

Reformed but not converted: Paolo Sarpi, the English mission in Venice and conceptions of religious change*

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Abstract

Taking as its starting point the well-known English effort to ‘convert’ Venice to Protestantism in the wake of the Venetian Interdict controversy (1606–7), this article explores the ways in which early modern conceptions of conversion varied according to context. Drawing on evidence relating to Venice, England, Ireland and the Jesuit missions to China, it traces how divergent understandings of religious change shaped – and were shaped by – confessional controversy. The idea of ‘conversion’ posed particular conceptual difficulties as a description of inter-confessional transfer, and this article probes the implications of these difficulties for religious and political debate.

For a brief moment in the early seventeenth century, a Protestant Venice seemed a real possibility. In April 1606, following a dispute over church property, the Pope declared an interdict against Venice, banning all major religious services. Though the specific questions of ecclesiastical jurisdiction at issue were soon settled and the interdict lifted in April 1607, tense relations between Venice and Rome persisted. Venetian writers – most prominent among them the Servite friar Paolo Sarpi (1552–1623) – had put up a spirited and public defence of Venice’s anti-papal stance, positioning themselves (in the Huguenot scholar Isaac Casaubon’s words) as defenders of the ‘cause of all princes in common’, against a papal universal monarchy.¹ This was a vision with particular resonance in England, where anti-papal feeling was running high following the narrowly prevented Gunpowder Plot of November 1605.² The English ambassador to Venice, Sir Henry Wotton, hoped that the Venetians might be provoked into a permanent break with Rome, and did his best to promote such an outcome; as Wotton’s biographer later put it, ‘The report was blown abroad, that the Venetians were all turned Protestant’.³

On the face of it, these English efforts were a complete failure: neither Venice nor Sarpi converted. But here we start to run into the problem of what ‘conversion’ really meant in early seventeenth-century Europe. What would it have meant for Sarpi to

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¹ Isaac Casaubon, *De Libertate Ecclesiastica* ([Paris], 1607), pp. 16–17, ‘Omnium principum communis haec causa est’. All translations my own.

² G. Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l’Europa* (Turin, 1974); and F. de Vivo, ‘Francia e Inghilterra di fronte all’Interdetto di Venezia’, in *Paolo Sarpi*, ed. M. Viallon (Paris, 2010), pp. 163–88.

³ Isaak Walton, ‘The life of Sir Henry Wotton’, in *Reliquiae Wottonianae* (London, 1651), sig. C1r.

‘convert’? Did the English really believe that the entire republic of Venice would be ‘converted’? I will contend here that important members of the English embassy did not aim to convert Sarpi, who in their view, was already as ‘Reforming’ as the English. Their emphasis was on ‘Reforming’ the rest of the Venetian population too – a goal conceived as distinct from ‘conversion’. More than this, the English actively emphasized that the Venetians would *not* be converting. This claim was integral to their evangelizing strategy. It is well known that justifying the Henrician Reformation as a return to past purity rather than novelty formed an important strand of Church of England apologetics.⁴ In this article I will explore how this particular view of the church shaped Anglo-Venetian exchange, and the appeal it held for the Venetian anti-papal party.

The English did talk about the ‘conversion’ of Venice, but not very often. Wotton discussed ‘the progress of reformation and steps ... of the Truth’ in his letters.⁵ William Bedell, Wotton’s chaplain between 1607 and 1611, used the word ‘conversion’ in relation to his work in Venice on only one occasion of which I am aware, as part of a suggestion that recent events in the city tended towards ‘conversion’ rather than ‘subversion’. Every other time, however, he preferred alternative locutions: a ‘change in Religion’, the spread of the ‘Truth’ or – most frequent of all – his hopes for ‘Reformation’.⁶ Giovanni Diodati, the Italian-Genevan theologian and translator who travelled to Venice at the request of the English in 1609, reported that Bedell had written to him expressing ‘hope for the imminent reformation [*reformationem*] of the Venetian Church’.⁷ Bedell’s friend and correspondent Samuel Ward (later master of Sidney Sussex, Cambridge) described Bedell as promoting the ‘cause of Religion’ in Venice.⁸ Joseph Hall, another of Bedell’s Cambridge friends and a fellow clergyman, offered a Venetian-themed metaphor for religious change, suggesting that just as Venice was ‘every yeere married to the sea’, she might now be ‘thorowly espoused to Christ!’⁹ English writers emphasized ‘Reform’, ‘Christ’, ‘Truth’ and the cause of ‘Religion’; ‘conversion’ was not a prominent term.

For their part, some modern historians have described the aims of the English in Venice as ‘schism’.¹⁰ This reflects the English emphasis on persuading Venice to jettison the Pope, rather than adopt a whole new religion; but it is a loaded term, used by papalist opponents of the English and the Venetian anti-papal party, which no member of either group would have used to describe their own aims. If the term ‘schism’ is loaded with papalist assumptions, applying the term ‘Reformation’ to the English efforts in Venice risks valorizing a Protestant vision of ‘Reform’, when, from a Roman perspective, support for the Council of Trent was the true sign of a ‘Reformer’.¹¹ A ‘break with Rome’ is a more neutral (if cumbersome) way to describe the English goal; the model was – as both sides knew – the Henrician Reformation, which had been sparked by jurisdictional controversies remarkably similar to those that underpinned the interdict

⁴ A. Milton, ‘Rome as a true church’, in *Catholic and Reformed* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 128–72.

⁵ Wotton to Salisbury, Venice, 28 March 1608, in *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton* (hereafter L.P.S.), ed. L. P. Smith (2 vols., Oxford, 1907), i. 417.

⁶ British Library, Lansdowne MS. 90, Bedell to Newton, Venice, [Jan.] 1608/9, fos. 108v–109r, printed in *Two Biographies of William Bedell*, ed. E. S. Shuckburgh (Cambridge, 1902), p. 231.

⁷ Diodati to Duplessis-Mornay, [Geneva], 22 Apr. [1608], in *Mémoires et correspondance de Duplessis-Mornay* (12 vols., Paris, 1824), x. 81 (‘ecclesiae venetae reformationem brevi speramus’).

⁸ Sidney Sussex Muniments Room, Cambridge, Ward MS. I, Ward to Bedell, [Cambridge], [1608], fo. 52r.

⁹ Hall to Bedell, [1607], printed in Joseph Hall, *Epistles, the First Volume* (London, 1608), pp. 74–5.

¹⁰ E.g., S. Villani, ‘Uno scisma mancato: Paolo Sarpi, William Bedell a la prima traduzione in italiano del Book of Common Prayer’, *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, liii (2017), 63–111.

¹¹ Vittorio Fratese discusses the difficulties of applying the term *Reform* to Sarpi in ‘Crisi di metodo o attenuazione ideologica?’, *Rivista storica italiana*, cxxi (2009), 667–91, at pp. 689–90.

dispute. Clearly, however, the English saw 'Reform' as their aim. Crucially, they were more willing to defend their work in these terms than as 'conversion'.

The English reluctance to use the term 'conversion' is important, as it made a significant contribution to the polemical aims of the Anglo-Venetian network in these years. This network aimed to found European stability on alliances between independent nations, each with its own national church (which would vary in ceremonial practice but share the same doctrinal basis in the 'true church'). This was a vision that posited national borders as an alternative to confessional polarization. Consequently, discussion of conversion was consciously rejected in favour of an emphasis upon national reformation and conformity.

This article will also explore how Anglo-Venetian attitudes to conversion were shaped by an awareness of extra-European Catholic evangelization. As Simone Maghenzani has cautioned, the efforts of the English in Venice cannot be described as a 'mission' in the same sense as the Jesuit missions to India or China.¹² Nonetheless, as Maghenzani and Stefano Villani highlighted in a recent volume, the activities of the English in Venice can and should be located within a broader history of British Protestant attempts to 'convert Europe'.¹³ They also deserve a place in the emerging history of how early modern Protestants approached the 'global'.¹⁴ My research suggests the English defined their own evangelical endeavours *against* those of their Roman Catholic rivals. The association between Jesuitism and conversion appears to have contributed to hostility to the term 'conversion' among Reformed Protestants, who often preferred to describe religious change in other ways.¹⁵ A cluster of terms, including 'reform', 'refuge' and 'schism', offered more precise – and polemically weighted – alternatives, which could be deployed to suit varying needs.

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In the lengthy letters he sent from Venice to Adam Newton, tutor to Henry, Prince of Wales, Wotton's chaplain William Bedell set out a careful analysis of the religious situation in Venice, mapping out a variety of ways in which religious change could occur. He categorized these possibilities under two main headings, 'reasons of conscience' and 'reasons of state'. Bedell explained that by 'reasons of state' he meant the possibility of a war against the papacy that would push the Venetians towards an alternative confession. By 'conscience' Bedell meant the slower process of persuading a large swathe of the ruling class that Reformed doctrines were superior to Roman ones. Bedell conceded that by January 1608, war between Venice and papal forces had become unlikely: the crisis point of the interdict had passed and the Senate had been reminded of the geopolitical advantages of peace. However, there was still hope for change via the second means: 'Reformation by that bye way of persuasion of the conscience, though slowly, seemes no way to be despaired off'.¹⁶

¹² S. Maghenzani, 'The Protestant Reformation in Counter-Reformation Italy', *Church History*, lxxxiii (2014), 571–89, at p. 578.

¹³ See S. Maghenzani, 'The English and Italian Bible', in *British Protestant Missions and the Conversion of Europe, 1600–1900*, ed. S. Maghenzani and S. Villani (Abingdon, 2020), pp. 102–18, at pp. 105–7.

¹⁴ U. Rublack, *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations* (Cambridge, 2020).

¹⁵ Here I build on earlier explorations of how confessional divisions shaped early modern understandings of conversion, including M. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580–1625* (Cambridge, 1996); and E.-O. Mader, 'Conversion concepts in early modern Germany: Protestant and Catholic', in *Conversion and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Germany*, ed. D. M. Luebke and others (New York, 2012), pp. 31–48.

¹⁶ Brit. Libr., Lansdowne MS. 90, Bedell to Newton, Venice, 1 Jan. [1607/8], fos. 108v–109r, in Shuckburgh, *Two Biographies*, pp. 231–2.

From Bedell's perspective, Sarpi and Micanzio did not personally need to be converted; they already fully understood the requirements of true religion and set no store by the corruptions of the Roman Church. Instead, the two Servite friars could assist the English with their reforming efforts. As Bedell put it:

These two I know (as having practiced with them) to desire nothing in this world so much as the Reformation of the Church, and in a word for the substance of religion they are wholly ours. What effect now the force of truth may have in the mouthes of such men, I leave to your consideration.¹⁷

Bedell's fullest statement of his understanding of Protestant–Catholic conversion is made not in his Venetian writings but in a published correspondence with James Wadsworth (written 1615–20; published 1624). Wadsworth was a friend of Bedell's from Cambridge; they had shared a chamber at Emmanuel College in the 1580s or 1590s.¹⁸ Like Bedell, Wadsworth had been appointed an ambassadorial chaplain, in his case being posted to Spain in 1605. Unlike Bedell, however, Wadsworth converted to Rome soon after arrival. He wrote to Bedell explaining his decision.

Bedell replied with a series of letters – the final one more of a treatise, complete with chapter headings – in which he tried to persuade Wadsworth that he had made a dreadful error. Bedell did not, however, frame this as a suggestion that Wadsworth convert back. Instead, he questioned Wadsworth's identity as a convert: 'You say you are become a Catholicke. Were you not then so before?'¹⁹ For Bedell, the Church of England was a true 'Catholicke' church. The Church of Rome was, at its core, a true church too, differing from the Church of England only in having added extra unnecessary points of doctrine and claiming – falsely – that belief in these novelties was necessary for salvation.

Bedell illustrated this point with an anecdote about an encounter in a Venetian stationer's shop – an important centre of Venetian sociability.²⁰ One customer had asked what the difference was between the Church of England and the Catholic Church. Someone (perhaps Bedell himself) had offered a simple reply: 'None: for we account ourselves good Catholics'.²¹ The replier had gone on to explain that members of the churches of both England and Rome believed in the twelve original articles of the Apostles' Creed. However, in the Church of Rome, the Pope had added a 'thirteenth article', which declared papal authority a necessary part of salvation. When the questioner had replied that he did not know of any such article, Bedell wrote, 'the Extravagant²² of Pope Boniface was brought, where hee defines it to bee altogether of necessitie to salvation, to every humane creature to bee under the Bishop of Rome', and thus the point was proven.²³ Here Bedell was quoting, in translation, Boniface VIII's controversial papal bull 'Unam

¹⁷ Brit. Libr., Lansdowne MS. 90, fos. 108v–109r, in Shuckburgh, *Two Biographies*, pp. 231–2. See also discussion in Villani, 'Uno scisma mancato', p. 72.

¹⁸ William Bedell, *Copies of Certain Letters* (London, 1624), sig. *3v.

¹⁹ Bedell, *Certain Letters*, p. 33 [41].

²⁰ This may have been the bookshop of Giovanni Battista Ciotti (where Giacomo Castelvetro, a close contact of the English embassy, lodged and worked; see D. Pirillo, *The Refugee Diplomat: Venice, England, and the Reformation* (Ithaca, 2018), p. 154) or Roberto Meietti (a leading anti-papal printer with close links to Sarpi's circles; see P. F. Grendler, 'Books for Sarpi: the smuggling of prohibited books into Venice during the interdict of 1606–6', in *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus (Florence, 1976), 105–14). More generally, see F. de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice* (Oxford, 2007).

²¹ Bedell, *Certain Letters*, p. 33 [41].

²² The term used for a papal decretal not included in Gratian's *Decretum* or the three official collections of the *Corpus Juris Canonici*.

²³ Bedell, *Certain Letters*, p. 42; emphasis in original.

Sanctam' (1302), which had entered canon law through the *Extravagantes Decretales Communes*, first printed in Paris in 1500 and then appended to the 1582 Roman edition of the *Corpus iuris canonici*, issued by Pope Gregory XIII.²⁴

Bedell described Boniface's addition as 'the thirteenth Article of the thirteenth Apostle'.²⁵ Returning to the case of Wadsworth, he summed up his view of what Wadsworth's so-called conversion really entailed: 'By straitening your faith to Rome, you have not altered it'; nor 'by becoming Roman [have you] left off being Catholicke'.²⁶ All Wadsworth had done was make unnecessary additions to a purer faith. Bedell applied the same reasoning to the individual case of Wadsworth and the case of the Church of Rome in general. What was needed was not an entirely different religion, but rather the excision of papalist corruptions.

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Bedell's claims that Sarpi and Micanzio were already 'Reformed' could be read as naivety. But this would do a disservice to Bedell's grasp of both Church of England apologetics and Sarpi and Micanzio's theological stances, and, indeed, to the Servites' grasp of Bedell's position. Over the last forty years, Sarpi scholarship has been enriched by close attention to his private philosophical notebooks, the *Pensieri*, which have been presented as evidence of the Servite's scepticism (Frajese) or even of his atheist materialism (Wootton).²⁷ One of the implications of this sceptical turn in Sarpi scholarship has been renewed emphasis on the layers of masking and dissimulation that characterized seventeenth-century religious discussion, and a concomitant reassessment of how far he really shared opinions with his British interlocutors.²⁸ I do not want to enter into the complex debate about Sarpi's internal religious beliefs here.²⁹ However, I do think that there is a danger of presenting the Servite as a unique figure, whose scepticism pointed a path to modernity that others did recognize. This sense of Sarpian exceptionalism leads Wootton and Frajese into somewhat teleological interpretations of the Servite's importance, attributing to him an understanding of separation of church and state of a later period.³⁰ In Sarpi's publicly circulated pronouncements, at least, his attitudes towards religion demonstrate considerable areas of overlap with those of Bedell, focussing on Reform within a state church rather than rejection of the institution of the church entirely.

Like Bedell, Sarpi's writings emphasize the corruption of the Church of Rome. The most famous manifestation of this vision is his *Historia del Concilio Tridentino*, first published at London in 1619. More valuable for a comparison to Bedell's views, however, is a different work: his (anonymous) additions to Edwin Sandys's *Relation of the State of*

²⁴ The original Latin is 'Porro subesse Romano Pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus dicimus, def-inimus et pronuntiamus omnino esse de necessitate salutis'. See *Corpus juris canonici emendatum et notis illustratum. Gregorii XIII. pont. max. iussu editum* (Rome, 1582), Part III, iv, I.8.1, col. 212. On the 1582 *Corpus iuris canonici*, see M. E. Sommar, *The Correctores Romani* (Zurich, 2009).

²⁵ Bedell, *Certaine Letters*, p. 42.

²⁶ Bedell, *Certaine Letters*, p. 42.

²⁷ V. Frajese, *Sarpi scettico* (Bologna, 1994); and D. Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi* (Cambridge, 1983). For the historio-graphical impact of the *Pensieri*, see G. Trebbi, 'Paolo Sarpi in alcune recenti interpretazioni', in *Ripensando Paolo Sarpi* (Venice, 2006), pp. 651–88.

²⁸ E.g., V. Frajese, 'Visti da Roma: Paolo Sarpi e Fulgenzio Micanzio nel triennio protestante', *Nuova rivista storica*, ciii (2019), 178–87.

²⁹ A valuable recent overview is G. Baldin, 'Irenista, calvinista, scettico, o ateo nascosto?', *Etica & Politica*, xx (2018), 121–61.

³⁰ Wootton's Sarpi is 'an isolated figure, between Renaissance and Enlightenment' (Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi*, p. 135); Frajese draws a close comparison between Sarpi and Cavour's Risorgimento liberalism in his 'Crisi di metodo', p. 691.

Religion (a book originally published but soon repressed in London in 1605).³¹ Sarpi's additions (*aggiunte*) were written during the period in which Sarpi, Micanzio and Bedell met regularly. They were originally produced with a view to being printed and distributed in Venice in 1610; in fact, however, they were not printed until 1625 (after Sarpi's death) in Geneva, in an Italian translation of Sandys's book put out by Giovanni Diodati. Though plans to print the book in Venice were abandoned, the *aggiunte* did have some level of manuscript circulation: as Diego Pirillo has noted, the Italian Protestant Giacomo Castelvetro (who died in 1616, having been a member of the Anglo-Venetian network in Venice in 1607–11) possessed a manuscript copy, which must have been produced well before the Geneva edition was printed.³²

Sarpi's additions to Sandys can usefully be compared to a short 'View of religion' written by Bedell just after he returned from Venice, which has not been discussed in any previous scholarship.³³ This brief treatise is preserved in a single manuscript copy at the National Library of Ireland.³⁴ It is structured as a comparison of what Bedell took to be all the world's religions, with the superior merits of true, Protestant Christianity demonstrated through comparisons to Judaism, Islam and (most frequently) Roman Catholicism. Internal evidence allows us to date this work to mid 1611, immediately after Bedell's return from Venice.³⁵ Consequently, it offers a unique snapshot of Bedell's thoughts immediately after his encounter with Sarpi and Micanzio.

Both Sarpi's additions and Bedell's 'View' charted the corruption of the Church of Rome as a historical process. For Sarpi, the first phase of this process occurred between 700 and 1300: 'There is no doubt that in [these] six centuries ... the Roman Popes assumed to themselves temporal power over kingdoms and principalities'.³⁶ He emphasized the effect of Gregory VII's campaign against the emperor in 1076, when the Pope 'excited a great part of Germany to arms, to overthrow the authority of Henry IV', and praised the kingdom of France, which from 1300 'began to open its eyes and in some part discover the falsity of the aforementioned maxims'.³⁷ Bedell's account started a little earlier, highlighting Pope Boniface's assumption of the title of 'Universal Bishop' in 606.³⁸ He went on to emphasize developments since c. 1100/1200: 'The deformity of the Christian Church & the disorders that were crept into itt, for these 4 or 5 hundred years past, have bin continuall complaints of good men'.³⁹ If the chronology of Bedell's treatise was subtly different from that of Sarpi's, the substance of his complaint was much

³¹ Sarpi appears to have been the primary author of these additions (evidence includes textual similarities to Sarpi's letters, as noted in *Opere*, ed. G. and L. Cozzi (Milan, 1969), pp. 299–300, n. 2), but he surely produced them in close collaboration with Micanzio and Bedell too (Edwin Sandys, *Relazione dello stato della religione* (Geneva, 1625), printed as P. Sarpi, 'Dalla "Relazione dello Stato della Religione"', in *Opere*, pp. 295–330. See also G. Cozzi, 'Edwin Sandys e la *Relazione dello stato della religione*', *Rivista storica italiana*, lxxix (1967), 1095–121).

³² Pirillo, *Refugee Diplomat*, pp. 157–8. Castelvetro's copy is preserved in Trinity College Library, Cambridge, MS. R.4.36, no. 4, 'Relatione delle essere della Religione', fos. 43r–8r.

³³ For a fuller account of this manuscript work, see E. Davies, 'Sarpi, Micanzio and Bedell: a new source for the Anglo-Venetian encounter at the monastery of Santa Maria dei Servi', in *La chiesa e il convento di Santa Maria dei Servi a Venezia* [provisional title], ed. E. Baseggio, T. Franco and L. Molà (Rome, forthcoming 2022).

³⁴ National Library of Ireland, Dublin, MS. 471, William Bedell, 'View of religion', 23 fos.

³⁵ Bedell returned to England in March 1610/11. A letter he delivered to Sir Edmund Bacon on his return to Suffolk is dated 2 Apr. 1611 (L.P.S., i. 505).

³⁶ Sarpi, 'Relazione', p. 297 ('Non è dubbio che ne' sei secoli ... i pontefici romani s'assunsero potenza temporale sopra i regni e i principati').

³⁷ Sarpi, 'Relazione', p. 321 ('aveva eccitato all'arme gran parte della Germania, per levare l'Impero ad Enrico IV', 'cominciò ad aprir gli occhi, et in qualche parte scoprire la falsità delle sudette massime').

³⁸ Bedell, [View], [fo. 9r].

³⁹ Bedell, [View], [fo. 10r].

the same, with Bedell taking note of papal offensives against the Holy Roman Empire and expressing approval for the fact that ‘Sundry Kings of France purposed reformation & the Councells of Constance and Basill were gathered to that end’.⁴⁰

Bedell’s and Sarpi’s works both attributed a particular role to canon law in the process of corruption, arguing that the glossators had deliberately worked to undermine the correct structure of church–state relations. Sarpi claimed that canon law had been developed in the schools to mimic civil law, with the express purpose of expanding papal authority:

A body of papal law was made in imitation of the imperial laws, which was amplified with glosses, until they had been reduced to terms ... [and] settled on the Roman Pope absolute power over all people.⁴¹

This is a similar case to that made by Bedell in his letter to Wadsworth. Comparable comments can also be found in his ‘View’, which describes how

By certain degrees the popes of Rome spoiled the emperors of the East of their rights ... & will now needs bee Lords & Monarckes of the world. In their Decretalls & the Blasphemous Glosses on them, they take fullnes of power to doe what they list.⁴²

For both Sarpi and Bedell, the sixteenth-century Reformation marked an important turning point. They described this new development in similar terms, stating that it had ‘pleased God’ to bring forth criticisms of Roman practices and noting the Reformers’ emphasis on a return to the purity of the Scriptures.⁴³ These were narratives not of conversion or schism, but of a return to an earlier, less corrupt form of religion.

Both men offered similar examples of Rome’s doctrinal corruptions, emphasizing the primacy of the Gospel, the necessity of vernacular worship and the importance of respecting the authority of the divinely instituted temporal ruler. The importance of these themes for the Anglo-Venetian encounter of 1607–10 is further underlined by their reappearance in the well-known cycle of sermons delivered by Micanzio in Venice in Lent 1609, which Bedell almost certainly helped compose. From Micanzio’s surviving notes and accounts in contemporary correspondence, it seems that the sermons did not openly criticize the papacy, but rather emphasized only the doctrines Micanzio considered compatible with the ‘true church’, notably the importance of the Gospel, the absolute authority of secular rulers and that matters of church government were ‘things indifferent’.⁴⁴ By proceeding cautiously, Sarpi and Micanzio could promote the cause of the ‘true church’ from within the corrupt Church of Rome.

Bedell, Micanzio and Sarpi were in agreement on the necessity of loyalty to the prince in matters of religious ceremony. For all of them, ceremonies were matters indifferent, and did not justify an individual breaking away from an established church; it was better to reform the church from within, ideally with the support of a godly prince. This helps explain why Micanzio and Sarpi did not wish to publicly ‘convert’, despite their sympathies with some aspects of ‘Reform’. It also explains why Bedell did not think

⁴⁰ Bedell, [View], [fo. 10r].

⁴¹ Sarpi, ‘Relazione’, p. 298 (‘fu fatto un corpo di legge pontificie ad emulazione delle imperiali, le quali ancho fecero amplificare con glose, sin che le han ridotte a’termini ... [e] costituisce nel pontifice romano un imperio assoluto sopra tutti’).

⁴² Bedell, [View], [fo. 9r–v].

⁴³ Sarpi, ‘Relazione’, p. 321 (‘Ha piaciuto a Dio’); and Bedell, [View], [fo. 10r].

⁴⁴ G. Rosa, ‘Politica e religione nella vita e nel pensiero di fra Fulgenzio Micanzio’ (unpublished Ca’Foscari tesi di laurea thesis, 1993), pp. 35–41. Micanzio’s notes are preserved in Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, MS. It. XI, 175 [= 6518], fos. 153r–194r.

they needed to. Combining the ideals of religious reform and obedience to temporal superiors was conducive to a vision of multiple national reformations, in which citizens worked to purify their own national churches from within. All three men agreed that the anti-papal cause would be better served by the Servites staying where they were.

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If this interpretation is correct, and the English in Venice were keen to emphasize that they were promoting not 'conversion' but 'Reformation', how can we account for the fact that the English *did* help a number of Venetian converts leave Venice and move to England? Five particularly noteworthy Italian converts moved to England as a consequence of the activities of Wotton and his successor in Venice, Sir Dudley Carleton: Gasparo Despotini (known in England as Jaspar Despotine), a Venetian doctor; Gian Francesco Biondi, a Dalmatian Protestant convert who acted as a courier for Wotton; two Carmelite friars, Giulio Cesare Vanini and Battista Maria Genocchi; and, most famously, Marc'Antonio de Dominis, archbishop of Spalato. Sarpi himself received an invitation to England from King James in 1612, which (as we shall see) he politely refused.

On closer examination, however, contemporary discussion of these converts and the details of the offer made to Sarpi reveal once again a reluctance to endorse the language of conversion. The English were warier of bringing converts back to England in this period than has often been recognized. These five Italian Protestants were not welcomed to England as converts *per se*, but rather as members of a narrower category: that of the religious exile. In recent years there has been increasing recognition of the distinctive role played by religious exiles in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.⁴⁵ Such figures, notably Giacomo Castelvetro and Giovanni Diodati (both members of second-generation Italian Protestant refugee families), assisted the English embassy with its activities in Venice. The number of religious exiles seeking refuge across Europe had substantially increased during the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion, but war was not the only force creating religious exiles: Italian Protestants fled papal persecution. Thus, even during peacetime, the search for religious refuge provided a well-established template enabling geographical and ecclesiastical movement. This was the language in which the Italian Protestants sent to England by Wotton and Carleton were discussed.

The term *refugee* did not enter English usage until the arrival of the French Huguenot refugees of the late seventeenth century. The language of 'seeking refuge' was, however, well known. Importantly, people who 'sought refuge' had left their own countries because of necessity and persecution. Had they instead left out of personal choice, they would have been open to accusations of disloyalty. Why would someone willing to abandon one church and secular ruler not also abandon another? Were their convictions really sincere, or were they converting for material gain? But as those who sought refuge had no real choice, these concerns ceased to apply. We can see a clear example of the language of refuge at work in the case of Despotine, who travelled back to England alongside Wotton and Bedell, making a permanent move to Bury St. Edmunds (where Bedell lived before and after his time in Venice). Wotton wrote a letter introducing Despotine to his brother-in-law and Suffolk notable, Sir Edmund Bacon, describing the doctor's conversion in proud terms:

by birth a Venetian, which though it be not *urbs ignobilis* [an unknown city] (as St. Paul said of his own mother-city), yet is his second birth the more excellent; I mean his illumination in God's saving Truth, which was the only cause of his remove; and I was glad to be the conductor of him

⁴⁵ O. P. Grell, *Brethren in Christ* (Cambridge, 2012); and Pirillo, *Refugee Diplomat*.

where his conscience may be free, though his condition otherwise (till he shall be known) will be the poorer.⁴⁶

Wotton here offered St. Paul as a model for Despotine's conversion. Once again, however, the words 'conversion' or 'convert' are not used, with Wotton preferring the terms 'illumination' and 'Truth'.⁴⁷ Wotton emphasized that Despotine's motives were purely spiritual and that in the short term he would be worse off, freeing him from any imputation that he had converted for material gain; he simply wanted to live a quiet life according to his conscience. In this Despotine succeeded, dying a wealthy and well-respected local doctor.⁴⁸

However, Despotine's success in England was unusual. Of the five Italians named above, three – Vanini, Genocchi and De Dominis – would revert to the Church of Rome. This frequency of reconversions was not for want of caution on the English side. Converts who announced an interest in moving to England were carefully examined before help was offered. As Carleton explained, he had assisted the two Carmelites only after they had given

so good an account of themselves, both for their reasons grounded upon good learning of their relinquishing the Church of Rome as likewise for their resolution ... of entering and preserving in ours, that I must confess I presumed more of them than of many others who have offered themselves to me in the same kind.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, Carleton's expectations were to be disappointed. After moving to England, the initially enthusiastic Carmelites became rather less enamoured of its church. The Carmelites claimed genuine doctrinal disagreement; their English hosts alleged that it was really a matter of unsatisfied demands for monetary rewards.⁵⁰ Either way, Vanini and Genocchi fled to France in 1614, claiming never truly to have left the Church of Rome.

In the wake of Vanini and Genocchi's relapse, we find Biondi too being viewed with some suspicion by Archbishop Abbot in a letter to Carleton:

I know nothing by Signor Francesco Biondi but good, and therefore I will hope the best. But heereafter wee shall be wary how wee hastily intertaine the Convertitoes of that nation, so inestimable hath bene the hypocrisie and lewdnesse, of the two Carmelites lately remaining with us.⁵¹

Abbot's choice of words underlines the fact that the category of refugee was preferable to that of convert. His use of the term 'convertito' to describe the duplicitous Carmelites stands in contrast to Wotton's description of Despotine, which emphasized the doctor's sincerity by noting that he sought only to live according to his 'conscience', despite

⁴⁶ Wotton to Bacon, Westminster, 2 Apr. 1611, printed in L.P.S., i. 505–6.

⁴⁷ For discussion of the widespread reluctance among sixteenth-century Protestants to use Paul as a model for conversion, see J. Pollmann, "'A different road to God': the Protestant experience of conversion in the sixteenth century", in *Conversion to Modernities: the Globalization of Christianity*, ed. P. van der Veer (London, 1996), pp. 47–64. Kathleen Lynch suggests that Pauline and Augustinian models gained a more prominent place in English conversion narratives from the 1620s; see K. Lynch, 'Conversion narratives in New and Old England', in *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution*, ed. L. L. Knoppers (Oxford, 2012), pp. 425–38; and K. Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 31–72.

⁴⁸ For Despotine in Suffolk, see T. W. Jones, *A True Relation of ... William Bedell* (London, 1872), pp. 125–8. His estate was valued at over £2,000 at his death; see Suffolk Record Office, IC/500/3/3/53, 'Probate inventory of Jasper Despotin', 27 July 1650.

⁴⁹ The National Archives of the U.K., State Papers 99/15, fo. 164v, Carleton to Chamberlain, Venice, 11 March 1613/14.

⁵⁰ C. F. Senning, 'Vanini and the diplomats, 1612–1614', *Historical Magazine*, liv (1985), 219–39.

⁵¹ T.N.A., SP 14/72, fo. 172r, Abbot to Carleton, Lambeth, 30 March [1613].

immediate financial uncertainty. A religious exile was acting out of necessity for their own survival, whereas a convert (still more an Italianate *convertito*) risked seeming changeable and thus faithless to all.

In fact, Biondi would not disappoint. For both Biondi and Despotine, sixteenth-century religious exiles had set useful precedents for building a new life in England. Biondi integrated into the broader Calvinist internationalist network dominated by older religious refugee families, marrying the daughter of Théodore de Mayerne, James's royal physician and a prominent French Calvinist.⁵² He and Despotine stayed in contact; Biondi visited Bury St. Edmunds in the autumn of 1613, presumably lodging with Despotine or Bedell, and stayed for over a month, writing that if he had the choice, he would choose to live there.⁵³ Like many sixteenth-century exiles, both men sought to make their own living, rather than relying on support from the court or church alone: Despotine prospered as a doctor, and though Biondi worked for James as a diplomatic agent, he also found other sources of income, including the publication of romances and histories.

It might appear surprising that Marc'Antonio de Dominis was welcomed to England in 1616, just two years after the messy reconversions of Vanini and Genocchi. However, this becomes easier to comprehend once we appreciate just how effectively he deployed the languages of 'reform' and 'refuge' when presenting his case. In his letters to Carleton discussing his potential move, he stated that he sought only 'some refuge in [his] persecutions'.⁵⁴ It was reported in the Venetian Senate on 9 October 1616 that De Dominis had claimed 'his intention was not to depart from the Catholic religion', and in the manifesto he published on leaving Italy, he insisted that he was not guilty of 'Schisme': 'I forsake errors, I shunne abuses and corruptions; these, and nothing else I flie'.⁵⁵ In his first sermon in England he repeated these claims, emphasizing that the 'Reformed' and 'Romane' religions were the same in 'essentials'.⁵⁶ All this was in keeping with the understanding of 'reform' and 'refuge' we have seen elsewhere. Indeed, De Dominis did not claim to be converting on his return to Rome either, instead framing his return as a belated recognition that the Protestant Reformation was made 'in Schisme', and thus at fault.⁵⁷ De Dominis continued to insist, however, that he had stayed of 'one and the same minde ... without any change' before and after coming to England; it was only his knowledge of the facts that had changed.⁵⁸

James's invitation to Sarpi in 1612 was also framed as an offer of refuge, with the king writing that he viewed it as one mark of royal power to be able 'to protect and favor persons of quality'.⁵⁹ Sarpi's polite refusal embraces the same idiom, with the Servite making clear that he was not currently in need of a refuge, but that if the situation changed he would gladly avail himself of James's 'favour and protection'. Until then, his duty was to Venice: 'I think myself obliged by civil duty to continue serving my

⁵² H. Trevor-Roper, *Europe's Physician* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), p. 257.

⁵³ T.N.A., SP 14/74, fo. 169r, Biondi to [Carleton], London, 21 Oct. 1613.

⁵⁴ T.N.A., SP 99/17, fo. 72r, De Dominis to Carleton, Venice, 7 Sept. 1614 ('in persecutionibus meis refugiam aliquod'); and W. B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 229.

⁵⁵ Quoted in S. Ljubić, 'O Markantunu Dominisu Rabljaninu', *Rad Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti*, x (1870), 1–159, at p. 120 ('il suo fine non essere di partirsi dalla religione cattolica'); and Marco Antonio de Dominis, *A Manifestation* (London, 1616), p. 48 (first published in Latin as *Causae protectionis suae ex Italia* (n.p., 1616)).

⁵⁶ Marco Antonio de Dominis, *A Sermon Preached in Italian* (London, 1617), p. 31.

⁵⁷ N. Malcolm, *De Dominis, 1560–1624: Venetian, Anglican, Ecumenist and Relapsed Heretic* (London, 1984), pp. 62–3.

⁵⁸ *M. Ant. de D[omi]nis Arch-bishop of Spalato, His Shiftings in Religion* (London, 1624), p. 43.

⁵⁹ T.N.A., SP 99/10, fo. 58v, James to Carleton, Greenwich, 22 June 1612, printed in E. Levi, 'King James I and Fra Paolo Sarpi in 1612', *The Athenaeum*, mmmcccclxix (1898), 66–7, at p. 66.

Patron [Venice] so long as my service is acceptable to him'.⁶⁰ James would surely have understood and entirely approved of the Servite's sentiments. Framing a move to England around the idea of refuge, rather than conversion, allowed a desire for religious reform to coexist with continued civil loyalty. Herein lay its value for Sarpi and James alike.

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The shared English and Venetian reluctance to embrace the language of conversion must also be viewed in the context of Catholic polemicists putting increasing emphasis on conversion in their defences of the Church of Rome. Protestants applied their suspicions of the depth of sudden conversions to the reported successes of the Jesuit missions in India and China. The importance of this extra-European context for the members of the English embassy in Venice has not often been noted, but it is clear that an awareness of the Jesuits' desire to characterize themselves as a missionary order fed into the fervent anti-Jesuitism of the English and Venetian anti-papal parties.

Wotton mentioned Jesuit claims to have made converts in Russia and Africa in a speech to the Venetian Collegio in May 1606. Noting the difficulties of verifying such assertions, Wotton scornfully added that the Jesuits might as well have publicized 'the conversion – God forgive me – of a crocodile'.⁶¹ Wotton's irreverent comment represents one of the simplest techniques used by Protestants to negate the propaganda benefits of the Jesuit missions: asserting that they were made up and linking this to the Jesuits' reputation for dishonesty within Europe. At other times, however, Wotton's analysis of Jesuitical conversion moved beyond mere flippancy: he wrote several detailed dispatches cataloguing the techniques used on English visitors to Italy, noting that the Jesuits had started to describe their focus on 'the work of conversion' as 'their essential difference from other orders'.⁶²

Evidence that Bedell too took an interest in the Jesuits' extra-European missions can be found in a letter that survives in a single transcribed copy at Lambeth Palace Library, addressed to 'Jaspar Despotine', the Venetian doctor that Bedell had brought back to Bury St. Edmunds with him on his return to Venice.⁶³ Here we have a very intriguing document: Bedell writing to a man he had converted about the latest news of Jesuit conversions. The purpose of Bedell's letter was to say how much he had enjoyed reading a book 'about the expedition to China' that Despotine had lent him. Though the letter is undated, this book must surely be Matteo Ricci's *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (Augsburg, 1615), translated into Latin by Nicolas Trigault. Bedell had found it gripping reading:

I did not (as I often do with other [books]) just flick through it, but rather read it from top to toe, indeed I read it repeatedly and so avidly, that sometimes I resented the announcement that dinner was ready; I had already (as the person says in the Comedy⁶⁴) eaten too freely of this History.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ T.N.A., SP 99/10, fos. 170v–71r, Sarpi to Carleton, Venice, 14 Aug. 1612 ('gratia e protettione', 'riputo esser in obbligo per debito civile di persequer servando il mio Patrone sin che la mia servitù li è accetta'); and Levi, 'King James', p. 67.

⁶¹ Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, x. 346. Original in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Collegio, Esposizioni Roma, 6 May 1606.

⁶² Wotton to Salisbury, Venice, 18 Aug. 1605, printed in L.P.S., i. 333.

⁶³ Lambeth Palace Library (hereafter L.P.L.), MS. 595, no. xix (unfoliated), Bedell to Despotine, [?Horringer], [?1616].

⁶⁴ Probably a reference to Plautus' *Poenulus*, I.8 ('qui non edistis, saturi fite fabulis').

⁶⁵ L.P.L., MS. 595, no. xix, Bedell to Despotine, [?Horringer], [?1616]: 'Remitto tibi, Despotine charissime, libellum tuum de Expeditione Sinensi: quem ego non (quod saepe alias soleo) pervolutari tantum sed a capite calcem, & quidem iterato perlegi tantam aviditate, ut indignatus sim interdum mensam instructam nuntiantibus; adeo nimis libenter (quod ait ille in Comoedia) hanc Historiam edi'.

He went on to explain he did not think that the Jesuits were sincerely preaching Christ. Rather, they were preaching

for the amplification of the domination of the Roman Pope, or for the ennoblement of their Society (certainly, the Superiors of this order are perpetual flatterers of the Curia, modifying everything at the nod and will of the Pope; the Inferiors practice blind obedience, doing what they are ordered).⁶⁶

Consequently, he asserted, Jesuit conversion ‘will instil idolatry and all types of Papist superstition more than the Christian faith in the Chinese’,⁶⁷ and he compared them to the hypocritical biblical Pharisees, to whom Jesus says, ‘Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves’.⁶⁸

Bedell did not, however, see the Jesuit missions as entirely worthless. Quoting Paul, he said that it was always good for Christ’s name to be preached – even when done by hypocrites to further their own ends.⁶⁹ Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Bedell’s response is the admiration he expressed for Chinese culture. The Chinese, he noted, were not ‘barbarous or fierce’ people, but in fact had ‘cultivated cities, laws and arts’, which – most strikingly of all – ‘are able to challenge our Europe, and perhaps even surpass it’.⁷⁰ Bedell ended with the words ‘[Europe] indeed does not know, whether she will rejoice, like him who has found an unknown brother; or will be more fearful to have encountered a new rival, with whom she competes for true merit’.⁷¹ To Bedell, then, China appeared to operate much like Europe, and conversion was thus also likely to work in the same way: the Jesuits’ superficial conversion efforts would pave the way for truer forms of religion, freed of papal corruptions.

This letter is frustratingly short; it may be only an extract from the original. Bedell’s full correspondence with Despotine – which continued until his death in 1642 – is a great loss. But the letter is nonetheless significant, representing one of the earliest Protestant responses to the Jesuits’ Chinese mission. Accusations of Jesuitical fraud would be repeated by English observers throughout the seventeenth century, though Bedell’s analysis placed more emphasis on the political ambitions of the Pope than many other accounts.⁷² In Italy, as we have seen, Bedell thought there was still a true church, labouring under the yoke of popish corruption. Similarly, he believed that the truth of the Gospel would shine through in China, even when preached hypocritically. The emphasis was clearly on the word of God, rather than the ceremonial aspects of the conversion, which

⁶⁶ L.P.L., MS. 595, no. xix, Bedell to Despotine, [?Horringer], [?1616]: ‘Christum a Jesuitis haud sincero amnio praedicari; sed vel ad amplificandam Rom[ani] Pontificis Dominationem, aut ad nobilitandam Societatem suam; (Nempe, Superiores huius Ordinis, perpetuos Asseclas Curiae, omnia moderari ad nutum, & Arbitrium papae; Inferiores caeco obediendi studio ferri, facere quod iubetur)’.

⁶⁷ L.P.L., MS. 595, no. xix, Bedell to Despotine, [?Horringer], [?1616]: ‘a[d] Idololatriam, & omne genus Superstitionis papisticarum potius, quam Christianam Fidem Sinensib[us] instillari’.

⁶⁸ L.P.L., MS. 595, no. xix, Bedell to Despotine, [?Horringer], [?1616]: ‘circuitis Mare, & Aridam, ut faciatis proselytum unum, & cum fuerit factus, facitis illum filum Gehennae duplo magis, q[uam] vos sitis’ (Matt. 23:15).

⁶⁹ L.P.L., MS. 595, no. xix, Bedell to Despotine, [?Horringer], [?1616] (Phil. 1:17–18).

⁷⁰ L.P.L., MS. 595, no. xix, Bedell to Despotine, [?Horringer], [?1616]: ‘quid nihilo minus interest, Gentibus non barbaris, & immanibus sed Urbibus, Legibusque, Artibusque ita excultis, ut Europam nostrum possit provocare, fortasse etiam superare’.

⁷¹ L.P.L., MS. 595, No. xix, Bedell to Despotine, [?Horringer], [?1616]: ‘Quae quidem nescit an gaudebit, ut Ille, qui germanum fratrem insperate invenit; an verebitur potius, ut qui egregium Aemulum nactus est, quocum de vera laude certet’.

⁷² Cf. J. Coffey, ‘“The Jesuits have shed much blood for Christ”: early modern Protestants and the problem of Catholic overseas missions’, in Maghenzani and Villani, *British Protestant Missions*, pp. 35–54, at pp. 38–43.

Bedell assumed would be full of idolatry and popish superstition. In the end, whatever the ceremonial corruptions, God's word would out, in China as in Venice.

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The Anglo-Venetian network's particular understanding of conversion helped opponents of papal and Jesuitical excess co-operate across confessional lines while remaining loyal citizens of their own states. But though this way of viewing Europe's religious divisions was well suited to post-interdict Venice, in other circumstances it proved more controversial. The way in which different contexts affected thinking about conversion was revealed with particular starkness later in Bedell's career, following his appointment as first provost of Trinity College, Dublin (1627) and then bishop of Kilmore (1629).

In Ireland Bedell deployed many of the same techniques he had used to promote Reform in Venice, including spearheading the first translation of the Old Testament into Irish. This time, however, he faced opposition from his own side, as James Ussher, archbishop of Armagh, informed Bedell in a remarkably hostile letter from 1630:

the course you took with the Papists [is] generally cried out against: neither do I remember, in all my life, that any thing was done here by any of ours, at which the Professors of the Gospel did take more offence, or by which the Adversaries were more confirmed in their Superstition and Idolatry.⁷³

Though Ussher saw some value in Bedell's schemes, and generally supported his translation project, his comments reflect clear concerns among the broader Anglo-Irish community about Bedell's indulgence towards the Irish Catholics.⁷⁴ These complaints were bound up with fears of disobedience and rebellion. In this potentially volatile colonial context, certain members of the Anglo-Irish elite preferred non-comprehending ceremonial conformity from Irish churchgoers to careful consideration of Reformed doctrine, enacting much the same shallow approach to conversion that Bedell had criticized in Jesuit missionaries.

While at Trinity College, Bedell came into conflict with Dr. Joshua Hoyle, Professor of Divinity, for defending the doctrine that Rome was a true church.⁷⁵ In 1634 an undeterred Bedell restated his claim that Rome was a true church in a sermon before the Lord Deputy and Parliament of Ireland at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. The sermon discussed his interpretation of the injunction to 'flee Babylon' (Revelations 18:4), usually taken as a reference to Rome. Bedell described how during the 'flight' some would run ahead, afraid to go back, but some would come 'in the rear', wanting to 'leave none of Christs people behind them'. He added, in a memorable image, that 'No man reacheth his hand to another whom he would lift out of a Ditch, but he stoops to them'. Though those who ran ahead and those who brought up the rear approached the task differently ('the one hates Babylon, the other loves ... Christ's people'), they were all one in their 'final intention'.⁷⁶ It seems probable, in the end, that Bedell viewed Sarpi and Micanzio as members of the true church bringing up the rear. They did not need to seek physical refuge in another country or church to be counted among the truly Reformed. For Bedell's Anglo-Irish listeners, however, such a separation of 'reform' and 'refuge' was more controversial, because it de-emphasized the importance of external conformity to a particular church.

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⁷³ Ussher to Bedell, Drogheda, 23 Feb. 1630, in *Correspondence of James Ussher*, ed. E. Boran (3 vols., Dublin, 2015), ii. 496.

⁷⁴ Ussher and Bedell reconciled at a meeting in August 1630, after Bedell successfully defended himself against hostile rumours. See Bedell to Ward, Dublin, 14 Nov. 1630, in Shuckburgh, *Two Biographies*, pp. 317–18.

⁷⁵ Shuckburgh, *Two Biographies*, pp. 26–7.

⁷⁶ *The Judgement of the Late Arch-bishop*, ed. N. Bernard (London, 1659), p. 103.

Since the term 'conversion' could be applied equally well to a move from Catholicism to Protestantism or vice versa, it posed several problems for religious polemicists. Writers on all sides of the Reformation divide looked for alternative ways of conceptualizing religious change, searching for categories that were weighted in their own direction. Where conversion could all too easily act as a revolving door, taking believers from Catholicism to Protestantism and back again, early modern writers sought concepts that would work more like a valve, legitimizing religious change in one direction but not the other. On the Roman side, accusations of 'schism' did much of this work. Protestants, meanwhile, adopted 'reform' as their own one-way path to true religion.

Within Europe, then, conversion was dangerous because it cut both ways. All parties feared that in the long run, claims of multiple conversions were more likely to undermine faith entirely. But while conversions between different Christian confessions were often a cause for concern, conversion of infidels, pagans or atheists were of unambiguous value. The authors of the early accounts of the Jesuits' missions hoped that publicizing Rome's missionary efforts might also contribute to the propagation of the faith in Europe, proving that Rome was able to make the right sort of convert (the non-Christian) more effectively than the schismatic Protestants. The self-declared Reformed, however, turned doubts about the depths of these conversions to their own advantage, using the unverifiability of extra-European conversions to disparage Roman conversions within Europe too.

The Jacobean Anglo-Venetian network developed its own response to the challenges posed by conversion, drawing on the language of 'reform' and 'refuge'. The language of 'reform' legitimized the evangelical transformation of a polity from within, without undermining the authority of the existing temporal ruler. The language of 'refuge' legitimized movement from one state to another when necessitated by religious persecution; unlike 'reform', this inevitably involved geographical and ecclesiastical movement. This vision of religious change offered what the English and Venetian anti-papal parties hoped would be a more secure foundation for European peace than geopolitical division along confessional lines. These hopes would be dashed: the slow, careful path towards a Venetian Reformation was never followed to its end, interrupted by the new conflicts and imperatives of the Thirty Years War. As a solution to the problem of balancing religious change and secular obedience, however, the ideas of the Jacobean Anglo-Venetian network continued to be an important touchstone. As Bedell's Irish opponents recognized, the claim that Reformed individuals could live Christian lives in an unreformed church also opened up new and controversial questions about how far external manifestations of religion mattered at all.