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“To One Another as Christians”: Alexander Pope and Jesuits*

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Abstract

Alexander Pope famously wrote to Francis Atterbury that he thinks both religions, Catholic and Anglican, “equally good” and that he found himself to be alternating between “a Papist and a Protestant.” His Catholic status has long received the scholarly attention that it merits, yet the same has not been true regarding Pope’s perspectives on other Christian denominations. In arguing the need for further investigation of Pope’s relations with other orders of the Christian faith, this essay focuses on Pope’s interactions with the Society of Jesus and examines the influences from the poet’s formative years as well as those which René Rapin, John Oldham, and Sir William Temple bore upon his works.

Keywords: Eighteenth-Century British Literature, Catholicism, Anti-Jesuit Discourse, Ecumenism

Introduction

Though never a journalist nor a writer of political commentary in the manner of Daniel Defoe, Pope always incorporated trade in his works. In *Windsor-Forest*, he celebrates the growing maritime prowess of his nation by appealing to St. George’s cross: “Bear *Britain’s* Thunder, and her Cross display, | To the bright Regions of the rising Day” (ll. 387-88, *TE* 1:189) (1). His *Rape of the Lock* boasts an ostentatious display of luxurious embellishments from as far away as China and Japan.

This essay explores the manifestations of Alexander Pope’s attitude towards the Jesuit order. As a public figure, Pope forged an identity as a professed Papist who exalted the Erasmian ethics of Christian toleration and ecumenism. Although Nancy K. Lawlor (1967), for example, has explored the possible presence of Thomist ideas in his *Essay on Man*, his interactions with other ecclesiastical orders and movements have remained in woeful neglect. With a wider goal of arguing the need for further examination of Pope’s relations with various Christian denominations, this essay limits the scope of such endeavor to further shedding light on the extent to which Pope’s life intersected with the Society of Jesus.

Building on previous research by such scholars as Chester Chapin (1973), Raman Selden (1984), and Peter Davidson (2006), the essay focuses on Pope's relations on the aforementioned matter with Sir William Temple, John Oldham, and René Rapin. Although their connections with Pope have each been investigated by scholars, there has not yet been sufficient research conducted on their links to Pope with the Jesuit order as the common thread.

Geoffrey Tillotson remarked more than four decades ago: "When studying the life or the works of Pope, we cannot long forget that he was a Catholic" (105). Indeed, Pope's "Paraphrase on Thomas à Kempis" is indicated to have been "Done by the Author at 12 years old," and he is said to have completed the tragedy on the legend of St. Genevieve when he was barely in his teens (*TE* 6:5; Sherburn 84n.). In his *Essay on Criticism*, the young poet was confronted, unexpectedly and for the first time, by a fellow Catholic and, in all probability, genuinely shocked by the censure from a co-religionist. His *Messiah* is more reminiscent of the Catholic, Douai-Rheims translation of the Bible than the Anglican, authorized King James version. *The Rape of the Lock* revolves around a conflict between two Catholic families, and Peter Davidson suggests that the heroi-comical poem may even be construed as an epic of persecuted recusants (103).

As much as Pope remained unswayable on the subject of conversion, he in fact held no staunch adherence to any one belief system. He famously wrote to Francis Atterbury in November 1717 that he found himself to be "a Papist and a Protestant by turns" (*Corr.* 1:453-54), which is echoed in later life in *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated*: "...term me which you will, | Papist or Protestant, or both between" (ll. 64-65, *TE* 4:11). He disclosed to Atterbury that he considers both religions, Catholic and Anglican, to be "equally good." He also touches on the concept that, "the part of *Joyning* with any one body of Christians might perhaps be easy, but I think it would not be so to *Renounce* the other" (*Corr.* 1:453). Just as significant is the oft-cited letter addressed to Swift, dated 8 December 1713, wherein he states that, although his father may have passed away, it would grieve his mother to renounce their shared faith (1:198-201). When William Warburton once posed the question, "Why... should not you conform with the religion of your country?", Pope supplied him with two reasons: "one, that the doing so would make himself a great many enemies, and the other that it would do nobody else any good" (Spence 1:156). As Chester Chapin once noted, it may well be that, if born an Anglican, Pope would never have converted to Catholicism (427).

1. Society of Jesus and England

Originally envisaging a pilgrimage to Jerusalem that never materialized, Ignatius of Loyola sought to be sent on missions the world over. By the bull *Regimini militantis* under Pope Paul III in 1540, the founding members of the Society of Jesus were granted approval to establish a new order. However, they were far from being the first international missionaries, having been preceded by older Catholic orders - the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians - in colonial Spanish America and Portuguese India. Nor was education included in the initial concept of the order, yet it became the medium through which to foster human dignity and development, thus constructing the two pillars characteristic of the Jesuit order: missionary activity and education (Banchoff 240). By the time of the death of the founder, Ignatius of Loyola, in 1556, the order numbered approximately 800 members and, towards the end of the sixteenth century, membership exceeded one thousand (Murphy 73).

The foundation of the order occurred almost concurrently with the beginnings of globalization in the early modern period, such as the “discovery” of the American continent to be known as the New World, the global circumnavigations of the Magellan–Elcano expedition and later by Francis Drake, and European territorial expansion that would rapidly evolve into colonization (Banchoff and Casanova 4). However, it was no coincidence that the establishment of the Society and the order by King John III of Portugal sending Francis Xavier to Asia occurred almost simultaneously (Maldavsky 93). Jesuits sailed on the same ships as Spanish and Portuguese merchandisers, men in military service, and opportunists and adventurers (Balleis 237). King Philip II of Spain likewise urged members of the newly found order to pave their way to the New World. Thus the missionaries set out for Peru in 1568 and Mexico in 1570 to convert the indigenous peoples as well as to found educational institutions (Maldavsky 94).

Nevertheless, as much as the Jesuits disapproved of the reduction of indigenous peoples into slavery, research has shown that Jesuits in Brazil participated in the transatlantic slave trade in an attempt to increase economic autonomy through their sugar plantations (Maldavsky 100). Indeed, the Jesuits’ theological missions were intricately intertwined with economic, political, and social factors, and, aside from the corporate nature of their operation, there were several major reasons one can point to in deducing why the Society became unpopular in Europe over time. Idolatrous worship abroad, both in Asia and in Ibero-America, was suspected and reprovved by Christian communities in Europe, even though

missioners did campaign for its extirpation (Maldavsky 97-98). Likewise, their accommodation of local rituals - the Chinese Confucian as well as Indian Malabar rites - as a necessary part of conversion was criticized by both Franciscans and Dominicans. Well known today as the Rites Controversy, the debate which arose in Europe during the mid-seventeenth century ultimately did not subside until the dissolution of the order more than a century later.

Another intra-Church conflict involved the Jansenists' view of the Jesuits as being too compromising and willing to emphasize one's free will rather than appeal to God's mercy. In France, the Jansenist Blaise Pascal (1623-62) produced the anti-Jesuit *Lettres provinciales* and, just like in other anti-Jesuit discourse, accused Jesuits of prioritizing the pope over the French monarchy and even accepting regicide as a plausible recourse (Pavone 117). Pope was aware of the publications by Pascal as well as the ecclesiastical strife between the two orders, but the Jesuit-Jansenist quarrel was virtually non-existent in England (*Corr.* 1:126). The English population would have heard of Jansenists yet, although they carried a rather negative connotation, most were unfamiliar with their congregational style or specific precepts (Chapin 415-16).

Other factors leading to their eventual suppression were their doctrine of probabilism and application of casuistic reasoning in confessions, which were often thought to have yielded undeserved social and political power. Their casuistry, or their willingness to be swayed by the shifting currents of society so as to render all changes to their advantage, was not viewed positively. Geoffrey Tillotson links Pope's rhetorical strategy to that of the Jesuits: "One of Pope's less pleasing characteristics, his habit of equivocating - that is, not actually telling lies, but wording his statements so as to give a false impression - was the self-defensive weapon of the Jesuits" (105). In addition, their acclamation of martyrdom was condemned by many, including John Donne who characterized it as training for death in his polemical poem *Pseudo-Martyr*. There was also internal contention, and some who fell out from the elitist hierarchy produced anti-Jesuit literature (Pavone 120). Thus, the seeds of dissolution also grew from within the brotherhood.

Jesuits were expelled from major European countries, one after another: from Portugal in 1759; from France, 1764; Spain, 1766; and then Naples in 1767 (Murphy 84). The Society was universally suppressed in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV. Although restored in 1814, it has never since regained its former political and intellectual vigor. In the twenty-first century, the number of Jesuit members stands at approximately 20,000 (Worcester 319).

Historically, anti-Jesuit discourse mostly derived from Protestants, Jansenists, liberal

Jews, and anticlericals, but there were Catholics who disparaged them, accusing them of forestalling the possibility of a union of Catholicism (Casanova 278). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fingers were pointed at Jesuits for political assassinations. Most were scapegoats, but, in France, for example, King Henry III was assassinated by Jacques Clément in 1589, followed by an attempt aimed at Henry IV in 1594 by Jean Châtel, who had received his education from the Jesuits of the Collège de Clermont (Worcester 104-6).

In England, Jesuits were clandestine existences. During the Elizabethan era, there were only a dozen or so of them operating in England. A series of new laws was implemented following the Act of Supremacy (1559), in which rejection of religious authority of the English monarch could be tried for high treason. Edmund Campion, who later became a martyr to their cause, and others formed an underground network that held meetings twice a year and at considerable peril (McCoog 90). William Weston, Thomas Pounce, and others were tried and imprisoned. Executions also took place, such as those of Henry Walpole and Robert Southwell, the latter of which John Donne may have witnessed (Klaue 203). Jesuits could not be counted on for political loyalty to Elizabeth I, and, even as Catholics, they were seen to prefer the foreign Spanish monarchy over the Scottish Stuart line.

Religious tolerance was more visible under James I. In England and Wales, there were about forty operating Jesuits in 1606. The figure reached approximately one hundred before 1620. The numbers increased until the Civil War erupted and Jesuits once again became prime targets of suspected regicide. By the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the figure for England and Wales had dwindled to about 147 (McCoog 94-95). However, friction between Catholics and Jesuits in England never abated. English Catholics – represented by the Old Chapter (1623-1850) – also called for more toleration for Catholics yet the expulsion of Jesuits (McCoog 95).

Like others of his era, both Protestant and Catholic, Pope partakes in the schism. In defending himself against Catholic censors regarding his *Essay on Criticism*, Pope writes to Caryll: “(for it seems at St. Omer’s they do not learn the English grammar)” (*Corr.* 1:127). In addition to the fact that the words are set in parentheses, they are in half-brackets in George Sherburn’s *Correspondence*, indicating that they were most likely omitted by Pope later (1:xxvii). It is a rare instance in which Pope himself uses the terms “Papist” and “Jesuit” interchangeably as forms of verbal assault, a habit usually reserved for adversaries of Catholicism (Questier 77).

2. Jesuit Education

There are understandably fewer associations with Pope and the Society of Jesus than with the poet and Catholicism in its entirety. Bar the possibility of his early instructors, Edward Taverner and Mr. Deane, Pope did not have intimate friends or close kin who were affiliated with the order.

The oft-quoted scenes from Joseph Spence's *Anecdotes* reveal the poet's early encounters with Jesuit methods: "Mr. Pope's first education was under a priest, and I think his name was Banister. He set out with the design of teaching him Latin and Greek together" (1:8). The Jesuit system of training indeed aimed to foster universal values and intellectual reasoning and expression through the learning of ancient languages and literature (McKevitt 280). Intensive study of languages featured in Pope's early education:

He began for Latin and Greek together (which is the way in the schools of the Jesuits, and which he seemed to think a good way) under Banister, their family priest, ... He then learned his accidence at Twyford where he wrote a satire on some faults of his master. Then he was a little while at Mr. Deane's seminary at Marylebone, and some time under the same, after he removed to Hyde Park Corner.

After this he taught himself both Greek and Latin. (Spence 1:9)

We know close to nothing about John Banister, also known as Edward Taverner (Rogers 26). "Mr. Deane," a master at one of what Pope calls the "little schools" and whom the poet will assist financially later in life, could have been a Jesuit. Pope speaks of learning from a "fourth priest" in the *Anecdotes*, which in effect was most likely a third and who was possibly William Mannock (Spence 1:8-9). George Sherburn suggests another possibility, Father Philips, whom Pope mentions in his letters to the Catholic Dancastle brothers, Thomas (18 February [1716]) and John (30 May 1717) (40n.). Despite the difficulty in identifying specific historical personages, records survive which demonstrate that Pope appreciated his formative years in training in the manner of Jesuits.

By 1715, however, Pope displays in *A Key to the Lock* his awareness that his Jesuit education may be good fodder for vitriol by ill-intentioned critics. The piece is written under the guise of an apothecary and astrologer, Esdras Barnivelt. In the Dedicatory Epistle placed before the *Key*, Barnivelt speaks of "Errors, which you have imbibed in your Education, and which, I hope, I shall never live to see this Nation digest" (*Selected Prose* 75). In the *Key* itself, the apothecary-astrologer suspects that the poet "may have been corrupted in the

Course of his Education by *Jesuits*” (77). Pope continues with the theme of Jesuits in a series of short works that followed the pseudonymous *Key to the Lock*, published on 25 April 1715. The second edition of the *Key* followed on 31 May, to which was attached the “Congratulatory Poems.” They are included in the *Minor Works* of the Twickenham edition as “Four Poems from *A Key to the Lock*.” The second poem, addressed to Barnivelt, contains the lines:

Of secret Jesuits swift shall be the Doom,
Thy Pestle braining all the Sons of *Rome*. (ll. 7-8, *TE* 6:134)

Pope provides some typical anti-Jesuit rhetoric that attempts to expose the underground network of Jesuits in England. The violent imagery reflects the public outcry to eradicate the Catholic and Jesuit sources of menace, in the face of false allegations heaped upon them in recent decades.

The *Key* and the accompanying “Congratulatory Poems” were designed to be preemptive measures. Pope was aware of potential identification with Jesuit affairs, and it is thus that he was able to maintain a fair amount of distance and composure.

3. René Rapin

Another Jesuit association may be found with the French classicist and Jesuit René Rapin (1621-87). Pope owned Rapin’s treatise, *On Pastoral* (*Dissertatio de carmine pastorali*) (1659), which was translated and prefixed to Thomas Creech’s translation of Theocritus’ *Idylls* in 1684. Pope’s *Pastorals* are indeed heavily indebted to Theocritus, whom he had been interested in since his early years. Had he not been obliged to embark on the translations of Homer, he may have translated short poems by eminent Greek poets, one of which was Theocritus (Spence 1:82). The bucolic poet remained in Pope’s mind, especially in relation to Virgil (1:230-31). Rapin was alive in Pope’s career through the ancient literary figure and by way of the activity of translation.

Where there is more an intersection with Jesuit ideas, though, may lie in Rapin’s *Of Gardens* (*Hortorum libri quatuor*) (1665). Rapin’s didactic poem was initially translated by James Gardiner into English verse, and the publication of its third edition in 1728 was undertaken by Pope and Walter Harte. That Pope bears influence from Rapin is evident in the lines:

Consult the Genius of the Place in all;
That tells the Waters or to rise, or fall,

Or helps th' ambitious Hill the heav'n to scale,
Or scoops in circling theatres the Vale,
Calls in the Country, catches opening glades,
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,

Now breaks or now directs, th' intending Lines. (ll. 57-63, *TE* 3.2:142-43)

James M. Osborn remarks of this section from the *Epistle to Burlington* (1731), that Pope had drawn inspiration on the methods of laying out a garden from Rapin's poem (Spence 1:253).

One of the major Jesuit contributions to horticultural and landscape arts was in the garden, especially that of the Chinese which, unlike the European emphasis on symmetry, valued the positioning of objects both living and inanimate in such ways that they replicate their natural setting (Davidson 104). Arthur Lovejoy, in the seminal essay "The Chinese Origins of a Romanticism," argued more than half a century ago that the Chinese garden had a profound impact on eighteenth-century European aesthetics (102 and 134-35). Peter Davidson has recently suggested that Jesuit interest in gardens left imprints as late as the Augustan eighteenth century, and that they contributed as prescribers of early modern aesthetic taste in European cultural history (105). That Pope was a connoisseur of landscape gardening is well-known. Overall, however, he still followed the Renaissance and baroque traditions rather than the Chinese garden that appeared exotic and innovative to European eyes. Pope himself makes no reference to the Jesuit introduction of a new gardening style nor to its Chinese provenance.

4. John Oldham's *Satyrs Upon the Jesuits*

Swift warned Pope time and again that the topicality of his satire may become a potential risk in contributing to the ephemerality of his works and reputation (*Corr.* 2:504, 3:343). This is comparable to the ways in which modern scholars of John Oldham (1653–84) lament the ways in which he has been neglected and point to the topicality of his productions as one of the chief reasons for his fading into oblivion (Zigerell 134; Hammond 1; Selden 109). However, Oldham was widely read and recognized in the century or so that succeeded him. Pope owned a copy of Oldham's *Works and Remains* (1685-94), in which was included the *Satyrs Upon the Jesuits* (1679). Seemingly unperturbed by its unsparing treatment of the eponymous congregation, Pope commended the work:

The Most Remarkable Works in this Author, as follow here.

Fourth Satire on ye Jesuits.

Satire on Virtue.

The Translation of Horace’s Art of Poetry.

The Impertinent, from Hor. Sat. 9 lib. I.

To the Memory of Mr. C. Morwent. (Mack 281-82)

The “Fourth Satire” of the *Satyrs*, which he appreciated for its Juvenalian wit, make it on his list.

Even though many Jesuit members fled England during the Civil War decades, the Society as a whole was thriving across Europe and worldwide. Not only their increasingly global network but also their growing success as an economic and political enterprise thus posed a threat to national interests and security in the citizens’ minds (Mackin 83). Protestants blamed Catholics for the Great Fire of 1666, and, in the *Paraphrase upon the 137th Psalm*, composed slightly earlier than the *Satyrs* in 1676, Oldham inserted a scene in which Catholics had indeed started the Fire:

Who laugh’d to see our flaming City burn,
And wish’d it might to Ashes turn. (ll. 80-81, *Poems* 142)

The tone in the *Satyrs* is more caustic, and the second satire opens with the lines:

May’t please some milder vengeance to devise,
Plague, Fire, Sword, Dearth, or any thing but this.
Let it rain scalding showres of Brimstone down,
To burn us, as of old the lustful Town:
Let a new deluge overwhelm agen,
And drown at once our Land, and Lives, and Sin. (ll. 3-8, *Poems* 18)

These lines forcibly evoke the recent calamities, both of the Great Plague of London (1665-66) and the Great Fire of 1666. Son of a nonconformist Presbyterian minister, John Oldham was undoubtedly anti-papist but did not focus solely on anti-Jesuit propaganda. His crude and vitriolic verse reflects the contemporary menace generated by Titus Oates’ Popish Plot of 1678-81, which implicated – chiefly and falsely – innocent Jesuits. Around two dozen Jesuits were executed or died in prison. Oldham makes his Jesuit speaker expose their overwhelming desire for more and utter destruction. His frequent use of the second person renders more forceful their merciless malevolence and hunger for violence and terror.

Unlike Oldham, Pope never engaged in harsh invective against the order or its members. Just as he considered Oldham’s panegyric *To the Memory of Mr. Charles*

Morwent a masterpiece of the Pindaric ode, it was thus not content that mattered in Pope's appreciation of the four-part satire but its style and beat. The two poets shared in their admiration for renowned authors: Dryden, Rochester, and Ben Jonson, from contemporary English literature; and Juvenal, Ovid, and Persius, among others, from classical antiquity. The *Satyrs Upon the Jesuits* are certainly indebted to Ben Jonson. Pope in turn inherited and perfected the imitation, in English, begun by Oldham and Rochester, which involved adapting the setting to modern times. Oldham imitated the works of Martial, Horace's *Sat.* 1.9, *Odes* 1.31, *Odes* 2.16, *Ars Poetica*, and Juvenal's *Satires* 3 and 13 (*TE* 4:xxvi). Oldham produced an ode for St. Cecilia's Day; Pope followed suit. Many parallels between the two writers' poems have been pointed out, some of which include Oldham's "To the Memory of Mr. C. Morwent" and Pope's "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady;" Oldham's *Bion* and Pope's *Pastorals*; Oldham's "A Satyr Touching Nobility" and Pope's *An Essay on Man* (Selden 119). It is evident that Pope inherited poetic traditions from his predecessor, yet he was able to keep himself detached from the content, that is, the vituperative outbursts of anti-Jesuitism.

5. *The Temple of Fame and the Origine of Sciences*

Michel de Montaigne envisioned positive Jesuit influence pervading all corners of the globe in his *Journal de voyage* (1580-81). Sir William Temple, along with Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and Montesquieu extolled the exotic cultures observed by the missionaries (Klekar 360). At the other extreme were the Moderns, notably Daniel Defoe and William Wotton, who often read the accounts with a skeptical eye and dismissed them as sinophile propaganda.

Sir William Temple cultivated friendships with figures such as Constantijn Huygens, who in turn corresponded with the merchant and later Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, Jacques Specx. Though Chaucerian in its formal foundations, Pope's *Temple of Fame* owes much of its content to the essays of Sir William Temple:

The Eastern Front was glorious to behold,

...

Superior, and alone, *Confucius* stood,

Who taught that useful Science, to be *good*. (ll. 93 and 107-8, *TE* 2:251-52)

That Temple's political philosophy commended the moral virtue of Confucius, recounted by missionaries, is well known. Temple lived in a time when Jesuit missions had reached their

zenith in the Far East and the number of missionaries were increasing progressively every year (Standaert 171). Pope's multivalent poem is largely modeled on the essays by Temple, who in turn relied on Jesuit records, and exhibits a surge in his interest in foreign lands (Temple 81). In *An Essay Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, he mentions:

...though we know little of the Antiquities of *India* beyond *Alexander's* time, yet those of *China* are the oldest that any where pretend to any fair Records: For these are agreed by the Missionary Jesuits to extend so far above Four Thousand Years....

(12)

Temple credits his sources and seems not to doubt their credibility.

Tributes or references to all sources are not always obligatory, but Pope's indifference is manifest in his silence as well, in the form of lack of acknowledgement. The aforementioned *Temple of Fame*, though perhaps not the ideal example, may be cited as one. Another is *An Essay of the Learned Martinus Scriblerus, Concerning the Origine of Sciences* which, as Pope states in the preface of his *Works* of 1741, was a collaborative work primarily undertaken by Dr. John Arbuthnot (vi; Spence 1:57 and 1:58). The epistle writer, Martinus Scriblerus, is a producer of sloppy, careless work who does not pay heed to the accuracy of the knowledge he is attempting to impart. He does accord fleeting recognition to Louis LeComte, author of *Memoirs and Observations* (1697) (*Prose Works* 292), but the concluding lines to the *Origine of Sciences* display express intention of separation from the Society of Jesus. Notwithstanding his collaborators, the sense of detachment is in line with Pope's own attitude of indifference, such as in Martinus Scriblerus' proposal that also reflects Aristotelian teleology: "allotting the proper business to each, I leave to the inquisitive and penetrating Genius of the Jesuits in their Respective Missions" (294). Other celebrated missionaries such as Matteo Ricci and Philippe Couplet do not figure anywhere. All else are tagged under the generic term "others" (292). In both *The Temple of Fame* and *Origine of Sciences*, Pope bypasses the achievements of and accords only scant acknowledgement to the missionaries.

Conclusion

All in all, Pope neither made Jesuits a target of denunciation nor contributed to vitriolic anti-Jesuitism. As a highly visible Catholic layman, he anticipated ill-intended associations with the Jesuit order. Bar the often false accusations of attempted regicide and other destructive plots in which both Catholics and Jesuits were implicated, the activities of the Society of Jesus did

not intersect very often with the poet's life. Of the two pillars constituting the Jesuit agenda - missionary and educational -, Pope did subscribe to their style of pedagogy. Nevertheless, in his literary career he was wont to demarcate his public identity from the Society. Though not examined in this essay, *The Hymn of St Francis Xavier* is yet another example in which Pope is presented with an opportunity for an explicit Jesuit connection yet does not develop it. Translated around 1711, it is a short piece that merits more scholarly attention than it has received. A task undertaken at the request of John Caryll's family chaplain, it saw the light of publication only posthumously in 1791 (*TE* 6:77). Pope indeed expressed little, if at all, due prominence to missionaries and their successes and tribulations abroad, as his concern lay more or less exclusively with the impact of their discoveries in Europe.

Finally, as a pronounced votary of Erasmus, Pope in his early compositions frequently manifests his ecumenical vision, such as when he deplores the divisions between Catholics and Protestants, as well as between Jansenists and Jesuits (*Corr.* 1:126). He had touched on the topic in *An Essay on Criticism*: "Scotists and Thomists, now, in Peace remain" (ℓ. 444, *TE* 1:289). This also points to his admiration for Erasmus which proved to be lifelong and the first expression of which we find later in the same poem, when he comments on the fall of the Roman Empire:

At length, *Erasmus*, that *great, injur'd Name*,
 (The *Glory* of the Priesthood, and the *Shame*)
Stemm'd the wild Torrent of a *barb'rous Age*,
 And drove those *Holy Vandals* off the Stage. (ll. 693-96, *TE* 1:318-19)

In the 1730s he wrote: "Like good *Erasmus* in an honest Mean, | In Moderation placing all my Glory" (*The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated*, ll. 66-67, *TE* 4:11). It is uncertain when the poet first became acquainted with the works of Erasmus, yet he had stated in 1711: "I will set before me that excellent example of that great man and great saint, Erasmus" (*Corr.* 1:118). It is thus quite safe to assume that his admiration was well-developed by then, and he remained proud of the fact that he shared his faith with his hero: "Yet am I of the Religion of Erasmus, a Catholick" (3:81).

In addition to his veneration of Erasmus, the virtue of charity as uniting mankind may also be found across his compositions: the "charity of mankind" is "the very greatest bond in which we are engaged by God to one another [as Christians]" (*Corr.* 1:126); "I as little fear God will damn a Man who has Charity" (1:331); mankind involves "resignation to our Maker, and charity to our fellow creatures" (1:335); and "But all Mankind's concern is Charity"

(*Essay on Man*, III.308, *TE* 3.1:125). This essay has attempted to demonstrate Pope’s overall indifference towards the Jesuit order that culminates in distance as well as silence. However, for all that Pope’s detachment from the Society of Jesus is discernible, recognition is due for his attempt to transcend the Protestant-Catholic dichotomy and to endorse the spirit of ecumenism.

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Notes

- 1) All citations of Pope’s works are from *The Twickenham Editions of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, which are abbreviated as *TE* throughout the essay.

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