Bernardine discourse in describing Christ’s wounds:

How many wide sluces & passages have they opened for the venting of [Christ’s blood]? What full streams & torrents gushed out at his nostrills? And that was most lamentable & grievous unto him, he was so captivated, as that he had not means to wipe away either his bloud or his Teares, that trickled downe all about his precious bodie.

Once again a virtually hallucinogenic image of Christ’s wildly effusive blood dominates devotion to the cross, and the repeated questions intensify the pulsing rivers of blood Heinsius describes. The text also limns Christ’s immobility (“he was so captivated”)

28 Ibid., 125.
29 Heinsius, 63.
created by his nailed hands and feet, a detail which makes Christ’s tortured and fastened body present to vision and which illustrates a preoccupation in Passion accounts with non-scriptural details Christ’s bodily suffering. Heinsius was not subject to the same English influences as Crashaw. However, the English translation of Heinsius’s Passion was printed by Bernard Alsop, prolific writer and printer of English political news throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, suggesting Heinsius’s potential appeal to enough of the English print market to be lucrative. Finally, Anthony Stafford’s *The Day of Salvation* includes a similar passage emphasizing Christ’s effusive, streaming blood:

> [the Roman soldiers] bind [Christ] so fast, that the Cord eates into tender flesh. On that Head wherein Universall Wisedome was contained, they set a Crowne of Thornes so fast, that his purest Blood runnes in streames down his sweetest Face.  

While Stafford’s text might generally lack the sustained glorification of Jesus’ flowing wounds, his Passion account is congruent with the Bernardine piety in *Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares* and in Heinsius and Falconer. Moreover, Stafford’s meditation was printed by Daniel Frere, a Protestant who published a variety of religious treatises throughout the 1630s and 40s ranging from commentaries like that on Malachi by Richard Stock (1640 and 41), to the theological treatise by J.A. Rivers, *Devout rhapsodies* (three editions 1647, one in 1648), to a *Synopsis* of the Church fathers by Daniel Tossanus (1635, 1637). Frere’s publications also included works of John Preston, whose Protestant non-conformity almost resulted in his expulsion from Cambridge by Bishop Andrewes, and

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30 Stafford, 106.
whose *A liveless life* and *Sinnes overthrow* was published the same year as Stafford’s meditation. Although Falconer’s text was printed at St. Omer, Heinsius’s and Stafford’s were printed by London Protestants whose other publications ranged across contemporary theological debates, a fact that strongly argues for the wider, trans-confessional appeal of Bernardine discourse—even of devotions that dwelled lengthily on Christ’s gruesome, very bodily suffering.

Finally, the highly popular and influential Protestant Bishop Lancelot Andrewes as well as the lesser known Thomas Ailesbury both use surprisingly similar rhetoric to describe Christ’s suffering. In his 1605 Good Friday sermon Andrewes writes:

> When blood is shed, it would be no more than needs; shed it would be, not poured out ... But here was the *fundetur*, havoc made at all parts; His Passion, as He termeth it, a second baptism, a river of blood, and He even able to have been baptized in it, as He was in Jordan...and so this blood, blood of God’s own bleeding, every drop whereof was precious, more precious than that whereof it was the price, the world itself ...Yet this blood wastefully spilt as water upon the ground.31

Andrewes meditates on Christ’s wounds and does so in words that exaggerate Christ’s bleeding by calling his blood a river and by vividly imaging Christ’s opened and butchered body with the colorful noun “havoc,” a word suggesting violence clearly exceeding scriptural warrants. Andrewes also links Christ’s blood to the baptism alluded to in “Jordan,” exaggerating Christ’s bleeding to the very limits of metaphor. Later, Andrewes describes Christ’s piercing with a homely agricultural trope: “They did not in Golgotha pierce His hands and feet, but made wide holes like that of a spade, as if they

had been digging in some ditch.”32 Not only do Andrewes’s words suggest Jesus’ gaping side-wound capable of housing a whole person, but they also parallel Thomas Ailesbury’s language in The Passion Sermon, in which he describes “the digging into his side opens the Monuments” and thereby links Christ’s piercing with another kind of earthly (if also supernatural) rending. Ailesbury also claims that Christ’s blood flows like water through a sluice, suggesting that the “bloud of compassion ranne” both in and out of Christ like through “Conduit pipes.”33 Like the printing histories of Stafford and Heinsius, the history of Andrewes’s and Ailesbury’s texts corroborates the claim that there was a mainstream and largely Protestant market for Bernardine devotion in the seventeenth century. Andrewes’s Ninety-Six Sermons was printed by Richard Badger in at least six editions between 1629 and 1641. Badger produced texts for the English Church as well as for a mainstream Protestant readership. These works included official inquiries into the major English dioceses and archdeaconries in the 1630s, the sermons of William Laud in the 1620s and 30s, and the more puritan-influenced sermons of John Stoughton in the early 1640s. Meanwhile, Ailesbury’s sermon was printed for Richard Moore, known for publishing anti-Catholic polemics such as Donne’s Ignatius his Conclave (1611, 1626), as well as William Crashaw’s anti-papist polemic, A parable of poyson (1618). That Moore thought Ailesbury’s work marketable strongly suggests Ailesbury’s potential appeal to a mainstream and even anti-Catholic readership.

Taken together, the publications above, from Sighes, Sobbes, and Teares to Andrewes’s sermons, illustrate the widespread appeal of specifically Crashavian liquid

32 Ibid., 170.
33 Ailesbury, 26, 30.
metaphors and their Bernardine representational strategies: readers across the confessional spectrum represented variously by establishment-minded and more polemical and anti-Catholic print markets found such tropes amenable to meditation. The trans-confessional appeal of Bernardine piety accounts for Crashaw’s (now largely forgotten) early popularity in the mid and late seventeenth century: his first volume of poems (*Epigrammatum Sacrorum Liber*, Cambridge, 1634) appears on a recommended readings list compiled by Richard Holdsworth (Master of Emmanuel College) in 1637. Crashaw’s work also appears in a positive light in Edward Phillips’s (Milton’s nephew) 1675 *Theatrum Poetarum*, and in John Dunton’s 1692 *The Young-Students-Library*—the latter of which names Crashaw one of England’s nineteen best poets. 34 It is not until the early eighteenth century that Alexander Pope claimed in a letter to Henry Cromwell that Crashaw’s poetry only contains “pretty conceptions, fine metaphors, glitt’ring expressions,” the “dress, gems, or loose ornaments of Poetry.” 35

Crashaw’s “Upon the Bleeding Crucifix” engages Christ’s liquefying body in terms virtually identical to those found in Bernardine Passion texts. In the 1652 *Carmen Deo Nostro*, the poem begins with a cruciform description of Christ’s wounds on the cross:

Jesu, no more! It is full tide.  
From thy head and from thy feet,  
From thy hands and from thy side  
All the purple Rivers meet. (1-4)


35 Qtd. in McDowell, 229.
As A.B. Chambers shows, Crashaw arranges the four parts of Christ’s body in cruciform: the head, feet, hands, and side limn the movement of the sign of the cross, from top to bottom, from side to side.\(^{36}\) This cruciform structure suggests the presence of the crucifix of the poem’s title, much in the same way that Southwell’s “Christes bloody sweate” mimes Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane. The lines also resonate with *Sighes, Sobbes and Teares* and some of Alabaster’s Passion sonnets, where the five wounds are almost rhythmically itemized line-by-line. Crashaw uses a different order for the extremities in both 1648 and 1652 versions (hands/feet/head/side and head/feet/hands/side, respectively)—intimating his awareness of the emblem’s significance—and both versions differ from Pseudo-Bernard’s ordering (heads/hand/feet/side). But the rhetorical strategies in both Pseudo-Bernard’s and Crashaw’s versions similarly emphasize each of Jesus’ bleeding wounds, establishing their issuing blood as the governing, corporeal conceit of the poem and the spiritual focus of meditation.

In elaborating the controlling metaphor, the subsequent stanzas develop the cruciform structure of stanza one, adumbrating the ever-present cross:

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What need thy fair head bear a part
In showres....(stanza 2)

Thy restless feet now cannot goe....(stanza 3)

Thy hands to give, thou canst not lift....(stanza 4)

But o thy side, thy deep-digg’d side! (stanza 5)
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Crashaw completely reorganizes the stanzas from the 1648 version—stanzas which move from Christ’s feet to his hands to his side to his head—to create the suggestiveness of the

cross in the final 1652 version, a movement of images that is quickly summarized in stanza one and is then developed through the first half of the poem. This organization brings Christ’s Passion to the reader through a form of mimesis, adumbrating the Passion in the poem’s structure of images and thus limning Christ’s corporeal suffering. Though no other poet in the period uses subtle shifting images quite in this way to imitate the cross, in general, the use of poetic form to mimic the cross (or other objects of devotion) is not alien to English poetry of the seventeenth century. The most famous examples of this representational strategy are Herbert’s “Easter Wings” and “The Altar,” poems that mime their content through their visible shapes, suggesting at least one important way in which Crashaw could be seen as “Herbert’s second”—and thus a participant in the mainstream of English poetic devotion. Additionally, Robert Herrick in Noble Numbers writes a Passion poem, “This Crosse-Tree,” which visibly mimes the cross through its own cruciform structure, a likely gesture to Herbertian poetics. Hence, in revising his lyric to complement its content through its form, Crashaw has synthesized devotion to Christ’s wounds so popular in prose Passion accounts with a mimetic structure epitomized in the works of Herbert and Herrick, two traditionally canonical and mainstream English poets.

37 Peter M. Daly has also discovered German poems on Christ’s cross that use visual form to mimic their content, much like Robert Herrick’s “This Crosse-Tree” mimes the visible shape of the cross it describes. See, for instance, Johann Helwig’s poem, “Nussbaum,” from his Die Nymphe Noris in Zweien Tagzeiten vorgestellet (Nürnberg, 1650), pictured in Daly’s Literature in the Light of the Emblem, Second Edition (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998), 148-49.

38 One might also note that Herrick composed several other lyrics on the Passion in Noble Numbers that seem to participate in trans-confessional discourses, such as “His Saviours words, going to the Cross,” which uses apostrophe to voice Christ, and “His Anthem, to Christ on the Crosse,” which uses apostrophe to draw the speaker and Christ intimately close together.
As we have seen in Pseudo-Bernard, Andrewes, Falconer, and Ailesbury, Crashaw’s preoccupation with flowing rivers and fountains of blood in poetry is far from alien to English Passion accounts in other genres. Crashaw’s finest examples of blood fountains and gushing pain emerge in “Upon the Bleeding Crucifix,” and the poem demonstrates Crashaw’s deft ability to use Bernardine images to create Christ crucified as the center of all transcendence:

Thy restlesse feet now cannot goe
For us and our eternall good,
As they were ever wont. What though?
They swimme. Alas, in their own floud. (3.1-4)

But o thy side, thy deep-digg’d side!
That hath a double Nilus going.
Nor ever was the pharian tide
Half so fruitfull, half so flowing. (5.1-4)

No hair so small, but payes his river
To this red sea of thy blood
Their little channells can deliver
Something to the Generall floud. (6.1-4)

We have seen this before: Christ’s “deep-digg’d side” occurs in both Andrewes’s and Ailesbury’s sermons, while the river of blood issuing from Christ’s side resonates with Andrewes’s Jordan reference. Similarly, Christ’s nailed-down hands resonates with Daniel Heinsius’s “he was so captivated,” while the transformation of Christ’s blood into a life-giving river (the “Nilus” that irrigates Egypt) is virtually identical to Sighes, Sobbes, and Tears and Falconer’s Fasciculus Myrrhae. We also see Crashaw’s coloration of these motifs. The lines develop the image of Christ’s blood flowing from his body, creating rivers of blood that inundate Christ, threatening his existence as corporeal image. Even the rhyme structure strengthens this dynamic, with “side” metamorphosing into “tide” and “blood” similarly turning into a “floud.” Additionally, the juxtaposition of
these strong rhymes with the weaker, smoother “going/flowing” and “river/deliver” creates a liquid poetic texture often associated with Crashavian imagery. All of this suggests that the poem is aimed at creating both a corporeal, fleshly image of Christ’s suffering, as well as an iconic representation of Christ’s sacrifice, a metaphorizing of the gushing body into a spiritual channel of sacramental grace. By exaggerating the blood poured out of Jesus’ body, Crashaw presents the physical death of Christ as well as the non-literal effects of it, the “rivers” of blood that baptize the faithful and grant them redemptive grace.³⁹

By stretching liquid images and metaphors to their limits, the poem reveals the unity of spiritual grace with Christ’s liquefying, eroticized body on the cross. Crashaw heightens the immediacy of this physical-spiritual flowing, using a deictic marker in stanza 7 to bring the event into the immediate present:

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But while I speak, whither are run
All the rivers nam’d before?
I counted wrong. There is but one;
But o that one is one all o’re. (7.1-4)
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“While” indicates that the bleeding happens at the same time as the speaker utters the words describing it. The word reminds the reader of the liturgical temporality of the Passion in the poem, a present temporality heightened both by the tense of the stanza’s first line and by the poem’s continued development of exaggerated imagery that reminds the reader of the sacramental purpose of Christ’s cleansing blood. In the stanza, the Passion and its graphic details happen even now, “while I speak,” and produce “one”

³⁹ Though this kind of iconographic imagery—imagery that moves from the purely corporeal to the spiritual registers of meaning—is analyzed in Matthew Horn’s “A Safe Place for the Texted Icon: Richrad Crashaw’s Use of the Emblem Tradition in His Devotional Lyrics,” *Exemplaria* 20.4 (2008): 410-29, Horn’s basic assumption that Crashaw worked in a Roman Catholic and even recusant atmosphere is inaccurate, as shown by scholars like Shell, Wall, and Healy.
river of saving blood flowing from the one body on the cross. After reminding the reader of the ever-present now of the Passion, the poem then develops the striking image of blood flowing into rivers, becoming a self-inundating flood that delivers souls from death:

Rain-swoln rivers may rise proud
Bent all to drown and overflow.
But when indeed all’s overflow’d
They themselves are drowned too.

This thy blood’s deluge, a dire chance
Dear Lord to thee, to us is found
A deluge of Deliverance;
A deluge least we should be drown’d. (8.1-9.4)

Metamorphosed into a river and then into a flood, Christ’s blood becomes an impossible combination of grace-filled sacrament and self-limiting destruction. The logic of the flooded river of blood intimates that the metaphor has reached its conceptual limit: for once a river overruns its banks, it ceases to be a river, and becomes an inundation. This flood is therefore both destructive (“a dire chance”) and salvific (“A deluge least we should be drown’d”), and the paradox parallels the Christian paradoxes of life grown out of death, of cleansing achieved through immersion in blood—blood that, in Donne’s words, “dyes red souls to white.”\(^40\) And at exactly the point where Crashaw’s conceit threatens to overrun the bounds of the poem and to move from exaggerated baroque conceit to the empty extravagance feared and reviled by so many of Crashaw’s critics, the poet provides a biblical distich that reins in the conceit and confines it within traditional, scriptural, parabolic discourse:

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\(^{40}\) The final line of Donne’s Holy Sonnet 4, “Oh my black soul.”
N’ere wast thou in a sense so sadly true,
The WELL of living WATERS, Lord, till now. (ll. 37-38)

Christ’s blood has metamorphosed from gory fountains of pain in the early stanzas, to a cruciform image rendered in the poem’s head-feet-hands-side structure, to a Nile-like river of liquefied suffering and lifeblood, to an inundation that is ultimately salvific, sacramental, and—through the Nile—fertile. The final distich, a reference to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, gives the poem’s outlandish conceit a biblical reference point to integrate the poem’s exaggerated body in pain within the culturally normative discourse of scripture, challenging Lewalski’s claim that Crashaw does not write within a mainstream, English biblical poetics. Such scriptural anchoring, more typical of Protestant Passions, complements Crashaw’s participation in the rhetoric of exaggerated bleeding and gushing wounds that characterize the Passion accounts of Pseudo-Bernard, Bishop Andrewes, Ailesbury, Falconer, and Heinsius. It also indicates Crashaw’s awareness of the poem’s potential to overflow readers’ sensibilities with extravagant imagery. Crashaw manifests his debt to Bernardine piety at the same time as he shows his scriptural credentials and his awareness of his poem’s visual, bodily affectivity; he does so comfortably integrating his remarkable lyric with typological, scriptural references to baptism and grace so central to devotional poets throughout the period.

In a way diametrically opposed to traditional readings of Crashaw’s baroque or Counter-Reformation aesthetics, “Upon the Bleeding Crucifix” argues for Crashaw’s participation in popular Bernardine piety. The poem also demonstrates Crashaw’s

41 Lewalski, 12, 104.
metamorphosis of this tradition into the surreal quality of his verse that straddles the visual and metaphorical, that uses the dying, liquefying body to channel spiritual, redemptive grace. Perhaps when composing the poem Crashaw was thinking of Andrewes’s Passion sermons published in his *Ninety-Six Sermons* in the 1632 edition, the volume for which Crashaw wrote a lyric on John Payne’s engraving of Andrewes, “Upon Bishop Andrewes his Picture before his Sermons”; perhaps he read the Bernardine works in his father’s extensive library. But whether or not Crashaw was acquainted with the specific Passion accounts cited here, his vivid images of Christ’s pained body are found in the rhetorical tendencies of prose accounts printed for a wide English readership.

Although Healy convincingly argues for Crashaw’s relationship to Laudian Cambridge, localized contexts should not obscure the poet’s engagement with widely used representational strategies of the Passion.\(^{42}\) For just as Pseudo-Bernard’s meditations were immensely popular, so too were Andrewes’s proto-Laudian sermons widely circulated—printed in London six times over the same decade that Crashaw was at Cambridge. Instead, we should be attuned to Crashaw’s poetic appropriation of Passion discourses common in English prose accounts of the seventeenth century, a piety which sees Christ crucified amidst spouting blood and flowing grace, a simultaneously corporeal and spiritual mode of conceiving the Passion that critics have insufficiently explored as a context for Crashaw’s verse.

\(^{42}\) Healy, 40-65.
Animating the Body in Pain: “On the wounds of our crucified Lord”

More consistently than traditionally canonical poets, Crashaw remains intensely corporeal throughout his verse. Though it might be tempting to normalize Crashaw by arguing that in his poetry the body yields to higher spiritual matters, we must resist this temptation as a facile attempt to make Crashaw look more like a very narrow interpretation of Donne’s or Herbert’s metaphysical intellectualism. As the above reading of “Upon the Bleeding Crucifix” suggests, Crashaw does not privilege the body or the erotic over the soul, nor does he simply use the body to symbolize purely spiritual understandings of redemption. Rather, Crashaw, like contemporary Passion prose writers indebted to Pseudo-Bernard, spiritualizes Christ’s bleeding body, using his characteristic imagery to “animate” the body with divine love. By animation, I refer to a treatment of the visualized and eroticized body in pain that rejects neither the spirit nor the body, but instead sees both as indispensable to devotion, recognizing physical imagery and spiritual metaphor without attempting to transcend or dispense with the flesh.

Animation resonates with an Aristotelian understanding of anima, that life force or essence of an entity that constitutes the form of its being—a philosophy of being consonant with Crashaw’s poetic imagery. Although such an understanding of anima is not fully congruent with later Christian theories of the soul, the writings of Thomas Aquinas provide a workable synthesis between Aristotle’s philosophy and Christian anthropology. Thomas and Aristotle were widely read at Cambridge during Crashaw’s tenure there, and it is highly probable, given that Pembroke College and Peterhouse had extensive collections of Thomas and Aristotle, that Crashaw would have had at least
some acquaintance with Thomas’s interpretation of Aristotle’s *de anima*. In his commentary on this work, Thomas claims that the full being of any object is a composite of both its form and its matter:

The rational soul can in a certain respect be called a definite thing, insofar as it can subsist by itself, but because it does not have a complete species, being rather part of a species, it is not in every way proper to call it a definite thing. The difference between matter and form is this, that matter is being in potentiality, but form is the *entelechía*, that is act thanks to which matter comes to be actual, and it is the composite that is actual being.

In relationship to human beings, what is essential to the Aristotelian and Thomistic definition of *anima* is that the rational soul is a form whose matter is a physical body; the totality of a human being is a composite of form and matter, of “spirit” or *anima*, and body. Without a synthesis of matter and form, the rational soul (or any other type of *anima* in Aristotle’s system) remains at best a partial rather than complete being, a being only in potentiality. In this scholastic understanding, matter and spirit/form are mutually dependent, rather than separable objects; to “animate” an object is to imbue it with a

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43 For Thomas’s popularity at Cambridge, see Healy, 47–48, where he shows that Richard Holdsworth recommended Thomas’s *Summa* for student reading. Examination of the descriptive catalogues of the library holdings at Pembroke and Peterhouse shows that Thomas Aquinas’s work, as well as that of St. Bernard, was well represented at Crashaw’s colleges. For example, Pembroke College listed among its manuscripts Thomas’s complete *Summa Theologica*, his commentary *de anima*, as well as other of Thomas’s commentaries on the Gospels. Pembroke also held manuscript copies of Aristotle’s *Metaphysica, Politica*, and *Rhetorica*, as well as St. Bernard’s *super cantica canticorum* (i.e., On the Song of Songs) and *de passione* (On the Passion). Similarly, Peterhouse’s more extensive holdings includes Thomas Aquinas’s commentaries on Aristotle’s *de anima*, as well as *super de Causis, super ethica*, and *super Metaphysica*. In addition to several dozen manuscript copies of Aristotle’s various works, Peterhouse’s library also housed a great number of commentaries on Aristotle by other writers, including works by Romanus Aegidus, Albert the Great, and Robert Kilwardby, as well as multiple anonymous commentaries on Aristotle. Peterhouse also contained a relatively high number of manuscripts of St. Bernard’s writings, including *de Amore Dei, de cruce*, and his *Sermons*. See M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Peterhouse* (Cambridge, 1899), and *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Pembroke College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1905).

complete being and meaning, to fill it with the “movement” of life that constitutes its essential form. If we understand Crashavian corporeality through the Thomistic and scholastic formations that were likely current in Laudian and Cambridge circles, then his sensual images—blood, the wounded body of Christ, tears—are both physically as well as spiritually saturated; they exist in the poetry as composite entities straddling the boundaries of spiritual and physical realities that are only illusorily distinct. Thus, metaphor and sometimes metonymy become the poetic strategies animating Crashaw’s imagery: the former allows the poet to reveal the hidden relationships between physical images and spiritual meanings, while the latter even more clearly demonstrates the unity of matter and form that constitutes being in Christian and Thomistic versions of the Aristotelian anima.

If in Thomistic philosophy the fullness of being exists only as form united with its matter, something similar can be said of Crashaw’s corporeally saturated Passion poetry: Christ’s bleeding body is never only a body in Crashaw, but rather the enfleshment of divine love. Throughout the period’s Passion devotion, Christ’s torture and death are never purely physical events. Rather, as we have seen throughout this study, the instruments of Jesus’ suffering as well as his body are often “animated” with spiritual signification, so that every corporeal detail signifies a deeper spiritual reality. Hence, Passion narratives across confessional divides “animate” the physical manifestation of Christ’s sufferings with spiritual signification, sometimes intentionally avoiding dwelling

on mere corporeal suffering in order to emphasize that such suffering represents (and produces) spiritual grace. For instance, in focusing on the spiritual efficaciousness of the Passion, John Falconer invokes the traditional *vir dolorum* to compare Christ’s suffering body on the cross with a drawn crossbow, an emblem of Christian endurance and spiritual warfare that moves the reader beyond the abject flesh.\textsuperscript{46} Protestants especially discourage superficial meditation on Christ’s Passion without awareness of its spiritual meaning, generally out of a fear that Catholics are devoted only to the outward pains of the Passion. We have seen this concern in John Foxe’s and Joseph Hall’s Passion sermons in previous chapters.\textsuperscript{47} Thomas Ailesbury, too, implies this when he writes, “Yet to consider Christ as a man of sorrow, & not a Saviour of sinners, that his wounds were not our salves, yeelds but a melancholike contemplation.”\textsuperscript{48} In devotion to the Passion, these writers claim, we must always keep in mind that Christ’s death is not merely a bodily or mundane event, but the manifestation of grace, forgiveness, and atonement.

The popular Bishop Andrewes not only reiterates this warning, but he also exemplifies the need to “animate” or imbue our Passion meditation with its spiritual essence. He writes in a 1597 sermon that we must look upon Christ “First, then, not slightly, superficially, or perfunctorily, but steadfastly, and with due attention, to ‘look upon Him.’ And not to look upon the outside alone, but to look into the very entrails; and

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. Falconer, 51, 77, 104, *et passim*. While the “Man of Sorrows” motif was popular in late medieval piety, so too was the motif *Christus Victor*—Christ as victorious warrior. For a discussion of the “heroic theory” of the atonement in English lyric, see Charlotte Clutterbuck, *Encounters with God in Medieval and Early Modern English Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 41-44


\textsuperscript{48} Ailesbury, 30.
with our eye to pierce Him That was thus pierced.” ⁴⁹ He repeats the claim in his 1605 Passion sermon, claiming that we must “look upon Him” “not with the eyes of flesh,” but instead, “by faith.” ⁵⁰ Most significantly, though, Andrewes wishes the faithful to see Christ right through to Christ’s “bowels of compassion and tender love,” ⁵¹ a fascinating trope that unites abject physicality with the central motive of Christ’s self-sacrifice, compassionate love. Emerging from Andrewes’s rhetoric of Christ’s suffering body is a movement between physical and spiritual registers: for Andrewes uses a gruesome (though as Michael Shchoenfeldt has shown, commonplace) ⁵² physical detail in “bowels of compassion” to join physical suffering with spiritual love. Even for Andrewes, whose consistent admonition in all three of his Passion sermons—1597, 1604, and 1605—is that we must “look upon” Christ, that we must “regard him” steadfastly, Passion discourse uses the visualized, pained body of Christ to understand the spiritual significance of salvation, thus animating fleshly vision. This in turn produces paradoxical figures in which terms like “entrails,” “bowels,” or in Crashaw’s case, “blossoms,” “roses,” “darts,” and “wounds,” straddle the conceptual space between fleshly suffering and spiritual reality, between the corporeal world of the earth and that space “some yards above the ground,” in “that other state” of spiritual existence. ⁵³ In Crashaw, such animation is also a poetic strategy “in between” flesh and spirit not confined to one or the other registers, but


⁵⁰ Ibid., 175.

⁵¹ Ibid., 129.


⁵³ Terms from the preface of the 1646 and 1648 poems, in The Complete Poems, 650.
animating and complementing each other through the corporeal-spiritual nexus of Crashavian imagery.  

Crashaw scholarship, as I have suggested, has traditionally separated the spiritual and the embodied, *agape* and *eros*, in its readings of Crashaw. This is often the reason critics like Eliot, Warren, Praz, and Lewalski devalue Crashaw’s poetry as alien, “feminine,” or “precious”: privileging the supposedly more “intellectual” or “spiritual” poetics of Herbert or Donne, such critics—usually using the infamous “The Weeper” as their main example—claim Crashaw is interested mainly in the physical realm, the sensuous and ornate. In offering correctives to this bifurcated critical tradition, a new generation of critics has proposed liturgical influences for Crashaw’s embodied Passion poetry, attempting to synthesize material and spiritual valences in the verse. While Eugene Cunnar has convincingly argued for a liminal dimension to ritual that allows participants to confuse and invert categories such as body/soul and male/female, Ryan Netzley has shown Crashaw’s engagement with Catholic and Protestant theories of the Eucharist. Meanwhile, Nandra Perry has incisively shown the role the body plays in stabilizing spiritual meaning in Crashaw, connecting the poet to Laudian theologies of charity and ritual to make her case. Motivating all ritual-oriented readings, many of them incisive and helpful, is the yoking of *eros* and *agape* enabled by liturgy, a similar kind of analogy we see in Thomistic adaptations of Aristotle. As these ritually-attuned

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readings show, the interdependence of spiritual and erotic love has deep roots in Christian devotion, both liturgical and personal.

Richard Rambuss’ work represents perhaps the most cogent interpretation of Crashaw along these lines.\(^5^6\) Rambuss’ reading emphasizes psychoanalytical and cultural theories influenced by Georges Bataille (among others) and claims that readers of devotional poetry have neglected the strongly erotic and sexual texture of early modern Christian devotion because of later moral taboos that accreted in Christian thought. However, in his haste to claim Crashaw for his presentist agenda, Rambuss has misidentified Crashaw’s erotics with the transgressive aesthetics of Andres Serrano and Chris Ofili. Quite unlike Serrano and Ofili, whose work is consciously aimed at transgressing traditional Christian mores, Crashaw writes within a mainstream of English Passion piety that comfortably synthesizes the sensual and spiritual. Thus, if we contextualize Crashavian devotion not merely within liturgical ritual, but also within a broader, popular (rather than transgressive) Passion piety in English prose texts, Crashaw’s liquefying bodies, and all the strangeness critics have taught us to see in the poet, become remarkably intelligible: Christ’s abject body is simultaneously a site of erotic union and spiritual love, a poetic space where affect and intellect join to make wounds into tongues and blood into rubies.

Reciprocity between erotic and *agape* love is often the animating force of Bernardine Passion texts of the period, and such texts sometimes invoke diction similar to the most gruesome and eccentric metaphors in Crashaw. Although the speaking,

bleeding, and weeping wounds of “On the wounds of our crucified Lord” lack any correlative in the poetry of the period, there is clear precedent for such a metaphor in some of the prose Passion accounts. For instance, of Christ’s wounds and the grace they produce, Falconer writes,

Thy woundes (gracious Lord) in such as made, or procured them, were signes of horrible hatred and cruelty; but in thy selfe gladly suffering them, they were as so many rents, of thy ardent love, breathed through them, fountaines of grace, and mouthes still open, to aske pardon for our sines, and heavenly graces for us, not by any sound of words, but by streames of bloud, powred from them, which spilt on the earth.57

Not only does the passage apostrophize Jesus, bringing his wounds into intimate proximity with the speaker, but it also transforms the wounds into “fountains of grace” and, most importantly, “mouthes still open” that beg for mercy through issuing blood. In this metaphor, blood becomes the instrument of articulation—a tongue-like object whose gruesome outpouring speaks on behalf of humanity. Similarly, the Protestant Ailesbury uses strikingly congruent language regarding Christ’s wounds and their capacity to speak, claiming that in Jesus we see “so many wounds, so many speaking and interceding tongues, pleading thy right at the mercy-seat.”58 In both writers we see the incorporation of bodily wounds that “speak” spiritual meanings and that utter the grace that saves sinful man; the accounts also integrate the rhetoric of atonement and economic exchange that characterizes substitutive discourse. As these examples evince, Passion accounts influenced by Bernardine piety often view Jesus’ Passion as a synthesis of spiritual and corporeal registers of meaning: Christ’s physical wounds become animating loci

57 Falconer, 47-48, emphasis added.

58 Ailesbury, 30.
signifying eternal life. Through such animation, Crashavian Passion poetry makes physical objects of abjectness—tears, wounds, blood, even milk—voice spiritual signification, giving them “tongues” to speak divinity.

“On the wounds of our crucified Lord” uses rhetoric similar to the above accounts to animate Christ’s bleeding wounds with spiritual meaning. Moreover, this process of corporeal-spiritual animation involves another subject, Mary Magdalene, model of ideal Christian devotion who is also animated—that is, given life and grace—through Christ’s Passion. Just like Ailesbury and Falconer, the poem metaphorizes Christ’s wounds as mouths and eyes:

O these wakefull wounds of thine!
Are they Mouthes? or are they eyes?
Be they Mouthes, or be they eyne,
Each bleeding part some one supplies. (1-4)

As eyes and mouths, the wounds are conduits of exchange, and the fact that each one is “supplying” the other with liquid reveals how economic (i.e., substitutive) discourse, so popular in especially Protestant Passions of the period, produces a Christ characterized by a reflexive “giving” and “receiving” of fluids. The self-contained reciprocity and fleshly emphasis of blood and mouths also manifests Christ’s perfect and gratuitous satisfaction for sin: he is the spiritual producer as well as the recipient of contrition. Even before speaking directly of spiritual grace, then, the poem marries sensuality and spirituality.

The next stanza is more specific about the nature of the fluids:

Lo! a mouth, whose full-bloom’d lips
At too deare a rate are roses.
Lo! a bloodshot eye! that weepes
And many a cruell teare discloses. (5-8)

First, the stanza describes the “roses” of Christ’s wounds, a trope that eroticizes Jesus’ act of submissive love and oddly beautifies the abjectness of bodily violence. The wounds
then become eyes in line 7. In Crashaw, tears are the signs of human repentance, and more than this, the channels by which the sinner is connected directly to Christ and to the divine paradoxically through self-abnegation—as in “The Weeper,” where Magdalene’s tears form upward-flowing fountains that “goe to meet / A worthy object, our lord’s FEET” (XXXI.5-6). In early modern English poetry, as Gary Kuchar has shown, “devout sorrow is less an emotional state than it is a language—a grammar of tears, so to speak,” a language expressing the soul’s emptying out of self-identity to make room for divine love.⁵⁹ That Christ’s wounds weep tears suggests Christ’s self-emptying or kenosis in very Southwellian terms, even at the same time as Jesus’ body becomes a locus for self-fashioning: for if tears are the mode by which the self is emptied, then Christ’s blood—the seat of the soul in early modern physiology—is ideally supposed to fill the evacuated self to forge a new identity. In this dynamic, Magdalene is the example of an ideal Christian soul’s subjection to God’s love, for she exchanges tears of self-abnegation for the blood of self-identification.

In the poem’s last three stanzas, the bodily fluids generate an economic exchange that enhances the process of self-identification through Christ’s Passion. As she weeps and watches, Magdalene exchanges her tears for spiritual treasures through the wounds:

O thou that on this foot hast laid
Many a kisse, and many a Teare,
Now thou shal’t have all repaid,
Whatsoe’r thy charges were.

This foot hath got a Mouth and lippes,
To pay the sweet summe of thy kisses:
To pay thy Teares, an Eye that weeps
In stead of Teares such Gems as this is. (9-16)

Magalene “kisses” Christ’s bleeding foot, giving tears as payment, which Christ repays through his wounds. This repayment emerges in stanza four, where Christ’s wounds are both “mouths” that will “repay” Magdalene’s kisses, and “eyes” that will pay back Magdalene’s tears. Economic connotations suffuse the stanzas—“repaid,” “charges,” “pay,” “summe,” and “Gems”—and draw Mary and Christ into an exchange where kisses and tears are the corporeal-spiritual currency of divine love and forgiveness. The economic tropes remind us that Crashaw’s poetry partakes of adapted substitutive discourse so widespread in especially Protestant Passion accounts at the same time that it draws on the discourse of the visualized, eroticized, suffering body that often surfaces in the poems of Alabaster and Southwell and in the sermons of Donne. This appropriation of economic language suggests the spiritual exchange of Mary’s repentance for Christ’s forgiveness through the corporeal images of wounds and tears; mundane and earthly processes manifest spiritual glory and help authorize the contrite soul through a poetic encounter. The final stanza then consolidates economic rhetoric by disclosing, as it were, the spiritual exchange rate:

The difference onely this appeares,
(Nor can the change offend)
The debt is paid in Ruby-Teares,
Which thou in Pearles did’st lend. (17-20)

What was once a seemingly equitable economic exchange between Mary and Christ is in fact an act of grace, an overpayment that Mary can never fully match: Christ’s wounds return rubies, the red blood of Jesus, in exchange for the “pearls” of a contrite heart that Christ loaned in the first place. Though metamorphosing blood into rubies can be chalked up to a dismissible preciosity in Crashaw, when contextualized against prose Passions’ tendency to dwell on the nexus between spiritual and corporeal meanings, such a
metamorphosis is far less strange. Indeed, substitutive language and even the discourse of the visualized body in pain are not merely “precious,” but are deeply rooted in the Bernardine Passion piety in Crashaw’s devotional culture; and if one considers the similar shadings of Ignatian meditation in earlier poets like Southwell and Alabaster, it becomes more difficult to single out Crashaw’s poetry as alien to English devotion in either poetry or prose. “On the Wounds,” as so many other Passion texts, dramatizes the dynamic movement between corporeal images and spiritual meanings, and manifests the inextricable relationship between spiritual grace and the fleshly world: rubies and tears are strikingly physical in their colorful suggestiveness, and they also metaphorize repentance and salvation through Christ’s wounds, describing through concrete, bodily images the ineffable power of divine love.

“On the wounds” blends both economic rhetoric and the animation of corporeal images into spiritual life that creates an exchange between Christ and Magdalene, between the worlds of flesh and spirit that were originally suggested in Southwell’s seminal Passion lyrics. Moreover, Mary’s contrition suggests her desire to be emptied and to be subsequently filled with Christ’s love, while Christ’s wounds, vacillating in the poem between eyes and mouths, are conduits animating and conjoining physical and spiritual registers while never fully relinquishing either: Christ’s rubies never fully cease being blood; pearls, though alluding to spiritual exchange, never stop dropping like tears. If, as Rambuss has argued, Crashaw’s poetry produces a “sacred eroticism” through the open wounds of Christ’s sexualized body, “On the wounds” produces an eroticism inextricably tied to agape—or more accurately to caritas, that Christian understanding of divine love that seeks to animate the pains of the physical world without leaving behind
the reality of the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{60} Only when we perceive the interdependence of spiritual and erotic love in Passion piety, especially in popular prose texts, does Crashaw begin to look at home in England and its literary culture; only when we recognize the Bernardine desire to dwell on the abject Christ and simultaneously to animate that sacred body with spiritual love can we see Crashaw as a powerful example of an important canon of contemporary devotion rather than a foreign interloper in English literature.

\textbf{Writing the Passion, Inscribing the Poet}

In Crashaw the Passion is the moment when the fleshly human soul is animated by Christ’s embodied, spiritual love. As is the case with Robert Southwell, William Alabaster, and even John Donne, Crashaw’s Passion devotion analogizes meditating on Christ’s Passion with writing or inscription. As outlined in the previous chapters, an understanding of the Passion as a process of divine inscription or writing on the human soul is common to both poetry and prose of the period. Not only does John Fisher liken the crucifix to a book or text, but Bishop Andrewes also uses this trope:

\begin{quote}
The cross is but a little word, but of great contents; but few letters, but in these few letters are contained \textit{multa dictu gravia perpessu aspera}.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

For sure, if ever aught were truly said of our Saviour, this was: that being spread and laid wide open on the cross, He is \textit{Liber charitatis}, wherein he that runneth by may read, \textit{Sic dilexit}, and \textit{Propter nimiam charitatem}, and \textit{Ecce quantam charitatem}; love all over, from one end to the other. Every stripe as a letter, every

\\textsuperscript{60} See Rambuss, \textit{Closet Devotions}, 1-9, for a discussion of sacred eroticism.

nail as a capital letter...His bleeding wounds as so many rubrics, to shew upon record His love toward us.\textsuperscript{62}

For Andrewes, proper understanding of the Passion is a form of right reading, an understanding of the letter and spirit of salvation. Christ himself is most “legible” in his crucifixion, a text that, like scripture, fully discloses the depth of God’s love and the meaning of redemption. Pseudo-Bernard also intimates this textual metaphor, claiming that God’s love in the Passion is inscribed directly into the soul:

\begin{quote}
Let thy lively and powerfull Word pierce into my side, and wound my heart: For thy Word, oh Lord, will sooner enter then a double-edged sword and penetrate deeper then the sharpest speare, even to the division of my soule, and the marrow inclosed in my bones, that instead of blood and water, there may issue forth continually streames of love, toward thee and thy brethren.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

The writer references Hebrews 4:12 (“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...”), but then elaborates it with the discourse of the pained body—the figurative sword becomes a piercing spear that punctures Christ’s side. In a sense, though in a kind of reverse ordering, his language conflates the physical torture of the Passion to a spiritual good: the entrance of Christ’s love into the reader’s soul is a piercing that both mirrors Christ’s piercing and suggests the admixture of physical wounding and emotional/spiritual wounding found in Crashaw’s “Sancta Maria Dolorum,” where the interlocked sorrows of Christ and Mary are compared to inscription—“His Nailes write swords in her, which soon her heart / Payes back” (III.7-8). “Sancta Maria Dolorum” resolves this dynamic into a quintessential moment of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 180.
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Crashavian poetry, in which the inscription of grace created by Christ’s wounds and human contrition dissolves the devotee into love itself:

By all those stings
Of love, sweet bitter things,
Which these torn hands transcrib’d on thy true heart
O teach mine too the art
To study him so, till we mix
Wounds; and become one crucifix. (X.5-10)

Not only does Crashaw compare Mary’s and Christ’s sorrow during the Passion to writing, an act in which Christ “transcribes” with his hands on Mary’s heart, but the poem also yearns for the soul’s absorption into the crucifix, a mingling of identity with the Mother of Sorrows and her dying son. Ideally, in Crashaw—as well as in Alabaster’s “The Sponge”—the Passion “writes over” the heart of the sinner and poet, making the soul one with Christ’s death.

Christian identity as inscription through the Passion is explicitly depicted in “On the still surviving markes of our Saviours wounds,” in which the speaker learns to read Christ’s wounds correctly as saving balms:

What ever story of their cruelty,
Or Naile, or Thorne, or Speare have writ in Thee,
Are in another sence
Still legible;
Sweet is the difference:
Once I did spell
Every red letter
A wound of thine,
Now, (what is better)
Balsome for mine. (1-10)

In terms paralleling both John Fisher a century earlier and Bishop Andrewes, his late contemporary, Crashaw conceives of Christ’s resurrected body (the marks are “still surviving”) as a readable text. Before the resurrection, the speaker saw red wounds, but now in the light of the resurrection, the speaker sees those wounds as healing salves. The
spiritual healing from Christ’s textual body is mediated by the red letters of his corporeal wounds, and the spiritual healing of the Passion is applied to the reader in a physical register—through the physical text of the poem and the “balsalm” it describes. As in Alabaster, where the best response to the Passion is the composition of passionate devotions, and in Southwell, where Passion poetry offers a consoling construction of the corpus mysticum, in Crashaw Christ’s spiritual inscription on the sinner’s heart is allusively compared to the act of writing Passion poetry. In inscribing poetry, Crashaw, as well as the devotional poets examined in the preceding chapters, share in the spiritual grace of Christ crucified, making of their lines a “Balsome” for others to partake.

Hence, if the goal of Crashaw’s Passion poetry is to move the reader to recognize divine love through Christ’s abject, yet animating wounds, poetry is the quintessential mode that allows readers to perceive Christ’s red-letter wounds as spiritual “balsalm”—the ideal artistic mode of sharing the Passion with a community of readers. The liturgical “Upon our B. Saviours Passion” (1648 title) outlines the relationship between poetry, Passion, and reading community, likening the poetic act to that liminal state of self-identity existing between self-abnegation and spiritual animation. In both the 1648 and 1652 versions, the poem concludes with “The recommendation of the precedent Poems”:

These howers, and that which hovers o’re my end
Into thy hands and heart Lord I commend,
Take both to thine account, that I and mine
In that hower, and in these may be all thine. (1-4)

“Howres” refers to the poems that precede it (the translation of the liturgical hours of the Passion, a ritual rooted in the ecclesial community) as well as to the speaker’s life (the hours that hover over his “end”), so that the speaker asks that Christ accept as gift both his life and art. This links the life and death of both speaker and reader to the poesis of
Christ’s Passion, the imaginative process by which the Christian soul, and by extension, the reading community, comes into self-identification with divine love. This sense is underlined in the subsequent lines:

That as I dedicate my devoutest breath
To make a kind of life for my Lord’s death,
So from his living and life-giving death,
My dying life may draw a new, and never fleeting breath. (5-8)

The poem’s focus on the liminal space between life and death—the space of self-sacrificing love and pain—returns full-force. The speaker (and readers making the words their own) claims that poetry makes Christ’s Passion live, presumably because his poems represent that Passion vividly and in a literary or liturgically present temporality; that is, the poems always voice speakers present at Christ’s death in the literary present tense, and many times in the language of hymn or Eucharistic ritual. As such, the poems are “living” literary and communal objects. Finally, the lines link the speaker’s “devoutest breath”—suggesting the poetry itself—and the living death it represents to his own potential “never fleeting breath,” the eternal life the crucifixion promises. In Southwellian terms, the lines connect poetry and the speaker’s life to Christ’s Passion, asking not only that he be dissolved into Christ’s “living and life-giving death,” but also that his poetry be a “life for my Lord’s death,” a living mirror or reflection for others not only of the poet, but preeminently of Christ—of Christ inscribed, as it were, in the souls of the various reading communities that take up the book of poems.

By understanding Crashaw’s authorial relationship to the Passion, we have come full circle to Southwell, a poet whose own biography is deeply connected to both Christ’s suffering and to his poetry. Yet there is a significant difference. Robert Southwell’s poetry takes advantage of the fluid identification between Christ and speaking voice in
order to collapse the author’s potential martyrdom and the spiritual martyrdom of his readers into the Passion. Thus, even as Southwell attempts to write Passion poems voiceable by readers in order to console and consolidate the Catholic community, his Passion poetry, especially after his actual martyrdom, also retains highly biographical resonances that paradoxically fuel his influence on seventeenth-century poetic devotion. Crashaw, on the other hand, seems to recede from his Passion poetry and from the community of English poets, advocating instead the complete absorption of the speaking voice and devout soul into Christ on the cross, a longing that Alabaster captured fifty years earlier in sonnet 34, “O that I were transformed into love,” and that Herbert expressed in “A True Hymn”—“O, could I love!” Crashaw’s authorial desire to be transformed into the “one crucifix” of love is fittingly summarized in “The Authors Motto” from the 1646 *Steps to the Temple*: “Live Jesus, Live, and let it bee / My life to dye, for love of thee.” It is a venerating gesture that makes the poet a self-effacing vehicle through which to communicate the Passion to the world. It is the motto of an author whose future membership in or exclusion from a particular canon of poets was likely for him not nearly as important as his poetic and natively English engagement of Christ crucified.

In her bold reassessment of Crashaw, Alison Shell argues that the contexts critics bring to bear on devotional poetry will determine whether such verse is read as mainstream or marginal.64 When critics assume that mainstream devotional poetry of the

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64 Shell asserts this in *Catholicism, Controversy*, esp. in her introductory discussion of Catholicism and literary-critical tradition.
seventeenth century consists mainly of the lyrics of Donne and Herbert, Crashaw becomes distorted, a foreign and baroque poet more at home in Spain or Italy than in England. Conversely, when we focus on the devotional discourses of Christ’s Passion throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and simultaneously broaden our consideration to include a variety of devotional texts, Crashaw becomes an important figure in a widely popular English piety that includes Catholic and Protestant alike. The myriad prose writers drawing on Bernardine Passion piety throughout the period embraced Christ’s liquefied and suffering body as the vital center of devotion; Crashaw would do no less in his poetic art. Reassessing Crashaw within these discursive and generic contexts, then, suggests that critics must attend to the complex devotional traditions at work in early modern England, and not restrict their understanding of seventeenth-century poetry to narrow and implicitly polemical assumptions regarding the religious lyric or the exclusivity of Catholic and Protestant literary communities. Such traditional interpretations are critical strategies that, in forcing Crashaw, along with Southwell, Alabaster, and Beaumont, out of the English literary canon, ironically “reduce the complexities of political-religious history to blockbuster simplicity.”
CONCLUSION

Reading Crashaw’s poetry within the broader contexts of seventeenth-century devotion to Christ’s Passion reveals that Crashaw’s poems, even those lyrics most preoccupied with Christ’s liquefying body, are as native and mainstream to English devotion of the period as the poems of John Donne or George Herbert. Reading seventeenth-century devotional poetry within the trans-confessional Passion discourses this dissertation has uncovered allows us to rethink our received assumptions regarding mainstream and marginal literature of the period, and challenges scholarly narratives that isolate Catholic and Protestant devotional and literary communities in the seventeenth century. Understanding poets like Crashaw, Beaumont, Donne, Alabaster, and Southwell within this set of common discourses reveals that despite distinctions in Catholic and Protestant theologies, writers across the confessional divide could draw on the same set of representational strategies to construct communion with and community through the crucified Christ. Most importantly, study of Passion discourses allows us to read neglected Catholic poets within mainstream English literary and devotional culture, challenging our understandings of literary canonicity and reading communities, and contributing to an emerging body of scholarly work that attempts to recover the influences of early modern Catholicism on English literature of the period.

This attempt to rethink Catholic and Protestant devotional communities and literary canonicity through Passion representations suggests several new avenues by
which to approach the period’s poetry. For example, how does George Herbert’s *The Temple* engage the Passion as a constituent of corporate and individual devotion? How do lyrics like “The Sacrifice” or “Redemption” participate in the discourses this dissertation has identified, and how does the poet appropriate such discourses to his own specific poetic, devotional, and ecclesial ends? How does a deeper understanding of the representational discourses and rhetorical strategies growing out of the Passion challenge or enhance our understanding of the structure and meaning of *The Temple*? Similarly, approaching the poetry of Amelia Lanyer through Passion discourses might produce fresh insight into her original adaptation of the Passion from a proto-feminist perspective and her construction of a particularly female religious reading community in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, her magnum opus on the Passion. How does Lanyer appropriate a vivid portrait and narrative of Christ’s suffering to speak to her concerns about gender identity and the role of the feminine in traditional Christian mythology? How does the poet appropriate substitutive discourse or intimate communion to her poem in order to challenge traditional theologies of redemption, sin, and male/female culpability in the fall, as well as to explore the role of gender in the atoning work of the Passion? To what extent does Lanyer’s epistolary apparatus complicate, challenge, or further her audiences’ understandings of the Passion and of Old Testament history, and how does Lanyer’s community-building project in this poem shape her theology and her representations of that theology? By understanding the ongoing power and prevalence of trans-confessional Passion discourses in this period, future studies of poets like Herbert and Lanyer—as well as of poets like Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and even Patrick Carey and Joseph Beaumont—can permit scholars to position poets in relation to the complex and
interrelated literary and devotional communities characterizing seventeenth century culture. By examining these poets’ potential engagements of communion and community through Passion representations, such scholarly enquiry could also produce a more complex and nuanced account of mainstream and marginal literature in the period.

Milton perhaps is the best test-case for the potential of Passion discourses to transform received narratives of canonicity and devotional traditions in the period. On the one hand, scholars like Michael Schoenfeldt, Richard Rambuss, and Gregory Chaplin have claimed that John Milton, the quintessential English Renaissance poet and de facto representative of canonical English literature, turns away from medieval Passion devotion that privileges the visualized body in pain and the intimate communion with Christ’s Passion that produces affective devotion.\(^1\) In such arguments, Milton represents a supposedly general trend among Protestants in the seventeenth century. Even a cursory glance at Milton’s lyric on “The Passion,” published in Milton’s Poems of 1645 (one year before Crashaw’s Steps to the Temple), suggests that the poet was unable or unwilling to imagine Christ’s suffering in the intimate and vivid way so many of the period’s poets found meaningful and useful in exploring questions of religious identity and community. However, on the other hand, Erin Henriksen has recently challenged the accepted view that Milton was categorically averse to the Passion, claiming instead that the Passion was for Milton “an underlying structure of Christian life,” and that Protestants like Milton produce an “alternative passion” that privileges a Protestant poetics of “fragmentation,\(^1\)

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Henriksen’s argument from omission and fragmentation is not always convincing, and it often recapitulates the kind of confessional dichotomization this dissertation has argued is insufficient to account for the period’s shared heritage of Passion devotion. Nonetheless, Henriksen opens readers’ eyes to the possibility that despite Milton’s difficulty with the Passion, he nonetheless is capable, if only in brief passages, of drawing on the devotional discourses other poets appropriated to their poetry, even if to different degrees and to other poetic purposes.

Though Milton’s “The Passion” does not engage the discourses this dissertation has discovered, “Upon the Circumcision,” a lyric Milton likely wrote around the same time as “The Passion” (c. 1631-33) and which was also published in the 1645 Poems, suggests that even Milton can participate in trans-confessional Passion rhetoric. Although Chaplin claims that for Milton, “the Passion does not represent God as sacrificing himself for Man; it demonstrates the obedience of a perfect creature to the will of God,” in “Upon the Circumcision” Milton includes substitutive language to underline the atonement the circumcision prefigures, and does so in lines of emotive piety that corresponds to some of the devotional texts in this study:

O more exceeding love or law more just?  
Just law indeed, but more exceeding love!  
For we by rightful doom remediless  
Were lost in death, till he that dwelt above  
High throned in secret bliss, for us frail dust  
Emptied his glory, ev’n to nakedness;  
And that great cov’nant which we still transgress  
Entirely satisfied,  
And the full wrath beside

2 Erin Henriksen, Milton and the Reformation Aesthetics of the Passion (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 5, 1, 199.

3 Chaplin, 360.
Of vengeful Justice bore for our excess,
And seals obedience first with wounding smart
This day: but O ere long
Huge pangs and strong
Will pierce more near his heart. (15-28)  

Milton does not linger on the bloody details of the circumcision (and by typological extension, the Passion), yet almost half of this lyric elaborates the atonement prefigured in the circumcision as an exchange of merit, a quenching of God’s just wrath at humanity’s sinfulness in heavily Anselmian language that resonates with the Passion accounts of Ailesbury, Falconer, and Lancelot Andrewes. Thematically, the poem also shares much in common with Southwell’s “The Circumsision” and Crashaw’s “Our Lord his Circumcision to his Father,” both of which explore the typological connection between that event and Christ’s blood-sacrifice, often through substitutive rhetoric. Milton’s poem even concludes with lines foregrounding the role of bodily pain in Christ’s redemption: the piercing of Christ’s foreskin prefigures the piercing of his heart on the cross by the spear.

While it is true that Milton’s poetry nowhere approaches the vivid visuality or sustained, intimate communion dramatized in so many of the period’s Passion poems, Milton’s poetry seems capable of drawing on similar discourses so popular in the seventeenth century. This suggests that despite theological distinctions between various Christian denominations, even a radical Protestant and staunch Arian like Milton—one who privileges learning and obedience over explicit blood-sacrifice as the central redemptive act—could still at least tentatively participate in trans-confessional Passion

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strategies to suit his own spiritual and cosmic vision. Such participation complicates the claims of Michael Schoenfeldt and Sarah Covington, both of whom have claimed that Protestants turned away from supposedly “Catholic” Passion devotion in the seventeenth century.\footnote{Schoenfeldt, “‘That spectacle of too much weight’”; Sarah Covington, \textit{Wounds, Flesh, and Metaphor in Seventeenth-Century England} (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 57-58.}

Ultimately, trans-confessional Passion discourses allow scholars to read poets like Herbert, Lanyer, and even Milton within a much more complex narrative of the period’s overlapping and porous confessional and devotional communities, a narrative that emphasizes representation over confessional identity, that considers prose as well as poetic appropriations of Passion discourses, and that includes recusant Catholic and establishment Protestant writing alike. The critical account this study forwards also complicates any picture of the seventeenth century in which Passion discourses recede in writers’ imaginations. Perhaps most importantly, this study encourages scholars to rethink how they construct mainstream and marginal literary canons of the period, to reconsider how received accounts of the waning of Catholicism and the ascendancy of Protestantism shape traditional and often incomplete views of an English literary community that privilege Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton. Indeed, in light of the popularity of Bernardine devotion and the continuing appeal of Passion piety in the period, poets like Milton who do not engage the Passion as a vital source of devotion look less central to seventeenth-century religious literature than previously thought, whereas traditionally marginalized poets like Crashaw, Southwell, Alabaster, and
Beaumont appear much closer to the mainstream of the period’s impassioned engagement of Christ’s cross.
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