Religious conversion in early modern English drama

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PART II: Interfaith Conversion

CHAPTER 5 'More Stable and Perfect Faith:' Religious Pluralization and the Paradox of Interfaith Conversion

In 1641, an anonymous pamphleteer complained about his discovery of "29 sects" in London, "all of which, except the first" he considered "most divelish and damnable."[1] His list includes "*Protestants, Puritans, Papists, Brownists, Calvinists, Lutherans, Fam. of love, Mahometans, Adamites, Brightanists, Armenians, Sosinians, Thessalonians, Anabaptists, Separatists: Chaldaeans, Electrians, Donatists, Persians, Antinomeans, Assyrians, Macedonians, Heathens, Panonians, Saturnians, Junonians, Bacchanalians, Damassians, The Brotherhood*."[2] What follows are brief derogatory and sneering descriptions of each sect. The members of the Family of Love, for instance, are said to believe that "a man may gaine salvation by shewing himself loving, especially to his neighbours wife."[3] Although the mocking tone of some of these characterizations as well as the inclusion of fictional sects (such as the "Electrians" and the "Damassians") suggests that the pamphlet was written with some satirical intent, it does express a genuine and widely shared concern over the co-existence of a variety of what the author perceives as false sects. "The Puritan," for example, is accused of "striving to poison, as neare as he can, the truth with his true-lyes" and said to hold with "conventicles and private meetings."[4] In addition to scorning the 28 sects, the author expresses his wish that all of their members embrace Protestantism, a "Diamond, which, though it bee cast to the Dung-hill, loseth not a jot of its splendor," and hopes that "*the ignorant Professors of the rest may see the light, which seemes more glorious to those who have walked so long in darknesse*."[5]

The above pamphlet exemplifies two interrelated developments in the early modern perception of faith. Firstly, it illustrates the experience of an unparalleled increase in the number and prominence of different religious denominations. This caused people, to a greater extent than they had done before, to identify religious truth and falsehood with religious group identities. Veracity, as well as heresy, profanation and dissent were defined along the lines of denominations, and people were identified, and identified themselves, with their religion. Secondly, religious pluralization gave an unprecedented urgency

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[1] *A Discovery of 29. sects here in London* (London, 1641).
[2] *A Discovery of 29 sects*, 1.
[3] *A Discovery of 29 sects*, 4.
[4] *A Discovery of 29 sects*, 2-3.
[5] *A Discovery of 29 sects*, 2. Original emphasis.

to interfaith conversion. The increasing prominence of religious difference brought about an upsurge in the number of conversions from one denomination to the other. These did not only include shifts between Catholicism and Protestantism, but also conversions from Christianity to Islam that were reported to have occurred in the Ottoman territories. In addition, early moderns were presented with accounts of English endeavours to Christianize native pagans in the New World.

Interfaith conversion raised different problems and challenges than its spiritual variant. While spiritual conversion amounted to a change of persuasion, made visible in adjusted behaviour and actions, interfaith conversion first and foremost entailed a change of *being*, that is, of one's religious identity. At the heart of the concerns over interfaith conversion was conflict between the conception of religious identity as an inherent and inalienable part of the self on the one hand, and the desire that religious others reject their erroneous belief and convert to (the right version of) Christianity on the other. This ambiguity also occurs in the above pamphlet. The author may articulate a desire for interfaith conversion, but it is not likely that he would accept as new Protestants people he previously dismissed as "more mad, ignorant" and "impious than the rest" (the Bacchanalians) or as resembling "*whoring rogues*" (the Brotherhood). Besides, his advice to readers to apply themselves to Protestantism and "*hate and eschew all*" other sects indicates a readership that is already Protestant and belies a genuine desire of conversion.

The present chapter explores the early modern paradox of interfaith conversion: the desire to convince members of other faiths of the truth of one's own while also striving to demarcate and render impermeable the boundaries of religious identity, which involved questioning or even denying the possibility of conversion. It shows that this contradiction went beyond denominational boundaries and affected every type of interfaith conversion, within Christianity, as well as between Christian and non-Christian faiths. An important part of this contradiction was the concern over the politicization of conversion. As we have seen in the previous chapter, conversion was perceived as being emptied of its theological or spiritual content and deployed as a tool for various secular purposes. This chapter explores interfaith conversion as an aspect of this politicization of faith. Homilists, for instance, used biographical accounts of the rare Christianizations of Jews and Muslims to polarize between Catholicism and Protestantism. While it seems as if these accounts were deployed in sermons as tools for proselytization among non-Christians, closer scrutiny of these sermons as well as of their implied audience reveals that they first and foremost served to polarize between Protestant and Catholic doctrine and identity and to demarcate their boundaries. This is illustrated in John Foxe's *Sermon Preached at the*

Christening of a certain Jew (1578) and Meredith Hanmer's *The Baptizing of a Turke* (1589). The first text was presented at the baptism of Yehuda Menda, who was christened Nathanael, at Alhallowes Church in 1577. Hanmer's homily takes as a point of departure the Christianization of Chinano of Nigropontus, a Turkish slave who had been rescued from a Spanish galley. At first glance, these texts are straightforward accounts of the ways in which converts had wandered in Jewish or Islamic ignorance before they became aware of the Christian truth, but a closer look reveals that the authors are more interested in the idea that the conversions are triumphs of Protestantism, serving as classic examples of anti-Catholic propaganda. Since the sermons were preached to a Protestant audience, the interfaith conversions of the Menda and Chinano were thus effectively used to advocate against interfaith conversion and promote Protestant steadfastness.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the integration of converts into their new religious environment. Its susceptibility to political interpretations rendered interfaith conversion suspect and the acceptance of new adherents of a faith problematic. Converts were accused of opportunism, which compromised their assimilation. In addition, they were accused of being inconstant, an allegation against which they could hardly defend themselves.[6] This challenge was more pressing for converts who changed their religion more than once. Recanters and serial converts negatively affected the general opinion of all converts, moreover. Concerns about inconstancy reveal a collective anxiety about the stability of religious denomination itself. Indeed, the increasing importance that was attached to the virtue of constancy – glorified, for instance, in accounts of martyrdom – must be seen as a response to this anxiety.

Interfaith Conversion as an Instrument of Denominational Politics

While the vast majority of interfaith conversions in early modern England were between Catholicism and Protestantism, reports of Jewish-Christian and Muslim-Christian changes of faith played a significant role in inter-Christian polemics. They were used to shape the understanding of religious identity and of the exchange of religious identities in interfaith conversion.

Conversions from Judaism to Christianity in early modern England were exceptional. In 1290, all Jewish inhabitants had been expelled from England and Jews were only readmitted to the country in 1655. According to James Shapiro, "there were Jews in Shakespeare's England, though probably never more than a

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[6] See also Michael Quester, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 55-56.

couple of hundred at any given time in the whole country, a very small number in a population of roughly four million."[7] A part of the English inhabitants of Jewish descent was from Spain and Portugal, their ancestors having been banished from their native countries or forced to convert. Despite the near-total absence of Jews, the English explored the idea of their Christianization with much fascination, as it helped them place in sharper focus their intimate and conflicted historical relationship with Jews.

English Christians were ambivalent towards Judaism. They were familiar with Deuteronomy 7.6, which reminds Jews of their special status as God's elect: "for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." At the same time, Christian understandings of Judaism were informed by the idea that Jews stubbornly refused to accept Christ as their Messiah. In addition, Jews were seen as responsible for the crucifixion, which fostered an endless range of myths about their cruel nature; they were thought to poison wells, to circumcise Christian men and ritually murder children.[8] The confusion produced by the complex scriptural status of Jews fuelled a desire for unmistakable tokens of Jewish otherness, which were typically found in the body. Pre-expulsion English attempts to separate Jews from Christians by forcing them to wear distinctive clothing[9] bear witness to an awareness that is was impossible to make physical distinctions between Jews and Christians, but this was not enough to prevent the cultivation of the racialized Jew with a typically dark complexion, hooked nose and red hair. In fact, as M. Lindsay Kaplan asserts, "thirteenth-century English culture gave rise to the concept of an immutable Jewish racial identity, corresponding to a modern definition of race, that was construed in religious, class, somatic, hereditary, and gendered terms," adding rightly that it is "the site of conversion" that "provides the context in which these emerging assumptions become clear."[10] Indeed, defining Judaism as a race rather than a religion was as much as saying that Jews could never fully become Christians. In Spain, the so-called pure blood laws were used to determine the extent to which someone was of pure Christian blood and to prevent any descendant of a convert from becoming a member of Christian society. The laws provided a means to re-establish these boundaries on the

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[7] James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 76.

[8] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, passim.

[9] See Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 95-96.

[10] M. Lindsay Kaplan, "Jessica's Mother: Medieval Constructions of Jewish Race and Gender in *The Merchant of Venice*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58 (2007): 1-30, 2.

grounds of race rather than faith, as "it was maintained that degenerate Jewish blood was impervious to baptism and grace."[11] Some English advocates of racial description of Judaism found creative ways also to argue for the possibility of conversion. Some believed that Jews produced a certain stench called *foetor judaicus*, while at the same time various legends recount that the power of baptism could remove the odour.[12] Others, like Sir Thomas Browne, did not take this seriously. With characteristic irony, he refuted the *foetor judaicus* on the grounds of the very possibility of Christianization: "as though aromatized by their conversion, [Jews] lost their scent with their Religion, and smelt no longer then they savoured of the Jew."[13] Rather than providing a sense of certainty, the racial understanding of Judaism raised disturbing questions about the possibility of conversion.

The Sermon Preached at the Christening of a certain Jew, by the Protestant martyrologist John Foxe (1516/17-1587), is an illustrative example of the early modern contradictory conception of Jews as both desired converts and as impervious to Christianization. A considerable part of the sermon is devoted to portraying Jews as enemies of Christ, "whome they trayterously murthered and hanged on tree."[14] Foxe does so by consistently depicting them as a "nation" or a "race" that is defined by their reprobation. According to Foxe, a principal characteristic of Jewishness is unbelief. This manifests itself in the fact that they "wittingly" refuse to "acquaint themselves with the trueth" and "cruelly persecute the same in al maner of outrage, slaughter, blood, blasphemies and most despiteful execrations," an attitude that is part of the natural make-up of Jews:

> this […] unbeliefe, which being more noisome then any pestilent botch may rightly and properly be called the Jewish Infidelitie, and seemeth after a certaine matter their inheritable disease, who are after a certaine sort, from their mothers wombe, naturally carried

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[11] Jerome Friedman, "Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18.1 (1987): 3-30, 3, 5, 11, 16.

[12] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945) 48-49.

[13] Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) quoted in David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603-1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) 170.

[14] John Foxe, *A Sermon Preached at the Christening of a Certain Jew, at London* (London: Christopher Barker, 1578) sig. B4v.

> through perverse frowardnes, into all malitious hatred, and contempt of Christ and his Christians.[15]

For this reason, Jews are, in Foxe's eyes, collectively punished for their deeds: "God" must avenge "his welbeloved sonne […] upon the whole nation, and roote out the remnant of the whole race altogether."[16]

It is significant that Foxe regularly addresses Jews directly while it is unlikely that there were any Jews present in the audience. He lashes out at them: "why do you so vylanously persecute your naturall kinseman, beyng likewise a Jewe borne, and why have you slayne him so cruelly," and "Does thou not see, how thy mischievous practises recoyle back upon thine owne head."[17] As Janet Adelman explains, Foxe, in this way, "[brings] the context into the present moment in England, thus allowing Foxe to represent himself as heroic in the face of a contemporary danger, boldly defending the claim of "the nations" – his underdog "Gentiles" – who are threatened by what amounts to an imaginary invasion of Jews."[18] Foxe's evocation of the fictional presence of Jews not only exposes the construction of religious group identity as a process of the imagination, but also as something that was stimulated significantly with dramatic techniques. Indeed, in the next two chapters I will show the great extent to which plays served to fashion and solidify notions of religious difference. Foxe suggests that his sermon essentially is about conversion – the occasion of a specific Christianization and the hope that this will set an example for "the whole remnant of the circumcised race […] to be desirous of the same communion" and turn Christian. Yet much of the sermon and especially his remarks to the imaginary Jews portray them as inherently different and inspire hatred against them. This irony is augmented when Foxe, in the heat of his resentment, even encourages Jews to continue in their monstrous atrocity "(thou cursed Jewe) thou art duly charged with the guilt of innocent blood: englut therefore thy greedie guts with goare."[19]

Although much of Foxe's sermon is devoted to portraying Jews as inherently evil and inconvertible, at times Foxe does acknowledge that they are capable of change and could be entitled to God's mercy:

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[15] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. B3r.

[16] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. B4v.

[17] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. C7r, L4v.

[18] Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in* The Merchant of Venice (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 28.

[19] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. L3r.

> as there are very many Jewes (as I saide before) which do confesse and professe Christ (as is this one Jewe whome ye see here present at this time) so is the Lord mightie, and of power to have compassion upon the remnant, and rayse them up, which are yet forsaken, and troden under foote.[20]

Like Calvin, Foxe was convinced that God's "casting away apperteined not to the whole nation of the Jewes, but to some portion of them onely."[21] He therefore takes pains to expose what he perceives as the stubborn ignorance of the Jews by meticulously pointing out to them the Old Testament Messianic prophecies and their fulfillment in the gospels.

At the end of his sermon, it becomes clear that Foxe's remarks about the Jewish capability of conversion are only superficially aimed at making converts, but serve mainly to discredit another religious enemy: the Catholic Church. Catholic idolatry, Foxe argues, has obstructed the conversion of the Jews, because Judaism is antipathetic to image worship:

> what marvel was it if the Jewes (they were taught by the prescript rule of gods law to abhorre worshipping of images) entering into the churches of christians, and beholding the walles, pillers, and al the corners thereof, bedaubed and painted, and carved idoles, besides innumerable other bables of imagery, […] what marvel was it (I say) if they being offended with this open idolatrie, did so long refraine form us, and from the discipline of our faith.[22]

These ideas echo Luther's treatise *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523), which was written in the conviction that the Jews' adoption of Christianity "had awaited the preaching of the true Gospel."[23] It denounces the way in which "popes, bishops, sophists, and monks" have treated Jews:

> They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. When they baptize them they show them nothing of

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[20] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. M6r.

[21] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. B5r.

[22] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. M8r.

[23] Steven Rowan, "Luther, Bucer and Eck on the Jews," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16.1 (1985): 79-90, 10.

> Christian doctrine or life, but only subject them to popishness and monkery.[24]

For both Foxe and Luther, the Christianizations of individual Jews foreshadowed the Apocalypse and served as powerful arguments in defence of Protestantism.[25] Foxe continues by claiming that the future of Protestantism looks bright, as the "ancient puritie of christian profession" is taking "good footing" and the elements "that may minister just occasion of offence to the Jewes" have disappeared from "our religion" and "doctrine."[26]

At the end of his Preface, Foxe explicitly reveals his interest in propagating Protestant constancy: "although my meaning was at the first, to have the [treatise] directed to the behoof of the Jewes chiefely, yet (I trust) it wil not be altogether unprofitable to the Christian readers."[27] This is because for some Christians, their faith has not "taken roote in their heartes."[28] And even if it had and "a man stande assured and stedfast in the certeintie of his faith," Foxe writes, human faith is always open for improvement: "what faith is there so sure, constant and unvanquishable, but may be made more stable and perfect?"[29] Foxe may claim that his text is directed chiefly "to the behoof of the Jewes," but the rhetorical weight of his argument is placed, paradoxically, on his message for his fellow Protestants that Protestantism has not yet reached a level of complete stability and perfection yet. His chief purpose is thus to encourage his coreligionists to intensify and consolidate their faith.

Although the exceptional status of Jews in the history of Christianity suggests that Protestant propagandists were interested particularly in Jewish converts, early modern Christianizations of Muslims were followed with similar

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[24] Martin Luther, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* [1523], in Martin Luther, *The Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader*, ed. Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2012) 76-83, 78.

[25] As Diarmaid MacCulloch writes, "having originated as the writings of oppressed people facing great crisis, apocalyptic has always had a ready appeal when crisis has reappeared for the Church, and the cataclysm of the Reformation was an obvious moment for it to come into its own; the figure of Antichrist which was a recurrent feature within apocalyptic writing could be identified with Roman error, and thus serve to explain how the pure New Testament Church had gradually been corrupted before the return of full truth with the Protestant Reformation." Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990) 79.

[26] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. M8r.

[27] Foxe, *A Sermon*, "The Preface to the Reader," sig. ¶7r-¶8v

[28] Foxe, *A Sermon*, "The Preface to the Reader," sig. ¶8v

[29] Foxe, *A Sermon*, "The Preface to the Reader," sig. ¶8v.

zeal and even employed to make the same points about Catholic error and Protestant truth in order to encourage steadfastness among Protestants. This was because these converts provided rare and treasured counterexamples to the alarming numbers of renegades, Christians who had "turned Turk." Whereas there were hardly any Muslims who gave up their faith to become Christians, conversions to Islam were a common phenomenon. A significant number of renegades consisted of captives who adopted an Islamic identity during or after their enslavement.[30] The other and more unsettling category of renegades included impoverished Christians who were able to find employment in the Ottoman Empire and its territories when they converted to Islam. In English accounts, all conversions to Islam were reported to have been motivated by secular and opportunistic reasons: because enslaved compatriots were forced to apostatize or because they were seduced by the sexual freedom that Islam was said to offer. As Matar and Burton remind us, the lack of accounts describing religiously motivated conversions to Islam does not mean that these did not occur.[31]

Like efforts at baptizing Jews, successful English attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity were scarce and readily exploited for domestic and international religious politics.[32] The first account of a Muslim convert to Christianity is part of a sermon that, in the vein of Foxe's homily, utilizes the Muslim's change of faith to address inter-Christian controversies of doctrine. In *The Baptizing of a Turke* (1586), the Church of England clergyman Meredith Hanmer introduces the convert as Chinano of Nigropontus, noting at the end of his sermon that he will be christened William at his own request. Hanmer explains that William had been taken captive at the age of 15 by the Spaniards among whom he spent 25 years in slavery.[33] In "Carthagina" he was "found" by Sir Francis Drake who, sent by God, acted as a "deliverer, not onely for the present sorrowes and miserye, but to his endlesse joy and solace in Christ."[34]

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[30] For indications of the numbers of enslavements on the basis of biographic and autobiographic travel documents, see Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 5-10, 34-39. For descriptions of British women captives, see his *Britain and Barbary, 1589-1689* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006) 92-108.

[31] Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 41; Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama 1579-1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005) 16.

[32] See Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 125-37.

[33] Meredith Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke A sermon preached at the Hospitall of Saint Katherin, adioyning vnto her Maiesties Towre the 2. of October 1586. at the baptizing of one Chinano a Turke, borne at Nigropontus* (London: Robert Waldegrave, 1586) sig. E3r.

[34] Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke,* sig. E4v.

During his years in Spanish captivity, a friar had tried to convert him but he had refused for two reasons – the Spaniard's "cruelty in shedding of bloud and his Idolatry in worshipping of Images."[35] "If there were not a God in England, there was none nowhere," William claimed according to Hanmer.[36] Unlike the conversion of Foxe's "certaine Jew," William's Christianization itself is hardly doctrinally or theologically motivated. Jacqueline Pearson points to the irony that Hanmer likens Catholicism to Islam as a corrupt faith, yet also describes William's conversion in "a phrase that might later seem dangerously legalistic if not popish", since "he is converted not by 'holie wordes, but workes.'" This is to say, "by the example of his rescuers and the kindness of (Protestant) strangers."[37] The manner of his conversion is not surprising, however, as William did not speak English, and, as Hanmer suggests, was aided by an interpreter during the baptism service.[38]

Like Foxe, Hanmer expresses the hope and the expectation that the brethren of the converts will follow the example of their former coreligionist, but spends a considerable part of the sermon on factional polemic. William's conversion is presented as the final argument and crowning touch of a long anti-Catholic, anti-Islamic and even anti-Jewish diatribe. Hanmer pays most attention to the genesis of Islam and the biography of the prophet Mohammed, which he curiously weaves into the history of Judaism and Catholicism. Thus, in a fashion reminiscent of the 1641 pamphlet on the discovery of 29 sects referred to in the introduction of this chapter, Hanmer claims that

> Mahomets law is no true religion, hee patched togeather his Alcoran of the lawes of and doctrines of Heathens, Indians, and Arabians, of superstitious Jewes, of Rechabits, of false Christians and Heretickes, as Nestorians, Sabellians, Manichees, Arrians, Cerinthians, Macedonians, Eunomians, and Nicolaits, of illusions, and inventions of his owne braine: and lastly for further credit be borrowed some out of the old and new Testament.[39]

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[35] Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke,* sig. E4r-E5v.

[36] Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke,* sig. E4v.

[37] Jacqueline Pearson, " 'One *Lot* in *Sodom*:' Masculinity and the Gendered Body in Early Modern Narratives of Converted Turks," *Literature & Theology* 21.1 (2007): 29-48, 35.

[38] Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke,* sig.A8v-A8r.

[39] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. Dv. The same passage can be found in *God's Arrow Against Atheists* by the Church of England divine Henry Smith, in which he unfavourably compares a large number of religions with the Church of England as the only true faith. The treatise first appeared in 1593 and was republished throughout the first three quarters of the

Hanmer uses the same argument as Foxe to explain why Muslims so far had not en masse converted to Christianity, considering the Catholic worship of images an obstruction to the conversion of non-Christians including that of William: "this is the credite these Images have brought into the Church, this was a stumbling blocke in the waye of this Saracen that he would not be baptized in Spain."[40] Hanmer follows Foxe's line of reasoning also when he claims that the Reformation, as the recovery of the true Church, has finally enabled the conversion of non-Christians:

> If either Heathen, or Jew, or Saracen, speake of the christian faith, immediately he hath Rome in his mouth. […] And for that they knowe not the puritie of religion in the reformed Churches […] There are many nations no doubt that if the truth were opened unto them they would most willingly receave the christian faith.[41]

Hanmer's instistence on William's geographic origins is part of the same argument. As Matar writes, the defeat of the (Catholic) Venetians at Negropont and the fall of the city in 1470 had been viewed in Christendom as an ominous sign of the growing power of the Turks. By referring to the Turk's birthplace, Hanmer showed that although the city was lost to the Muslims English Protestants were now reclaiming its inhabitants by the power of their faith.[42] Hanmer continues his argument by blaming Catholicism for the existence of Islam, claiming that God had brought Islam into the world as a scourge to punish mankind for papacy: "The Church of Rome beganne to lift up her selfe in pride and abhomination, the Pope calling himselfe universall Bishop. God was highly displeased with this wickednes, and suffered Mahomet to rise as a rod or scourge to whippe his people."[43]

Like Foxe, Hanmer did not preach his sermon to the people whose conversion he desired and commended, but to a congregation of fellow Protestants. This meant that the ostensible celebration of conversion in actual fact served to prevent conversion and encourage religious steadfastness. Hanmer's ambiguous appreciation of conversion is also clear from the fact that he gives

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seventeenth century. Henry Smith, *Gods arrow against atheists. By Henry Smith*, (London : G[eorge] M[iller]) 1628) 51.

[40] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. Fr.

[41] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. F2r-F3v.

[42] Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 126.

[43] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. E2v.

almost equal rhetorical weight to William's refusal to turn Catholic. Indeed, most of what is quoted from the convert relates to his brutal treatment at the hands of the Spanish Catholics. By the same token, Hanmer is remarkably silent on the status and future of his new convert. The sermon concludes with five confessions of faith that William pronounces, including his desire that "hee might be received as one of the faithfull Christians, and bee baptized in the faith of the blessed Trinitie, promising from henceforth newness of life, and fruits according unto this profession,"[44] yet we do not learn anything about the way William intends to fulfill this promise. The question as to why William himself chose the name William remains equally unanswered. It is furthermore telling of Hanmer's lack of interest in his convert as a person that he most of the time refers to him as "the silly Turke," and "silly Saracene," epithets that do not contribute to a smooth integration into Christian society.

While there is no evidence of William's post-conversion life, the experiences of other converts show that they were aware or must have been aware of the ambiguous attitude of their new coreligionists towards interfaith conversion. In the section that follows below, I will largely focus on the position of converts. Their statements imply that there was a pervasive resistance to accepting them as full members of the community, something that affected converts of any religion, albeit in different ways.

The Social Acceptance of Converts

After his Christianization, Foxe's convert Nathanael Menda did not integrate into the Christian community, but spent the next thirty years of his life in the *Domus Conversorum*, a house for baptized Jews that was founded in 1232 by King Henry III and located in London.[45] Menda's lack of assimilation is also reflected in his "Confession of Faith," that was enclosed with Foxe's sermon. Menda repeats Foxe's point about Catholic "Idolatry" that thwarts the conversion of Jews and rejects Jewish theology as perceived by Christians – "that false looking for an other Christ" – but he consistently writes in the *first* person to refer to the Jewish nation: "*our* Lawe teacheth *us* that our God Jehovah is all sufficient, and that all treasures are in his hands."[46] He continues to explain:

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[44] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. F4r.

[45] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 70, 68.

[46] Nathanael Menda, *The Confession of Faith, Which Nathanael a Jewe Borne, made before the Congregation in the Parish Church of Alhallowes in Lombard Streete at London* (London: Christopher Barker, 1578) sigs. B8v, B7v. My emphasis. As Janet Adelman observes, despite its ostensible English Protestant audience, the document attributed to Nathanael initially

> the man Jesus Christ [...] is the undoubted Meshiach promised to *our* fathers for the redemption and deliverie of us his people out of the captivitie wee are in: which is not the captivity of Egypt of Babylon, or the captivitie of the Romanes Empire, which *we* have justly deserved by the shedding of his innocent bloud through betraying and delivering him into the handes of the wicked to be crucified.[47]

This is all the more striking since in stating that he has changed his name – "as I have received a new gift from the Lord, so in token thereof I may be called Nathanael" – Menda suggests that he has already become a member of Christian society and can legitimately use the first person to refer to fellow Christians.[48] It is furthermore telling of his post-conversion status as an alien that he signed his receipts for the *Domus Conversorum* with his Christian name in Hebrew.[49]

It is impossible to establish Menda's motives for apparently maintaining a Jewish identity in his own writings, but converts were aware of the reluctance their new coreligionists felt in admitting new believers into their congregation. This reluctance was not so much based on the religious origin of converts as on their status as converts, which is exemplified by the considerable variety of terms used to capture and label new coreligionists, including apostate, convertite, marrano, renegade, turncoat, and proselyte. The epithets not only reveal the urge to categorize converts as a separate category in its own right, but the derogatory nature of many of the words also suggests a suspiciousness of people who had changed their religious identity.

A document that provides insight into the other major allegations that were levelled against converts is the translated testimony of the Frenchman M. du Tertre, Lord de la Motthe Luyne, who was a Capuchin preacher before he turned to the reformed Church of France. Although Du Tertre's introductory

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addresses itself to an audience of newly converted Jews: 'Men and brethren, to whom God hath revealed in these later dayes the secrete of his sonne which was hidden from you many ages, it is not unknowen unto you how that in the dayes of our forefathers God chose us to be a precious people unto himself above all the people that are upon the earth.' (B1r). Only one-third of the way through his lengthy confession does the referent of 'you' shift to 'you the Gentiles' presumably his audience (B4r)." Adelman, *Blood Relations*, 149 n73.

[47] Menda, *The Confession of Faith*, sig B8r. My emphasis.

[48] Menda, The *Confession of Faith*, sig. B8v.

[49] Michael Adler, *Jews of Medieval England* (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1939) 332.

epistle is "directed to those of the Church of Rome," the Church of England clergyman and translator of the text Edward Meetkerke (1590-1657) wrote in his introductory letter (dedicated to William Goodwin, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford) that he considered the account "a very profitable worke for the Church [of England]," as it could be instrumental in the "bringing home of such, of whom there is yet good hope they may be reclaimed."[50] Meetkerke furthermore notes that Du Tertre's arguments for embracing Protestantism are well-known, but their formulation precisely by a former member of the Capuchin order invests them with persuasive force. This is because monks are not simply Catholics, but have "with a nearer bond, and as it were an apprentiship for terme of life bound themselves never to depart," their order being the "quintessence as it were of religion."[51] In a declaration, that is remarkably empathetic to his former coreligionists who look upon his conversion with suspicion, Du Tertre recapitulates the negative responses from his environment:

> When you heard of, knew, and saw my departure, God knowes what sinister opinions I ran into in regard of many amongst you; some taking my designe to be but a lightnesse, inconstancie, and inconsideratenesse of minde; others thinking it to have proceeded from a matter and occasion of disquietnesse and discontent received from them, from whom I am departed; others from a desire of greater libertie and more licentious life; and many other the like: but all in generall esteeming it a manifest disloyaltie and notorious treacherousnesse to your societie and company.[52]

After Du Tertre has explained that his conversion was "purely and simply to no other end, then to the glory of [his] God, and the assurance of [his] salvation," and before he enters into a detailed explication of his arguments against Catholicism, he draws attention to the problematic aspect of change in conversion.[53] His forsaking of Catholicism might appear "strange" to the reader,

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[50] Edward Meetkerke, "The Epistle Dedicatorie," *A declaration and manifestation, of the chiefe reasons and motiues of the conuersion of Master M. du Tertre, Lord de la Motthe Luyne late preacher amongst the order of the Capucins, vnder the name of F. Firmin &c. Together with his conformitie vnto the reformed churches of France* (London: Edward Griffin, 1616) sig. A2r.

[51] Meetkerke, "The Epistle Dedicatorie," A3v.

[52] M. Du Tertre, *A declaration and manifestation, of the chiefe reasons and motiues of the conuersion of Master M. du Tertre, Lord de la Motthe Luyne*, trans. Edward Meetkerke (London: Edward Griffin, 1616) 1-2.

[53] Du Tertre, *A declaration*, 2.

Du Tertre notes, but he will try and make "this change more familiar."[54] Du Tertre continues by saying that his conversion could be considered strange because "every alteration and change of religion is simply so of it selfe" since "we ought to end in that wherein we have begun."[55] To counter this view, Du Tertre, mentions the conversions of pagans that, he believes, his (Christian) audience must have welcomed, rhetorically asking his readers if they preferred to see the religious steadfastness of non-Christians too:

> what then I pray will become of those among the Jewes, Turkes, the men of *Japan*, of *Margaia*, and other barbarous and strange nations, which have changed and daily doe change their owne religion, and that of their fathers, in the which they had beene nurtured and brought up, for to make themselves Christians, to wed themselves to the law and faith of our Saviour, and to professe his religion?[56]

Trying to convince his former fellow-Catholics of the sincerity of his religious transition, Du Tertre touches on two accusations that were leveled at converts, by former and new coreligionists alike, and that came to determine their collective image. One is the motivation quoted above to embrace a faith out of an opportunistic "desire of greater libertie and more licentious life." The other is the more fundamentally problematic notion that his conversion could be seen as a form of "inconstancie," that in and of itself was strange.

Accusations of Opportunism and Inconstancy

The suggestion that people converted to satisfy their lust was one of the most commonly made allegations against converts, particularly against Christians who had embraced Islam. Preachers and travel writers typically portrayed the prophet Muhammad as a seducer luring Christians into his cursed sect by picturing Islam as a faith celebrating sexual and other liberties.[57] For instance, in his *The Manners, Lawes, and Customes of all Nations*, translated by Edward Aston, Joannes Boemus suggests that the "incredible allurement" of the Muslim faith could be explained by the fact that Mohammed was "giving to his people free liberty and power to pursue their lustes and all other pleasures, for by these

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[54] Du Tertre, *A declaration*, 6-7.
[55] Du Tertre, *A declaration*, 7.
[56] Du Tertre, *A declaration*, 7.
[57] Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) passim; and Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, passim.

meanes, this pestilent religion hath crept into innumerable Nations."[58] This did not mean that licentiousness was exclusively associated with Islam. New Catholics were accused of similar offences. Sir Francis Walsingham remarked about Anthony Tyrrell, Francis Shaw, Richard Sheldon and John Copley, all converts to Catholicism, for instance, that their motives were "good fellowship, good cheare, loose life and women."[59]

Interfaith converts were said to have changed their faith for other material reasons as well. As the examples of Foxe and Hanmer's sermons show, conversions were exploited for strategic religio-political purposes, and in order to make converts in each other's camps, Protestants and Catholics held out the prospect of material rewards to potential new coreligionists. Career prospects formed one of the most important lures. The English state took great pains to compensate financially clerics who had converted from Catholicism, even when they had been coerced into conversion, so that they would not relapse.[60] Some converted clerics received a pay rise and became royal chaplains, and Catholic priests who had been arrested were sometimes offered benefices by the Church of England if they turned from Rome.[61] A similar thing happened in Catholic circles. In his attempt to coax a Protestant minister into changing his religion and working for a Catholic congregation, George Brome argued that if he joined his cause the minister would "lacke neither golde nor Silver."[62] Not surprisingly, measures like these heightened the suspicion of converts' ulterior motives and inspired accusers to compare the embrace of the enemy's religion to acts of fornication.[63]

However vehement and scalding the charges of expediency, a more challenging allegation converts were faced with was that of inconstancy. It was an accusation made by believers who saw their coreligionists defect to another faith, but the worry that converts may have given proof of their inconstancy was also shared by a convert's new religious community. This is indirectly evidenced by the fierce condemnation of inconstancy in a variety of contexts and the

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[58] Edward Aston, *The Manners, Lawes, and Customes of all Nations* (London, 1611) 137.

[59] Quoted in Michael Quester, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 44. In William Rowley's Tragedy *All's Lost by Lust*, the nobleman Antonio expresses his desire to be "perswade[d]" to "turne Turk, or Moore Mahometan," because " by the lustfull lawes of *Mahomet* " he "may have three wives more." William Rowley, *All's Lost by Lust* (London: Thomas Harper, 1633) D4v.

[60] Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion* 45.

[61] Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion* 45.

[62] Quoted in Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion* 44.

[63] Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 84.

according great moral importance that was attached to the value of constancy, precisely when interfaith conversion became more common and visible. As Katherine Rowe writes, "early seventeenth-century English writers did not invent the idea of inconstancy but they wielded it with a particular urgency."[64] She adds that innate changeability, for instance "unpredictable changes of opinion, [...] figures importantly in a variety of discourses in the period: discourses of ethnicity, nation, political organization, medicine, psychology, and domestic life, to name a few."[65]

Just as fickleness was recognized and denounced in a range of social and cultural domains, the virtue of constancy was celebrated and associated with a wide variety of merits. Ranking steadfastness among the most important graces, poets sang the praise of constancy as the ultimate means to happiness, as a synonym for (religious) courage and sincerity and as the proof of wisdom and true love. The fourth grace in Nicholas Breton's *The Soules Immortall Crowne Consisting of Seaven Glorious Graces* (1605) is constancy, described as a key quality of lovers: "the locke upon the heart of love;" a form of wisdom: "the learning of the wisest wits instruction;" and feature of Divine grace: "the seate where Mercy sits in Majestie." [66] Robert Aylett's *Peace with her Foure Garders* (1622) presents constancy as "the Souldier, that the towne would winne, / Fights stoutly, till he conquers all within" and the "lustre of whose face, / Both heav'nly *Love*, and all her Peeres for ever grace."[67] Particularly important about constancy was the notion that it proved someone's honesty. If an inconstant character denoted unreliability, steadfastness was associated with sincerity. This is illustrated in George Herbert's poem "Constancy" (1633), which hardly explicitly refers to its title, but revolves around the question propounded in the first line "Who is the honest man?" According to Herbert's speaker, the honest man has "Vertue" as "his Sunne" and "his words and works and fashion too" are "all of a piece and all are clear and straight."

The early modern preoccupation with steadfastness specifically in matters of religion was intensified by converts who proved their inconstancy by returning to their original faith. Recantations were damaging to the

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[64] Katherine Rowe, "Inconstancy: Changeable Affections in Stuart Dramas of Contract" in eds. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 90-102, 90.

[65] Rowe, "Inconstancy: Changeable Affections in Stuart Dramas of Contract," 90.

[66] Nicholas Breton, *Soules Immortall Crowne Consisting of Seauen Glorious Graces* (London: 1605) sig. F4v, F4r.

[67] Robert Aylett, *Peace with her foure garders Viz. fiue morall meditations: of concord, chastitie, constancie. Courtesie. Grauitie* (London: 1622) 25, 23

trustworthiness of those who converted only once. Indeed, with examples of recanting converts, it became much harder to for people to convince their new coreligionists that they would not relapse into their despised original faith. Clergy in charge of readmitting regretful converts into the Church showed themselves aware of the difficulty of welcoming recanters as reliable believers. The group of reconverting apostates they treated with special caution consisted of renegades who had returned home from the ports of Barbary or Ottoman cities. [68] In addition to being accused of expedience, they were also considered highly inconstant. "Among us," the Church of England divine Edward Kellet wrote, "such as are to choose Religion: *Ambo-dexters, Nulli-fidians*, such *Amphibia*, as can live, both on Land and Water, or such as have stayned their soules with some blacke sinnes: these are the Chamelions which will change colour with euery ayre, and their beliefe, for matters of small moment."[69] Despite his concern over the treacherous changeability of renegades, Kellet and other clergymen encouraged the readmission of people to the Church once they had repented their tergiversations. To consolidate former renegades' Protestant identity, the preachers dwelled extensively on the heinousness of their crimes and the importance of being sincere in their repentance. On top of that, and despite the fact that this came obviously too late for repenting renegades, they spent a considerable part of their homilies on what they considered to be the ultimate form of religious constancy: martyrdom.

Although there is no reliable evidence of Turks violently coercing conversion to Islam, English clergy explained in gruesome detail the pressure to which they believed Christians in the Ottoman empire were be exposed in order to emphasize the heroism of those who remained steadfast in their faith. As Henry Byam noted, "I have read of some, and those some of the valiantest the world did see within their age, who, after all kinde of ignominy and Turkish crueltie practiced upon them, were fleaed alive by little and little, for fifteene dayes together."[70] He went on to describe at length the specific agonies they suffered, such as the pulling out of eyes and the making of holes in necks to "drawne" tongues "out backward."[71] The Christians did not budge from their faith, however. "Yea," Byam wrote, "the persecutors themselves were astonished to see their constancy, and how they went to their Martyrdom […] they went to

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[68] See Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 63-72, for a discussion of this phenomenon.

[69] Edward Kellet, *A Returne from Argier* (London: 1628) 35.

[70] Henry Byam, *A Returne from Argier* (London: 1628) 56. Kellet and Byam delivered a sermon on the occasion of a renegade returning to the Church of England that were both published under the same title.

[71] Byam, *A Returne from Argier*, 56.

the fire as to a feast, as to a dainty feast, as to their bridall bed."[72] All of these descriptions served to make the point there is "no greater Sacrifice to our Master" no better way of achieving "happinesse" and "no better example to others" than religious martyrdom.[73] Likewise, Kellet wrote that "a Martyr is a Seale and Signet on the finger of the All-mightie."[74] William Gouge, a Church of England divine who wrote a sermon "at the receiving of a Penitent Renegado into the Church," explained in terms similar to those of Byam and Kellet that "the anguish of a tormenting conscience is much more intolerable then of scourges, whips, bastenadoes, strapadoes, racks, or any torturing instruments on the body."[75] Therefore, "it is better to live and die in despaire, then to live and die in an impudent remorselesnesse."[76] What is more, Gouge provided his listeners and readers with series of "directions for constancy in the Christian faith," which included the advice to "take an unalterable and invincible resolution before hand to stand to thy faith" and to "set [ones] heart on Christ and on his Gospell," this because "a Christian well rooted and grounded in the Articles of his faith, will sooner have his limbes pull'd one form another, and his body and soule severed, then drawne from his faith, and renounce his profession thereof."[77] Nevertheless, a Christian must realize, Gouge warned his audience, that constancy proceeds from God's grace and is not the result one's own efforts; in fact, "self-conceit is a forerunner of Apostacy."[78]

Whereas there are virtually no personal recantation statements of renegades, statements of former defectors to Rome were widely disseminated. William Chauncie, who was "long tyme misled in Poperie" assured his readers on the title page that his confession was "written with his owne hand as an evident witnesse of his undoubted Resolution."[79] William Tedder wrote "my desire is, that all her Majesties Subjects whersoever, though they heard me not, shold have if it please them, a copie of my Recantation in theyr hands. First to peruse for their satisfaction. Secondly to prayse God myne effectuall

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[72] Byam, *A Returne from Argier*, 57.
[73] Byam, *A Returne from Argier*, 57.
[74] Kellet, *A Returne from Argier*, 28.
[75] William Gouge, *A recovery from apostacy Set out in a sermon preached in Stepny Church neere London at the receiving of a penitent renegado into the Church* (London: George Miller, 1639) 26.
[76] Gouge, *A Recovery from Apostacy*, 28.
[77] Gouge, *A Recovery from Apostacy*, 58, 60.
[78] Gouge, *A Recovery from Apostacy*, 59-60.
[79] William Chauncie, *The Conversion of a Gentleman Long Tyme Misled in Poperie, to the Sincere and True Profession of the Gospell of Christ Iesus* (London, 1587).

conversion."[80] Among the recanters who had shifted between Christian Churches was a small but particularly notorious group of serial converts. "Extreme" serial converts included John Nicholls and Anthony Tyrrell. They resembled each other in the sense that most of their turns and returns to the Roman fold coincided with visits to Catholic bastions such as Rome, Rheims and Douai, and that their imprisonment in various places elicited reconversions. Having travelled to Rome, John Nicholls (1555-1584) converted to Catholicism, a change he soon renounced after his return to England when he was detained in the Tower. During another imprisonment in Rouen, however, he became a Catholic once again, which he remained until his death. The Catholic priest and Church of England clergyman Anthony Tyrrell converted no less than six times, three times of which in prison. In addition to the statements of their countrymen, the English public was also presented with various published recantations, often combined in single publications, that were translated from French, Dutch and German originals and narrated (re)conversions to the Reformed Church.[81] It is likely that these were distributed with the same purpose as that of Foxe and Hanmer, to boost confidence in the steady growth of Protestantism.

Converts anticipated accusations of inconsistency by bringing up the allegation themselves and attempting to convince their readers of the definitiveness of their change. In so doing, they often relied on Biblical passages. Although the books of the Old Testament state that those who have first been converted to God and then apostatize cannot be reconverted: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened […] if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (Hebrews 6: 4-6), they could easily refer to Christ's clemency in the New Testament and tap into a variety of biblical conversion allegories that celebrate the return of lost people, animals or items. Recanters thus encouraged their readers to hail their reconversions as the return of the prodigal son or the discovery of the lost coin. Most commonly cited in conversion statements were the shepherd narratives, such as the parable of the

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[80] William Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell, *The recantations as they were seuerallie pronounced by VVylliam Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell* (London, 1588) sig. A3r.

[81] See, for instance, *The confession and publike recantation of thirteene learned personages* (London, 1602); *The Voluntarie recantation of foure learned men of France lately conuerted from poperie, to the true religion* (London: 1615), and Jean Haren, *The repentance of Iohn Haren priest and his returne to the Church of God; publickly by him recited in the French Church at Wezell, in the presence of the senate, conposed of the ministers and the people assembled togeather vpon the 7. day of March, Anno 1610* (London: W.White, 1610).

lost sheep in Luke 15:3-7 and that of the shepherd's duty to protect his flock in John 10:11-17. The popularity of these tales in particular can be explained by the fact that the herd was a powerful metaphor to describe the true Church and allowed (repentant) converts to portray the Protestant faith to which they had turned or returned as Christ's own fold. The Augustinian friar turned Protestant Godefrid Raben, for instance, used as a motto to his conversion statement John 10:11-17, in which Christ presents himself as a good shepherd who takes care not only of the sheep in his fold, but adds his "other sheep," so there will be "one fold, and one shepherd." [82] As a former Catholic, Raben identified himself with one of "the other sheep" of Christ, suggesting that the Protestant Church is the heart and future of Christianity. Likewise, having returned to Protestantism, the former Catholic John Harding asked God in his recantation sermon to lead him "in the truth […] Albeit I have erred and strayed like a lost sheepe."[83] To further endorse the sincerity of their embrace of Protestantism, recanting converts noted as a rule that God was fully responsible for their reformation and added to their narrative a list of arguments against Catholic doctrines.

Other ways to underline the definitiveness of their conversion included a reasoned account of the converts' temporary lapse into degeneracy that concluded with the suggestion that the latest change of faith marked the end of a period of doubt and inconstancy. In their mutual epistle dedicatory to the Queen preceding their recantation statements, William Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell compared their Catholic periods to the inconstancy of sea waves: "How miserablie we have beene tossed on the sourges of schismes and devisions, howe sore we have beene overwhelmed with the waves of heresies, and overflowen with the floods of Idolatrie and superstition."[84] Similar wording was used by an anonymous Protestant turned Catholic who wrote to his father that "mortall waves tossed [his] unstedy barke," but the "influence" of "that unmoving Pole," had "touched [his] heart."[85]Tedder noted that he had never been "fully persuaded" of the real presence of Christ's body in the sacrament, adding "now I renounce it, craving pardon of God, for defending that which I always doubted

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[82] Godefrid Raben, "A Recantation done on the second Sonday after Easter" in *The confession and publike recantation of thirteene learned personages* (London, 1602) sig. ¶3r.

[83] John Harding, A *recantation sermon, preached at the gate-house at Westminster, the 30. day of Iuly 1620* (London; 1620) 24.

[84] William Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell, *The recantations as they were seuerallie pronounced by Wylliam Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell* (London: John Charlewood and William Brome, 1588) 2.

[85] *An epistle of a Catholicke Young Gentleman, (Being for his Religion imprisoned)* (Doway, 1623) 8.

of."[86] Godefrid Raben simply promised to remain constant in Protestantism: "I will not depart from this pure doctrine and knowne trueth, neyther through joy nor sorrow, neyther through hunger nor miserie, neyther through good nor ill successe; but as before I have sayd, will abide constant to my end: whereunto God assist me with his holy Gospell." [87]

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, interfaith conversion posed different challenges than spiritual conversion. If spiritual conversion was affected by questions of agency (see chapter three) and by an emptying out of spiritual meaning (see chapter four), interfaith conversion raised issues about the very possibility and desirability of conversion. This was because interfaith conversion involved an exchange of religious identity, while religious identities themselves were still very much in the process of definition, formation and stabilization. Virtually all early modern texts quoted in this chapter exhibit concern over the solidity of denominational identity. Indeed, it was precisely the idea of the exchangeability of religious identity – or, in the words of our discoverer of the 29 sects, the "Dung-hill" of religious pluralization – that polemicists used to disparage denominations other than their own. The pamphleteer insisted that the "splendor" of the "Diamond" of Protestantism was in no way affected by the dunghill in which it had been cast, but this demonstrates above all the concern religious controversialists had about the steadiness of their own religious identity. It is ironic that in precisely this climate of perceived instability polemicists relied on interfaith conversion to invest their faith with unshakeable truth. Although it seemed a good strategy to publicize how religious enemies had come to see the light and the error of their own faith, the very fact of their exchange of religious identity was in itself disturbing.

The conversion texts discussed in this chapter reflect this concern over the destabilizing effect of interfaith conversion. The conversion sermons by Foxe and Hanmer appear to promote and celebrate conversion, but closer inspection of the homilies and of their intended audiences suggest that they served rather to ward off new conversions. Converts themselves met with the ambivalent appreciation of their change in different ways. Jews could be physically excluded from society and locked away in house for converts; others could experience forms of verbal

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[86] William Tedder, "The Recantation of William Tedder," in *The recantations as they were seuerallie pronounced by Wylliam Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell*, 7-23, 15.
[87] Raben, "A Recantation done on the second Sonday after Easter," sig. A2r.

exclusion and be branded as turncoats, Marranos or apostates. In addition, converts were suspected of opportunism and inconstancy. That these accusations were also made by converts' new coreligionists becomes clear from the statements by converts themselves, in which they emphasized the prominent place of repentant sinners in the gospel, argued that they wanted to be (re)admitted to Christ's flock, and averred that their conversion was genuine and marked the end of a period of inconstancy.

The next three chapters explore the ways in which the theatre reflected on interfaith conversion. The considerable number of plays that represent or refer to a variety of interfaith conversions – between Judaism, Islam and Paganism on the one hand and Christianity on the other, and between Protestantism and Catholicism – bear witness to the great dramatic appeal of interfaith conversion. At the same time, as will come become clear, the theatre was also a space par excellence for the construction and consolidation of religious identities. The tensions between the desirability of interfaith conversion and fear over its unsettling effect is perhaps nowhere more insightfully illustrated than in the imagined worlds of playwrights, where interfaith conversion was subject to strict narrative patterns that hardly any playwright wished to break.