

Defending the 'faith':
Henry VIII, the Pilgrimage of Grace,
and the power of images

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The pamphlet Assertio Septem Sacramentorum [Defence of the Seven Sacraments], published in 1521, seeded the idea that Catholicism was not only under attack by the reformation, but that Henry played a powerful role in fighting the reformers. This article explores two artefacts, each symbolising the idea of defending the faith, yet sitting in deep tension with each other: the first, a painting featuring Latin scripture in the hands of Henry VIII; the second, a tapestry badge featuring the wounds of Christ. Both artefacts reveal defence of the faith to be an instrument of political persuasion, as well as an expression of religious ideology. This article uncovers fresh evidence to connect the painting to Henry's meeting with Francis I in 1532, through whom he sought to influence the Pope, in a last-ditch act of diplomacy before finally breaking from Rome.



Figure 1. Joos van Cleve, Henry VIII, c.1532, oil on panel, 72.4 x 58.6 cm, Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2021

On images of Tudor kingship, Sydney Anglo acknowledges the ‘very complex questions, of intentionality and serendipity in the creation of dynastic imagery’.¹ Debate over the date of Van Cleve’s painting suggests that it could be from before, or after, the break from Rome in 1533.² Given the most distinctive component of the painting is the scroll held by Henry, featuring a bible verse in Latin which translates ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15), the origination of the painting is crucial to unlocking the intentionality of the artist: portraying Henry as Defender of the Faith, loyal to Rome, or Defender of the Faith in his defiance of Rome, literally taking the word into his hands. Evidence for the latter is considered by the Royal Collection, ‘The same words were inscribed on Holbein’s title page for the Coverdale Bible of 1535’, while acknowledging the scope for serendipity, in being one of ten verses quoted on the title page of the Coverdale Bible. The Royal Collection also suggests more compelling evidence which places the painting before the break from Rome: it matches in size, composition and costume to the same artist’s portrayal of Francis I, suggesting they were painted as pendants to commemorate

the kings’ 1532 meeting in Calais and Boulogne.³ This article reveals fresh evidence to support this origination. Hall’s *Chronicle* ‘containing the history of England’, describes in fine detail the exact clothes Henry was wearing at this meeting: ‘The kyng of Englande was appareled in a cote of great riches, in braides of golde laied lose on Russet Veluet, and set with Traifoyles, full of pearle and stone.’⁴ This precisely matches the most distinctive components of Henry’s dress as detailed in Van Cleve’s painting: the defining construct of braids of gold, laid on a reddish-orange velvet, which has been cut to expose the shirt beneath, and, where the braids cross, clusters of pearl and stone jewels are set. The *Chronicle* was published in 1548, suggesting it likely Hall had referred to van Cleve’s painting for the description, or that perhaps both parties had received the description from a third party. Either way, the painting is closely associated with the meeting between Henry and Francis. Hall continues to describe the tone of this meeting as being greatly positive, ‘the twoo kynges [...] embrased eachother in suche fashion, that all behelde them reioysed’, marking a conciliatory approach to Henry’s foreign policy with France, in

the hope that Francis might make a final bid to the pope to grant him the divorce he desperately needed.⁵

Van Cleve’s intended audience must also be carefully considered to identify intentionality over serendipity. A theory discussed by the Royal Collection is that van Cleve had created the painting speculatively, with the hope of winning future royal commissions. This feels a contrivance, as a way of explaining how he came to paint Henry having never been recorded as visiting England. As Anglo also advises ‘it is not always clear just whose gaze [Tudor images] were intended for or whose vanity they were supposed to flatter’, offering examples of paintings which were ‘probably acquired or commissioned by the owner of the house [...] because he had participated *with the king* in the various events thus celebrated’.⁶ The ownership of the painting offers compelling insight, hitherto unconsidered. The painting was acquired by Charles I, from Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel. While the 14th Earl was a famous art collector, who could well have acquired the painting of his own volition, there is compelling rationale that he inherited it, having been originally acquired by his great-grandfather, Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel. According to Lion

Cust ‘for the hereditary instinct [of Thomas Howard’s art collecting] it is necessary to go back to the days of Henry Fitzalan’.⁷ Henry Fitzalan accompanied Henry VIII to Calais in 1532, as a page to his court. This would have been a hugely exciting field trip for a fifteen-year-old, and of symbolic foundation to his later appointment as deputy of Calais in 1540. Whether it was Fitzalan, or a fellow courtier, who originally commissioned the work alongside the portrait of Francis, in commemoration of the meeting in Calais, one can imagine this painting as being quite thrilling to own: Fitzalan was a staunch Roman Catholic, and, once decodified, the painting represents an almost embarrassing memento of Henry’s failed diplomacy, in subservience to papal authority.⁸

The composition, cropped closely to Henry’s upper torso, replete with fine details of his clothing, offers a much more intimate relationship with the sitter compared to an imposing full length, hands on hips, Holbein type of portrait. Henry’s hands, instead, delicately unfurl the scroll, which offers the script for the viewers’ benefit, placing Henry in a dutiful role as Defender of the Faith, as the pope had intended. Prayer scrolls themselves, according to the British

1 Sydney Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship* (London: Seaby, 1992), p. 5.

2 ‘Joos van Cleve: Henry VIII’, *Royal Collection Trust* <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/403368/henry-vi-ii-1491-1547>> [accessed 24 February 2021].

3 ‘Joos Van Cleve: Henry VIII’.

4 Edward Hall, Richard Grafton, and Henry Ellis, *Hall’s Chronicle; Containing the History of England, during the Reign of Henry the Fourth, and the Succeeding Monarchs, to the End of the Reign of Henry the Eighth, in Which Are Particularly Described the Manners and Customs of Those Periods*, vii, [1], 868, [39] p. (London: Printed for J. Johnson [etc.], 1809), p. 803 <<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000769753>>.

5 Hall, Grafton, and Ellis, p. 803.

6 Anglo, p. 112.

7 Lionel Cust and Mary L. Cox, ‘Notes on the Collections Formed by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel and Surrey, K. G.’, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 19.101 (1911), 278–86 (p. 278) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/858816>> [accessed 7 March 2021].

8 ‘Arundel’, *Britannica* (Horace Everett Hooper, 1911), 706–707 <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page%3AEb1911_-_Volume_02.djvu/750> [accessed 7 March 2021].



Figure 2. Unknown, Badge of the Five Wounds of Christ, early 16th Century, embroidered textile, Arundel Castle

Library Archives, ‘were one of the casualties of the Reformation’.⁹ The Latin language, and indeed the use of a prayer scroll, was considered distinctly papal, which according to Susan Doran ‘were common as part of the devotional practices of late-medieval England [in which the user] touched the material object so as to become closer to the divine and earn heavenly reward in the afterlife.’¹⁰ This is an important detail that helps to further cast the painting in new light, where Henry’s unfurling of the scroll might be seen as the delicate act of a devout king; as opposed to a post-break interpretation, which might see Henry’s hands as representing the potency or agency of royal touch.

According to Cust, it was ‘after the death of Henry VIII when [Fitzalan] formed a collection of pictures and works of art [...] “right worthy of remembrance”’.¹¹ Tantalisingly, Fitzalan had purchased Nonsuch Palace a decade after Henry’s death, and according to Mary Hervey, ‘he completed and beautified the place’. One can imagine van Cleve’s painting sitting pride of place for Fitzalan, as a Catholic, and a witness to the

occasion; although perhaps this was not the memorial Henry might have envisaged, in a building that was itself a failed memorial. It is promising to then track Fitzalan’s collection to one recipient, according to Hervey, ‘[he left] Nonsuch, with all its priceless treasures, to his widowed and childless son-in-law Lord Lumley’.¹² An inventory marking the death of Lord Lumley in 1609 includes at least three portraits of Henry VIII.¹³ Of this collection, Cust explains ‘it may be conjectured with some probability that a certain number of them, especially portraits of family interest, passed by virtue of direct descent to the only surviving representative of Henry Fitzalan, namely, the aforesaid Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel.’¹⁴ According to the Royal Collection, the painting was later acquired from Thomas Howard by Charles I.¹⁵ Arnold Meyer describes Charles I as having ‘a predilection for Italian culture [linked first by] aestheticism, the second Italy, and the last Roman Catholicism’. This delicate painting would have been an aesthetic reminder of the last moment an English monarch had such links to Rome, and perhaps brought Charles strength as he married a Catholic,

⁹ ‘Collection Items: Henry VIII’s Prayer Roll’, *British Library*.

¹⁰ Susan Doran, ‘Henry VIII and the Reformation’, *British Library*, 2019 <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/henry-viii-prayer-roll#>> [accessed 20 February 2021].

¹¹ Cust and Cox, p. 278.

¹² Mary F. S. Hervey, ‘A LUMLEY INVENTORY OF 1609’, *The Volume of the Walpole Society*, 6 (1917), 36–50 (p. 37) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41830002>> [accessed 9 March 2021].

¹³ Hervey, p. 48.

¹⁴ Cust and Cox, p. 278.

¹⁵ ‘Joos Van Cleve: Henry VIII’.

and 'mainly founded on religious sentiment [...] became aware of a pronounced mental affinity between himself and the actual leaders of the Catholic Church'.¹⁶ Thus he may have been particularly interested in this representation of Henry as a European, and Catholic, statesman, and the positive associations this brought to the title *Fidei Defensor*, which Charles, and indeed all subsequent monarchs, inherited from Henry VIII.

Van Cleve had captured a rare moment of desperate diplomacy and influence, through Francis, to win favour with Rome. According to Richardson 'but for the power of Charles V, Clement would probably have complied'.¹⁷ Charles's aunt, Catherine, was at risk of public humiliation if the divorce was to be granted, and thus more was being defended by Charles than simply faith. Henry's attempts at diplomacy had ultimately failed: 'What had begun as a polite request from an English king to the pope, became a determined campaign to rid England of all papal authority.'¹⁸ While Henry continued to use the title *Fidei Defensor*, this took on a new, uncontrollable, authority. The dissolution of the monasteries soon followed, which as Richardson explains, also had little to do with

faith: 'Financially hard pressed as ever, Henry could not resist the prospect of their wealth'. This was the major factor in provoking the Pilgrimage of Grace, due to 'the loss of the livelihood and the social welfare services traditionally provided by the monastic orders'.¹⁹ Doctrinally, The Act of Ten Articles, published in 1536, had reduced the seven sacraments, which Henry had so vehemently defended, down to three. According to Williams, 'There does not seem to have been any lively concern with the doctrine of the Ten Articles. Some men were drawn by their fears for the future [...] more were alarmed at the abolition of holidays and the clergy were naturally uneasy at the threat to their livelihood'. Faith, however, was used as a powerful symbol of political influence by the Pilgrims, played straight back at Henry.

The Pilgrimage of Grace adopted the symbol of the Five Wounds of Christ for their cause. Given the unplanned nature of the rising, it seems to represent impressively considered branding. Instead, according to Fletcher and McCulloch: 'A set of these badges was apparently made for a planned crusade in North Africa in 1511; Thomas Cromwell was furious that Lord Darcy allowed the Pilgrims

to appropriate them in 1536 in their rebellion.'²⁰ This mixture of 'here's one we prepared earlier' serendipity, met the intentionality of Darcy who, having originally resisted the rebels, succumbed to 'the fundamental assumptions of Tudor society [in which] the commons expected the gentry to give the lead.'²¹ He made the gesture of providing these badges with which they might march; a symbol likely to have also been hoisted aloft as banners. His home, Pontefract Castle, was 'known since the 13th century as the Key to the North', and it is fitting that the symbol of the rebellion might originate from here.²² Darcy did not get involved until a fortnight after Aske branded the movement a pilgrimage.²³ Thus the retrofit symbolism was itself applied after The Pilgrimage had already picked up a head of steam, so should not be considered an image which inspired initial recruitment. That said, in depicting the suffering of Christ, this no doubt inspired the cause of those who wore the badge; according to Walter Hilton, a 14th century canon of an Augustinian priory

exclaimed 'what scripture conveys to the clerks, a picture is wont to exhibit to the layfolk'.²⁴ But the intended audience would primarily have been Henry himself: according to Fletcher and McCulloch, 'the grace which [the Pilgrimage] sought was not primarily grace from God, but grace from the king for his poor subjects.'²⁵ According to Penry Williams 'Ultimately the Pilgrimage was a defence of local communities against the intrusion of Cromwell [and] his political henchmen', and clearly unable to enact any deposition 'had therefore to rely upon the King himself turning against Cromwell'.²⁶

Sir John Elyot published *The Book named the Governour*, dedicated to Henry VIII, seeking to codify governance and statesmanship in 1531. He explains 'we be men and nat aungels, wherefore we knowe nothings but by [...] some exteriour signe, and that is either by laudable report, or excellencie in vesture, or other thinge semblable'.²⁷ The Pilgrims' badges infused religious with heraldic symbolism: the five

16 Arnold Oskar Meyer, 'Charles I. and Rome', *The American Historical Review*, 19.1 (1913), 15 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1834804>>.

17 Glenn Richardson, *Renaissance Monarchy: The Reigns of Henry VIII, Francis I and Charles V, Reconstructions in Early Modern History* (London : New York: Arnold ; co-published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 130.

18 Richardson, p. 131.

19 Richardson, pp. 133-34.

20 Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions, Seminar Studies in History*, Rev. 5th ed (Harlow, England ; New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), p. 72.

21 Fletcher and MacCulloch, p. 7.

22 'Pontefract Castle Stories', *Pontefract Castle* <<https://www.pontefractcastle.co.uk/Castle-Stories.aspx>> [accessed 3 March 2021].

23 'The Pilgrimage of Grace, Timeline', *Tudor Times* <<https://tudortimes.co.uk/military-warfare/the-pilgrimage-of-grace/timeline>> [accessed 7 March 2021].

24 G. R Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters & of the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), p. 137.

25 Fletcher and MacCulloch, p. 31.

26 Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 232-322.

27 Elyot Sir John, 'Justice Distributive', in *The Book Names the Governour*, ed. by Croft, 1531 (188-201, 1833), I.

wounds of Christ were formally arranged within a shield shaped outline, and (as exemplified by fig.2) were presented on rich red velvet, and woven with fine gold thread. Such visual language would have appealed to Henry as a Christian, as well as a King, appealing to both religious faith, and feudal ideas of honour and loyalty. Beyond the heraldry, all Pilgrims also swore an oath which specifically protected loyalty to the king. Fletcher and MacCulloch honour the ability of the central organiser, Aske: his 'achievement in creat[ing] a demonstration that had an atmosphere of honour and chivalry was remarkable.'²⁸ Unfortunately the honour which the Pilgrims sought to do business, was refuted by Henry and his chief negotiator, Norfolk.

The only remaining badge (fig.2) is in the ownership of the current Duke of Norfolk at Arundel Castle: a family keepsake which reflects the key role Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk, took in purloining it. Where Christ's five wounds resulted from the betrayal of Judas, the 3rd Duke of Norfolk betrayed the Pilgrimage of Grace. Before meeting the Pilgrims at Doncaster Bridge to discuss terms, Norfolk wrote to Henry: 'I beseech you to take in gode part what so ever promes I shall make unto the rebells for sewerly I shall observe no

part thereof'.²⁹ According to Fletcher and MacCulloch '[Aske] wanted to trust Norfolk and, with Darcy's backing, he won [...] in the presence of Norfolk, the Pilgrims tore off their badges of the Five Wounds, saying 'We will all wear no badge nor sign but the badge of our sovereign lord.'" One can imagine the Duke pocketing the badge as a symbolic keepsake, and 'In the end, Henry only won with false promises'.³⁰ For Darcy and Aske, the badge became a self-fulfilling prophecy, where their defence of the faith resulted in execution, albeit a beheading as opposed to a crucifixion. For the Duke of Norfolk, the badge became a memento for the part he played in this moment of history, just as the Van Cleve painting became a memento for the Earl of Arundel.³¹

Where both artefacts represent the idea of defending the faith, 'faith' can be considered a proxy for political power and influence. In the instance that Henry sought diplomatic resolve, through Francis, continued defence of the 'faith' would have been intended as reassurance to the Pope, in an attempt to secure the divorce Henry so desperately wished for; itself so clearly detached in spirit and in doctrine from the Catholic faith. In reaction to this, Charles V's defiance, itself an exertion of political power and influence, was less the defence of faith, and more

the defence of honour, namely that of his aunt. Glenn Richardson considers honour for European monarchs being 'derived from being regarded as three things: a Christian governor, a generous but discerning patron and above all, a successful warrior'.³² Leveraging the break from Rome to ransack the wealth of the monasteries would have demonstrated little honour in the eyes of the many, which according to Richardson 'produced an unprecedented financial windfall for the king and his favourites'.³³ The Pilgrimage of Grace, in response, acted with considerable and contrasting honour. While they could be equally accused of leveraging the idea of faith as a political tool against changes that had affected their livelihoods, there were of course reasonable fears for their belief system. Although labelled rebels, they were neither seeking to disrupt the ideals of monarchy or of Church. Their symbolic synthesis of heraldic and religious iconography, albeit retrofitted, was imbued with chivalric and monarchic honour, which was ultimately defeated by a distinct lack of honour from the very man they were seeking to influence: the King of England, as he continued to defend his own wealth, over that of the commonwealth. Henry might well have sympathised

with the cause of the pilgrims, but could not bring himself politically (or indeed economically) to negotiate with them. The idea of defending the faith itself took an interesting turn for Henry, both publicly and privately. Publicly, only a year after the Pilgrimage of Grace, and the publication of the Ten Articles, *Institution of a Christian Man*, or *Bishop's Book*, was published. This was closely edited by Henry, and recovered the four missing sacraments. Although history remembers the Pilgrimage of Grace as a failure, thwarted by the king, it is perhaps not given the credit it is due, nonetheless influencing Henry's approach to policy. According to Doran, although Henry 'tried to find a path between the extremes of Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism [he] took up a conservative position on virtually all of the controversial points'.³⁴ This extended to pressure on evangelical publicists, according to Alec Ryrie, 'if [they] stirred up public dissent, or openly challenged the political and religious status quo, they could expect to be silenced'.³⁵ Henry's defence of the faith also became expressed privately, according to Doran, he 'continued his private devotions in Latin [and his] personal convictions [...] remained conventionally pious', on whose death England was 'doctrinally Catholic despite the rejection of papal

²⁸ Fletcher and MacCulloch, p. 41.

²⁹ Fletcher and MacCulloch, pp. 34–35. Norfolk letter to Henry VIII.

³⁰ Fletcher and MacCulloch, p. 38.

³¹ It is entirely serendipitous that the Earldom of Arundel passed to the dukes of Norfolk in the following century, and so the Earl of Arundel and Duke of Norfolk have since been considered the same person.

³² Richardson, p. 5.

³³ Richardson, pp. 133–34.

³⁴ Doran.

³⁵ Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 114.

supremacy'.³⁶ As demonstrated, however, faith was a concept abused by power and influence. Henry's break with Rome was concerned with power, meaning even a highly conservative movement like the Pilgrimage of Grace that was in tune with Henry's religious conservatism was doomed because Henry would not tolerate any challenge to his political authority. As Richardson explains 'The edifice of English doctrinal Catholicism may have remained virtually intact under Henry, but the walls of the monasteries did not.'³⁷

³⁶ Doran.

³⁷ Richardson, p. 133.