
As the burgeoning “revisionist history” of the English Reformation has been making increasingly obvious, English national identity grew out of, and has been sustained by, anti-Catholic sentiments—even into the twenty-first century. I am reminded that Arthur Marotti’s *Religious Ideology & Cultural Fantasy* begins: “English Nationalism rests on a foundation of anti-Catholicism.” A recently translated study by Spanish scholar Leticia Álvarez-Recio (University of Seville) titled *Fighting the Antichrist: A Cultural History of Anti-Catholicism in Tudor England* explores this phenomenon tracing the formation, rise, and cultural embedding of Protestant anti-Catholic discourse of pamphlets (often anonymous) and drama (public and private) from Henry VIII into the early years of James I’s reign. The study includes special focus on the lengthy reign of Queen Elizabeth I (chapters 3–4 especially). Readers familiar with the periods covered will recognize many polemical, political (often blatantly propagandistic) texts in both prose and verse while lesser-known titles and the iconography of portraits and emblems provide the study with greater breadth and depth.

In the main, Álvarez-Recio demonstrates how anti-Catholic sentiment in England was relentlessly tied to both Spain and Rome, and, by the 1580s, to the Jesuits (opposed even by certain Catholics, cf. the *Appellants*). Some of the various negative characteristics associated with Catholics include superstition, idolatry, blind adherence to tradition (over the Word of God), material greed, lust, deception, cowardice, and cruelty—the latter especially in regards to the Spanish (fears fueled by the Inquisition) and Black Legend. Moreover, all of these negative traits were bound up in a perceived constant threat of foreign invasion—primarily from Spain and supposedly blessed by the Pope. This was coupled, especially after Pope Pius V’s papal bull excommunicating Elizabeth (1570), with further dread about threats against the queen’s life—often imagined to be from enemies within
England. Thus sedition was viewed as an inherently Catholic trait as well. Spying, dissimulation, casuistry, and equivocation were added to the mix when the Jesuit missions brought “treason” directly to England’s shores. Creating a menacing “Other” was one way to appeal to English citizens’ sense of “Patriotism” and encourage greater loyalty to the crown. Ironically, the majority of recusant Catholics in England—and English Jesuits—in fact, swore temporal allegiance to Elizabeth, but the “Bloody Question” wrought by her excommunication put them very painfully between a rock and a hard place. Propaganda also aimed to distract Englishmen from anxieties about economic issues, shifting policies, succession (a forbidden discussion), and the authority of a female monarch. Indeed, texts often strive to conceal political and economic motives when “everything is reframed in religious terms in an effort to assert…righteousness.”

By the end of the study, Álvarez-Recio shows how Queen Elizabeth—in a wave of nostalgia after disappointments when hopes in James I were undermined by unfulfilled promises about greater toleration, partly perceived as his “absolutism” versus the deceased queen’s “populism”—actually became a metonym (157) for anti-Catholicism as the English Protestant champion. The strategy of “victimhood” begun under Mary I became an ironic cornerstone under later Protestant monarchs. Elizabeth was “Gloriana” who represented the Victory of Protestantism (Chapter 4) and its triumph over victimization. This occurred to the extent that “[f]ollowing her death, the image of a deified Elizabeth, as an icon both of national identity and of English Protestantism, and champion of European Protestantism became a symbol that rendered the detailed accusations and rationalizations of anti-Catholicism redundant.”

This salient study engages the reader with insight and includes a plethora of useful notes and the necessary catalogs of relevant acts and laws that enforced anti-Catholic strategies. One thing that is particularly striking is the negative influence of Calvinism—especially the Doctrine of Reprobation—that would have been extremely difficult for many to accept. I am reminded of Anne Sweeney’s astute comment in her recent study on Robert Southwell, Snow in Arcadia: Redrawing the English Lyric Landscape, when she writes, “the contemporary controversies [engaged] over the access of divine grace, highlight[ed] a perceived weakness of Calvinism: ‘performing deed’ seemed irrelevant to a ‘Saved’ soul already destined heavenward; and if a soul were denied such heavenly election from birth, what difference would a good deed make?” Repeatedly in Fighting the Antichrist, Álvarez-Recio presents not only the dismal idea of reprobation but