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# Seizing the stake: Female martyrdom in England during the Reformation

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**Seizing the stake: Female martyrdom in England during the Reformation**

by

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A Thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: History

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## ABSTRACT

This study will examine the complicated relationship between female religious expression and society during the sixteenth century Reformation. Luther originally formulated Protestant society in a way where women would be located in the home and away from the dangerous, but religiously critical, concept of martyrdom. Even in England, where society was different from that of Germany, women were still expected to behave subserviently to men in matters of religion and chose to reject outside forms of control of their faith. John Foxe wrote extensively on the women in question and his book formed a model for examining and discussion Reformation martyrdom. By using Foxe's book, as well as a number of other primary and secondary sources, I will attempt to describe how martyrdom became a central female response to sixteenth century society and religious control.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Strengthen me good Lord in the truth to stand, for the bloody butchers have me at their will. With their slaughter-knives in their hand, my simple carcass to devour and kill.”<sup>1</sup>

With these words Anne Askew resigned herself to martyrdom in England in the year 1546. She represented a growing wave of martyrs that followed in the land during the English Reformation. The ballad, written while she was in prison and reproduced after her death, was her confession that she had been led astray by Popish forces and only when she finally saw the light in Protestantism did she come to the realization that it was acceptable for her to die and leave her mortal form behind. An educated woman and daughter of a knight, she reflected a growing discontent among women regarding their relationship to religion in the Reformation. Her story was first told by John Foxe, an academic and leading martyrologist in England.

Foxe was continuing an intellectual effort Martin Luther had started in the 1520's when Luther first wrote about martyrs. These men, as two of the leading male writers of the time, either recorded or discussed female behavior as it related to religion. Through these two figures I will look at how female religious behavior that eventually culminated in martyrdom developed as a response to the changes Protestantism tried to enact. Luther serves as much of the foundation for this discussion, while Foxe was a leading martyrologist through whom we can see the tangible impact of the particular theological ideas regarding martyrdom and social structure.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Askew, “I am a Women Poor and Blind,” 1670, lines 61-65.

Anne lived in a period during the Reformation that was tumultuous for women in English society. By the time of her execution, England had adopted several of the ideas Martin Luther first articulated at the beginning of his break with the church. The Reformation has long been considered primarily a revolution in religious behavior. When Martin Luther stood up and denounced the Catholic Church on a number of theological topics it set off a firestorm of new thinking across Western Europe. This thinking revolved around how to approach the standing traditions of the Catholic Church: sacraments, the role of clergy, and what behavior was necessary for salvation. Through his notion of *sola scriptura*, Luther emphasized scripture as the sole authority of religious behavior and practice. This not only undermined the authority of the Catholic Church, which relied a great deal on tradition, but also meant that anyone who could read the scriptures could develop his or her own interpretation of what those words meant. This idea was amplified by the number of confessions that sprung up alongside Lutheranism. This religious development meant that educated people outside of ecclesiastical circles could start commenting on the scriptures. Of course, men from across Western Europe wrote what they thought about the sacraments, marriage, celibacy, and so forth, but it was notable that before long women began to react to those same positions.<sup>2</sup>

Early on in the reform movement, Protestantism changed the framework of women's religious lives. One of the first things Luther did was to attack many of the institutions that upheld the Catholic Church's hold on society like the convents and monasteries. By trying to weaken these centers of Catholic power, he was taking power from the established religious

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<sup>2</sup> For general information on the Reformation see Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* 2<sup>nd</sup>. Edition (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

structures and putting it into the hands of his civil allies across Germany. This fed into a grander idea that involved restructuring social and religious life in keeping with Luther's interpretation of scripture. This social change revolved, in no small part, around removing women from direct involvement in the Christian structures in which they had participated in Catholicism. He wanted to replace those systems by having women either marry or, in some cases, place cloisters under the control of civil institutions.

Marriage among formerly celibate groups was Luther's major social change.<sup>3</sup> The medieval institution of clerical celibacy was seen as inhibiting people from celebrating the original relationship between men and women in the biblical creation story. By freeing up large numbers of single men and women, Luther hoped to allow people to realize a more fulfilling way to serve God in the world. Within marriage Luther thought of men and women as equal authorities for child rearing and education in the home.<sup>4</sup> He even went one step further and articulated that women should be in control of the internal functions of the household.<sup>5</sup> This gave women a great deal of power, but only within the home.<sup>6</sup> This was a position that appeared not only in Luther's writings, but also in works of most of the major Reformers'.

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<sup>3</sup> For medieval foundations on clerical celibacy see Peter Damian, *A Letter to Bishop Cunibert of Turin, 1604*, in Maureen C. Miller, *Power and the Holy in the Age of the Investiture Conflict: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2005), 46-49.

<sup>4</sup> This was an early example of the developing divide between public and private spheres of behavior, terms that appear in modern historical thought. I will occasionally reference such things where necessary, but will not rely on them due to the chronology.

<sup>5</sup> Gerta Scharffenorth, *Becoming Friends in Christ: The Relationship Between Man and Woman as seen by Luther* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1983), 62.

<sup>6</sup> Luther, in *A Sermon on Keeping Children in School*, mentions a number of professions in society such as medicine and other liberal arts as he saw them, but only references the education of men in the sermon when not using the generic term "children". While not stating the role of women directly given common rhetoric, one can still partially infer the place of women in the sermon. Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," in *The Christian in Society III*, ed. Robert. C. Schultz, *Luther's Works Vol. 46*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 209-258.

Luther, at the very least, didn't envision this placement of women as misogynistic. According to Gerta Scharffenorth, his conception of women's authority in the home and equality in marriage was designed to allow men and women to become "friends" in Christ, an idea based on the creation of the genders in Genesis.<sup>7</sup> Because men and women were both created by God, Luther saw this relationship as mostly equal in terms of domestic authority. Men were always the dominant figure, but women were intended to have a key role in child rearing and use of household resources.

This new social status for women caused them to react strongly and resist in different ways. Some of these reactions have been examined only in a German context, but there are potentially similar situations in France or the Netherlands that lie outside my largely English focus here. In several instances nuns refused to leave their convents to enter the world. These women were severely punished for their efforts. Protestants preached at them, city councils confiscated their lands, and the convents weren't allowed to take in new members even when they weren't forcibly closed down. A large number chose to follow Luther's call and left the convents to join society, but a small number in Germany chose to take Luther's concept of priesthood of all believers very seriously and either wrote or preached openly without the oversight of others. These were quickly dealt with and most harshly handled. They were sometimes burned, but this method of execution had the potential to be very damaging politically and so they were more often drowned and/or beheaded depending on the regional laws. The potential damage from a public execution derived from any circumstance that would cause pity for the victim. In one episode in Friesland, the woman was drowned at night

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<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1: 27. Scharffenorth, *Becoming Friends*, 28.

because she was crippled and the authorities feared the backlash against killing such a person.<sup>8</sup> These reactions have become new topics incorporated into Reformation history as it has been combined with newer social and gender histories.

The history of women in the Reformation has been slowly growing over roughly the past forty years. The debate has mostly centered on how women were affected by the Reformation and whether or not the changes wrought were beneficial to them. Much of the history done prior to the 1970's and 1980's didn't give women any special attention or only assumed that the positive effects felt by men (vernacular bibles, more attentive clergy, and so forth) somehow transferred naturally to their spouses or associated females. As social history started to merge with Reformation history, the role of women became more and more visible in scholarship. The two authors who demonstrated this inclusion best are Lyndal Roper and Merry Weisner-Hanks. Both of them have focused on how women reacted to changes wrought in the Reformation. Roper argued that to read Protestantism as a source of strength for later feminism is a serious misreading of the situation. The benefits that the Reformation wrought (changes in marriage, duties intended for wives, and the ability to be a "priest" solely through one's belief) were often applied across all society without more in-depth study. This view implied that the movement was much more progressive and "modern" than it was to her.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, she proposed that the Reformation was made more successful by the rewriting of women's roles as wife and homemaker.<sup>10</sup> This means that the Reformation was more easily

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<sup>8</sup> Merry Weisner, "Women's Response to the Reformation in The German People and the Reformation," ed. R. Po-Chia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 162.

<sup>9</sup> Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

established thanks to the placement of women within the narrow social and political confines of the home; that keeping women from having a broader role on par with men made the movement more acceptable to nobles who would support Luther. Hanks similarly argued that gender in the Reformation has been ignored, focused only on a small group of noble women because of existing sources, or viewed from the males' perspectives. She argues that comparing the different genders' experiences gives a more complete picture of how the Reformation affected women.<sup>11</sup>

This position was in direct response to earlier historians' idea that by forcing women to leave the convents and encouraging clerical marriage, Reformers were simply trying to curb the more sinful behaviors of concubinage, whoring, and other hypocritical sexual practices. This position also depicted cloisters as places to which unwanted daughters could be shipped off in order to ease the financial burden on large, upper-class families. Historians in this camp, exemplified by Steven Ozment, considered the Reformation to be a liberating moment for many of these "unwanted" women.<sup>12</sup> This was one of the earlier social examinations of the 1980's, and while attractive, it does not take into account just how many avenues of religious expression were stripped away from women in favor of making the household the new central unit for Protestant belief.

The removal of such avenues, which will be discussed later, eventually resulted in the rise of women as martyrs. Throughout the Reformation martyrs played an increasingly large role in shaping internal religious discourse within many Protestant confessions. While Luther

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<sup>11</sup> Weisner, "Women's Response to the Reformation", 149-150.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 9-13.

was the first man to write in defense of martyrs in the Protestant context, others followed suite. In the course of the sixteenth century four major figures wrote martyrologies, stories of martyrs' lives, to help solidify Protestant confessions. Each man, Ludwig Rabus in Germany, Jean Crespin in France, Adriaen van Haemstede in the Netherlands, and John Foxe in England, wrote in different contexts defending their somewhat different religious positions. While Germany, France, and the Netherlands all had unique stories, England presented the most interesting martyr situation. John Foxe (1516/17-1587), the most prominent of all the Reformation martyrologists, lived and wrote in the chaotic period comprising the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I. This string of monarchs produced large numbers of martyrs over the course of the mid-sixteenth century. This had to do with England's switching back and forth from Catholicism to Protestantism not once, but two times. This was compounded by the fact that England had already been home to a pre-Reformation heterodox movement in Lollardy.

In contrast to other nations, England's religious and political situation made the land unique in the Reformation. By the 1550's, England had already had a fairly long tradition of religious dissidents beginning with John Wyclif and the Lollard movement. Lollardy became a very popular movement in England that existed for slightly more than one hundred years until the early sixteenth century, but its influence was felt among the ordinary people well into the sixteenth century and has been the subject of a great deal of study.<sup>13</sup> In addition to providing a backdrop to English Reformation martyrs, Lollardy had such a major impact on European

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<sup>13</sup> For some more on Lollardy see Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) and K.B. McFarlane, *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England* (New York: Collier Books, 1966).

religious culture through intellectual ties to the Bohemian Hussite revolt and Luther's debate with Johannes Eck that it is important to touch on some of the issues it raised.

Lollardy was only one of the factors that made England such an interesting location for religious changes in the pre-Reformation and Reformation eras. Unlike the rest of Western Europe, England experienced not one but two female rulers in the middle of the century. Henry VIII's two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, played huge roles in England's eventual conversion. Most of the martyrs killed in England for religious reasons died under Mary, who wished to turn the country back to the Catholic Church after her father's and then her brother Edward's efforts to separate England from distant Rome. This was where Foxe came into the picture; the number of martyrs under Mary gave Foxe a good source base to begin writing his martyrology in order to support an increasingly persecuted Protestant confession.

Women seemed to hold a special place in English Reformation thought. After Henry broke from the church he declared that reading the bible was forbidden for non-noble women, lower guildsmen, and all those who might be considered lower-class. Noble women could read the bible in private, but not to others.<sup>14</sup> Even though the act was apparently repealed in 1547 (the same year Henry died), it showed that at least initially, the monarchy did not trust women enough to let them express their religious conviction. Instead, women were supposed to read about topics like midwifery, cooking, and other tasks associated with being a wife and mother. These genres were intended to help provide women with an awareness of their social and

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<sup>14</sup> Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), xii.

religious roles based on the opinions of intellectuals in the church and academia.<sup>15</sup> In general, the danger present for women during Henry's reign was not particularly unique from a religious standpoint. His persecution revolved largely around forcing all people to accept his new church, and the ban on biblical study coincided with the efforts for solidifying his supremacy. Contrasting that effort was Mary's rule, which was less a socio-political struggle revolving around making sure people read or spoke the right things, but a more directly religious struggle as she turned England back to Catholicism and created a wealth of material for England's famous martyrologist, John Foxe.

Foxe, in his *Actes and Monuments*, provided story after story designed to celebrate the martyr's strength of faith and provide support to Protestants caught in the religious turmoil caused by Henry VIII's break with the church. As one of the most prominent women jailed who would eventually be included in Foxe's book, Anne Askew's ballad, mentioned above, was composed during her imprisonment in 1546 and her words, combined with Foxe's writings in the 1550's, showed what could happen to women during Mary's reign. Anne wasn't the only woman in Foxe's martyrology, however; he included at least twenty-eight others (most of whom lived during Mary's reign) who were martyred during the chaotic middle of the sixteenth century. Some of the entries are quite small and nondescript about the women in question, but one can somewhat determine that all involved were at least not of the lowest social classes and had some connection to Protestant teaching or scripture either through personal knowledge or relation to someone who did. These women were targeted for a number of reasons, such as

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 6-7.

not attending church, that will be more deeply explored in the section dedicated to the martyrs themselves.

Martyrologies themselves were not a new genre in the 1500's. The Protestant versions were all modeled to some extent on the famous *Legenda Aurea*, or Golden Legend, which first appeared in the 1260's. Its author, Jacobus de Voragine, put the book together as a collection of hagiographies, and it was hugely popular during the late medieval period. These stories would idealize the saints' lives and even bestow fantastical abilities on the persons in question. As one of the most well-known medieval books on examples of proper religious behavior it would have been read by almost all educated men into the sixteenth century and it provided a template for portraying Protestant martyrs similar to heroic figures of the early church. Of course, the Protestant martyrologists carefully stripped out the aspects of the stories that were identifiably Catholic in order to bring the genre in line with growing Protestant confessions.<sup>16</sup> They were intended for persecuted Protestants across Western Europe (Anglicans, Huguenots, and Lutherans), in order to support developing Protestant identity among those groups.

There are some obstacles in connecting the use of martyrdom as a reaction to Protestantism in England to the larger European context and especially Protestantism's origin in Germany. First, Foxe did not appear to have any contact with Luther personally. The martyrologists formed an international network of sorts through reading and incorporating parts of each other's work into their individual martyrologies. When Foxe fled Marian England, he traveled around parts of the German Empire and would have had easy access to Luther's

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Kolb, *For All the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 4, 35.

writings, but because Foxe only lived there from 1554 until 1559 and Luther died in 1546, there is no mention of the two having personal contact. This is not a serious issue, but that Foxe received Luther's words in only second-hand form needs to be noted. More important questions that will be addressed in the following chapters are: how believable are Foxe's stories, what sources was he using when he did not have first-hand information, why were his particular subjects targeted, and how popular was Foxe's work during the middle of the sixteenth century. Lastly, making the leap from Germany to England difficult is the fact that in Germany, the Reformation started out as a religiously motivated movement before turning partially political after the German Peasants Rebellion of 1524-1526. In England, by contrast, the Reformation was almost entirely motivated by political factors surrounding Henry VIII's desire to be granted a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, with religious motivations attached after the fact.

Adding to the geographical distance is how English and German writers addressed the question of martyrdom differently. Luther, in one of his 1530 commentaries, stated "They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord's Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ."<sup>17</sup> He goes on to state that to be persecuted because of a connection to Christ is to be sanctified.<sup>18</sup> He wrote the first sympathetic piece after Johann van Esschen and Heinrich Voes were burned in Belgium with his hymn *Ein Neues Lied*, and he continued to write memorials for persecuted Protestants

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in *Luther's Works Vol.41: Church and Ministry III*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 164.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 165

thereafter.<sup>19</sup> However, Luther did not think all those killed for their faith were worthy of the title of martyr. He did not think that Zwingli or the Anabaptists could be considered martyrs because he did not believe in the worthiness of their respective ideas. Foxe also used this same tactic to deprive earlier English individuals of martyrdom and it was in turn used against his martyrs by some loyal to the throne.<sup>20</sup> Finally, in later years, Luther was somewhat more ambivalent on martyrdom and what it should mean for believers.<sup>21</sup> In chapter 1 we will see how Luther's failure to achieve martyr status himself caused him to question how important the concept was in being considered a true believer.

While Luther did address martyrdom at some length, he never mentioned any women alongside men in that system. One could interpret this as positive inclusion for women in Protestantism in the sense that they were not explicitly left out, but more likely is that Luther did not refer to women because he did not conceive of a situation that would necessitate women leaving the home in order to be martyred. Luther thought that women would have no need to leave the home because that was where they held the most power and authority over household finances and child-rearing.

Even though Luther was the first Protestant martyrologist and had an evolving position on the subject over his lifetime, there was no one in England who discussed the topic in the same way. John Foxe came the closest with his most famous martyrology, but did not take a

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<sup>19</sup> These two were Belgian monks who had professed Lutheran doctrine soon after Luther's break with the church. Their death provided an early opportunity for Luther to comment on their status as martyrs and Protestant heroes. For the hymn see *Luther's Works Vol. 53: Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 212.

<sup>20</sup> David Baggchi, "Luther and the Problem of Martyrdom," in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 214-215.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 218.

theological stance. Foxe wanted to tell the stories of martyrs in his time and then connect them back to the early church in order to place his figures in a developing Protestant conception of history. Because the early church was composed of individuals martyred and persecuted for going against the established Roman religion, suffering for a noble cause was what connected Protestants to the church fathers. While Foxe was analogous to Luther as a martyrologist, there was no Luther-like theologian commenting on martyrdom. Men like Thomas Cranmer, Thomas More, and Thomas Cromwell did not seem to discuss martyrdom at all. It could have been because each of these writers had fairly tenuous positions in England due to the quickly shifting political situation and so none of them wished to talk about a topic that would have made them easier targets for persecution.

There is a variety of scholarship that has started to appear since historians and scholars have started to look at the Reformation socially. Luther's writings serve as the foundation for much of the work done on him and his positions. In addition to the numerous works on Luther and the Reformers, there are dedicated women's histories, works on books written specifically for women, and how rise in print culture (through popularity and lower costs) affected women's development and how they might have had reasons to strive for martyr status. The topics mentioned above will all help answer the questions of who these women were, why they were martyred, and how these stories should be interpreted in light of what people were writing in the Reformation.

This paper will consist of three sections. The first chapter will focus on the social background of the Reformation, discussing Luther's articulations of where women fit into the

new society. Luther wrote a great deal about how men and women should relate to each other and how society was structured to prevent all people from realizing their place in it according to his interpretation of scripture. He also started to develop a Protestant conception of history that John Foxe also used. The chapter will also describe how social and family life was generally structured in the early modern period in order to see just where the changes affected people. As historians like Weisner, Roper, and Ozment used the tools developed in social and women's history to discuss the Reformation, they covered an extensive range of topics from family life, to marriage, to general overviews of women across Western Europe in the sixteenth century. It is necessary to establish a framework of society in which to discuss more deeply women's attitudes toward change.

The second chapter will discuss Foxe and his book in depth. Because Foxe's book is still held even in the modern period as the standard for martyrologies and one of the best primary sources on martyrs in general, it is important to spend time looking at his life and how he constructed his work. The storytelling and use of Protestant history were part of a larger trend into which Foxe situated himself. Finally, he also faced some opposition to his treatment of Protestant martyrs which deserves mention as well. How Foxe described the women showed his attitudes toward his characters and how they can be approached in relation to both Luther's ideas and the particularities in England.

Finally, the third chapter will stay in England, but will focus on English society and history as it related to Foxe. It will start with the existing religious avenues available to women including pilgrimage, mysticism, and Lollardy before focusing largely on the circumstances of

several of Foxe's figures. The critical details of each story were class, reasons they were accused, and other unique circumstances that will be mentioned when relevant to certain individuals. There were also genres of literature intended for women that showed an interest in providing instructional material for their expanded Protestant roles in the household. Finally, Elizabeth I is included as a figure who represented a balance of both femininity and religious expression as head of the Anglican Church. The combination of all these topics, alongside the model found in Luther's writing that frames the particular circumstances and tensions in England, will illustrate the central argument that female martyrdom represented a direct rejection not only of Luther, but any idea that would prevent women from expressing their individual faiths.

## CHAPTER 2: LUTHER, WOMEN, AND MARTYRDOM

The first Protestant figure to comment on society and martyrdom as a form of religious expression was Martin Luther. Luther was not the only individual to propose some of the changes that became hallmarks of the Reformation (clerical reform, personal access to scripture, etc.), nor were his positions ultimately the most extreme to emerge in the sixteenth century, but his ideas regarding the social relationships between the sexes were radical compared to the preexisting Catholic traditions of clerical celibacy and cloistered nuns. Early in his career he also saw martyrdom as a high form of expressing one's religious beliefs. He intended to remake European social structure in order to remove what he saw as negative influences from the dominant, yet stagnant, Catholic Church. Luther's primary goals were to eliminate the current systems in place that were keeping men and women from acting more in accordance with the relationship he interpreted in scripture. He also wanted to articulate a position on martyrdom that made it a meaningful way to demonstrate Protestant belief. Luther wanted his ideas to allow both sexes, but especially women, to more fully realize their place in society according to the bible. However, these changes to society also functioned to limit women's ability to express their faith compared to pre-Reformation times and these new restrictions motivated women to push back against Luther's writings. While other writers like Zwingli also wrote about similar changes, Luther created the initial Protestant framework and so he is most suitable for direct comparison to the martyrologist John Foxe in England.

Regarding martyrdom as separate from social relationships initially, Luther commented a fair amount on the concept starting around the early 1520's, and his tone on the subject

changed substantially over the next twenty years. His evolving attitude toward martyrs would not have meant much in the aftermath of the Peace at Augsburg (the establishment of a region's religion based on the denomination of its ruler helped separate and stabilize religious tensions), but was still important in understanding the overall feeling towards martyrdom as a facet of religious expression. It was precisely because Luther's attitude changed over time that makes a comparison to John Foxe more interesting. Luther wanted to construct a historical framework for Protestantism that incorporated martyrdom that Foxe and the later martyrologists used more heavily than Luther, and this Protestant idea of history has appeared in a growing amount of historical research.<sup>22</sup> Reformation society and Luther's attitude toward martyrs were separated in his ideas at first, but they intertwined over the course of his career. Most importantly for my argument is that Luther's argument about martyrs, combined with a lack of attention his system gave women, caused them to feel powerless in their own religious expression once previous avenues were closed to them.

The first big change to social structure in the Reformation was the effort to end the separation of monks and nuns and having the priesthood renounce celibacy. Luther felt that by closing themselves off from marital relationships, or by remaining celibate, people were not acting as they should have been. Luther intended for men and women to live as Adam and Eve did in the Genesis story. He interpreted that particular event as the ideal relationship between the sexes. More accurately, that relationship represented God's true intentions for the two

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<sup>22</sup> Works that look at Protestant conceptions of history include Helen White, *Tudor Books of Saints and Martyrs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963) and Robert Kolb, *For All the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987).

sexes to exist equally as “friends in Christ.”<sup>23</sup> The most curious part of the view is that it would have partially rejected the standard narrative where Eve betrayed Adam in Genesis. Because of Eve’s temptation and betrayal, Catholic teaching had long identified women as a dangerous force in society. They were capable of leading males away from the God’s path and corrupting his influence through diabolic means such as witchcraft, a charge used with increasing frequency against medieval women. In order to avoid such temptation women who wanted to pursue the highest form of religious life were put in cloisters so both sexes could focus separately on their love of Christ. This new articulation that women and men should live more equally in Christianity as opposed to the more anti-female Catholic stance (that women were the source of original sin) was one that may have surprised many people. It also may have led to the rise in female theological writing and publishing in Germany in the Reformation’s early years.

Part of this new relationship focused on the education of men and women, but in very different ways. Luther discussed a number of professions that were sorely needed in society like doctors, rhetoricians, and jurists. While these were very important professions, Luther only mentioned how men should be educated in such fields.<sup>24</sup> With men out in the world, women were left to receive education in matters regarding household activities. This meant that women’s schooling was supposed to be designed entirely around the home’s operation, including managing the family’s material resources.<sup>25</sup> This would have given women a large

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<sup>23</sup> Gerta Scharffenorth, *Becoming Friends in Christ: The Relationship Between Man and Woman as seen by Luther* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1983), 43.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” in *The Christian in Society III*, ed. Robert C. Schultz, *Luther’s Works Vol. 46*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 252.

<sup>25</sup> Scharffenorth, 59-62.

amount of power to regulate house finances and their location in the home allowed women to take charge of educating and disciplining their children, but this was an inferior position spiritually compared to men's.

Generally speaking, I think it was probable that Luther intended this relationship to exist among the low and middle-classes of society. As Luther grew closer to the nobility in order to continue receiving valuable political support for the Reformation, he most likely didn't want to address noble relationships as heavily as those among the peasantry. It was more beneficial to establish a more structured system of marriage among the non-noble classes because it would help prevent them from being led astray by "corrupt" clergy as the Reformation removed them from view. Organizing peasant marriage was also a good way to ensure that each sex had a responsibility to act its best and promote the values Luther identified. Nobles were in the position where the changes to marriage probably did not affect them a great deal because both sexes already had a defined position in the relationship and already understood many of the legal and moral facets to their marriage. I'm sure other classes may well have been aware of what Luther was doing to change social structure, but they didn't factor as heavily into his thoughts as he relied more heavily on the upper-classes to support his ideas.

While simple in Reformers' minds, this marital relationship was fairly complex. The shared responsibility in Reformed marriage did not prioritize men over women within the household. Men were supposed to act strong and provide for their women while also treating them with respect. A man was supposed to "rule" his house essentially how God was thought to rule his kingdom in Heaven. There was enormous legal pressure as well not to abuse the

paternal authority that existed in both Catholic and Protestant society. According to Steven Ozment, marriage counselors dwelt on men not abusing their domestic position to such an extent that there must have been a concerted effort to condemn and eliminate forceful rule in the house.<sup>26</sup> If a husband acted with aggression or committed other marital indiscretions a wife could legally secure a divorce. The most common way to win a divorce was to have an adulterous husband, but the inability to satisfy the conjugal duty of marriage was also a condition that allowed for divorce.<sup>27</sup>

Not all authority and attention was focused on the husband, however. Women were equally important for being the heart of the household, responsible for the mature advice necessary to run the house smoothly in addition to the important task of bearing children. Ideally a woman was to be skilled both vocationally and emotionally and have an education to fulfill the roles Reformers outlined for them.<sup>28</sup> Lyndal Roper identified this relationship, while equal on the surface, as extremely unequal when considered more critically. In Reformation marriage a man was really only required to provide physical and financial protection and not abuse his status, while a women had to educate and discipline the children, manage the state of the house, and be skilled enough to assist a man in his work.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, when taking all the aspects of marriage into account, the relationship between husbands and wives was much more complicated than it seemed. Certainly Luther did not intend to place women in an

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<sup>26</sup> Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 51.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther, "The Estate of Marriage," trans. Walther I. Brandt, in *The Christian in Society II*, ed. Walter I. Brandt, Vol. 45 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 30-33

<sup>28</sup> Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Lyndal Roper, *They Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 134.

inferior position, but as marriage changed within the context of Protestantism it was apparent that women were losing some of their old religious avenues. These avenues included veneration of certain saints and the ability to enter convents, which follow below.

When the Protestant martyrologists stripped out the more Catholic aspects of the *Legenda Aurea* in order to create their books, they also eliminated some parts of the faith that were attractive to women. Part of this elimination meant downplaying a saint's ability to intercede on behalf of worshipers. This effort suddenly deprived women of some of their most important and popular saints. Saint Anne, patron saint of mothers (among other groups) and mother of the Virgin Mary, was among the popular female saints who were removed from Lutheran veneration. Along with this change, the celebrations of womanhood associated with Anne and others were also eliminated. This effectively took away any prestige that women had previously enjoyed in Catholicism.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, it was not the Reformers' goal to strip women of their former glory. In their minds they were sincerely trying to help men and by extension, women, achieve a fuller realization of scripture. They wanted to undermine and eliminate the excesses and hypocritical abuses they observed among both the secular and regular clergy. Forcing these groups to marry would, in Reformers' minds, reduce the number of bastard children born to clergy and stop concubinage, whoring, and sexual impropriety among the cloisters.<sup>31</sup> It would follow that communities would see their priests no longer committing sins and would stop sinning themselves based on their bad example.

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<sup>30</sup> Merry Wiesner, "Women's Response to the Reformation," in *The German People and the Reformation*, ed. R. Po-Chia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 155.

<sup>31</sup> Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 5.

More visible than the treatment of the important female saints was the closing of the convents. The convents were the institution most identifiable with women's religion and how they could practice their faith, but they served other purposes as well. Convents were valuable as places where unmarried daughters of noble families, older women, or other categories of women could be unloaded to ease burdens on the family or community. By going to convents, these groups of women could live in a place protected from the outside world, surrounded by their fellow believers. In turn, society had a place to contain "dangerous" female sexuality. So when the convents were targeted, it wasn't necessarily because the idea of dangerous women had gone away. Rather it was that Luther felt far more strongly about giving women the ability to fulfill their place as an equal to their husbands and to reproduce as he felt they should.

The goal of eliminating the convent system and putting the former inhabitants into the household served two purposes. It helped to serve Luther's interpretation of the relationship in Eden and it helped to undermine a fairly large element of Catholic authority. Removing women from the previous ecclesiastical structures greatly damaged the Catholic Church's ability to keep women in the fold because suddenly a place for them to live and worship was gone. The convents were closed only in lands allied to Protestantism. However, that would not have stopped Reformers from arguing for their closure across the entirety of Europe until the Peace at Augsburg in 1555 that drew clear denominational boundaries in the German Empire. Amy Leonard used a particularly excellent metaphor; removing the nuns from their previous places stripped the nails from the convent walls in order to prop up those of the home.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Amy Leonard, *Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2.

This shift had the unpleasant consequence of forcing a number of women, some of whom had known almost no life outside the cloister, into a society where they had no idea of how to act or provide for themselves. Nuns did not always follow the Reformers' desires and leave willingly. Depending on the situation, women either stayed in the convent while it was being deprived of new members, and where they were often forced to hear Protestant preaching constantly as an urging to leave and join society, or the buildings were placed under the control of civil authorities and made to pay taxes and otherwise come back to the world under different circumstances.<sup>33</sup> In situations where women stayed in their cloisters, it was often because of uniquely strong leaders like Caritas Pirckheimer in Nuremberg, who managed to keep her own religious house safe from Protestant civil authority.<sup>34</sup>

It was not surprising, then, that women chose to be martyred to the degree they were in Germany. Reformers targeted everything in Catholicism that helped women achieve either religious independence in the case of convents or gave them positive models in the saints. The thing that limited martyrdom in the German empire most was the 1555 Peace of Augsburg. With the fairly sharp division of territories and the associated political and religious allegiances, it meant that there were fewer avenues for dissatisfied groups like women to express their displeasure at how society had changed to effectively marginalize them from a comparatively stronger position. After the general changes to society above, now we will move into a more direct look at Luther and his approach to women and then martyrdom.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 5.

Luther had a complex relationship with several women in his life. This led to a complicated situation in Protestantism that both gave women new power and restricted their expression at the same time. Many of the general Protestant positions were based largely on his preconceived ideas about how religious women should be. Luther's attitude toward his mother, wife, and female contemporaries were all indicative of more complex feelings that went beyond the generic position for women that appeared in his sermons on marriage or education. Hindering discussion of this topic is that while we have a voluminous amount of material from Luther, including his letters to and about individual female figures, there is almost nothing from those women to him. The letters written to Luther were never preserved to the extent that his writings were, if at all. Much of what was said to him has to be constructed based on the few tracts written by certain females and the formula of letters in the sixteenth-century.<sup>35</sup>

We have seen that Luther had very clear ideas of what women should be socially in Protestantism, but he also very clearly emphasized that men and women were equal in a spiritual sense because God created both of them. To violate the "ideal" relationship in Eden in the institution of marriage was to go against "proper" gender relationships. Men were supposed not only to behave in a certain way, but also to actively participate in the home. They should help with diapers, prepare food, and stay involved with their wives' tasks.<sup>36</sup> Again, while in the home women and men were to behave a certain way, women were not equal socially. They should not write books, or try to behave as though equal to their male counterparts.

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<sup>35</sup> A work that mentions the lack of women's writing to Luther is Roland Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971). 97.

<sup>36</sup> Albrecht Classen, Tanya Amber Settle, "Women in Martin Luther's Life and Theology," *German Studies Review* Vol. 14, no. 2 (May 1991): 235.

Seemingly only when dealing with uniquely ambitious or intelligent women did Luther treat them differently than his public views.

As far as Luther's mother, Margarethe, was concerned, she apparently embodied the image of a married woman in his mind. She was possibly superstitious regarding witches and exercised a degree of control in the house, but stayed subservient to her husband in all matters. According to this description, given by Albrecht Classen and Tanya Settle, what we see of his mother in his writings may have been projected because of what he emphasized later in life.<sup>37</sup> In any case he apparently valued his mother's opinions throughout his life, even dedicating a volume of his theological writings to her. Even if Margarethe was an important influence on Luther's perceptions, there is nothing to indicate she did a great deal to affect his overall mindset towards women. While she was probably unique enough to not fit neatly into Luther's domestic system, he was not able to reconcile her with his larger ideas and mostly left her out. Finally, part of the difficulty in their relationship was her inability to understand his becoming a monk.<sup>38</sup> This lack of understanding in their relationship might have hurt communication in his later life. This might have also contributed to the lack of mention she received in his writing.

Katharina von Bora was easily a more substantial figure in Luther's life than his mother. Originally they married in 1525 after Luther was unable to find any other suitable husband for her and they remained married until his death in 1546. Katharina had originally been a nun in Nimbschen in Saxony until she decided to escape the convent and join the reform movement.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 242.

Luther had first tried to find her a husband, but married her himself after being unable to do so, because he felt responsible for her being out in the world after a long life in her old convent. During their twenty-five years together she grew to have a very important role in his life. She helped him understand her role as organizer of their large household, a former cloister in Wittenberg, and the economics of operating such a home.<sup>39</sup> Katharina's intelligence and skill in keeping their home was what gave that role such a prominent place in Luther's mind when applied to the rest of society and social relationships. He consistently referred to her as an important figure in his life and deeply respected her intelligence almost to the point of equality. She was clearly special enough to warrant such glowing remarks as "Meiner freundlichen lieben Hausfraw Catharina von Bore."<sup>40</sup> Luther considered her the exception to the rule when thinking more broadly.

Finally, when dealing with women not of his own family, Luther considered himself their friend, but did not think of them as his spiritual or intellectual equals. He could be very encouraging, as seen in a letter to several noblewomen in 1523, where he supported them to stay strong in their Protestant faith, "Do this also in view of the fact that you are enlightened by God's Grace, and they are blind and obdurate..."<sup>41</sup> However, he could also act in the "misogynist" manner more common to his time as seen in a letter to Katharina Zell, "...but also

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 240-245.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther, *Briefen*, Vol. 11, 300. Citation taken from Classen, "Women in Martin Luther's Life," 245.

<sup>41</sup> Luther to the noblemaidens Janna von Drashwitz, Milia von Ölsnitz, and Ursula von Feilitzsch, Wittenberg, 18 June 1523, in *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook*, ed. Susan Karant-Nunn and Merry Wiesner Hanks (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), 206.

that He has given you such a husband, through whom you daily and unceasingly are better able to learn and hear this..."<sup>42</sup>

When confronted with specific women like Argula von Grumbach or Katharina Zell, Luther had certain tendencies. Like in his letters to groups of women, Luther kept women at a distance. According to Classen and Settle, in his correspondence with particular women, Luther would be supportive, but then also make very little mention of them afterwards. In particular, after Luther and von Grumbach met in 1530, he did not discuss his feelings toward her, but rather he mentioned a recipe which she had given him. Von Grumbach was a key figure who supported the reform efforts in Bavaria and defended a student from Catholic authority. Luther did value her drive to help, but did not mention her a great deal in *Table Talk*. Probably he was not too aggravated with her because he needed the support, but the lack of mention or preservation of their correspondence meant that he was somewhat uncomfortable with her skill. Katharina Zell was also a valuable asset to the Reformation, but Luther felt that because she married the pastor Matthias Zell she acknowledged her inability to pursue her goals alone. He was at the same time respectful of her skill, but also demeaning of her participation in light of her married status. This meant that by writing, she was essentially undermining her position through marriage.<sup>43</sup> This might seem contradictory given his idea I listed earlier, that women and men were to have roughly equal standing in marriage. This episode highlights what I see as the disconnect between Luther's larger ideas and the reality of his world.

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<sup>42</sup> Luther to Katharina Zell, Wittenberg, 17 December 1524, *Luther on Women*, 206-207.

<sup>43</sup> Classen and Settle, "Women in Luther's Life," 250-252.

Overall in many of Luther's letters to women he was very supportive, advisory, or conciliatory based on the situation, and did not often demean women to their face. When talking about women, he would occasionally break character and describe very negative behavior such as whoring, but this was not as common in the early years of his life. In a letter to a friend dated from 1544, Luther mentioned a singular woman who he characterized as a "shameless liar," an "archwhore," and "desparate [sic] slut" for sleeping with a number of men and then trying to violently abort by having a maid jump on her.<sup>44</sup> While only a single instance, these comments from an older Luther showed that he perhaps developed a harsher attitude toward certain female actions as time went on.

In contrast to his relatively clean-cut goals for women, Luther's attitude toward martyrs was much more complicated. At the beginning of his reforming career, Luther held to the concept of martyrdom as a key component of Christianity very strongly. From Luther's creation of *Ein Neues Lied* in 1524, which commemorated the death of two Belgian monks, to his 1539 treatise *On the Councils and Church*, he constantly placed martyrdom as a central part of being a good Christian. Suffering and martyrdom were absolutely necessary to become like Christ as he suffered. He placed the suffering of martyrs above that of Jews, Turks, and all other groups because those groups were heretics and devils and not the true servants of God. Not only were groups outside Christianity dismissed, but so were the processions associated with saintly relics, including those of supposed martyrs. Luther accused the Papacy of using ordinary bones from graves and tricking the people into believing they were salvific objects. Venerating objects associated with the saints ran the danger of contradicting not only God's word, but also the

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<sup>44</sup> Letter from Luther concerning Rosina von Truchess, 1544, *Luther on Women*, 222-223.

power that it conveyed.<sup>45</sup> If saints could intercede in humanity, then God's purpose was diminished. Even if the bones were of the actual saints, they would still not hold any significance in Luther's conception because only pain and persecution for one's faith could save a person, and not all saints died in such a fashion.<sup>46</sup>

The early Christian martyrs were the true church, and at the beginning of his career. Luther, like the rest of the martyrologists, associated Protestant martyrdom with the founding of Christianity. Using the *Legenda Aurea* as their model, many Reformers removed the fantastical stories of saints in favor of the lives of martyrs. These lives were also somewhat idyllic in style; sufferers were portrayed favorably with much of their lives leading to the inevitable, but glorious, death at the end. They also almost all went to their executions willingly and showing no pain, but singing and praising God for the chance to die. In addition to essentially copying the *Legenda's* framework for these subjects, the writers started to make their own calendars that communicated the Protestant form of church history. Such calendars, whether Protestant or Catholic, were designed to help users keep track of important dates connected to religious figures' deaths and understand true Christian history through the lives contained.<sup>47</sup>

However, Luther did not think all suffering in Protestantism was equal. The peasants killed in the 1525 rebellion and the first executions of Anabaptists fell far short of Luther's ideas. The peasants, who had been inspired by the devil for their rebellion because it defied

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<sup>45</sup> Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in *Luther's Works Vol.41: Church and Ministry III*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 164-165.

<sup>47</sup> Kolb, *All the Saints*, 32.

heavenly ordained order, were fanatics who didn't follow Luther's teachings as closely as they should have.<sup>48</sup> Anabaptists were not martyrs because their cause was not worthy enough to be classified as true suffering. Denying the Anabaptists was also partly political in nature as well. Anabaptists were routinely dismissed by the various theologians and martyrologists because the group was considered a dangerous political separatist one. The refusal to take oaths and serve in militaries (two critical parts to civic life) scared Luther and the other writers and so the Anabaptists were left out of or completely ridiculed in the writers' religious opinions.<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly, Luther never made explicit distinction between male and female martyrs in his own time. While he considered all martyrs in the church's early history excellent examples in his early career, he never commented separately on those persecuted in his own time. As with his comments on education, Luther only discussed males as martyrs. This was probably due to where he placed the sexes in society. In placing women in the home and in charge of the household duties, Luther didn't envision a situation where women would be targeted for persecution as religious tensions grew.

Luther, like the martyrologists who followed him, was careful to construct his ideas of martyrdom to fit a particular conception of history. Aside from the use of Jacobus' *Golden Legend*, Luther adopted a position similar to that of Augustine. Not only was history a simple chronicle of human events, but it was also a narrative that writers thought illustrated God's intentions for believers. In this system people could not set into motion history's events, but

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<sup>48</sup> Baggchi, *Luther and Martyrdom*, 214. See also Martin Luther, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*, in *Luther's Works Vol. 46, The Christian in Society III*, ed. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1967), 45-56.

<sup>49</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 201-204.

could only passively act on God's behalf to understand his will.<sup>50</sup> According to Markus Wriedt, Luther constructed a large part of his historical framework around the idea of God working through opposites. By this he meant that some of God's choices seem foolish to humans, like Jesus' crucifixion. Within the person of Jesus God is at first the hidden God, only to be revealed at death. This seemingly odd choice was not to be understood among humanity, but the complexity of it was supposed to instill the importance of faith to comprehend God's will.<sup>51</sup> The complexity found in historical events, including periods of martyrdom, was to underscore the interaction between humans and God in history and how that fit into their time. This Protestant history would matter more as Foxe and his fellow writers rose to address their particular audiences.

If Luther was mostly so approving of martyrdom, then why did he not strive harder to be placed in the growing pantheon of Protestant martyrs? Not counting his refuge in Wartburg castle, there was a somewhat real possibility that he could have been killed and turned into a martyr at some point, and yet was not. It is hard to speculate just what kept him safe from death, but whatever the reason was, it left doubt in Luther's mind that he was even worthy for the status of martyr. In the mid to late 1530's, Luther's lectures on Genesis showed a decline in the sacredness of martyrdom. David Bagghi identifies this series as the one where Luther spends more time praising the surviving patriarchs of the church over the martyrs while also dismissing, with increasing frequency, actual martyrs as unworthy or even unclean spiritually. This was probably due to the fact that Luther survived persecution; because Luther was not

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<sup>50</sup> Markus Wriedt, "Luther's Concept of History and the Formation of an Evangelical Identity," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe Vol I: The Medieval Inheritance*, ed. Bruce Gordon (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, 1996), 33-34.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

killed, he rationalized that it was the intellectual leaders of religion who deserved as much praise as those on the front lines dying. He continued to de-emphasize martyrdom through his lecture series until in 1540 in one of his Sunday sermons, Luther finally claimed that the Devil was greatest martyr of all and so seems to have completely reversed his original opinion on the concept.<sup>52</sup>

Despite this radical shift in opinion toward negativity, Luther still had a few positive things to say on the subject; in those same lectures, he praised individuals like Saint Agnes and the martyrs Agatha, Lucy, and others for having no fear of death and torture, and he still sometimes held on to the earlier praises he had for martyrs' strength in the face of certain doom.<sup>53</sup> Luther's own martyrology was the least popular compared to the major four figures in Europe and the growing ambivalence he showed was probably the greatest contributing factor to that part of his theology being downplayed as the Reformation marched on. Certainly, the lack of clarity in Luther's position gave John Foxe in England the avenue he needed to become the most famous martyrologist in the sixteenth century.

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<sup>52</sup> Baggchi, *Luther and Martyrdom*. 216. The original Latin formulation, with some German, is "Sic Diabolus maximus martyr, sed damit sucht er, ut totum mundum seducat." In *Luther's Works 49: Letters II*, ed. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1972), 27 n.16

<sup>53</sup> Baggchi, *Luther and Martyrdom*, 217-218.

## CHAPTER 3: JOHN FOXE AND THE FORMATION OF FOXE'S BOOK OF MARTYRS

John Foxe was the most prominent martyrologist of the mid-sixteenth century. In this area he was something of an intellectual successor to Martin Luther who wrote extensively on the lives and deaths of martyrs in England and Europe. He picked up the topic of martyrdom as a high form of religious expression that Luther had started in the 1520's and became the primary martyrologist for English Protestants. In contrast to Luther, Foxe's feelings toward martyrdom did not waver over his career and he remained firmly enthusiastic about its role in Protestantism. His masterpiece, *Actes and Monuments*, known more casually as the Book of Martyrs, was the most important Protestant book of its type in the period. It was read not only in England, but also in France and Germany as other writers and publishers translated it to their languages. The stories contained within made the book a concrete part of the developing Protestant identity that Luther had been articulating for years by the time Foxe rose to prominence. While the overall focus of this thesis is on the significance of Foxe's subjects, it is important to give some attention to the author and the construction of his book. His intellectual inspiration and sources played into just how he constructed his book to fit the Reformers' particular idea of history's function. Growth in the printing industry also helped Foxe by making his writing more available to interested readers. Foxe's life, environment, and academic pursuits were a reflection of an increased interest in martyrs and how they became further integrated into Protestant identity and the struggles it faced.

John Foxe (1516/17-1587) was born in Lincolnshire, England as a son in a relatively prominent family. He first attended Brasenose College before entering Magdalen College

School in 1535. When he finished his schooling he had received a master's degree and was made a lecturer of logic at Oxford. It is important to note that compared to the other major martyrologists in Western Europe, Foxe was the only one who entered the profession academic career path over the others, who held posts in the "real" world.<sup>54</sup> Because he was not a formal scholar of religion as Luther and others were, he was not as preoccupied initially with questions relating gender to religious expression. This would have meant that he may not have seen women the same way as his contemporaries.

Not long after completing his education and becoming a lecturer, Foxe resigned from his academic post at Oxford in 1545 to protest the requirement of faculty to take holy orders. In particular, he found issue with the practice of clerical celibacy, which had not been abolished in the 1534 separation of the Church of England. Additionally, he disagreed with the Act of Six Articles, which reaffirmed the Church's stance on transubstantiation and traditional Catholic doctrine in England.<sup>55</sup> He was not alone, as many Protestant faculty were also purged from the university in 1545 during Henry's efforts to gain support from important institutions in his kingdom. He became a household tutor in Charlecote before marrying in 1547. His life generally improved during Edward VI's brief reign as he moved to London and was able to complete translations of several sermons. He also gained a patron in Mary Fitzroy, a daughter-in-law of Henry's, who hired him to tutor her brother's children.<sup>56</sup> He finally was made a deacon in 1550 and formed a close network of supporters and friends until Mary's ascension in

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<sup>54</sup> This is considering only Ludwig Rabus (a Lutheran pastor), Adriaen van Haemstede (a jurist), and Jean Crespin (another jurist)

<sup>55</sup> D. M. Loades, *Henry VIII: Court, Church and Conflict* (Kew: National Archives, 2007), 114.

<sup>56</sup> Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 167.

1553. Finally, it is important to note that several years prior to his removal from his teaching post, Foxe was witness to the execution of William Cowbridge in Oxford in the year 1538. Cowbridge had been head bailiff at Colchester and was burned for trying to convert people.<sup>57</sup> Foxe's description of the event portrayed Cowbridge as "deranged," but that at the very end he was rational in his final praising of Christ. Witnessing Cowbridge's death was an important moment for Foxe because it showed the danger present for Protestants even though men like Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell were in high positions in Henry VIII's court.<sup>58</sup>

Mary's reign (1553-1558) marked a serious change in English religious attitudes that heightened the tensions in England after the reforms of both her father and brother. When she came to power she sought to bring England back into the Catholic fold. She released multiple people who had been imprisoned for supporting her, one of whom belonged to the family employing John Foxe. The family was then forced to release Foxe from service. After his release as tutor he saw the danger posed by staying in England given his well-known religious stance, as he had helped translate and publish Protestant writing during Edward's time. He witnessed several of his friends persecuted and was probably convinced that he would be one of the next targets because of his contributions to English Protestantism. He fled to Belgium on his way to Germany and spent the years of Mary's rule traveling around the Netherlands and the Holy Roman Empire engaging in religious debates, collecting stories, and developing the network of friends he had made. Despite having many acquaintances on the continent he did not personally meet Luther, as the man had died several years before Foxe was exiled.

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<sup>57</sup> John Foxe, *Fox's Book of Martyrs; or the Actes and Monuments of the Christian Church, Vol. 1*, ed. John Malham (Philadelphia: J.J. Woodward, 1830), <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044014400287;view=1up;seq=9>. [accessed January 1, 2014].

<sup>58</sup> J. Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 21.

However, he had access to Luther's writings on the subjects of martyrdom and society and that access, combined with his network of Protestant friends, gave Foxe a wealth of information to use when he returned home.<sup>59</sup>

After Elizabeth I replaced Mary as England's monarch, Foxe was able to return home where he soon started working on his martyrologies. Prior to his exile, he had become friends with the printer John Day.<sup>60</sup> Day, like Foxe, had benefited from the leniency toward Protestantism during Edward's reign, but remained in the country during Mary's rule. He was jailed for several years during the period for refusing to cease printing Protestant material and was released only at Elizabeth's ascension. While Foxe provided the stories that would capture readers' attentions, Day supplied the presses, materials and money that would make the project a reality. Especially important were the numerous woodcuts that were contained in *Acts and Monuments* that depicted particular scenes of persecution. Because of the material and financial support he provided, Day was central to the eventual publication of the first English edition of the Book of Martyrs in 1563.<sup>61</sup>

Day's importance should not be overlooked in comparison to Foxe. He not only supplied material and financial support for the project, but he helped find and edit stories before their inclusion. Day's efforts took place during a period in English history where printing was becoming a more important method for spreading information. Protestants, in particular, seized upon the use of printing as a way to defend and disseminate the information in their

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<sup>59</sup> For general information on John Foxe see the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation Vol. 2*, ed. Hans J Hillebrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122.

<sup>60</sup> Day occasionally appears in sources as Daye.

<sup>61</sup> During his exile, Foxe had published an early version in 1554 that focused on Lollard persecution and a fuller version in 1559, both in Latin.

message.<sup>62</sup> Multiple authors used the English printing industry to promote their thoughts, but also to garner support for further projects. Foxe dedicated one his books to the Duke of Württemberg, which helped him gain patronage from Johannes Oporinus, a Swiss printer, who provided further financial support even beyond Day's.<sup>63</sup> Printing helped connect writers to those who could assist them in getting their work to increasing numbers of readers.

Day stood above most printers of his time because of his "lifelong commitment to the dissemination of Protestant books and pamphlets."<sup>64</sup> He originally rose to prominence during Edward's reign defending the establishment of a Protestant religious settlement, which attracted several patrons that helped him start his career in earnest. After establishing himself as a Protestant supporter, he was imprisoned during Mary's rule for his publishing activities. Shortly before Elizabeth's ascension, Day was released and he returned to London to resume his business. He was unique among printers because he was the sole owner of his business instead of having a partnership, which was more common in his profession. During the compilation of Foxe's book, Day would entice audiences with individual selections that kept cost down before the full book was published. In part, this tactic made the Book of Martyrs so successful that it allowed Day to establish a near monopoly on the printing of major Protestant books.<sup>65</sup> Day's assistance in creating and spreading Foxe's book was instrumental in its popularity and reflected how printing became an integral factor in getting martyrs' stories to the public.

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<sup>62</sup> John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 70.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 83.

Foxe's book was almost immediately a great success, but also faced opposition soon after release. The first real version of *Actes and Monuments* came out 1563, but he produced another version in 1570 that expanded some areas while also defending his efforts from Catholic criticism. The critics had sought to diminish the worthiness of Foxe's subjects, similarly to how Luther had handled the Anabaptists. Luther had separated persecuted Anabaptists from other Protestant martyrs with the claim that it was not just being a target for persecution that was important, but the worthiness of the cause for which one was persecuted. Reformers left out Anabaptists in their considerations because the group's refusal to take oaths or participate in traditional civic duties. One of the main detractors of Anglicanism was Nicholas Harpsfield, a priest and Marian supporter who was made Archdeacon of Canterbury and oversaw many Protestant trials during the period. He contested the idea that Foxe's figures were true martyrs because of their Protestant leanings and tried to undermine the worthiness of their cause in relation to their manner of death.<sup>66</sup> Harpsfield was also critical of Elizabeth and was imprisoned for his refusal to take the reinstated Oath of Supremacy confirming her leadership of the Church of England, which Henry had started and which had been briefly repealed during Mary's reign.

After the second edition of *Actes and Monuments* came out defending the first's arguments, a third and fourth edition were published in 1576 and 1583 respectively. The third was not noteworthy, but the fourth continued the trend of growing in size, reaching around

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<sup>66</sup> David Bagchi, "Luther and the Problem of Martyrdom," in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 214-215.

2000 pages in double columns.<sup>67</sup> After Foxe's death, editions were still churned out semi-regularly in abridged or edited forms. The current total of editions after Foxe's death is at least ten and potentially more. The number of editions printed since the mid sixteenth-century is a good indicator of just how foundational this book was to English perceptions of martyrdom and identity as time went on.

As the size of the editions grew, so did their historical scope. The earliest Latin version began with Jan Hus and John Wyclif and drew largely on a smaller group of subjects. The focus on figures considered proto-Reformation was important because they were still in people's collective memories and the mental connections between them and Foxe's period would have been obvious to many readers. After Foxe's return to England he was able to include stories he had gathered from his continental travels, including those from martyrologists in other lands. For contemporary stories, it isn't clear just how many he witnessed personally. He did see some executions firsthand before his exile, but most of them were probably told to him and he then included them from a first-person perspective. Because some of his allies had stayed in England during the Marian period, Foxe had a large number of individuals from whom to draw stories. Additionally, he started to expand the size of his work chronologically and began making the sorts of historical claims about Protestantism that had started with Luther and the early Reformers.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Select Narratives* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], xli. <http://site.ebrary.com.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/lib/iowastate/docDetail.action?docID=10317686> (Accessed on Jan 2, 2014).

<sup>68</sup> For studies of *Actes and Monuments* see William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: J. Cape, 1963) and J. Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970).

John Foxe was not content to display history as he saw fit, but he also took steps to include himself and at least one of his most important supporters in it. In a preface to one of his editions, he likened Elizabeth's tolerance and support for reform to that of Constantine the Great. He also compared himself to Constantine's biographer, Eusebius, further showing that he saw his work as part of the whole narrative of Christianity.<sup>69</sup> He was careful to remind readers of his choice in historical figures to emphasize the importance he saw in both martyrs and famous Christian figures from antiquity. While he used the *Golden Legend* like many other writers as a model, he (like the rest of his contemporaries) never acknowledged the source's influence or the nature of any of the subjects within. Because it was a Catholic work, the writers would have avoided such references to it to prevent criticism that they were copying Catholic work to support their own. These historical claims and omissions were some of the criticisms that he had to vigorously defend as he continued to write and include more and more tales of persecution.<sup>70</sup>

The inclusion of women was a natural one given the visibility of the group as religious tensions increased. As stated in the introduction, Henry VIII had forbidden a majority of women to read the bible because he potentially did not trust such knowledge with the majority of his populace. Outside of this, it seemed rare for a woman to be in trouble for religious reasons, with Anne Askew being an exception because of her openness about embracing her gender on top of her religious knowledge. More specifically, Anne and any other women persecuted during Henry's reign suffered mainly because they defied family structure that

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<sup>69</sup> Helen White, *Tudor Books of Saints and Martyrs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 138.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 140.

placed them subordinate to men.<sup>71</sup> I interpret this as different from later persecution because it was social persecution that was divorced from religious belief. However, women like Anne Askew became increasingly prominent for different reasons and their knowledge of the bible was revealed as on par with that of their interrogators. Foxe would probably have had access to the interviews from heretic trials and the intellectual ability that the women showed in those cases was too important to his arguments to leave them out. Many women were also related to prominent civil and public figures and so including them might have been intended to stir up more support from influential people. Women were not just a political tool, though; they were integral to Christian spirituality in their society and so their inclusion would have been a very obvious way for Foxe to continue the connection between his times and female martyrs in the early Church's history. Because women were important to the spread of Christian spirituality in the early Church's history and then Reformation society, it made sense to connect the two sets of women together through martyrdom. Based on the proportion of women that Foxe included (roughly one-fifth compared to less than fifteen percent for the other martyrologists), it can be safely said that he was more aware of women in his efforts.<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, Foxe never went into the same sort of theological discussion as Luther and so his personal feelings on the matter of martyrdom are less clear looking back.

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<sup>71</sup> Diane Willen, "Women and Religion in Early Modern England," in *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe*, ed. Sherrin Marshall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 143

<sup>72</sup> William M. Schutte, "Women in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*," (Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, St. Louis, Mo., October 24, 1980), 4-5. Citation found in Jeannine Olson, "Jean Crespin, Humanist Printer among the Reformation Martyrologists," *The Harvest of Humanism in Central Europe: Essays in Honor of Lewis Spitz*, ed. Manfred P. Fleischer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 333-334.

One small matter is what kinds of literature Foxe would have been exposed to as he became an increasingly prominent Protestant writer. While he would have known famous works like the *Golden Legend* and much of Lutheran writing with the rise in printing technology, there would have been some England-specific material that influenced his thoughts and arguments. Peter Marshall mentions that Foxe possessed a copy of Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* that gave, in particular, an account of the murder of Robert Packington. Packington had been a successful city merchant until his shooting at the alleged hands of angry clergy in the 1530's. He was included in one of Foxe's Latin editions and the controversy that surrounded his death provided a particularly vivid episode for the martyrologist.<sup>73</sup>

Alongside Foxe's intellectual foundation were his sources and use of them in creating his narrative. In situations where he could not rely on first-hand information due to chronology, geography, or contacts, he often consulted several episcopal registers in the dioceses of London and Lincoln, which gave him a wealth of information on Lollard and Lutheran persecution under Henry.<sup>74</sup> He relied heavily on these registers to give him the details he needed, but often he also compressed the register information to fit his particular motives and enhance his stories when appropriate.<sup>75</sup>

This selective use of information created the particular version of events that appeared in Foxe's writing. In chapter 1 I mentioned Luther's initial comments on martyrdom trying to set up a Protestant idea of history based on religious suffering. Foxe and the other European

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 71.

<sup>74</sup> Walter E. Bauer, "Foxe's Martyrs," *Church History* 3, no. 4 (December 1934): 253-254.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 255.

martyrologists designed their work to create an overarching narrative that made martyrdom the central thread connecting the Protestant movement with the early or “real” church. Foxe in particular constructed his narrative to give readers a sense that they were among the godly or “elect” that should break free from Papal corruption.<sup>76</sup> This Anglican identity was constructed to help insulate its supporters from the dangers of Papal supporters both within the land and without.<sup>77</sup> These enemies who threatened Anglicanism’s place in history are ever present in Foxe. Protestants were to battle the bishops as agents of darkness that threw people into prison and served an evil that always remained just over the horizon, ready to snuff them out. The martyrs that Foxe used were the defenders that had existed since the earliest days of the church and kept believers safe spiritually from religious tormenters.<sup>78</sup> Foxe was not the only Englishman to be engaged in this effort as he was assisted by John Day and numerous other figures, but they were less energetic in their efforts compared to the former academic.

An interesting obstacle to a comparison between the religious situation in England and the German Empire is the fact that while Luther commented extensively on martyrdom as an aspect of religious expression, there was not a clear equivalent across the Channel. Foxe was the closest example, not just through his historical arguments, but with the qualitative aspects of martyrdom he added as his critics voiced their opinions. After his early Latin and English editions, Foxe was forced to address the worthiness of his subjects and he became the leading example of an English writer commenting on martyrdom in any fashion, but he was no theologian. Other individuals like John Bale, Thomas Cranmer, or Thomas Cromwell did not

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<sup>76</sup> Haller, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, 141.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

<sup>78</sup> White, *Tudor Books of Saints and Martyrs*, 145-156.

appear to write any sort of Anglican version of Luther's discussion of martyrdom, nor did they respond to his evolving arguments on that topic as they would have regarding the Lord's Supper or more doctrinal issues.

The closest these English figures came to the subject was as subjects. Two of these figures were Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer. In *Actes and Monuments* Cromwell was included as a Henrician victim and Cranmer as a Marian. David Loades highlighted Cranmer's importance as showing how early persecutions were based more on violation of political loyalty and then became more about incorrect religion as England's throne changed hands.<sup>79</sup> Foxe also used Cranmer as a mirror of sorts to underscore the importance of women's behavior in the minds of persecutors; if such a visible church figure as Thomas Cranmer could be executed, then women who faced the same persecution could hold their religious efforts in even higher regard.

Overall, Foxe is the best figure to look at when trying to study martyrdom in England. His intellectual background, proximity to religious tensions, and general ambition to tell particular stories resulted in his interest in persecuted people. Additionally, he was at the forefront of the English wings of print expansion and Protestant history that were central to the identity that was forming across Europe. The political-religious dynamic that had begun with Henry VIII gave people in the land a reason to show interest in individuals and their religious expressions. Foxe was able to capitalize on that interest to produce his large-scale narrative of

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<sup>79</sup> David Loades, "John Foxe and the Traitors: The Politics of the Marian Persecutions," in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 237.

Christian history through persecution. Foxe and his books were the best stage for the conflict between Protestant society and female religious expression to be put on display.

## CHAPTER 4: WOMEN IN ENGLAND

The final chapter will look at several different topics within the general framework laid out at the beginning of this paper. First, Foxe forms the basis for studying women's religion and female martyrdom in England during the Reformation and is the center of much of my analysis. He covered many female subjects persecuted for their religious actions or associations in his book. He detailed the circumstances surrounding each woman and any particular aspect that seemed unique or particularly noteworthy. I will therefore use Foxe to try to determine the issues of female religious freedom and efforts to control their own religious expression. Second, there was a history of female religiosity stretching backwards into the high medieval period that often found itself set against church authority. These medieval expressions were important because they showcased the varied efforts women made to better control their own faith rather than being told how to worship. Lastly, Elizabeth I is used as our final point to look at the highest figure in England at this time in terms of female religious expression. When she became queen, she assumed the role of head of the church in England and so she represented the combination of religion and femininity in a singular figure.

Because a good deal of what we know regarding female English Protestant martyrs comes from Foxe, he serves as the central source for studying women's religion in England both before and during the Reformation. Much has been made of John Foxe's treatment of women in his writings. After covering his narrative construction and writing environment in Chapter 2, we now need to look more closely at the stories themselves as they pertained to female subjects. While he presented women martyrs as positive role models for his readers, he also

simplified his descriptions in cases where he did not have access to detailed records. Much like in medieval hagiographies, authors of early modern martyrologies found it easy to stereotype and condense the circumstances surrounding their subjects' deaths. The stereotyping, rather than taking away from the women in question, was used to emphasize just how non-conformist or "heretical" they were. This meant that Foxe summarized and simplified the questions put to accused persons and how they eventually ended up tied to a stake rather than detailing each situation on a more individual level.<sup>80</sup> The details that would have separated these women for easier identification were often glossed over in favor of emphasizing the similarities of their deaths to keep with his particular style. This was likely to reduce the amount of time spent covering similar situations in order to focus on just how their actions fit into the Protestant model of martyrdom. This glossing was probably due to Foxe's desire to more easily fit each story into the Protestant model rather than giving exhaustive details that might otherwise undermine a subject. Only when a story was particularly unique, like with Anne Askew, did Foxe give more information for his readers. When the descriptions were briefer, it was probably due to a lack of excitement in the situation, existence in written material, or firsthand accounts regarding the person in question.

As an example of a briefer account in Foxe, there is the story of Joan Trunchfield. In terms of her background, he mentioned only that she was the wife of a shoemaker and that she probably listened to lectures of a pastor who had recently been martyred. She was condemned for denying the doctrine of the real presence in the Lord's Supper. During imprisonment and

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<sup>80</sup> Roland H. Bainton, "John Foxe and the Ladies," *The Social History of the Reformation* ed. Lawrence P. Buck (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 1972), 209.

execution she found the strength to hold to her convictions and call the Catholic Church corrupt compared to scripture.<sup>81</sup> The reason for Trunchfield's entry being relatively brief was again probably due to a lack of information that made her story unique, like Anne's general knowledge of scripture when questioned.

When significant information was present and fit his intentions, Foxe could write much more detailed stories about his female figures. He gave Anne Askew one of the most extensive descriptions; he started at her first arrest in 1545 and mentioned how she was initially coerced to provide a confession while also demonstrating religious knowledge and infuriating her interrogators. When she was placed in custody a second time and sent to the Tower of London for torture, she stood firm in her religious beliefs until she was sentenced to die. The most important part of his description is where she was being bound to the stake, unable to stand under her own power, and he proceeded to declare her "full belief in the scriptures, sufficient for salvation; but the mass, as then used, she rejected as abominable idolatry."<sup>82</sup> It is clear in Foxe's martyrology that he thought very highly of Anne to give her such a detailed record in his tome. His interest was probably driven by her relation to wealth and class and the intelligent articulation with which she used to defend her belief in the Protestant model described earlier. It was not emphasized in Foxe, but these qualities illustrate Anne's unwillingness to submit to male domination in religion.

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<sup>81</sup> John Foxe, *Fox's Book of Martyrs; or the Actes and Monuments of the Christian Church, Vol. 1*, ed. John Malham (Philadelphia: J.J. Woodward, 1830), <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044014400287;view=1up;seq=9>. 345.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 129.

I have mentioned Anne numerous times, but have not yet gone through her story in detail. The daughter of a wealthy landowner, she was most likely able to read and learn the bible because of her social standing. However, she was turned in to religious authorities by her staunchly Catholic husband when she was around twenty-five. In a lengthy account of her trial she was questioned on a number of religious topics including saintly intervention and transubstantiation.<sup>83</sup> She is described in glowing terms as God's vessel and other positive religious terms, but it was the intelligence she demonstrated that was significant. When her accuser asked her how she had acquired knowledge to defend her religious positions, she responded with "that I woulde not throwe pearles amonge swine, for acornes were good ynough."<sup>84</sup> This response, likening her accusers to pigs, illustrated that Anne was intelligent enough to not only defend herself, but go on the attack, with scriptural references, against men she considered beneath a polite response.

After several rounds of interrogation and torture, Anne was ultimately condemned to death. During her internment at Newgate prison she composed her ballad, which was reproduced many times in the following decades and centuries. She remained defiant of her persecutor's ultimate authority and did not show fear in the face of death. Because of the torture she had suffered, she could not walk or stand on her own and they were forced to tie her to the stake around her midsection. She was not burned alone, having several men alongside her (who are not described in detail), but she demonstrated the strength of will to

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<sup>83</sup> For the full account of Anne's trial see *The first examination of Anne Askew lately martyred in Smithfeld, by the Romish popes upholder, with the elucidation of John Bale*, 1547. [Eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=Byld&id=D000009984996400000&WARN=N&SIZ=269&FILE=../session/1391187491\\_7877&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATION&DISPLAY=default&ECCO=default](http://Eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=Byld&id=D000009984996400000&WARN=N&SIZ=269&FILE=../session/1391187491_7877&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATION&DISPLAY=default&ECCO=default) (accessed on January 31, 2014).

<sup>84</sup> *The first examination of Anne Askew*, 1547, 11.

encourage her fellow victims to be strong and courageous in death.<sup>85</sup> Anne's episode was one that resonated with people. Her knowledge and confidence in her faith, on display through torture and death, provided Foxe and his readers with a figure that was to be admired in the Protestant movement. And for us, she represents a woman who insisted on practicing her religion as she saw it, without male influence.

Anne was not the only women to receive significant mention in Foxe's work. While other records did not occupy the same amount of space as Anne, their descriptions were just as important to demonstrate their Protestant belief and that they were not content to follow Protestant men's leadership in religious matters. Anne's entry occupies over a full page of Foxe's double-columned work, while the "typical" entry was usually half a column in length or less. Elizabeth Warne was arrested while praying at a private residence and executed in 1555. In her interrogations she reportedly replied to questions on religion with the response, "If Christ were in an error, then am I in an error."<sup>86</sup> She, along with her daughter, was turned in by a Dr. Story, who was trying to obtain a full pardon for an unspecified offense.<sup>87</sup> She was the only case in either Foxe or any other primary source where a woman was arrested in a raid-type situation along with other people.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 129.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 328.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *The History of Elizabeth Warne widow, burnt at Stratford bowe*. 1689. Found in John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments Vol.2*, 1583.

[http://eebo.chadwyck.com.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/search/full\\_rec?Eebold=34&ACTION=ByID&SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ID=34&FILE=..%2Fsession%2F1391367884\\_2946&SEARCHSCREEN=param%28SEARCHSCREEN%29&VID=181330&PAGENO=897&ZOOM=100&VIEWPORT=&CENTREPOS=&GOTOPAGENO=&ZOOMLIST=100&ZOOMTEXTBOX=&SEARCHCONFIG=var\\_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=param%28DISPLAY%29](http://eebo.chadwyck.com.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/search/full_rec?Eebold=34&ACTION=ByID&SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ID=34&FILE=..%2Fsession%2F1391367884_2946&SEARCHSCREEN=param%28SEARCHSCREEN%29&VID=181330&PAGENO=897&ZOOM=100&VIEWPORT=&CENTREPOS=&GOTOPAGENO=&ZOOMLIST=100&ZOOMTEXTBOX=&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=param%28DISPLAY%29) (Accessed on November 1, 2013).

Five individuals, including four women, were executed in 1556. Anges Snoth, Anne Wright, Joan Sole, and Joan Catmer were all accused of rejecting various Catholic doctrines and were all dealt with in similar ways. One interesting note is that they were all related in some way to other men who had suffered under Mary. With this episode, Foxe noted how unusual it was to have four women with “irreproachable” lives executed. He also remarked how when Protestantism was finally supreme, there was very little in the way of burnings or cruelties toward people, but especially women, and that “it is the nature of error to resort to force instead of argument...”<sup>89</sup> This episode clearly stood prominently in Foxe’s mind as a contrast between Protestant and Catholic responses to religious behavior based on his opinion of the event described. A particular point of interest is that Foxe used the term religious murders later when discussing another group of individuals that were executed. He uses it casually as he refers to the process of interrogation and condemnation they experienced as ordinary.<sup>90</sup> With this statement he seemed to be classifying all episodes he recorded. While Foxe did make a great effort to hide his bias, this particular use of words arguably showed that he did not always hide emotions in his writing.

The reasons that women were brought to trial are an important issue in trying to determine just why some of Foxe’s subjects were executed. Accusations ranged from neighbors accusing individuals of infractions in prayer to questions over material goods that morphed into other problems. In the latter case, a woman named Perotine Massey, along with her mother and sister, was summoned to discuss some pewter vessels found in their house.

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<sup>89</sup>Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*. 339.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 356.

While it is unknown if there was anything special about these objects, the women were soon cleared of those charges. The magistrate then became concerned with spiritual matters and found them to be in adherence to the previous set of Edwardian laws instead of Mary's. On the day of their execution the three women were first strangled above the fire, but as Perotine's rope broke, she gave birth to a son. The child was quickly saved by a W. House, but the bailiff almost immediately condemned that it be returned to the fire to join its mother.<sup>91</sup> This was arguably one of the most graphic episodes recorded in Foxe. Not only was a pregnancy unconsidered in the sentencing, but the unbaptized child was then punished for essentially nothing. The decision to punish an unbaptized child for a mother's rather vague crimes (according to Foxe) should illustrate the steps authorities would take to punish incorrect religious observance or expression. This episode, even without the secondary cruelty, displays some of the almost random circumstances that surrounded religious trials.

It seems almost too fantastic to have happened, but it appeared in a couple sources in addition to Foxe; Peter Heylyn gave a description of the same episode in his *Ecclesia restaurata*. This work dated to the 1660's so it is possible he copied part of Foxe for this episode, but that is not clear from the book itself.<sup>92</sup> The episode is given closer examination in Mozley's *John Foxe and his Book*. He mentions that Foxe faced several attacks on this story in particular because he left out Massey's guilt as a thief, lecher and murderer as well as a heretic. According to opponents, she had to have been married to gain the name Massey and then slept with

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 352.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Heylyn, *Ecclesia Restaurata*, 1660-1661, 57.

[http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full\\_rec?action=ByID&source=pgimages.cfg&ID=12706619&VID=66032&PAGE\\_NO=30&SUBSCRIBER\\_TCP=Y&FILE=../session/1391368049\\_3280&SEARCHCONFIG=var\\_spell.cfg&HIGHLIGHT\\_KEY\\_WORD=default](http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?action=ByID&source=pgimages.cfg&ID=12706619&VID=66032&PAGE_NO=30&SUBSCRIBER_TCP=Y&FILE=../session/1391368049_3280&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&HIGHLIGHT_KEY_WORD=default) (Accessed on November 1, 2013).

another to become pregnant because no husband appeared to defend her. The shame of birth out of wedlock was then so much that she refused to reveal her pregnancy to her accusers to gain a stay of execution and the child was killed because he was supposedly born dead. Mozley notes that the accusations against Foxe first appeared around ten years after the story was published and made no effort to cite concrete information. He then confirms that Foxe's sources are accurate. As far as the interpretation of those facts to reach the final story, the accused in this case were ultimately punished for heresy, not theft; and she did not reveal the pregnancy possibly because she thought it obvious enough she was with child that she didn't need to or because she didn't know the law at all. As far as the husband was concerned, he apparently fled the country during Mary's rule and essentially abandoned Perotine to whatever fate she would meet. The matter of revealing the pregnancy is one point that is still unclear with Massey's story. There is also no clear reason for the child's death either. Despite Mozley's more detailed effort to look at Perotine Massey's tale, there are still several questions about her pregnancy and child's death that remain unclear.<sup>93</sup> This story, while possibly entirely true, should be approached with caution due to the lack of solid reasons for some of the details.

Again, accusations were much more varied in nature than just in cases like Perotine Massey's or the others mentioned previously. Joan Waste, a blind woman, was accused of adhering to the previous Edwardian laws. Alice Benden was turned in by her Catholic husband for not going to church and starved for several months before being killed. Elizabeth Cooper revoked a previous recantation for anti-pope language while in her parish church. Rose Mundt had her hand burned as torture in the act of fetching water for her sick and "heretical" parents.

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<sup>93</sup> J. Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 223-235.

Elizabeth Folks was executed for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation, and finally, Joyce Lewis was eventually executed for first becoming interested in Protestant belief after watching another martyr's death.<sup>94</sup> The circumstances, ranging from observances of certain laws to belief in doctrines to simply not going to church all showed that any deviation from "accepted" belief or worship on the part of women could lead them to death. These were far from the only stories outside of Anne Askew and others, but they are some of the best examples of the wide range of difficulties faced. Also, it is important to note that these accusations were not exclusively used against women, and that women were victims of the same charges that men faced. This would help reinforce the notion that women were trying to take control of their religion in a masculine sense because there no new violations were created just for them. Obviously stories like Perotine Massey's could only happen to women and a key thing to remember is that those stories (ones with particularly feminine qualities) are used to highlight Catholic cruelty above the "ordinary" level of persecution directed at women.

The reasons for accusation were much less diverse than the accusations themselves. Elizabeth Warne was betrayed for a pardon regarding a completely different set of crimes, but if there were any ulterior motives for some of the other accusations, Foxe did not address them. It was possible that Perotine Massey's first trial related to the vessels found in her house was intended to procure those same vessels for the accuser, but Foxe makes no mention of the accuser because it did not matter to him. Any other stories he included similarly did not address or even allude to any possible motivations beyond the victims being "good subjects" during Marian rule. The only sources beyond *Actes and Monuments* that would potentially

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<sup>94</sup> Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*. 352-367.

address the accusers' motivations would potentially be the registers upon which Foxe drew, but the availability of those records pose an entirely different problem for the historian.

Given that Foxe was sometimes sloppy in his narrative construction, it becomes necessary to read through his general simplification to try and understand the women on a deeper level. In an essay on feminine spirituality, Ellen Macek looked at how the women, even in their depictions in *Actes and Monuments*, underwent "a dual process of spiritual growth and moral liberation from the restraints of Tudor society and the Roman Church."<sup>95</sup> She carefully articulates the change she sees in Foxe's female subjects while avoiding using more modern feminist systems of evaluation. She emphasizes the lay status of these women as they took control of their religious growth and how they were from a wide range of ages, meaning that no one demographic appeared more than any other. The process of martyrdom represented the final "awakening" for the figures that started to come out during their previous lives and trials.<sup>96</sup> By this, Macek means that as a woman underwent persecution, she moved from material concerns to spiritual ones. She finds Foxe to be a particularly empowering figure whose stories helped not only idolize women, but also assist readers in thinking about a growth in female spirituality. Interestingly, she takes the position that many of these women were lower class and does not mention the alterations Foxe made.<sup>97</sup> This difference in how one categorizes the women means that if many are considered lower-class, then the desire for religious expression was a much more pervasive one than if it was confined to the women related to the upper classes.

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<sup>95</sup> Ellen Macek, "The Emergence of a Feminine Spirituality in the Book of Martyrs," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1988), 64.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 68-69.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 66

Class was an identifiable feature throughout Foxe that is important to mention. Anne Askew was one of the best examples of how a high-status woman could tie herself to the Reformation. She was the daughter of a wealthy landowner and gentleman and had the opportunity to study the bible because her birth afforded her the opportunity to circumvent Henry's restriction on reading the bible. When she was finally brought to trial, she demonstrated an incredible knowledge of scripture, answering questions on God's dwellings, the sacraments, and the role of scripture in faith.<sup>98</sup> Other examples of socially visible women as martyrs were wives of craftsmen like upholsterers or shoemakers, widows of previously martyred spouses, or women who were otherwise related to individuals who were prominent in Protestant communities. The thing that bound these women together was shared rejection of religious and political positions about what they could and could not do. The groups listed above marked the largest ones from which Foxe drew many of his subjects for his stories.

The Reformation-era women marked the bulk of Foxe's subjects, but they were building on a long tradition of women trying to take control over their own religion. In order to fully understand them and how Foxe and other members of their society would have seen them, it is necessary to look back at that earlier tradition. Starting in the medieval period, female religious enthusiasm (outside of the convent system) was found primarily in the number of medieval women who desired to go on pilgrimage. Pilgrimages to shrines had been one of the most visible expressions of faith at the time because it allowed believers to connect with particular figures, including the female saints Reformers would eventually eliminate. According to Leigh Ann Craig, it had grown tremendously because of an interest among lay people to engage with

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<sup>98</sup> Bainton, "John Foxe and the Ladies," 210.

the practice as part of their devotional regimens. This caused a concern among church officials who felt that ordinary people were using pilgrimage as an excuse to leave the home.<sup>99</sup> In chapter 1, I mentioned how the convent system was the most common way for women to express faith, but traveling to saintly shrines was a much more open system that allowed women to demonstrate their faith alongside their male counterparts, and much harder to control from the perspective of religious officials. This need to control women's pilgrimages expressed an early desire to keep them largely out of dominant religious practices and located in environments that could be more closely monitored.

Because pilgrimage became a common practice for women, it was depicted in the popular culture that would have been noticed by far more people than just church officials. For example, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* included the Wife of Bath character, whose portrayal defied many of the traditional traits given to medieval literary depictions of women. This character had more masculine qualities with regards to marriage behavior and sexual independence and was a strong, if fictional, example of a woman who took control over her personal situation.

A more extreme form of women exercising control over their religion was through mysticism. Mystics articulated direct communication with God and circumvented traditional church structures to an extent. While women like England's Margery Kempe were able to carve out a place for themselves in the Catholic system that lay outside of convents, they also had to be cautious in how they promoted their personal connection to God. If a mystic professed

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<sup>99</sup> Leigh Ann Craig, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons: Women as Pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 9-10.

something too deviant from standard doctrine, she ran the risk of being declared a heretic as in the example of Marguerite de Porete. A French mystic and author of the popular *Mirror of Simple Souls*, she was put on trial and executed in 1310 over concerns that her book pushed a personal religious relationship and a level of spiritual “perfection” that was unachievable for readers.<sup>100</sup> Despite the dangers present for such women, they continued to demonstrate a level of independence and religious knowledge in the face of male authority. Women arguably used mysticism to manage marriage responsibilities or avoid the act all together. They were also able to develop an internal network that allowed them to communicate with each other; Margery Kempe was able to visit the famous anchoress and mystic Julian of Norwich during her lifetime to discuss their religious experiences.<sup>101</sup> Outside of the danger of heresy, mysticism was also controlled in part through male figures acting as interpreters of mystic experiences and potentially filtering what was said.<sup>102</sup> By the fifteenth century, mysticism was joined by the heresy of Lollardy as a way for women to take control of the religious expression.

Lollardy was a movement that had grown out of John Wyclif’s efforts to translate the bible into the vernacular and the fallout that occurred from the insights he gained during the process. The Catholic Church denounced his advocacy for personal religion as heresy within a year, but he remained immensely popular among multiple social groups in England including women. He was not executed and influenced the other major late medieval movement, the Hussites, which in turn influenced the Reformation. Lollardy had partly focused on clerical

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<sup>100</sup> Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 22-23.

<sup>101</sup> “The Book of Margery Kempe,” *Readings in Medieval History*, Vol II, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Patrick Geary (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 353. It is important to note that anchoresses could be mystics, but that hermeticism was not a variety of mysticism.

<sup>102</sup> Craig, *Wandering Women*, 13.

lapses and the incorrectness they saw in Catholic worship. Wyclif and the Lollards' criticisms gave Protestantism a prime location for its social and religious ideas to take root and flourish.<sup>103</sup> Lollardy, like the Reformation that followed, has come under new study as women and gender studies have grown over the decades to combine with previously existing fields. A good examination of the relationship between gender and Lollard religion is Shannon McSheffrey's *Gender and Heresy*, which looks at the concept of gender as a fluid identity and how that interacted with religious dissent. For McSheffrey, female Lollards were sometimes overlooked in historical records, but still played important roles in their communities, which will be discussed further on.<sup>104</sup> Lollardy was a critical movement prior to the Reformation and many of its criticism were echoed in the subsequent period.

Women were not the principle leaders of the movement, but sometimes they held status that allowed them to act in ways unavailable otherwise. Lollard females, like their later Protestant counterparts, were often very knowledgeable and enthusiastic participants in religion. If they themselves were of high social status they could lead groups of lower-class people in communities, but not the point that they could direct the movement itself.<sup>105</sup> Alice Rowley, the widow of a well-known merchant and landowner, led Lollards in Coventry and even formed a core of females in the community.<sup>106</sup> While Alice was an impressive figure, high-status women were typically rare in leadership roles.

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<sup>103</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Malden: Wiley=Blackwell, 2010), 295-296.

<sup>104</sup> Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1995), 11-21.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 109-110.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 30-31.

More often, Lollard women were either enthusiastic participators without status or vice-versa. One particular case of the former that shows up in Foxe was Agnes Grebil. Foxe's entry on her lacks details, but mentions the critical point that her family gave her to the authorities, a claim which is echoed in McSheffry's more detailed study. Her sphere in influence was apparently limited to home and personal relationships, but was still visible enough within that sphere to bring attention to her family.<sup>107</sup> On the surface the case could be made that she was betrayed for being too active as a woman, but McSheffry notes that she appeared to play a secondary role compared to her husband and other outside figures. This would have meant that they may have betrayed her to deflect attention from their own associations.<sup>108</sup>

A second female, Margery Baxter, presented a different story from Agnes Grebil. She predated Grebil by several decades, but she was knowledgeable enough about religious matters to vehemently deny transubstantiation and reportedly enjoyed attacking the established religious authorities in Norwich. She was not an expert on Lollard belief, but was a devoted follower to the point that she tried to convert people. She was punished, but not executed for her efforts. While she was more outspoken than Grebil, she was also not a woman of high status.<sup>109</sup> Both of these stories show that social station was not always a factor in determining who the most energetic believers were.

Despite high status women being seemingly rare in Lollard society where leadership was concerned, they weren't entirely uninvolved. In certain areas around Colchester, Oxfordshire, and other places, wealthy and visible women were important members of their communities.

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<sup>107</sup> Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 112.

<sup>108</sup> McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, 112-112.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 113-114.

One case noted was that of Hawise Mone, the wife of a particularly well-to-do cobbler. The Mone house was one of the chief centers of Lollard activity in East Anglia. Mone was reportedly assertive and unafraid to stand for herself in the bishop of Norwich's court, even boldly attacking the clergy while on trial saying, "but thay be lecherous and covetous men and fals deceyvours of the puple."<sup>110</sup> She also received heretics in great numbers, but did not teach others. She was content to facilitate Lollardy in her area, which was an important role nonetheless. This potentially meant that she helped Lollards meet and communicate, but it is unclear from the description given. What further separated Mone from other influential women was her arrest and incarceration prior to her trial, which, in a rare instance, was separate from that of her husband, and her point-by-point repudiation of doctrine.<sup>111</sup> Hawise Mone shows that while somewhat rare in comparison to women tied to the middle-class, higher-class women could function as important members of Lollard community leadership. These women related back to Foxe because they were seen as proto-Reformers and were early examples of women talking on traditionally male roles through religious knowledge and community leadership. With this look at the different struggles women faced during the medieval period and the efforts made to take on a larger religious role complete, we can return to our central point of Foxe and Anglican women.

Moving back into the early modern period, there was the matter of what books women were rejecting in favor of the bible. I have mentioned Henry's ban on reading the bible for most females during his reform, but that wasn't to say there was nothing for them to read. On

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<sup>110</sup> *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-1431*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Camden Society, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., 20, 1977. Found in McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, 119.

<sup>111</sup> McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, 118-120.

the contrary, there was an expanding body of literature intended for women that ultimately failed to satisfy them intellectually. It consisted of books on subjects like midwifery, cooking, education, and other things related to “women’s duties” or histories of famous women. This literature helped reinforce the specific roles intended for its readers, again focusing on traditional domestic roles of maintaining the house and providing early education to children. While the genres above did not constitute all of English literature directed at women, this list does contain much of what is known to modern historians.<sup>112</sup> By the time England reached the sixteenth-century, a greater percentage of women were reading these sorts of domestic-oriented materials. There are not solid literacy rates, but Suzanne Hull estimates (based on another estimate from Sir Thomas More), that around half a million women could potentially read by the mid-1500’s.<sup>113</sup> This would have included women in the middle-class, and as a result many of these women would have had access to Foxe as time went on. Even though they could read the bible by mid-century, Foxe would still have provided the most concrete literature to fulfill women’s desire to express their faith. And at this same time, women would finally receive a figure that represented the height of their ability to interact with religion, either scripturally or otherwise, with the ascension of Elizabeth I in 1558.

Elizabeth was a key figure in demonstrating just how women could engage with religion while avoiding martyrdom. As the most dominant female figure of English Protestantism, she occupied the unique position of being the head of a church that attempted to keep women in a particular social and religious position. Figures like Nicolas Harpsfield were highly critical of her

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<sup>112</sup> Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982, x-xi.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

as she resumed the reforms started under her late father and brother, but she did not antagonize her opponents to the degree that other women did. While she was not a martyr, during her time as monarch she effectively balanced her authority and refusal to bow to traditional standards like marriage with the practical need to not push so far with her Catholic opponents that they openly rebelled. According to Susan Frye, she effectively took masculine qualities as her own upon her ascension and was able to represent both her “male” authority (as reflected in her monarchical status) and female virtue.<sup>114</sup> This was something that Lollard women had been effectively doing for a century with the participation in community leadership roles. But obviously Elizabeth took this practice to a much more elevated level.

Part of Elizabeth’s efforts revolved around representations of her body or womanhood. Part of asserting herself as a ruler who could appeal to her male subjects and opponents involved trying to remove mentions of her body in public address and sexual connotations from her femininity. This meant emphasizing her unmarried status and public perceptions of virginity.<sup>115</sup> While she is forced to hide at least the sexualized aspects of her femininity in her role as monarch, she was still able to project a strong, religious female figure that did not need a male counterpart to help her rule or lead the church. Elizabeth embodied some of the dissatisfaction with the traditional relationship between gender and faith. Finally, Foxe’s likening of her to Constantine the Great further solidified just how critical she had become to the growing Anglican identity in light of the previous political and religious turmoil.

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<sup>114</sup> Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 37-38.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

Despite the obstacles to religious expression that women faced, they continued to exercise their agency in religious matters. They rejected the place that literature intended for them to occupy and read the bible to gain personal knowledge and a closer relationship with faith. Through Foxe we can see, in spite of certain difficulties with story sources and his descriptions of who he chose to include, the circumstances that surrounded their efforts. They did not let political decree or the threat of persecution intimidate them into conforming to societal expectations. Women like Anne Askew, Elizabeth Warne, Perotine Massey, and the rest of the women mentioned all had similar, yet different experiences that revolved around keeping these women in particular places religiously and socially. Ultimately, none of the violent or coercive efforts succeeded in preventing women from developing their personal knowledge of God and they had slightly more freedom to demonstrate their faith after Elizabeth's reign began. The prior periods of persecution illustrated women's desire to seize control of their religion similar to men, while maintaining their femininity in the process.

## CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Women faced a difficult position in the Reformation. In the course of our discussions we first looked at Martin Luther's initial efforts to change and improve society. He wished to lead women from their entrapment in convents to a more free life inside the home and within marriage per the Genesis story. That they were to have more executive control over domestic matters (gardening, cooking, household finances, children's education, etc.) was supposed to be empowering for the newly "independent" women. However, the elimination of convents and other Catholic structures for women meant that they were not being liberated, but confined in new ways that limited Protestant women from expressing their faith or identifying with historical religious women.

Additionally, while Luther was also a martyrologist, he poorly articulated a position for women within the concept of dying for one's faith. He assumed his new structure for Protestant society left women satisfied, with no desire to endanger themselves for their devotion to God. Also, because Luther avoided a martyr's fate, he began to think it was nobler to be a surviving leader of the movement rather than a dead symbol. Despite this, he still held certain women from the early Church's days in high regard for the persecution they faced as Christians. This long-term ambivalence left a hole in his system that did not adequately address how martyrdom should function in Protestantism as a whole, much less for women. It was left to men in other places to pick up the question of Protestant martyrdom, which was where John Foxe entered the story.

John Foxe was the figure that helped connect Luther's ideas on martyrdom to the situation in England. He was a trained academic who allied with the Protestant cause over disagreements with the Catholic doctrine that the Anglican Church adopted. He was present to witness a fellow believer executed for his belief and support of Protestantism and became convinced it was no longer safe in Marian England. His years spent abroad were useful for they allowed him to collect stories of foreign martyrs and develop connections on the continent.

Upon his return, he partnered with the preeminent printer John Day to start producing the English-language version of *Actes and Monuments* that would propel both men to the forefront of English Protestantism. Their effort to compile the stories of martyrs from the early church to early modern Protestants was designed to solidify the idea that Protestantism was similar to the "true" church of late antiquity through martyrs' suffering and persecution. Foxe's book highlighted the struggle that female martyrs had always faced in pursuit of their religious goals and the popularity of the book showed the resonance the message had with readers both inside and outside England.

The women whom Foxe described were limited by both theologians and political authorities in the period. In England, Henry tried to limit access to scripture for most women and Mary attempted to physically destroy Protestantism with her persecutions. With these obstacles in their way the only thing left for females was to accept the rules or push against them. They continued to pursue their own faith through persecution and death. Reformation-era women followed the tradition of female religiosity that had existed with the acts of pilgrimage, mysticism, and Lollardy. This tradition eventually led to the position where women

became targets for outside authorities to assert control over those actions. The resulting tension between authority and women ultimately resulted in martyrdom for the latter. While they were not the majority of victims, they were a significant proportion that illustrated some of the poorly addressed issues in Reformation thought.

The Reformation is a huge subject within history, but women occupy a relatively small space within that general field of scholarship. The secondary material has not developed beyond the initial question of whether or not the Reformation was good for female figures and how they fit into the larger structures of reform. The general consensus seems to be that they were either helped thanks to general improvements to marriage and education, or limited by those same changes, and this opinion often seems to rest on the gender of the author. The next step in analyzing women in the period would be to continue asking what it meant for women to act in ways contrary to Reformers' opinions and look more deeply at their involvement in the movement. One sub-topic that would easily fit with the framework I have presented is history of other groups that were persecuted for interpreting Protestant theology "incorrectly" in the minds of the authorities. The Peasant Revolt of 1424-1426 took Luther's words as support for a class uprising, which was eventually crushed at his urging. It would be interesting to see a comparison between that sort of interpretation and women, as each group was pushed down in light of its approach to Reformation theology.<sup>116</sup>

England is but one piece of the reform puzzle. It was important for its unique political situation and history, but was far from the only place where women were persecuted and

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<sup>116</sup> Works that cover the Peasant Revolt, but do not discuss gender explicitly, are Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) and *The Radical Reformation*, ed. Michale B. Baylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

mentioned in martyrologies. France, the Netherlands, and to an extent Germany, all saw religious persecution that included women. France, in particular, and the presence of large numbers of Calvinist Huguenots would be another interesting comparison to Luther and his approach to martyrdom. Calvin is perhaps the second most famous Reformer and had his own successful counterpart martyrologist in Jean Crespin which would be an interesting comparison to Luther and Foxe.

The relationship between women and religion is something that is still discussed in modern parlance as well. Catholicism and certain branches of Protestantism still struggle to decide how deeply women should be involved in terms of preaching and leadership roles. Of course, women are no longer physically persecuted in those groups, but there are still barriers to participation. Denominations have fractured over the ordination of women and in certain contexts females are relegated to the stereotype of the "church basement lady." It is important to remember that the struggle for participation is not a new one, but centuries old. Perhaps the best way to approach the question of how women should express themselves religiously is to not to look to scripture or the Reformation, but to understand those things as part of the debate that continues today as women take control of their faith in what has historically been considered a masculine sense, while maintaining their femininity.

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