What Ensued from the Bull’s Publication in England

This bull of Pius v was published by being pinned to the doors of the false bishop of London, for which two men died, condemned as traitors. One of them was John Felton, a gentleman of ardent spirit who, seeing the devastation of his homeland, and that so gangrenous a wound could not be cured save by fire and strong medicine, moved by God’s zeal affixed the printed bull to the door of the bishop’s house on the day of the sacred sacrament in the year 1570, where it remained until eight in the morning of the following day—seen and read by many, and copied out by several. A Spaniard named Pedro Berga, a Catalan by nation and a prebendary in the church of Tarragona, aided John Felton in this business, but he fled, leaving Felton, who refused to run, in the heretics’ clutches. They sentenced and punished him as a traitor, with the tortments and execution inflicted upon such people in England, as have been described in this book. In the Martyrologium Romanum, for February 8, mention is made of several sainted monks who died for having published the apostolic letters of Pope Saint Felix against Archbishop Acacius of Constantinople.

1 Sander, De origine ac progressu, 427–32.
2 Edmund Grindal (c.1519–83), bishop of London since Bonner’s deprivation in 1559.
3 On May 25, 1570 (a few days after the feast of Corpus Christi), John Felton (d.1570), a well-born Catholic from Norfolk, nailed up a copy of Pius v’s bull Regnans in excelsis, thereby publishing it in England and giving it canonical force. According to several contemporary sources, he acquired the bull from Pedro Berga (dates unknown), prebendary of Tarragona and chaplain to the Spanish ambassador. Soon after, Felton was apprehended and confessed, but he was tortured nevertheless, in hopes that he would admit to conspiring with the Spanish. Sentenced as a traitor, he was hanged, drawn, and quartered on August 8, 1570. Julian Lock, “Felton, John (d.1570),” in ODNB, 19:282–83, here 282.
4 This sentence is added in the 1595 edition.

The entry for February 8 in Cesare Baronio’s 1589 edition of the Martyrologium Romanum relates: “At Constantinople, the martyrdom of the sainted monks of the monastery of Dios, who were brutally slaughtered for the defense of the Catholic faith, when they brought letters from Pope Saint Felix against Acacius.” Baronio, Martyrologium Romanum, 73.

In 484, Pope Saint Felix III (r.483–92) rejected the Henotikon (482), a document devised by Acacius, ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople (d.489) and promulgated by Emperor Zeno (r.474–75, 476–91) as an attempted solution to the Chalcedonian controversy. Felix was unable to compel Acacius’s submission, though more because the pope’s envoys proved
Felton died with the utmost joy and constancy, professing that he perished in the Catholic faith: by this glorious testimony he gave much solace and encouragement to the Catholics, and much dismay to the heretics.\(^5\)

His Holiness’s sentence produced diverse effects. The Catholics continued to obey the queen, since they were not strong enough to resist, and because they saw that the bull had not been lawfully and solemnly published (so they said); and that the other Catholic princes and states engaged with the queen exactly as before; and that the pope died a few years afterward, and no one knew whether his successor, Gregory XIII,\(^6\) had renewed and confirmed it; and, lastly, that they would lose their property and their lives if they did anything else. The heretics took care to show outward disdain for the bull, saying that these were bugbears to frighten children, yet inwardly they were perturbed and distraught, all the more so since a pope as saintly as Pius V had pronounced that judgment, and each day the kingdom’s Catholics took heart and grew in number. But so deeply did the queen feel this blow that she hardened and grew yet crueler: having summoned parliament, she enacted several ghastly laws against the followers of the Catholic faith, among which were these:

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5 Ribadeneyra may have drawn on Sander’s description of Felton’s exploits in his *De visibili monarchia ecclesiae* (1571): “So, by divine providence, a copy of this declaratory sentence was brought to England, to John Felton, a man both of consideration renown for nobility and of even greater renown for his fortitude of spirit. He, driven by zeal and devotion to the Catholic faith, because he observed that the well-nigh hopeless condition of his country could not be cured save by some bitter medicine, refused to allow this sentence of the supreme pastor to remain hidden from his fellows and countrymen. Accordingly, in the year of our Lord 1570, on the feast of Corpus Christi, he affixed the said sentence of Pius V to the bishop’s gates, beside the principal church in the city of London. The letter remained on view in broad daylight almost until the eighth hour of the day, and was said to have been seen by many, read by many, and copied out by several more. And another, who was present when Felton posted the letters, when he fled the island, urged Felton to consider his own flight. Felton refused to do so, insisting that whatever happened, it would be determined by God’s grace. When they fiercely pursued him for this, and he was finally caught, John Felton showed himself worthy of Jesus Christ and the primate instituted by him. [...] Felton was unanimously condemned by the judges as a notorious traitor. Accordingly, on the eighth day of August, being carried to torment, he told those present that he died for the Catholic faith, as he affirmed the primacy of the supreme pontiff and denied the queen’s claim to be the supreme head of the Church.” Nicholas Sander, *De visibili monarchia ecclesiae libri octo* (Leuven: Ioannis Fouleri, 1571), 734. For a sixteenth-century depiction of Felton’s martyrdom, see Book 2 figure 28.1.

6 Pius V died on May 1, 1572. On May 13, Ugo Boncompagni (r.1572–85) was elected Pope Gregory XIII.