Salve, festa dies:

An examination of the Marian Restoration through the reforms of Reginald Cardinal Pole and a woodcut from John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perilous Days*

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This essay examines two ‘artefacts’ of the Marian period concerning the restoration of the Catholic Church in England after its nadir during the minority of Edward VI. The decrees that emerged from Reginald Cardinal Pole’s legatine synod, which met at Lambeth and Westminster between November 1555 and February 1556, detail the approach of a central figure of the Marian regime toward the reform of the Church in England upon Catholic lines. A woodcut from John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, from London publisher John Day’s 1570 edition of the work, portrays the ‘fanatical and bigoted’ view of the Marian Church and demonstrates the Protestant reaction to the Marian reforms. The woodcut will be analysed with specific reference to the imagery of procession with the Blessed Sacrament.

At the Palace of Westminster on 30 November 1554, Mary Tudor and Philip II of Spain ‘sat on dais under gold cloth’ as Reginald Cardinal Pole formally absolved England from schism and reunited it with the See of Rome. *Legate de latere* to England and second cousin of Henry VIII, Pole was a central figure in the Marian Restoration of the Catholic Church in England. His return from exile on the Continent on 20 November 1554 heralded a transformation of the religious landscape in England, although his impact in the period remains obscured by the shadow of his queen. The trope of ‘Bloody Mary’ looms large over any discussion of the reign of Mary I. The enduring image in the historiography is the burning of Protestants that Mary presided over, as ingrained in the historical consciousness by the work of the Protestant martyrologist John Foxe.

The received opinion of Whig history casts Mary as ‘being too old and increasingly ugly […] a religious fanatic and bigot, and in thrall to two foreign powers, Spain and Rome’.2 Recent works by John Edwards and Eamon Duffy have presented a reappraisal of the Marian regime’s policies,3 although Pole has found it difficult to escape dismissal as a figure of mere ‘arid legalism’.4 This essay will examine the Marian Restoration through analysis of the works of Pole and Foxe. The twelve decrees formalised at Pole’s legatine synod in London present a Church occupied with moral reform and the full restoration of Catholic life in England. In their nature the decrees anticipate the reforms of the Council of Trent. A woodcut from Foxe’s Actes and Monuments showing the burnings of Martin Bucer and Paulus Phagius at Cambridge, meanwhile, presents the Marian Church as superstitious, primitive, and violent. The imagery used in the woodcut of a procession with the Blessed Sacrament will be used to analyse the wider implications of such processions in the period.

The ceremony of reconciliation presided over by Pole at the Palace of Westminster in 1554 occurred the year after Mary’s accession. Mary and Pole inherited a fraught religious landscape. During Edward’s minority the Mass was abrogated by statute, the Gregorian musical tradition of the Church was lost with the liturgical change to the vernacular, and there was widespread destruction of altars, missals, and devotional paintings and images.5 Edward’s regime had ‘bulldozed away centuries of devotional elaboration, and had stripped bare the cathedrals and parish churches’.6 Mary and Pole thus sought to restore the Catholic Church in England from the depths of extreme political persecution, and the legatine decrees must be seen in this context. Certain ecclesial reforms were enacted at Mary’s first parliament, in October 1553, with the restoration of the Mass and the nullification of the Edwardine reforms regarding clerical marriage, liturgy, and the monarch’s status as Supreme Head of the Church of England.7 Regarding reform at the parish level, there are several notable documents from ecclesial figures of the period that set out detailed directives for the clergy and laity to implement. The injunctions of Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London, regarding the visitation of his diocese in September and October of 1555 are a pertinent example and these became a template for parish reconstruction, which would inspire Pole in his legatine reforms.8 Some immediate progress had thus been made before the calling of

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6 Duffy, Fires of Faith, p. 3.
7 Edwards, Mary I: England’s Catholic Queen, p. 137.
the synod, but the extreme depredations the Church had suffered under Henry and Edward meant that long-term solutions were needed.

Pole’s legatine synod first assembled on 11 November 1555, with the full approval of Pope Paul IV. In the Cardinal’s words, ‘it seemed fit to assemble all the Bishops of this realm who might inform us of the abuses, and at the same time consult with us concerning their remedies.’ Pole was fully aware of the disastrous state of the Catholic Church in reformation-era England, with all but one of the English bishops submitting to Henry VIII’s ascent to Supreme Head of Ecclesia Anglicana, and the theft and destruction of Church lands and property with the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Root and branch reform of the English Church was required, and this is what the synodal reforms sought to achieve.

Twelve formal decrees, wide-ranging in nature, emerged from the synod. The decrees emphasise the importance of regular and effective preaching from the clergy. As with Bonner, Pole viewed this as a crucial means of imparting Catholic doctrine to the laity and fighting the Protestant and reformed teachings. Such preaching would help to breach the ‘generation gap’ regarding the Catholic faith in England, after the suppression of Catholic practice and teaching during the Edwardine period. The synod’s fourth decree urges archbishops, bishops, and priests to ‘feed the people committed to them with the wholesome food of preaching’. Pole states that the role of the priest ‘chiefly consists in the preaching of the divine word’, and he himself is a germane example of this. After the synod, Pole ‘gave at least twelve sermons in the remaining years of his life, while his Protestant successor, Matthew Parker, preached only nine in twenty-five years.’ Such details dispute the notion that the Marian Church ‘was suspicious of preaching and consequently reluctant or slow to provide it’. There are, for example, records of over ten thousand people in a single day attending the regular Sunday preaching sessions at St Pauls Cross in London.

Precepts for the moral reform of the Church hierarchy are seared throughout the decrees. The third decree condemns the ‘great abuse’ of those bishops not resident in their own diocese. It was often the case that these dioceses were left in the care of stipendiaries. By residing permanently, the bishops would ‘give their flock the presence that is due to them […] and […] labour in all things and fulfil their ministry’.

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9 Edwards, Mary I: England’s Catholic Queen, p. 239.
11 Duffy, Fires of Faith, p. 23.
14 Ibid.
16 Duffy, Fires of Faith, p. 50.
17 Ibid., p. 19.
19 Ibid.
fifth decree urges the extirpation of ‘certain abuses which in the corruption of the past time have crept into the morals and life of the clergy in this country’, with specific reference to the issue of clerical marriage. In the Edwardine period a considerable number of the clergy had taken wives, after the Duke of Somerset successfully fought for the right of Church of England clerics to marry. The importance of the clergy leading moral and upright lives is constantly reiterated by Pole, as ‘inasmuch the example of life contributes a great degree of authority to the word, and is as it were a kind of preaching’. The clergy should not dress extravagantly, should be frugal at table, and should lead lives marked by a spirit of moderation. The Church’s funds should be given as alms to the poor for various needs, with Pole stating that ‘the whole surplus income of the church … should be distributed for the rearing up and nurturing of Christ’s poor, for the education of boys and young men, in schools and learning, and in other pious works for the glory of God, the good of our neighbour and the example of others’. Both material and educational succour are emphasised.

The eleventh decree, the most novel, mandates the creation of diocesan seminaries for the training and education of the clergy. A ‘sort of nursery’ for seminarians would be created in each diocese. In his desire for a purified Church, Pole sought for the children of the poor to be especially selected for the seminary, and states that they should receive board and a stipend. Their education would begin with grammar, and then ‘ecclesiastical doctrine and discipline’ would follow. In Duffy’s words these reforms ‘helped shape Trent’s most momentous innovation’, being the modern diocesan seminary. The process of seminary reform in England compared favourably ‘with the snail’s pace of implementation of the Council’s decree on seminaries across the rest of post-Tridentine Europe’. By the time of Mary’s death, four major seminaries had been founded in the cathedral cities of Lincoln, Wells, Durham, and York.

The remaining decrees deal with a variety of ecclesial and practical matters. The restoration of traditional Catholic practises is endorsed, such as the carrying and processing with palms on Palm Sunday, the veneration of the cross on Good Friday, and the application of ashes on Ash Wednesday. A new English translation of the New Testament is mandated to combat William Tyndale’s translation of the scriptures, along with the production of a new Catholic catechism. Pole urges that the importance of England’s reconciliation to Rome be not forgotten, and suggests that an annual

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20 Ibid., p. 36.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 34.
25 Ibid., p. 50.
26 Ibid., p. 52.
28 Ibid., p. 25.
procession should be made on the feast of St. Andrew to commemorate the ending of the schism:

[…] in every year in all Cities, Towns, and Villages of this kingdom, on the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, on which day the peace and reconciliation of this land with God and his Church was effected, that a solemn procession should be performed […] [to] renew the memory of so signal a blessing received from God.\(^\text{29}\)

Pole’s decrees sought to cement this ‘peace and reconciliation’ across England. Although the decrees were not published in Rome until 1562, after Pole’s death, they provide a detailed insight into the Marian Church’s programme of reform. The decrees convey a Marian Church that is vibrant and reforming, a body concerned with the salvation of souls, giving succour to the poor, and battling the moral laxity of wayward ecclesiastics. Indeed, ‘in its revised version they [the decrees] largely constituted the relevant decrees of the Council of Trent.’\(^\text{30}\) The decrees thus prefigure the reforms of the wider Counter-Reformation, and in this sense show that Pole moved more swiftly and methodologically than many of his Catholic counterparts in Europe.

The next artefact we shall examine, the John Day woodcut, presents the Marian Church as a force of religious extremism and superstition contra the Church of moral reform conveyed in Pole’s decrees. John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perilous days* (also known as the ‘Book of Martyrs’) is a work that has done more than any other to solidify the view of ‘Bloody Mary’ in the historical consciousness. The vivid and graphic descriptions and images contained within the work have been and remain a crucial contributor to the traditional view of Mary, and the work was read by generation upon generation of English schoolchildren. In the Victorian era, in certain Protestant circles, the *Actes and Monuments* was one of the few books permitted to be read by children on the Sabbath.\(^\text{31}\)

Figure 1 is a woodcut from the 1570 edition of the *Actes and Monuments*. It portrays the infamous *auto de fe* in the market square in Cambridge on 6 February 1557, when an array of Protestant books was burned along with the exhumed remains of Martin Bucer and Paulus Phagius. The incident occurred during a legatine visitation to the university presided over by Pole. Foxe’s descriptions of the proceedings utilise the diaries of the university registrar John Mere.\(^\text{32}\) The registrar describes the searching out of reformed books during the visitation, with ‘certeyne prohybyted bookes and lettres’\(^\text{33}\)

being located and destroyed. Foxe viewed the legatine visit as a particularly egregious example of the excesses of Marian policy, and speaks of the ‘blynde and bloudye articles set out by Cardinal Poole’ and ‘the straunge and vngodly thinges done in Quene Maries tyme’. The events portrayed in the woodcut are thus, for Foxe, an encapsulation of the reprobation of the Marian regime.

Figure 1. A woodcut of ‘The burning of M. Bucer and Paul. Phagius bookes and bones’, from John Foxe, Actes and Monuments of these latter and perilous days, 1570 edition, p. 2191.

Bucer was a former Dominican friar and was based in Strasbourg where he sought to further the reformed doctrines. Phagius, who emerged from Isny, was another reformer who subsequently went to Strasbourg to join Bucer. Due to the religious settlement of Charles V, they both traversed the seas to England at the invite of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. A royal warrant was required for the exhumation and burnings of their remains to proceed, and this was provided by Mary from London. Cuthbert Scott, Bishop of Chester, announced the posthumous sentence on Bucer and

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35 Ibid.
Phagius in Great St Mary’s Church.\textsuperscript{37} The exhumed remains were then given to the Mayor of Cambridge to prepare for the burning.\textsuperscript{38} Foxe describes the proceedings in the market place, of a crowd shocked at the macabre scene unfolding in front of them:

There was that day gathered into the towne, a great multitude of countrey folke (for it was market day) who seyng men borne to execution, and learnyng by inquirie that they were dead before, partly detested and abhorred the extreme crueltie of the commissioners toward the rotten carcasses, and partly laughed at their folly in makyng suche preparature.\textsuperscript{39}

The woodcut distils the proceedings of several days into one image. The procession pictured occurred on 8 February 1557 through the streets of Cambridge. Those in the procession sing the Easter hymn \textit{Salve, festa dies}, which tells of the triumph of Christ over the powers of darkness. The Blessed Sacrament is carried in a monstrance under a canopy, while those leading the procession carry flames toward the conflagration to stoke it further. Behind them the Protestant books, taken from a basket, are flung into the fire. There is a striking disconnect between the onlookers genuflecting as the sacrament passes, whilst behind them Bucer and Phagius’ bones and possessions are stoked in the flames. Three figures, in the bottom right-hand corner of the image, object to proceedings: a woman gestures on her knees, while two men look on with horror-struck visages. The woodcut’s meaning is clear: Mary’s Catholic regime is violent, repressive, and superstitious.

The woodcut’s use of the image of a public procession with the Blessed Sacrament is significant in that it shows an explicitly Catholic devotion, which re-emerged during Mary’s reign with royal approval and patronage. In Edward’s words, such an event was a ‘uniformly loved manifestation of traditional Catholic religion and social cohesion’\textsuperscript{40} in pre-Reformation England. As seen in the discussion of Pole’s decrees, such a procession was mandated annually for the celebration of England’s return to the Catholic fold. Processions with the Blessed Sacrament are most closely associated with the Feast of Corpus Christi, which celebrates the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As in the woodcut, the host is carried in a monstrance while a variety of hymns and canticles are sung. At the conclusion of the procession the priest blesses the people, making the sign of the cross with the monstrance and so imparting the benediction. The liturgical celebrations of the Feast of Corpus Christi were a central feature of the religious landscape before the Reformation and provided the people, in

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 49.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Foxe, 1583, p. 1987.
town and country, with an opportunity for a public profession of the faith. These events
were large and joyous occasions:

the churchwardens purchased [...] five dozen garland of flowers, to be worn by the clergy
and choir [...] the rector and wardens would provide bread, ale, and wine [...] the
canopy over the Sacrament would be carried by distinguished laymen, past houses
decorated with cloths and tapestries, and along streets strewn with flowers and herbs.41

The Corpus Christi day procession at Kingston-upon-Thames in 1555 is notable for
Philip’s patronage. On this occasion the monstrance was carried by the royal chaplain
from Toledo Cathedral, Cristobal Becerra. The singers and musicians were from
Philip’s household. Becerra ‘asked His Majesty for wax, ornaments, the Chapel [Royal,
of Philip] and all its music. And thus he organised [...] a procession with all solemnity,
having altars placed in the street, and preaching against what the heretics had done, by
preventing the practice of such processions’.42 The processions in this period thus
occurred with full royal support.

Further processions occurred in the very heart of London at Whitehall, and at
Bishop Bonner’s episcopal palace in Fulham. The symbolic intention of these
processions was quite clear from the Catholic perspective: ‘Christ in the form of the
consecrated bread of the Eucharist was to reoccupy all those crucial places which had
been desecrated by rebellion and heresy under Henry and Edward.’43 For the
reformers, these processions were clear and egregious examples of the success of the
Marian Church in reforming the English Church to return to its Catholic nature. The
strength of feeling aroused by the processions was demonstrated by an incident at a
Corpus Christi day procession in London in the year before the Kingston ceremony,
during which a priest was attacked and stabbed.44 Public opposition centred on this
public expression of the Catholic view of the sacrament (which to the reformers was
blasphemy of the highest degree) and on protests against the Spanish Match, with fears
of England becoming a mere vassal of Habsburg.45

The woodcut can thus be analysed in two ways regarding the Marian Church.
It presents the Cambridge burning as a macabre incident, the result of a superstitious
and repressive Catholicism. It also, through the presentation of the procession imagery,
conveys the wider importance of processions with the Blessed Sacrament during the
period and the important part they played in the reintroduction of Catholic life in
England. Intertwined with the processions is royal patronage, Mary’s own personal

41 Ibid., p. 143.
42 Edwards, ‘Corpus Christi at Kingston upon Thames: Bartolome Carranza and the Eucharist in
Marian England’, p. 139.
44 Edwards, ‘Corpus Christi at Kingston upon Thames: Bartolome Carranza and the Eucharist in
Marian England’, p. 141.
45 Ibid.
devotion to the sacrament, the public affirmation of the Catholic Faith in a fraught religious environment, and protests against the Spanish influence in England.

The Marian period and the reform of the English Church under Pole remain contentious in the historiography. It is fitting that the ‘artefacts’ examined in this essay present opposing portrayals of the Marian Church. Pole’s legatine decrees call for a moral overhaul of the Church hierarchy and are concerned with the education of the poor. The bold and reforming nature of the decrees is shown by their call for the creation of the diocesan seminaries. The John Day woodcut from the Actes and Monuments, however, portrays a Marian Church that is intolerant, superstitious, and triumphalist. Though the examination of these ‘artefacts’ has cast some light upon our subject matter, a certain mystery remains: Why did Mary and Pole support a widespread policy of public burnings, which seems so antithetical to their faith? It must be noted that Mary’s regime did not have a monopoly on religious violence. Religiously motivated executions under Henry and Elizabeth outnumber the Protestants burned in the Marian epoch, and the extirpation of heretics was widely seen as a positive public good in Europe at this time. However, Mary was known to be ‘possessed of an idealistic and “pure” Christian humanist, religious nature […] [with a] a deep devotion to Christ […] in His personal sufferings’.46 The above question, perhaps, may never fittingly be answered.

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SECONDARY SOURCES


