"THIS BOOKE HATH BRED ALL THE QUARREL":
THE BIBLE IN THE 1641 DEPOSITIONS

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1.   Introduction

 "The English and Scotts combyned and joined in a petition to his Majestie… to come into Ireland with the Bible in one hand, the Sword in the other."[1] So begins "The Grievances of the Peers and Gentry of Ireland," a seventeenth-century document outlining the concerns of Irish gentry at a time when tensions between the English and the Irish were escalating in dramatic fashion.

This quotation raises a number of issues, including what role, if any, the Bible *did* play in Ireland during the contentious seventeenth century. As a starting point to begin exploring this question, I will survey a collection of documents known as the 1641 Depositions, and the various references to the Bible found in this collection. Following on from this I will explore one recent study on the functional dimensions of Scriptures that highlights the issue of iconicity, an issue which is particularly relevant for the present study. I will then return to the Depositions and tease out the ways in which this theory might be helpful for understanding the references to the

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[1] TCD MS 840, f. 25r, "The grievances of the peers and gentry of Ireland." This and subsequent references to documents from the 1641 Depositions cite manuscript and folio number from the Trinity College Dublin collection, which can be accessed online at www.1641.tcd.ie. This example is unique in that it comes from the vantage point of native Irish (even if the upper echelons), while the vast majority of the collection gives voice to settlers.

Bible in this collection, and conclude with some reflections on the role of the Bible in shaping identities in seventeenth century Ireland.

2.   The Rising and the 1641 Depositions

Conflict between the English and Irish did not, of course, begin in the seventeenth century; indeed, the seventeenth century inherited a number of issues that had taken root in the centuries prior (see the discussion on pages XX of the Introduction). The issue of settlers and plantations, for example, and thus colonization more broadly, came to the fore in the sixteenth century in the age of the Tudors, particularly under Mary and Elizabeth. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, an England that was now firmly Protestant had mustered enough stability to impose its will on Ireland, or at least those parts about which it was concerned. And with the Flight of the Earls in the early seventeenth century, many of England's greatest threats on the island were no longer on the scene.

There remained, however, many who found themselves increasingly unsettled, in both senses of the word. Events that transpired in Ireland in 1641 began with a rising of the Irish Catholic gentry. These "Old English", many of whom had been in Ireland for generations and were Catholic, had remained loyal to the crown. However, an increasingly Protestant-centric English Parliament coupled with progressively aggressive appropriation of lands for new English and Protestant settlers in Ireland, made life increasingly uncomfortable for this class of Irish Catholic landowners. In 1641 the Irish gentry rose up against Protestant settlers in Ulster and demanded changes to English rule in Ireland, including the treatment of Catholics and the continued appropriation of lands for these new settlers. The uprising seems to have

quickly spread beyond this upper, land owning class to a broader base, in essence pitting all Irish Catholics against English and Scottish Protestant settlers. The conflict turned violent and the events of 1641 would instigate over a decade of conflict in Ireland.[2] While the Ulster plantations and the question of land played a significant role in this conflict, the rising was complex and was triggered by a number of factors, including political unrest in Ireland and Britain; ethnic and nationalistic differences; social and cultural change; and, of course, religious tension.[3]

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[2] The literature on this period and the rising in particular is voluminous. Helpful entry points include Hiram Morgan, "Rising of 1641," in *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (ed. S. J. Connolly; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 487; John McCavitt, "Rebellion 1641," in *The Encyclopaedia of Ireland* (ed. Brian Lalor; Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2003), 917; Andrew Hadfield, "The Rebellion of 1641," in *Strangers to that Land: British Perceptions of Ireland from the Reformation to the Famine* (eds. Andrew Hadfield and John McVeagh; Gerrards Cross: Colin Smyth, 1994), 115-122; Brian MacCuarta, ed., *Ulster 1641: Aspects of the Rising* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies/QUB, 1993).

[3] On issues related to land, see Raymond Gillespie, *Colonial Ulster: The Settlement of East Ulster 1600-1641* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1985). Political dimensions are outlined in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin, and F.J. Byrne, eds., *A New History of Ireland, vol. 3: Early Modern Ireland 1534-1691* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). Ethnic and nationalistic issues are discussed in Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie, eds., *Natives and Newcomers: Essays on the Making of Irish Colonial Society 1534-1641* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1986). For more on social and cultural changes,

The 1641 Depositions are a compilation of materials that were gathered over several years following the rising, and consist of claims by refugees for compensation for losses incurred during the Rising, statements taken to gather intelligence for military purposes, and materials gathered to prosecute those accused of atrocities.[4]

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consult George O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century* (Clifton: Augustus M. Kelley, 1972 [1919]). Religious dimensions are helpfully elucidated in Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590-1641* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985); Phil Kilroy, "Protestantism in Ulster, 1610-1641," in *Ulster 1641*, 25-36; Nicholas Canny, "Religion, Politics and the Irish Rising of 1641," in *Religion and Rebellion* (eds. Judith Devlin and Ronan Fanning; Dublin: UCD Press, 1997), 40-70.

[4] This collection was recently digitized and transcribed by a digital humanities initiative at Trinity College Dublin. The collection known as the Depositions actually contains four sets of documents: statements from refugees taken from 1641-47 by a commission headed by Henry Jones, related to claims to compensation for property lost in the rebellion; depositions taken in Munster in 1642-3 by the English Parliament; statements taken to gather intelligence, from both Protestant refugees and captured insurgents for military purposes; and materials collected by High Court of Justice in 1652 to prosecute those accused of atrocities in the Confederate War (Irish Civil War, 1641-53), which followed the 1641 rising. The Depositions are thus a response to 1641 in later years and are a snapshot of a particular time, including ongoing hostility. See Hiram Morgan, "Depositions," in *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, 141; Liam Irwin, "Depositions," in *The Encyclopaedia of Ireland*, 283-

This leads us to a significant issue: the historiographical questions and ideological agendas that surround the Depositions. The veracity and usefulness of the Depositions have both been vigorously contested, on historical and ideological grounds.[5] To begin with, it is important to keep in mind that these Depositions are in fact a compilation of materials that were gathered over several years following the rising, and consist of claims and requests for compensation, among other things. Thus, there are serious questions about the reliability of the testimonies in the Depositions, particularly as many of the deposed are settlers and refugees seeking reparations. For example, the numbers which were said to have been killed during this conflict has long been a matter of contentious debate, with a general agreement now that the numbers given in the Depositions are seriously inflated. Related, it is worth noting that almost all of the reports we have of Irish Catholics in the Depositions come from the testimony of English and Scottish Protestant settlers, and so the collection is by no means a balanced account.[6] There are, in short, very few Catholic voices in these documents.

284; Aidan Clarke, "The 1641 Depositions," in *Treasures of the Library: Trinity College Dublin* (ed. Peter Fox; Dublin: Royal Irish Academy for Trinity College Library, 1986), 111-122.

[5] See Morgan, "Depositions," 141; Irwin, "Depositions," 283-284.

[6] It is also important to keep in mind that there are significant differences and tensions between the English and Scottish in Ireland at this time, not to mention conflict between the home countries themselves. For more on these issues, see Hugh Kearney, "Scotland," in *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (ed. S. J. Connolly; Oxford:

What use, then might these documents have for us today? There has been a recognition in recent years that, in spite of historiographic and ideological difficulties, these Depositions are helpful in painting a broad picture of social and cultural dynamics in seventeenth-century Ireland, and it is to this end that we can perhaps best employ this collection when reflecting on the role of the Bible in these Depositions.[7]

2.1   The Bible in the 1641 Depositions

In researching these texts, I was able to isolate over sixty different references to the Bible in the depositions, and have categorized these into examples referring to oath swearing, and those related to destruction or desecration of Bibles.

2.2   Oath Swearing

Oxford University Press, 1998), 501-502; J.C. Beckett, "Irish-Scottish Relations in the Seventeenth Century," in *Confrontations: Studies in Irish History* (London: Faber, 1972), 26-46; Phil Kilroy, "Protestantism in Ulster, 1610-1641," in *Ulster 1641*, 25-36; Hill, *The English Bible*, 271-283.

[7] N.P. Canny, "The 1641 Depositions: A Source for Social and Cultural History," *History Ireland* 1:4 (1993): 52-55; Morgan, "Depositions," 141; Irwin, "Depositions," 284.

The first grouping of references invokes the Bible in the act of swearing an oath.[8] In these cases the Bible is said to have been used on account of an assumed positive quality: an ability to solicit honesty and integrity of word and deed on behalf of those that use it in this manner. Examples of this include gentry being asked to swear, on the Bible, allegiance to the king, Protestants being made to swear upon their Bibles an oath of association with the rebels, and Protestants swearing on the Bible not to conceal things from the rebels.[9] In all of these occurrences the Bible is understood primarily in constructive terms: it should bring forth honesty on the part of those swearing oaths. In fact, a recurring theme in several of these depositions is the shock that such oaths have been disregarded, particularly in light of the solemnity of invoking the holy text.

2.3   Destruction and Desecration

In contrast to these few instances of using the Bible to swear an oath, there are well over fifty references in the Depositions to the Bible that suggest destruction and desecration of these texts. These references are composed almost entirely of examples

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[8] Whether this is literally or figuratively is not always clear. For more on this idea, see John Spurr, "A Profane History of Early Modern Oaths," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 11 (2001): 37-63. Spurr (46) also addresses the rise of the use of Bible in the Middle Ages in ritual contexts of oaths.

[9] TCD MS 840, f. 23r, "Declaration of the Lords Gentry of Leinster and Munster"; TCD MS 828, f. 209v, "Deposition of Michael Vine"; TCD MS 831, f. 99v, "Deposition of Jane Boswell"; TCD MS 831, f. 113r, "Deposition of Rose Ennis."

of Bibles being burned, stolen, destroyed, or otherwise desecrated, and all such cases are reported to have been done at the hands of Catholics against Protestants.[10]

The most common type of destruction recounted in the Depositions is the burning of Bibles, with over twenty-five separate instances cited.[11] Some examples

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[10] On Bibles being stolen: this is noted to have happened to individuals, as well as in churches, as reclamation of church property was a large issue during this period. For personal examples, see TCD MS 834, F. 175r, "Deposition of William Reinoldes"; TCD MS 815, f. 47r, "Deposition of Morgan Couraghie"; TCD MS 813, f. 307r, "John Walsh"; TCD MS 831, f. 242r, "Deposition of James Bayley"; TCD MS 817, f. 177r, "Deposition of Arthur Aghmoty and Martin Johnston." For church-related examples, see TCD MS 816, f. 111r, "Deposition of William Howard (vicar)"; TCD MS 820, f. 211r, "Deposition of Phillip Chappell"; TCD MS 817, f. 148v, "Deposition of Nathaniel Hollington"; TCD MS 834, f. 131v-132r, "Deposition of John Mountgomery"; TCD MS 835, f. 176r, "Deposition of Elizabeth Taylor." On the issue of reclaiming church property, see Canny, "Religion, Politics, and the Irish Rising of 1641," 56-58.

[11] Examples of personal Bibles being burned include TCD MS 818, f. 25r, "Deposition of William Whalley"; TCD MS 811, f. 170r, "Deposition of Timothy Pate"; TCD MS 815, 241v, "Deposition of Thomas Collins"; TCD MS 817, f. 38r, "Deposition of Thomas Fleetwood"; TCD MS 835, f. 198v, "Deposition of Simon Crane"; TCD MS 813, f. 380v, "Deposition of Mary Squirrel"; TCD MS 815, 300v, "Deposition of Joseph Woolley"; TCD MS 815, 295r, "Deposition of John Wilmott"; TCD MS 834, f. 109v, "Deposition of Alexander Creichton"; TCD MS 836, f. 58r,

are worth noting. In the testimony of one Thomas Ricroft, for example, we read, "Those rebells … before the faces of severall protestants burnt all the bibles they cold meete … saying … in disgrace & contempt of religion, what will yow doe now yor bibles are burnt."[12] In another instance we read that one man "tooke the deponents new testament and & first opening of it spread it vpon the fire and burnt it & kept his foot vpon it, that it might be burnt the sooner, & in that action sayd of the booke that this is the thing that offends me."[13]

In addition to burning, the Depositions note the physical abuse, destruction, and denigration of Bibles. Thus, there are several instances of Bibles being cut up or torn to pieces and thrown about.[14] Other examples are given of rebels throwing Bibles out of houses and hurling stones at them.[15] A number of the documents give fuller explication of such episodes. One account notes that after a vicar had been

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"Deposition of Ellen Matchett"; TCD MS 811, f. 40r, "Deposition of Edward Deane"; TCD MS 815, f. 217r, "Deposition of David Buck." In one case it is specifically mentioned as a Greek New Testament and a book of penitential psalms (TCD MS 834, f. 103r, "Deposition of Robert Browne").

[12] TCD MS 818, f. 124r, "Deposition of Thomas Ricroft."

[13] TCD MS 820, f. 20r, "Deposition of Richard Belshire."

[14] TCD MS 815, f. 173r, "Deposition of Thomas O'Carroll"; TCD MS 835, f. 109r, "Deposition of Robert French"; TCD MS 815, f. 217r, "Deposition of Dennis O'Brennan"; TCD MS 815, f. 253r, "Deposition of Robert Robins"; TCD MS 836, f. 49r, "Deposition of William Duffeild."

[15] TCD MS 824, f. 149r, "Deposition of Agnes Tucker."

killed, "in derision to his function they tore a Leafe out of a Bible … & put this leafe vnto the said Breretons hand (being already dead) calling to him & bidding of him to preach."[16] Another deposition notes that:

> Hugh Brady … and divers others of the Rebells, did then often take into their hands the protestant bybles & wetting them on the *durty* water did 5 or 6 seuerall tymes dash the same on the face of the deponent & other protestants saying come I know you love a good lesson. Here is a most excelent one for you & come to morrow & you shall have as good a sermon as this."[17]

Finally, we read in one account that:

> "on the 24. of october last the said Rebells tooke this deponents byble opend it, and laying the open side in a puddle of water lept and stampt vpon it,

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[16] TCD MS 815, f. 376r, "Deposition of Martha Piggot"; also recounted in, TCD MS 815, f. 381r, "Deposition of Isabelle Smith." Similarly, another deponent "did see Major Piggott kild by 3 soldjers … & was stript naked before hee was kild. hee alsoe saw the Rebells sett him with his naked *& dead* body to the wall, & saw them put a bible into his hands" (TCD MS 815, f. 439v, "Deposition of Edmund MacShane Doyne"). Another episode recounts that "in the howses & shopps … & divers other Merchants within the said Cittie the protestant bybles & prayer books & other good English & protestant books were torne in peecs & vsed & imployed as wast paper to wrapp in sope startch Candles and other Wares" (TCD MS 812, f. 213v, "Deposition of James Benn").

[17] TCD MS 833, f. 1v, "Deposition of Adam Glover."

Saying a plague ont this booke it hath bred all the quarrel, … *& they hoped that within 3 weeks all the bibles in Ireland shold be vsed as that was or worse & that none should be left in the Kingdome.*"[18]

This leads us to one final category of references to the Bible, those which point to specific religious, theological, and socio-cultural issues of the day. To begin with, several accounts make the connection between the Protestants' Bibles and their misguided ways. One list makes note of a rebel in the "parish of Kill *whoe burned the Church bible saying it was the words of the divell & that … the protestants were vncristened people*."[19] In other depositions we see a deep-seated suspicion toward the Bible being available to laity. One deponent notes that "one of the rebels … teareing the singeing Psalmes out of this deponents Bible or Testament & shee reproueing of him for doeing soe, … *said to* this deponent I am sory … honest woman that you are soe deluded, for there is nothing in that booke but *the* devills Inventions."[20] We also see this idea from the vantage point of the clergy. In one account we are told of a Friar Malone who had taken pity on a group that had been captured. Some time later,

the said fryer …fownd sume bybles and other prayer bockes: which said bockes he *after* Cast into the fyer: and wished that he had all the bybles in Christendome and he would sarue them all soe: and demanding of him what

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[18] TCD MS 835, f. 170r, "Deposition of Edward Slacke."

[19] TCD MS 833, f. 162v, "List of Rebels." See also TCD MS 811, f. 47r, "Deposition of Henry Ffisher."

[20] TCD MS 820, f. 50v, "Deposition of Elizabeth Hooper."

was his reson he asnwered that it was fittinge for euery man to haue the byble

by *rote* and not to mistrucke them which should haue it by rote."[21]

3.   Materiality, Iconicity, and the Functional Dimensions of Scriptures

What are we to make of these references to the Bible in the 1641 Depositions? For

those interested in the Bible and its reception, attention is often focused on the

biblical text -- the content of the book and how that has been received. While the

content of the Bible is very much in the background of the stories told in the

Depositions (they contain, after all, the "devil's inventions"), there is very little actual

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[21] TCD MS 834, f. 119r, "Deposition of Roger Holland." Related: 'the ladyes were

contynually assaulted and laboured to goe to Masse by the preists and amongst others

had one booke of controuersy deliuered them Wherein it was vndertaken that the

protestants should bee confuted in their owne bibles" (TCD MS 831, f. 194r,

"Deposition of John Gouldsmith"). In another scene involving a priest, "when the

deponent desired his Bible, which the said ffryer tooke from him with other Books,

he refused to give it, *but* told this Deponent that he was sworne to burne all the

protestant Bibles that came to his hands." The deposition goes on to note: "The said

ffryer vsed many perswasions to this deponent and his wife to turne to their Religion

and promised them, that if they would soe to doe, they should goe with him to the

howse of Mr Barnewell of Brymore, and fare noe worse then he did" (TCD MS 810,

f. 245r, "Deposition of Edward Leech"). The role of clergy in the uprising and

subsequent conflict is complex. On this, see Canny, "Religion, Politics, and the Irish

Rising of 1641," 58-60.

reference to this content. Instead, we have oath swearing and examples of the destruction and desecration of the text. And yet, the book is there, and in some sense plays an important role.

As noted in the Introduction to this volume (pages XX), it is worth bearing in mind less text-centred elements of the reception of the Bible, and the Depositions seem to offer us a useful example of such usage. One potentially fruitful way of thinking further about these issues is found in the work of James Watts, who has proffered a three dimensional model for understanding the use of Scriptures.[22]

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[22] James W. Watts, "The Three Dimensions of Scriptures," *Postscripts* 2.2-3 (2006), 135–159, reprinted in *Iconic Books and Texts* (ed. James W. Watts; London: Equinox, 2013), 9-32.Watts (136) notes that scholars in biblical studies, and in the scholarly study of Scriptures and religious texts in general, "have devoted the vast majority of their time and publications to explaining the origins and meaning of scriptural texts." Over the past few decades some attempts have been made to deal with this disparity, touching on issues such as orality and the phenomena of how Scriptures are actually used, outside of the academy. Important examples include Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (London: SCM, 1993); Miriam Levering, ed., *Rethinking Scripture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989); William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (Signifying (On) Scriptures; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

Watts's model has several important dimensions that lie beyond the scope of this study, including a focus on the ritualized use of Scriptures that draws heavily on ritual theory, as well as a focus on Scriptures across religious traditions.[23] What I would like to focus on here is Watts's three-fold functional scheme, whereby the use of Scriptures can be classified in terms of a semantic dimension, a performative dimension, and an iconic dimension.

The semantic dimension, according to Watts,

includes all aspects of interpretation and commentary as well as appeals to the text's contents in preaching and other forms of persuasive rhetoric. This dimension has always received most if not all of the attention of scholars, for the very good reason that religious traditions themselves place great emphasis on scholarly expertise in scriptural interpretation."[24]

Meanwhile, the performative dimension of Scriptures, Watts suggests, is the performance of what is written, be it the performance of the words or the contents of Scriptures. This can take the form of ritualized public readings, recitation of texts, musical performance or singing of Scriptures, dramatic presentation, and artistic illustration.[25]

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[23] See Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory and Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[24] Watts, "The Three Dimensions," 141.

[25] Watts, "The Three Dimensions," 141-142.

Watts's third dimension, iconicity, is the most relevant for the present study. Beyond the semantic and performative levels, Scriptures function as icons. Sacred texts are iconic in that they point to something beyond themselves. As such, their physical forms are treated differently from those of other books. Scriptures are often the objects of detailed, painstaking artistic attention and illumination. "They are often displayed prominently on podiums or tables, hung on walls, or else hidden within special cases that call attention to them."[26] Further, "Scriptures are also often treated differently from other books. They are carried in religious processions, displayed to congregations, and venerated through bowing and kissing. ... They are also manipulated in political ceremonies—displayed or touched as part of oath ceremonies and waved in political rallies and protests."[27]

This iconicity can lead to another factor, which is that Scriptures often come to be identified with the tradition as a whole, and so also with the legitimization of particular traditions. Giving the example of some contemporary forms of evangelicalism, Watts notes that they take pride in carrying their Bibles, in both sacred and secular contexts. "In their hands, Bibles function as badges of Christian Identity."[28] Scriptures, then, often function as signifiers.

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[26] Watts, "The Three Dimensions," 142.

[27] Watts, "The Three Dimensions," 142.

[28] Watts, "The Three Dimensions," 148.

The issues of scriptural iconicity and signification lead to another factor, which is the potential desecration of Scriptures.[29] "Insofar as the scripture has become identified with the religion to the point that the tradition's legitimacy is conveyed by … the material book, its ritual abuse can feel like an attempt to delegitimize the whole religious tradition."[30] Thus, people often "view an attack on scriptures as an attack on themselves, on their religion, and on their god. As a result, 'violence against books is understood by all parties involved as being comparable to violence against people and/or ideas.'"[31]

4.   Returning to the 1641 Depositions

Watts's reflections on the functional dimensions of Scriptures, it seems to me, are helpful for thinking about the references to the Bible in the 1641 Depositions because, rather than the semantic text or the performance of it, it is the iconic, signifying book that is most often invoked here. The material, iconic text is used to

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[29] James W. Watts, "Desecrating Scriptures," A Case Study for the Luce Project in Media, Religion, and International Relations (2009). Cited 20 October 2014. Online at http://surface.syr.edu/rel/3/.

[30] Watts, "Desecrating Scriptures," § 1.

[31] Watts, "Desecrating Scriptures," § 4. The last quotation is from Cordell Waldron, "New Testaments Burned in Israel," from the *Iconic Books Blog*, May 28, 2008; n.p. Cited 20 October 2014. Online: http://iconicbooks.blogspot.ie/2008/05/new-testaments-burned-in-israel.html.

swear oaths, it is used as a bargaining chip, it is desecrated and destroyed. Why this focus on the material text, the iconic dimension?

To begin with, it is clear that the Bible—and in particular, the English Bible—was emerging as a Protestant signifier in this period. It is well known that the vernacular Bible was a key agent in Reform-based efforts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[32] The Reformed traditions would thrive on the notion of individuals engaging the Bible for themselves. Further, as Christopher Hill's study on the use of the Bible in the English revolutionary period points out, the vernacular Bible played a major role in English nationalism during the century and a half prior to the Revolution. This correlation of the English Bible and nationalism, Hill notes, became potent in part because it asserted "the supremacy of the English language."[33]

This highlights a unique confluence of issues during this period: for Protestants in seventeenth-century Ireland, to possess the vernacular Bible spoke of their Reformed faith, of their language, and even of their nationality and political allegiance. In fact, one Deposition notes that a Protestant was urged to convert, to join the rebellion, and to burn her Bible. She responds that "before she would burne her

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[32] Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1993), 3-44; Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982); Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood, eds., *The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Fearghus Ó Fearghail, *The Irish Testament of 1602* (The Bedell Boyle Lecture 2003; Dublin: National Bible Society, 2004).

[33] Hill, *The English Bible*, 7; cf. 264-270.

Bible … or turne against her countrie shee would die upon the poynt of the sword which [she and her husband] made good upon the saboath day in the morneing next."[34] Here the Bible and nationalism are explicitly linked. Thus, it is clear that the English Bible became an iconic text for Protestants in seventeenth century Ireland, a signification that was at once religious and political. The numerous references in the Depositions to the material Bible and its misuse appear to bear this out. The way in which the Bible is treated symbolizes larger issues at play. Desecration of the holy book is seen as coterminous with antipathy to the peoples and traditions for which it stands.

What, if anything, might we say about Irish Catholics from this period? This question is more complex. We do know that while the Reformed traditions were embracing the vernacular Bible, the Catholic tradition held firm to its belief that the Scriptures were better off in Latin, and in the hands of the clergy.[35] Further, when the Bible would eventually be translated into Irish at the turn of the seventeenth century, it was primarily a Protestant-led endeavor, to be used as a tool of conversion of Gaelic-speaking Ireland (see Ó Fearghail's contribution in Chapter ??).[36] Thus, it is not hard to imagine that for the Irish Catholics of this period, there might have been

[34] TCD MS 815, f. 197v, "Deposition of John Glass."

[35] This notion lasted in effect until Vatican II. See Daniel J. Harrington, "Catholic Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Bible in the Churches: How Different Christians Interpret the Scriptures* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 35.

[36] Ó Fearghail, *The Irish Testament of 1602*. See also Ford, *The Reformation in Ireland*.

hostility toward this book. For Catholics, the English Bible was no Bible at all; the Bible was in Latin; *this* book stood for otherness, English imperialism, and perhaps theological and ecclesial chaos.[37] However, the extent to which this might have informed action taken against Protestants and their Bibles is not a straightforward issue, at least as far as the Depositions are concerned.

Here we must bear in mind the serious historical and ideological questions that surround these documents. As noted earlier, it is important to note that these Depositions are in fact a compilation of materials that were gathered over several years following the rising, and consist of claims by refugees for compensation for losses incurred during the rising, statements taken to gather intelligence for military purposes, and materials gathered to prosecute those accused of atrocities. With this in mind, I would suggest that we are able to glean much more from these Depositions about seventeenth-century Protestants than about Irish Catholics. The Protestants being deposed recognise the value and significance of the Bible as an iconic text, and highlight this in their own narrative retellings of the events to their Protestant audience. Indeed, the ideological nature of these testmonies may reinforce the larger point here under discussion: the Bible, the iconic signifying text, becomes a tool by which passions might be aroused and sympathy might be gained because of what the book itself has come to represent. The Bible does not even actually have to have been desecrated for this process to take root; the mere telling of such stories highlights and reinscribes the (English) Bible's iconic status. What comes through very clearly in

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[37] As Alan Ford points out (*Reformation in Ireland*), there was an underlying assumption on both sides that Reformation and Anglicization would go hand in hand.

these Depositions is that the Bible was emerging as (another) significant marker of difference between natives and settlers.[38]

5.   Conclusions

Taking on board the various historical and ideological complexities inherent in dealing with this collection, it remains the case that it is primarily the material object and the Bible as icon that we find in the pages of the 1641 Depositions. While it is all but impossible to verify the veracity of statements given in these Depositions, the very way in which the Bible is invoked in the testimonies belies larger understandings of what the Bible had come to represent in this era, particularly for Protestants, and the significant place the Bible was coming to have in identity formation. The Depositions are a reminder that fully appreciating how Scriptures are used may require us to look beyond the content of sacred texts and take seriously the functional dimensions of these Scriptures, not least of which is their iconic, signifying power.

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