The vocabulary of religious conflict in early modern English

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Abstract

This paper will propose an analysis of the lexicon of religious conflict in a small corpus of Protestant and Roman Catholic English texts.

The excommunication of Elizabeth I of England by Papal Bull in 1570 and the attempted conquest of Ireland by Catholic forces in 1579 precipitated the already strained diplomatic relations between London and Rome during the complex process of definition of the established Church of England. The Registers of the Company of Stationers bear clear witness to the rapid development of religious polemic in English during this time, and of its culmination in the anti-Catholic 'Campion controversy' in the early 1580s. Edmund Campion's widely circulated manuscript 'challenge' to the Church of England elicited in fact an unprecedented debate: one 'challenge' was met by a 'refutation', challenged in its turn by a 'censure', supported by a 'defence' and answered by yet another 'response'. These texts and the controversies they bore are all inter-related, as are their vocabulary and language.

My paper will discuss the results of a corpus-based study of a small group of texts published in print or manuscript between 1579 and 1584. It will centre on the lexicological analysis of the series of binary oppositions produced by 'the Protestant analysis of popish anti-Christianity' (Lake 1989, 73) towards an assessment of the language of the Protestant and Roman Catholic authors.