Summer 6-2021

Traveling Tolerances: English-Speaking Protestants Abroad After the Restoration

Lisa Clark Diller
Southern Adventist University, ldiller@southern.edu

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One of the assumptions often bandied about in twentieth century educational circles is the importance of travel for widening perspectives and deepening understandings of difference in a way that contributes to comfort with pluralism. In my work on the limits of liberalism, and specifically those limits that were obvious in what is often viewed as the birth place and time of liberalism, seventeenth century England, I have found myself wondering whether travel would play that same role for English-speaking folks in the decades of the Restoration. These were the years when the subjects of the Stuarts wrestled with one of the elements usually attributed to liberalism: religious toleration, or the ability of loyal citizens to practice their religious beliefs without fear of reprisal. Toleration in this context refers not to whether folks of one religious stripe were happy to live near practitioners of a faith they disapproved of, nor does it refer to equality within the polity, but to whether the state provided for legal space for more than one denomination or religious practice. Would travel in societies that were more overtly pluralist in their populations impact which options seemed most attractive to those British writers reporting on their experiences?

It has been observed that the subjects of the Stuarts were among the most well-travelled in Europe. Of course the reasons for travel were highly varied. In the seventeenth century the tradition of young men travelling as part of their education was already strengthening; but as the Stuarts expanded their empire, there were greater economic benefits to travel as well.[1] These same global realities also promoted political/diplomatic travel, missionary work and religiously-motivated emigration (whether short or long-term). English-speaking travelers made judgements on how well their host societies handled their religious commitments, including their tolerance for religious pluralism. And rather than be inspired by any of the religious settlements they observed, it appears that travelers were primarily instructed in the negative—these were ways NOT to organize the British Christian state.

The primary models of religious diversity most noticed by British men and women were in Holland and France. However, the Spanish empire in the Americas, the Islamic world, the outposts of European trade in the Indian Ocean, and the developing English colonies in the Americas also provided exotic spaces for observing societies with different religious settlements. As Linda Colley has long pointed out, France loomed large as a menacing Catholic power with an increasingly put-upon Protestant minority. This was *not* how to handle the spiritual settlement. Beginning in the mid 1660s, Louis XIV was changing policy with respect to French Protestants and narratives of their suffering were becoming very popular in England—and some of these were sponsored by state administrators to support an anti-French policy. However, martyr narratives and refugee stories were bolstered by the accounts of English men and women who travelled to France.[2] Tony Claydon has argued that "English Protestants often identified their religious foes, not with a precise theological position, but simply by their violence toward other Christians."[3] John Locke, who had once admired the court of Louis XIV as representing one of the high points of civilization was horrified by what happened to the Protestants and in his *Second Treatise* argued that "the Civilized part of Mankind… [was] corrupted…. By the Gallic

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[1] John Stoye, *English Travellers Abroad,* (Yale, 1989), 4.
[2] Tony Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England, 1660-1760*. (Cambridge, 2007), 137
[3] Claydon, 169

disease" and turned to tyranny and persecution. Travel and experience could change one's mind about what constituted civilization.[4]

By the time the Scots Anglican minister Gilbert Burnet travelled there in 1685, the country was roiling with religious persecution. Burnet was horrified. "I went over the greatest part of France while it was in its hottest rage," he wrote.[5] Like other Protestants, he saw the Revocation of the Edict of Nante and the expulsion or forced conversation of French Calvinists as the absolute model of what Catholic tyranny could accomplish. John Evelyn, also traveling across Europe in 1685, used extremely dramatic language when he reported on all the persecution of the French Huguenots and described some of the tragedies in his journal: "the sending to the Gallies all the Ministers" and executing people as "relapsers", taking away all children from Protestant parents, confiscating land, burning libraries. [6]   In general, this association with Catholicism with persecution and the continuation of the Reformation-era Protestant mythos of popery as tyranny was coalescing on France, rather than Spain during the Restoration.

Against the negative example of France as a Catholic state doing it wrong was Holland, often positively framed as handling its religious diversity effectively. During the reign of James II many of the religious and political exiles who had angered the king by their outspoken dissent were at the court of William Prince of Orange and his wife Mary, heir to the Stuart throne. The correspondence between the two countries, and the experience of the English-speaking refugees there, led to a natural comparison. James himself appealed to the Dutch example saying "he was resolved to lay aside all the penal laws in matters of religion: they saw too well the advantages that Holland had by the liberty of conscience that was settled among them."[7] A Protestant pamphleteer commented about Holland, "Roman Catholics continue still in your country and though the ill inclinations they showed made it necessary for public safety to put them out of the government, yet they still enjoyed their common rights of the country with the free exercise of their religion."[8] As was traditional for toleration in these years, there was no sense that all religious expressions (or God forbid, atheism) were equal, but that worship was tolerated and economic integration and perhaps property rights might be allowed for a diversity of religious groups.

For many British Protestants, the Prince of Orange was an attractive advisor during the crisis of 1688/89 because the Dutch religious settlement was so appealing and William could "give due limits to the prerogative and our Liberty to secure us that are the Protestant subjects in our Religion and to show the king what sort of liberty he truly ought to expect for his Roman Catholique subjects."[9] The Netherlands, viewed as England's natural Protestant allies, gave a clear model for what toleration could look like—a Protestant settlement with a state church that

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[4] S.J. Savonious-Wroth, "Political Imagination of John Locke," in *Politics, Religion and Ideas in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain.* Edited by Justin Champion, John Coffey, Tim Harris and John Marshall. (Boydell, 2019), 150-152.

[5] Burnet, *History of My Own Times*, vol. 3, 75.

[6] John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2005), 296.

[7] Burnet, *History of My Own Times*, vol. 3, 166.

[8] "Reflections on a Pamphlet entitled *Parliamentium pacificum*," March 16,1688, Stowe 305, f., 156(b), British Library, London; the Catholic writer Joshua Basset thought Holland was a bad example of religious practice because it was a divided and ungodly country, *Reason and Authority* (London, 1687).

[9] Mr. Sergant Finch? Speech to Commons Jan 28, 1689, DDCa 17/214, f. 29(b), Lancashire Record Office, Preston, England.

still allowed Jews, Dissenting Protestants, and Catholics to worship without fear for their lives and property, if not with full social equality.

But the context of travel itself helped shape opinions about how possible it could or should be for people of opposing viewpoints to live as citizens of the same community. Most travelers relied on local hosts and guides for their understanding of the political community, and when those were Catholic, the British observers frequently found themselves allowing for exemptions to their stereotypes. Gilbert Burnet, like many a Protestant with a Catholic friend, exempted the Catholics he met in France from the general execration of "popery." He reported that both Catholics and Protestants in France thought disunity within Christianity promoted atheism and that most French Catholics thought the pope's power was problematic and reformation of some sort was needed.[10] Frequently travelers could appreciate Catholic practitioners, institutions and rituals abroad and still be very suspicious of them at home.[11] Reading these sorts of cultural tourism accounts that were created by young men on educational tours, or religious refugees from the Stuart court, one can too easily confuse admiration of architecture and individuals with a desire to promote toleration or pluralism at home.

John Evelyn's hysterical reporting on the horror King Louis's actions caused was also tempered by the relationships he formed and what he saw as the resistance of the general population to these actions: "France was almost dispeopled, the bankers so broaken that the Tyrants revenue exceedingly diminished: Manufacture ceased, & every body there save the Jesuites etc abhorring what was don: nor the Papists themselves approving it; what the intention farther is time will shew, but doubtless portending some extraordinary revolution."[12] Clearly Evelyn saw the violence of the Revocation of the Edict as ensuing primarily from the French king and absolved most of the French Catholics from the guilt of this tragedy. Such generalizing from a few sympathetic hosts allowed British tourists to enjoy their travels and to assume that most of the people they met agreed with them.

Occasionally the kind of expansion of hearts and minds that modern liberals often assume is provided by travel do show up. For instance, while was very important to Protestant parents who sent their sons abroad for an educational tour that those same young men come back equally committed to their faith, this wasn't always the case. Some of the diaries or memoirs from these nascent Grand Tours expose devout English-speaking young Calvinists finding that some of their ideas were broadened when they spent time among Huguenots in France, who were more lenient in their practices.[13] And while not everyone went this far, the English non-conformist minister Edmund Calamy explained that his experience of toleration in Utrecht (during the reign of James) even positively affected his opinion of Catholics.[14] These were usually personal experiences and not connected to their ideas about how the British state should organize its toleration policies.

William Bulman's *Anglican Enlightenment* adds a great deal to our understanding of another form of travel, that of religious scholarship. He argues that early Orientalists in the Restoration period such as Lancelot Andrews, Lancelot Addison, and William Nicolson wanted

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[10] Burnet, vol. 2, 394-95.
[11] Stoye, 8.
[12] John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2005), 296.
[13] Stoye, 304-307. Stoye uses the examples of Thomas Wharton and his brother, whose father, Lord Wharton, was very concerned at the ways their religious practices flagged as they stayed with French Calvinist families in Caen.
[14] Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), 171.

to know more about non-Christian and Catholic religious practices on a deep level in order to better convert them to Protestantism. Addison, in particular, was ecumenical abroad, but against toleration at home. While he returned from his travels in North Africa and Spain with broader understanding of religious and cultural traditions and a sort of "elite secularity," Addison remained even more committed to the importance of Anglican predominance in Britain. In fact, the inability of the Stuarts to provide strong Anglican religious instruction and enforcement in their colonies, was especially obvious in the Tangier of Addison's experience, where the presence of Portuguese protected by Charles II's 1662 treaty merely added to the Catholic nature of the administration of the colony, let alone the indigenous population.[15] Clearly travel, while adding nuance to English understanding of other contexts for faith practice, could reinforce fidelity to Protestantism in its Anglican form.

Like his Scots compatriot, Gilbert Burnet, Addison believed that reform of Christians at home went hand in hand with conversions abroad. Along with his other Anglican scholars, Addison translated and composed texts in Arabic, Hebrew, and Algonquin in order to better communicate with those they were converting. Addison thought living side by side in a pluralistic community could allow Anglicans to convert non-Christians. However, Bulman argues that Addison's failure to actually convert many Jews "left Addison flustered. But they also led him to reflect upon the dynamics of religious competition and pastoral power in England, across Europe and throughout the world."[16] These early forms of ecumenical cultural exchanges in the Levant, North Africa and India pre-empted the attempt by the SPCK after the Glorious Revolution to connect scholarship with real-life knowledge of the target cultures for missionary clergy.[17] Additionally, Addison's *West Barbary* narrative offered "implicit commentary on the English Revolution."[18] Clearly, current events and concerns for statecraft and religion, were never far from the minds of many travelers.

When the travel was economic or diplomatic in nature, the arguments about toleration and getting along took a decidedly utilitarian rather than idealist form. Overtly religious arguments took a back seat during the wars with the Dutch. Rather than waxing lyrical about their thriving pluralist society, Sir George Downing's description of his time in Holland focused on his criticisms of their immoral economic practices.[19] Other travelers who were writing anti-Dutch propaganda during the Restoration war years accused them of being both rebels against kingship *and* as proponents of their own universal monarchy.[20] In this fashion anti-Dutch writers such as Henry Stubbe removed Holland from the realms of Christian brotherhood for the purposes of war by referencing their perfidy and cruelty.[21] It seems that any form of behavior that was abhorrent to the observer could be criticized as anti-Christian and the society or entity be put beyond the pale, whether that bad behavior was religious, economic, political or social. "Christianity" as a category was being used by English-writing Protestants in a more global context as a stand-in for civility and morality. In this, we can see evidences of William Bulman's observation that travel and its commentaries were tending toward the universal categories so

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[15] William J. Bulman, *Anglican Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2015), 3-6, 23-36, 213.
[16] Bulman, 66.
[17] Bulman, 62-69.
[18] Bulman, 89.
[19] Tony Claydon *Europe and the Making of England, 1660-1760. (Cambridge, 2007), 137*
[20] Claydon, 139. They were also accused of cruelty and treachery due to their treatment of English prisoners and their allies, pp. 142, 143.
[21] Claydon, 148-151.

beloved by the Enlightenment.[22] With increasing travel, British Christians were beginning to relativize their ideas about the desirability of religious pluralism and civility.[23]

Such exposure to diversity abroad could contribute to observing pluralism within the three kingdoms. Intentional exposure to ethnic and religious minorities could also be utilized for such pedagogical and sympathizing purposes. In 1687, the political economist and Irish sympathizer William Petty wrote an unpublished essay "A remedy to the Fears and Jealousys which the king of England's nonpapist subjects may conceive concerning their being forced from their religion." For the good of national unity and economic flourishing he encouraged English men and women to go visit the Catholic churches in their areas. He thought that seeing the extreme demographic minority, as well as the de-mystification of the Roman services, would give confidence to the English Protestant majority that their polity was in a good state. Petty thought that this sort of local tourism, provided by the happenstance of a Catholic king who allowed the open practice of Catholicism for a few years, could soften the hearts of Protestants, presenting the toleration of Catholicism as harmless. While Addison had no desire to support toleration at home, but advocated for it in the colonies for practical purposes of statecraft, Petty based his domestic toleration proposals on a similar grounding of civil unity.

However, John Evelyn, who partook of this domestic tourism of Catholic worship services, had a more nuanced view of it. Several times in early 1687 he attended Catholic chapels in England to hear Italian singers or other foreign visitors. He said he "found much crowding, little devotion." While he opposed the promotion of Catholics by James II in violation of local policies (in towns and the universities and in the military), he didn't seem to mind the allowance of public worship. In April 1687, he again described how full the Catholic chapels were, but also that the Dissenting chapels were full as well, and that tolerating Catholics did more for Nonconformists than for Catholics, so it was only Anglicans who were left alone protesting against the penal laws and Test Act being abrogated.[24] Evelyn was among those who could appreciate Catholicism in its place and still be deeply concerned about its expansion in terms of power. For him, toleration of practice was compatible with exclusion from public office.

Travel in societies with different political and religious settlements allowed English-speaking Protestants to expand their imagination and reinforced many of their commitments. Sometimes they learned to articulate their ideals in new language, but mostly their travel appears to have provided evidence to support the commitments they already had. While it may have been possible for new experiences to cause them to change their minds about whether religious toleration or pluralism was a good idea, they most frequently seem to have found broader vocabulary or a more cosmopolitan framework within which to house their desire to promote a particular political theology.

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[22] Bulman, 126.
[23] Bulman, 131.
[24] John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2005), 304.