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Cardinal Archbishop

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Reformation Cardinal: Reginald Pole in Sixteenth-Century Italy and England, ed. James Willoughby, Oxford: New College Library and Archives, 2023, pp. xviii + 153, ISBN: 978-1-9160651-3-0.

Visitors to Canterbury Cathedral in the present day may be surprised when they enter the Corona, the semi-circular chapel that was built as a pilgrimage shrine at the cathedral's eastern end to hold a fragment of the skull of the martyred archbishop Thomas Becket. He was murdered in the cathedral's north transept on 29 December 1170. The Corona has been known recently as the Chapel of the Saints and Martyrs of Our Time, where Archbishop Óscar Romero, among many others, have been remembered. Yet, visitors may be curious when they notice a severe tomb set against one of the Corona's walls. It marks the final resting place of the sixty-ninth archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500-1558).[1]

In contrast to the magnificent recumbent effigies of kings, priors, and great ladies that visitors come to the cathedral to see, Pole's tomb is unostentatious, even stark. The Italianate wall painting that once adorned it with allegorical figures and Hebrew letters disappeared long ago. A recent history of the cathedral describes it as 'a plain plastered brick tomb-chest' whose blunt inscription, 'Depositum Cardinalis Polis', strikes visitors for its very 'oddity'.[2]

The austerity of Pole's tomb may serve as a symbol of the man himself. I have argued elsewhere that contradictions in the life of Thomas Cranmer, his immediate predecessor, made him among the most challenging of all the major figures of Tudor England to understand.[3] Yet the same could be said of Pole. His opinions, and the

* For their encouragement, the author wishes to thank Anne Dillon, Paulina Kewes, Janet Sanderson, and Robert Tittler (who shared his memories of the late Jennifer Loach).

[1] Margaret Gibson, 'Normans and Angevins, 1070-1220', in Patrick Collinson, Nigel Ramsay, and Margaret Sparks, eds. *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 38-68, esp 62-5; and Katherine Eustace, 'The Post-Reformation Monuments', ibid., 511-552, especially 512-13.

[2] Thomas F. Mayer, *Reginald Pole: Prince and Prophet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 345-54; Eustace, 'Post-Reformation Monuments', 512-13, 538-9 and pls. 130, 152. See also fig. 7.14 in *Reformation Cardinal.*

[3] *Thomas Cranmer*, Routledge Historical Biographies series (London: Routledge, 2017), 1-12.

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reasons that lay behind his actions, often seem enigmatic or opaque. As John Edwards observes in the introductory chapter of the present volume under review, part of the answer may lie in Pole's 'complex and often secretive character' (p. 3). After he returned from Italy in late 1554, he became the senior advisor to Mary I, England's first reigning queen. Yet, although capable of expressing himself forcefully in print or sermons, Pole's habitual reticence prevented him 'both from strong verbal expression and from decisive action' (p. 3) whether he was in Rome, Trent, or London.[4]

Cranmer has been studied since the mid-sixteenth century, when John Foxe included a brief account of the archbishop's life and death in his vast ecclesiastical history, known as the *Book of Martyrs*.[5] Moreover, Cranmer's role in producing the *Book of Common Prayer*, still valued as the order of service in the established English Church and in the world-wide Anglican communion, ensures that he is of perpetual interest.[6] In contrast, discouraging difficulties prevented efforts to understand Pole until relatively recently.

For many years, historians dismissed Mary's reign and Pole's career, because they were perceived to belong to a troubled hiatus in the Tudor dynasty's otherwise triumphal progress that began with the successful challenge that her father Henry VIII mounted against the power of the papacy. In 1534, Parliament completed the passage of several new laws that acknowledged Henry as the Supreme Head under Christ of an English Church that was no longer legally bound to Rome.[7] The first Henrician Act of Succession excluded Mary and put her sister Elizabeth in line for the throne.[8] Thomas Cromwell, Henry's chief minister, prepared the new statutes, and he created other policies that enhanced the king's powers at the expense of the Church. Between 1536 and 1540, more than eight hundred religious houses across the realm were closed. Nearly a millennium of monastic life in England and Wales was brought to an abrupt end.[9] Carthusian monks in

[4] John Edwards is the author of *Archbishop Pole* (London: Routledge, 2014).
[5] John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London: John Daye, 1563, *RSTC* 11222), 1470-1503, and subsequent editions.
[6] See the Introduction to *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and the concluding remarks of Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 632.
[7] The Act of Supremacy: 26 Henry VIII, c. 1; Stanford Lehmberg, *The Reformation Parliament, 1529-1536* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 64-73; Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: a History of the English Reformation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 203-43.
[8] 25 Henry VIII, c. 22.
[9] David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales* (London: Longman, 1971) and David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England: The Tudor Age*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959). See also James G. Clark, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries: A New History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), 3; Harriet Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 1, 15.

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London and at the Charterhouse at Sheen were singled out for brutal suppression.[10]

Canterbury's Christ Church Cathedral Priory, which stood to the east of the cathedral, was founded in the early 600s by Benedictine monks who were sent by Pope Gregory the Great on a mission to bring Christianity to England. The cathedral itself, and the province it represents, were established through the Benedictines' mission. But Canterbury's priory was suppressed with all the others. Abbots were removed from the House of Lords. Monastic properties were seized by the Crown and parceled out as rewards to those who were willing to support the royal supremacy.[11] Becket's shrine was removed from the cathedral in September 1538 when cartloads of gold and gemstones disappeared into the king's coffers.[12] Cromwell fell in 1540, and thereafter Canterbury and England's other monastic cathedrals were refounded. They were fortunate to survive the dissolution of the religious houses.[13]

Generations of historians understood that the royal supremacy and a newly-established state Church were important developments for the English Constitution. They wished to understand how Cromwell's creation of new policies gave far-reaching advantages not only to Henry as monarch and as Supreme Head, but to his successors. Also, they were eager to trace the implementation of important doctrinal changes, during his reign and that of his young son, Edward VI. Widespread religious reform was achieved relatively quickly, according to one interpretation.[14] Historians also wished to observe how Queen Elizabeth I, at the start of her long reign, adapted or readapted her father's and brother's policies to establish a Church of England that was identifiably Protestant. Henry's and Elizabeth's reigns created important constitutional precedents that have continued to define aspects of the relationship between the State and the English Church to the present day.

[10] See Anne Dillon's important studies: *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), and *Michelangelo and the English Martyrs* (London: Routledge, 2016).
[11] 27 Hen. VIII c. 28; Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 4.
[12] Thomas F. Mayer, 'Becket's Bones Burnt! Cardinal Pole and the Invention and Dissemination of an Atrocity', in Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer, eds. *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, c. 1400-1700* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 126-43.
[13] Wabuda, *Cranmer,* 158-160.
[14] As a sample, see G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: the Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) and his *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). See also the comments about Elton's historiography in my review essay in this journal: 'Thomas Cromwell and His Revolution', *British Catholic History*, 34 (2019): 478-485. The influential textbook by A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964) created the special historical category under that name. See also his expanded 2nd ed. *The English Reformation* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1989).

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But Mary's reign, and Pole's role as her archbishop, could not fit comfortably into the grand narratives that once emphasized the development of the English Constitution. As queen, Mary made an unpopular marriage with her Habsburg cousin Philip, which eventually involved England in his wars on the continent. Parliament restored the Roman Catholic Church as England's state religion. The Latin Mass was set up again, and medieval laws that prohibited heresy were revived. A few religious houses were refounded during her reign.[15] Cranmer was deprived, then executed as a heretic in March 1556, when Cardinal Pole became archbishop. Had Mary lived as many years as did Elizabeth, the ordinary church-goers of sixteenth-century England might have embraced early modern Catholicism. The new order that Mary and Pole established would have prevented the constitutional developments that began to become familiar during her sister's reign.

But by coincidence, Mary and Pole died within hours of each other on 17 November 1558. Once again, Elizabeth and her first Parliament rejected English ties to the papacy. Until 1603, she reigned as Supreme Governor of the English Church. The Book of Common Prayer was restored. Historians through the mid-twentieth century celebrated Elizabeth as the Gloriana who brought Protestant England many of its most notable successes, including the defeat of the Gran Armada, the invasion that Philip launched against her in 1588.[16] Viewed from the narrow perspective of constitutional politics, Mary's reign was understood as an unfortunate interruption in the realm's forward development into a modern bureaucratic state. Moreover, it was a distraction from the considerable achievements of the Tudor dynasty.

Pole's reputation suffered accordingly, even though he was an important figure in the Italian Renaissance. He studied Greek and Hebrew (and eventually Italian), and he followed the latest trends in the revival of classical Latin. Michelangelo was one of his friends. His correspondence was extensive, though many of its over two thousand items remained unexplored even at the end of the twentieth century. Scholars of the Italian Renaissance and Reformation were intensely interested in Pole, unlike their English-language colleagues.[17]

However, Pole's private opinions were unusually difficult to understand. His study of classical texts enabled him to be exquisitely subtle in his thinking, and even sly in his dealings. He re-invented his

[15] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 51-2, 86, 160, 246,

[16] See the various studies on the queen by J. E. Neale, most especially *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), which has been frequently reprinted.

[17] Mayer, *Prince and Prophet*, especially 1-5, 10-11. Mayer noted at 59 that Pole may have learned Hebrew in 1528 because Henry was grooming him to take a leading role in establishing the invalidity of his first marriage by reference to the prohibitions listed in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. For his slow progress with Italian, see 138, and Susan Brigden, 'The Early Life of Reginald Pole', 10 in the volume under review.

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identity as he erased his past, especially concerning his most important book, *Pro ecclesiasticae unitatis defensione,* an attack on Henry's royal supremacy, whose bitter ramifications ultimately cost the lives of Pole's eldest brother, and then his mother. But he had misgivings too about papal power, and his positions on matters of doctrine led him into a life-altering clash with his nemesis, Cardinal Gian Pietro Carafa. In late 1549, when Pole seemed likely to be elected pope, Carafa accused him of heresy. Julius III was elected instead. Yet, Pole's diffidence was a factor in his defeat, because he did not advance his own candidacy.[18] In May 1555, Carafa's election as Pope Paul IV was a disaster for Pole and his friends.[19] Until interest in Mary's reign began to rise, Pole remained a neglected figure. Eamon Duffy called him 'the invisible man of the Marian restoration.'[20]

Every generation raises its own questions about the past. In the 1970s, as constitutional themes were re-examined, the late David Loades noted that many books needed to be written about Mary's reign.[21] In 1980, Jennifer Loach and Robert Tittler explored the queen's five parliaments in *The Mid-Tudor Polity, c.1540-1560.* Their book was followed in 1983 by Tittler's study, *The Reign of Mary I,* and in 1986 by Loach's monograph, *Parliament and the Crown in the Reign of Mary Tudor*.[22] Together, they were the vanguard of the revisionists.

Their work did much to increase appreciation of mid-Tudor England, and to place Mary's reign, and thus Pole's career, in fresh contexts. At the same time, profound changes in the wider culture of society expanded the number of topics that became ripe for scholarly investigation. To name only a few, they included early modern Catholicism (in England and on the continent),[23] Catholic

[18] Mayer, *Prince and Prophet*, 175-6; and his essay 'The Conclave of Julius III and Cardinal Pole' in his collection *Cardinal Pole in European Context: A Via Media in the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). See also T. F. Mayer, 'Pole, Reginald, 1500-1558, in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*), online edition September 2004 [https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22456 (Accessed 25th June 2024)].

[19] See especially M. Anne Overell, *Nicodemites: Faith and Concealment between Italy and Tudor England.* St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Leiden: Brill, 2019), ch. 2.

[20] Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 29.

[21] D. M. Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor: Politics, Government, and Religion in England, 1553-1558* (London: Ernest Benn, 1979), vii-viii.

[22] Jennifer Loach and Robert Tittler, eds. *The Mid-Tudor Polity, c.1540-1560,* (London: Macmillan, 1980). Robert Tittler's *The Reign of Mary I* (London: Longman, 1983) was periodically re-issued in subsequent editions. Jennifer Loach's *Parliament and the Crown in the Reign of Mary Tudor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) was developed from her 1974 doctoral thesis. Her untimely death in 1995 was a loss to the field.

[23] John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975); and more recently, John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000); Lucy Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

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martyrdom,[24] and queenship. Important new studies resulted, including Susan Brigden's 1989 monograph *London and the Reformation,* which devoted fresh attention to the return of Catholicism in Mary's reign.[25]

A new understanding of Pole's importance was launched by the late Thomas F. Mayer, first in his 1989 edition of Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset*,[26] which he followed with an essay in 1992 on Pole's circle of friends as 'a nursery of resistance'.[27] His *Reginald Pole: Prince and Prophet* appeared in 2000, but Mayer did not believe that he had written the cardinal's 'definitive life', even though his research had required visits to more than twenty archives in Italy, France, and the United Kingdom. Mayer's approach was thematic, rather than chronological. Among the subjects that he chose not to pursue in detail were Pole's 'literary milieu', and his highly-spiritualized friendships with the Roman noblewoman, the poet Vittoria Colonna, or with his companion, the Venetian nobleman Alvise Priuli.[28] Before a long illness claimed him in 2014 when he was only 62, Mayer also edited four volumes of Pole's correspondence.[29] In one of his last messages, he told me that he was grateful that he had been able to complete his three-volume study of the Roman Inquisition, and the trial of Galileo.[30] Many of the essays in the present book under review have taken up for further work Mayer's suggestions,[31] and the authors pay tribute to his considerable achievements.

Reformation Cardinal: Reginald Pole in Sixteenth-Century Italy and England, edited by James Willoughby of New College, University of Oxford, was produced to accompany an exhibition by the same name at Lambeth Palace Library in late 2023. The volume is lavishly illustrated, and it is aimed at the museum-going general reader. In addition to the Introduction by John Edwards, each of its nine chapters

[24] Dillon's *Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community* (2002) has led the field.
[25] Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
[26] *Thomas Starkey: A Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset*, ed. T. F. Mayer, Camden Fourth Series, 37 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1989).
[27] T. F. Mayer, 'Nursery of Resistance: Reginald Pole and His Friends', in *Political Thought and the Tudor Commonwealth: Deep Structure, Discourse and Disguise,* eds. Paul A. Fideler and T. F. Mayer (London: Routledge, 1992), 51-76.
[28] Mayer, *Prince and Prophet,* 3, 11-12, 439-51.
[29] *The Correspondence of Reginald Pole,* ed. Thomas F. Mayer, *Volume 1. A Calendar, 1518-1546: Beginnings to the Legate of Viterbo* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2002); *Volume 2. A Calendar, 1547-1554: A Power in Rome* (2003); *Volume 3. A Calendar, 1555-1558: Restoring the English Church* (2004); *Volume 4: A Biographical Companion: the British Isles* (also ed. Courtney B. Walters, 2008).
[30] Thomas F. Mayer, *The Trial of Galileo, 1612-1633* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); *The Roman Inquisition: A Papal Bureaucracy and Its Laws in the Age of Galileo* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2013); *The Roman Inquisition on the Stage of Italy, c. 1590-1640* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2014); and *The Roman Inquisition: Trying Galileo* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2015).
[31] Mayer, *Prince and Prophet*, 3-4.

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is a noteworthy contribution that demonstrates how Pole's life and career can now be understood.

In 'The Early Life of Reginald Pole', Susan Brigden describes how his family stood at the pinnacle of the English nobility, but their proximity to the throne spelled disaster. Pole's grandfather George, duke of Clarence, was executed for treason in 1478 by his brother, King Edward IV. Clarence was apparently drowned in a barrel of malmsey wine, a story that Shakespeare made familiar in *Richard the Third.* After Henry Tudor seized the crown at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, Clarence's children became potential threats, because their claims to the throne were stronger than his. Henry moved swiftly to arrange the marriage of Clarence's daughter Margaret to his cousin, Sir Richard Pole.[32] Her brother Edward was executed for treason in November 1499. Margaret's third son Reginald was born only four months later, in March 1500. Although he was proud of his ancestry, as Brigden notes, 'His was a grand but ruined inheritance'(p. 7).[33] Nevertheless, Pole received a fine education. He was sent to the Benedictines' school at Christ Church Cathedral Priory in Canterbury (or to the Charterhouse at Sheen). In 1513, he went to Magdalen College, Oxford, with a stipend from his cousin Henry VIII.[34]

The University of Oxford introduced Pole to the men who played a large role in shaping the beginning of his life. Magdalen had been an early stepping stone in the career of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, and he figured among Pole's early patrons.[35] Brigden observes that Pole was tutored by the humanist scholar Thomas Linacre, who had gone to Padua in the late 1480s to learn Greek from Niccolò Leonico Tomeo. One of Linacre's earliest students, after he returned to Oxford, was Thomas More. By 1518, More was writing to Pole warmly, with references to his mother, who had been created Countess of Salisbury by the king. From a little more than a year from May 1520, Pole's mother was governess for Princess Mary.[36]

Following in Linacre's footsteps, Pole set out to study Greek in Italy, and by April 1521 he arrived in Padua. Pole established his own household there, as he would do repeatedly in his career, He gathered

[32] In Act I, Scene 4 of *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third,* Shakespeare shifted the responsibility for Clarence's death from the king to their brother Richard. To protect Henry Tudor's reputation, Shakespeare also ascribed to Richard the arrangement of the 14-year-old Margaret's marriage to 'a mean-born gentleman': Act IV, Scene 2.

[33] Also, Mayer, *Prince and Prophet*, 5, 46-7.

[34] *Ibid.*, 46-7.

[35] Also, Mayer, *Prince and Prophet*, 48; Susan Wabuda, 'Cardinal Woley and Cambridge', *British Catholic History,* 32 (2015), 280-92.

[36] *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More,* ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), no. 71; Mayer, *Prince and Prophet*, 47. Margaret succeeded her brother when she became Countess of Salisbury *suo jure* in early 1512. See Hazel Pierce, 'Margaret Pole, *suo jure* countess of Salisbury, 1473-15', *ODNB*, online edition September 2004 [https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22451 (Accessed 25th June 2024)].

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his Oxford friends, and they studied together with Italians. The city was, as Tim Wade writes in his chapter, 'Reginald Pole and Humanism in Padua', a 'hotbed for the new ideas of the Renaissance' (p. 16). Renaissance humanism was an international literary and artistic movement that revived the learning of the ancient writers of Greece and Rome. Venice, with its own attractions, was only a day's journey to the east. Pole studied privately with Leonico, who encouraged him to read the works of Aristotle and Plato, as well as St John Chrysostom, an early Greek Father of the Church. In their chapters, Brigden and Wade describe how Pole was a fine linguist, and he became a great book collector, eager to obtain manuscripts in Greek, some of which are held today in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford. He also owned a substantial number of works by the great Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus,[37] whose 1516 edition of the Greek New Testament was the very first to be released in print. In Italy, as elsewhere, no one could forget how close Pole stood to the throne (p. 7), and Leonico introduced him to the Venetian nobleman Pietro Bembo), secretary to Pope Leo X. Bembo introduced him to the French scholar Christophe de Longueil, who encouraged Pole to immerse himself in the writings of Cicero.[38]

Pole returned to England in 1526, just as tensions at court began to rise alarmingly. Henry had become convinced that the marriage he had made with Katherine of Aragon at his accession in 1509 was doctrinally invalid from the outset. Pole was deeply ambivalent about entering royal service, and he intended to retreat to the Charterhouse at Sheen to devote himself to his studies. But Henry demanded that anyone loyal to himself must help him prove his case in the eyes of the world. Fred Smith's chapter, 'From Royal Servant to Arch-Traitor: Pole, Henry VIII, and *De unitate*', discusses how Pole was placed under enormous pressures to comply with the king's demands.[39]

In 1529-30, Henry sent Pole in a legation to the University of Paris. The decisions that its faculty of theology made in settling difficult questions of doctrine were respected across Europe. Pole was successful in obtaining a favorable decision for the king, for the faculty ruled that popes had no power to grant a dispensation against divine law, which meant that Henry's marriage to Katherine had always been defective. Their decision became a cornerstone that informed the first Henrician Act of Succession.[40] Within a year,

[37] For Pole's library, see also Lucy Wooding's chapter in the present volume, '"Now is the hour for us to wake from sleep"', 96.
[38] Also, Mayer, *Prince and Prophet*, 49-54.
[39] Frederick E. Smith is the author of the recent monograph, *Transnational Catholicism in Tudor England: Mobility, Exile, and Counter-Reformation, 1530-1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
[40] 25 Henry VIII, c. 22.

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however, Pole began to recast what he had done to sanitize his role in helping Henry. In an early version of *De unitate,* he warned the king that his policies risked the security of the realm, and in 1532 he returned to Padua and Venice.[41]

Pole remained silent until Bishop John Fisher and Sir Thomas More were executed in mid-1535 for their opposition to the royal supremacy. Both men were internationally famous: More as the author of *Utopia*, and Fisher for his denunciations of Martin Luther's attacks on the sacraments of the Church. Now, in the most definitive action of his life, Pole redrafted his 1531 warning to the king in a treatise that has become known as *Pro ecclesiasticae unitatis defensione*: a clarion call to his cousin Henry to repent, to renounce the royal supremacy, and to return to the Catholic Church, for he was risking both his realm and his immortal soul.

The history of *De unitate* is extraordinarily complicated. The mature treatise was sent to England in late May 1536 as a private warning to the king, but it rapidly escaped to a wider readership. On its strength, by the end of the year Pope Paul III summoned Pole to Rome and made him a cardinal (although Pole was only a deacon and not yet a priest). After the book was printed in Rome in 1538, Henry's reputation internationally was shattered beyond repair.[42]

As Fred Smith observes, Pole's book was 'political dynamite', and it changed his world forever (p. 33). From 1536, he became 'public enemy number one' (p. 34), even though he had not included the most damning paragraphs in the private version that was sent to England. In 1538, the destruction of Becket's shrine led Pole to urge the king of France and the Holy Roman Emperor to join forces against Henry.[43] Parliament attainted Pole as a traitor, and he now became a target of kidnaping and assassination. Henry revenged himself against the cardinal's family. His eldest brother was executed as a traitor in early 1539. Kept close in the Tower, his mother was dispatched with great brutality in May 1541.

In her essay, 'Martyrdom and Michelangelo', Anne Dillon describes how 'Pole's understanding of the ideal of martyrdom ran like a leitmotif through his life and work' (p. 65). Now he understood that he was the son of a martyr, just as Fisher and More were martyrs for their witness to the Church. When he was in Rome, one of his earliest actions as the newly-appointed warden of the English Hospice, was to restore a tiny chapel on the Appian Way, the setting for the

[41] T. F. Mayer, 'A Mission Worse than Death: Reginald Pole and the Parisian Theologians', *English Historical Review* 103 (1988), 870-91; and included in his essays, *Cardinal Pole in European Context*.
[42] See the forthcoming book by Paulina Kewes, *Contesting the Royal Succession in Reformation England: Latimer to Shakespeare* (Oxford).
[43] Mayer, '"Becket's Bones Burnt!"', 126-43.

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second-century story of St Peter, who had decided to flee the city to escape the Emperor Nero's persecutions. But along the way, Peter had a vision of Christ, carrying the cross. Lord, he asked 'quo vadis?' Jesus answered that he was on his way to Rome, to be crucified again. Thus, Peter turned back to the city to take up his own cross as the head of the Christian Church.

Remarkably, the chapel on the Appian Way still stands, Dillon explains, built on the site where Peter is believed to have had his vision. Relics were venerated there, and Pole decorated its walls with paintings of St Peter with Christ. Dillon writes that he restored the chapel at the same time that Pole met Michaelangelo, who drew for him a small devotional image of the *Pietà* that Pole carried with him to Trent. In turn, Pole's spirituality influenced the frescos that Michaelangelo painted for Paul III's private chapel in the Vatican Palace. *The Conversion of St Paul* is matched on the opposite wall by *The Crucifixion of St Peter,* each a haunting depiction of the familiar stories. Dillon writes that viewers are 'pierced by Peter's agonized, intense stare' (p. 78) with its messages to Paul III and his successors of their responsibilities to guide the Church, in humble imitation of Christ in his sacrifice on the cross.

Pole's conception of himself as the son of a martyr also shaped his friendships, as Abigail Brundin writes in her chapter, 'A more than maternal love: Pole and Vittoria Colonna.'[44] Michaelangelo entered Pole's circle of friendship through Colonna's introduction, and he also created for her some of his most moving private devotional images.[45] But as Brundin shows, Colonna's friendship with Pole was complicated by their respective positions in society: hers as a widowed noblewoman, and his as a prince of the Church. Her search for spiritual direction led her to rely upon Pole, whose charism attracted her as well as Priuli. Thus, although she was only eight years older than Pole, they both characterized their friendship as essentially maternal on her part, analogous to the relationship between Christ and his mother, which became intensified by Margaret Pole's desperate plight. In 1547, as Colonna was dying in Rome, Priuli and Michelangelo visited her. Pole wrote her to explain that he had not merited her great love, freely given, which would be rewarded by God. As Brundin notes, Colonna needed the cardinal more than he needed her, and in the one-sided portrait that emerges of their friendship, 'Pole himself remains elusive' (p. 62).

[44] Abigail Brundin is the author of *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). See also Vittoria Colonna's *Sonnets for Michelangelo,* ed. and trans. Abigail Brundin (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2005); Vittoria Colonna, *Selected Letters, 1523-1546: A Bilingual Edition.* eds. and trans. Abigail Brundin and Veronica Copello (Toronto: Iter and ACMRS Press, 2022).
[45] Illustrated as figs. 6.6 and 6.7 in Dillon's 'Martyrdom and Michelangelo'.

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The intense devotions that the members of Pole's circle pursued was another complicating feature of the friendships they shared, as M. Anne Overell writes in her chapter, 'Pole and the *Spirituali:* Italy, 1532-1553'. His household developed regular routines of hearing Mass, Bible reading, and private prayer. Like Erasmus and Fisher, Pole's studies led him to desire to reform the Church, but from the inside. He became one of the leaders of a mystical religious movement whose members have come to be known as the *spirituali.* Cautiously, Pole and his friends explored questions concerning the doctrine of salvation, which Luther's challenges to the papacy had made dangerous. They were shielded from interference by Cardinal Gasparo Contarini.

In 1541, Paul III sent Contarini as his special envoy to the Diet of Regensburg, where he was unexpectedly successful in working out a compromise with Lutheran theologians on the tenet of justification by faith. Contarini hoped Pole would support him in gaining the pope's agreement, for the compromise was in line with Pole's own thinking. But in times of crisis, Pole tended to disappear. Negotiations with the pope took place just as his mother was executed, and Pole stayed away from Rome. Contarini was badly let down by Pole's absence, and an unparalled opportunity was lost.[46] As a result, traditionalist Catholics became invigorated, and in the following year, the Roman Inquisition was created to root out heresies.

Fearful of assassins sent from England, in August 1541 Pole moved his household to Viterbo, fifty miles north of Rome, where his circle sponsored the distribution of an anonymous mystical text, *Il Beneficio di Cristo* which borrowed from Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, and Benedictine spirituality in a blend that 'teetered on the brink of ancient heresies, condemned centuries earlier' (p. 48).[47] But Pole disappeared again at a crucial moment in 1546, when Paul III sent him as papal legate to the Council of Trent, whose purpose was to define the doctrines of the early modern Roman Catholic Church. Trent provided another opportunity to shape discussions concerning an understanding of the nature of salvation. But Pole withdrew before the contentious debates on justification had proceeded very far. In his absence, Trent established that Christians are saved by both faith and the good works that they perform, a position that was at variance with the tenets that Pole believed and taught.

Young King Edward died in July 1553, and that summer, Mary successfully defended her right to the throne against a Protestant coup that intended to replace her with her cousin Lady Jane Grey.[48] Although Pope Julius III named Pole as papal legate to England,

[46] Mayer, *Prince and Prophet*, 103-130.
[47] Further, see also Overell's essays in *Nicodemites*.
[48] Eric Ives, *Lady Jane Grey: a Tudor Mystery* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).

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his arrival was delayed for months until Parliament reversed his attainder in late 1554. In her chapter, '"Now is the hour for us to wake from sleep": Archbishop Pole and the Marian Restoration', Lucy Wooding writes that Pole returned to England carrying 'a great burden of expectation', for no one was certain that Mary could restore Catholicism readily. Those who had been granted lands from the religious houses had no wish to surrender their gains. Pole's orthodoxy was suspect. Yet, with his credentials as an English nobleman, a reform-minded cardinal, and the son of a martyr, Pole 'seemed the obvious person to reunite the English Church with the rest of Catholic Europe' (p. 86). On 28 November 1554, Pole announced to Parliament that England was to be reconciled to the Roman Catholic Church, an event he celebrated two days later in one of the greatest ceremonies ever held in Tudor London.

Wooding notes that it is a tribute to Pole's 'energy and determination' (p. 85) that in only four years he was able to advance Catholicism in England substantially. Pole believed that the papal headship of the Church was 'a guarantor of the unity of faith' (p. 90), and that the pope was 'an exemplum of martyrdom' (p. 101). He placed the task of reinvigorating popular piety in the hands of a renewed priesthood. The regime harnessed the powers of the pulpit along with the printing press. Pole considered obedience a 'spiritual compulsion', rather than a 'political obligation' (p. 101), and he preferred that the queen's subjects be converted, rather than punished.

Yet, to strengthen the Marian state, in early 1555 Parliament revived the old laws against heresy. Executions began almost immediately. Nearly three hundred men and women were burnt in the queen's reign, exceeding the repressive measures taken against heretics in the Habsburg Netherlands.[49] Wooding notes that religious persecution, as interpreted by Foxe's *Book of Martyrs,* was 'for many years the single defining feature' of Mary's rule (p. 91).[50]

Cranmer was among those who slowly treaded to the stake. In late 1555, he wrote to warn the queen of the potential consequences should Pope Paul IV challenge her prerogatives. Because in 1533 Henry had applied for the necessary papal bulls for Cranmer's consecration, Pole could not succeed him until Rome approved. Pole was finally ordained priest the day before Cranmer was burnt on 21 March 1556. On the following day, Pole was consecrated archbishop of Canterbury.

Wooding writes that Pole's work in restoring Catholicism in England had 'broad implications for the rest of Europe', as a 'test case for the chances of Catholic resurgence elsewhere' (p. 100), an

[49] See Christine Kooi, *Reformation in the Low Countries, 1500-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 63-73.
[50] See also Duffy, *Fires of Faith,* 171-87.

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observation echoed in Maurice Whitehead's chapter, 'The Enduring Legacy of Pole's 1556 Legatine Synod'. As papal legate, in the year after England's reconciliation, Pole opened a Church conference that created new educational opportunities for the clergy through the establishment of seminaries. In this too, Pole achieved more than was once commonly understood, for he sponsored a system by which bishops and wealthy benefices would contribute to the staffing of a seminary in each diocese. Clerical education would be centralized at cathedrals, where seminarians could be closely supervised and trained. In developing his plan, Pole drew upon his experience as warden of the English Hospice in Rome. Whitehead reproduces the text of the synodal decree of 1556 that led some English bishops to start seminaries, albeit just before Mary's reign ended. Abroad, Pole's ideas informed one of the most far-reaching decrees that concluded the Council of Trent in 1563: the establishment of seminaries for the clergy in every diocese, which over time has been one of the lasting achievements of the early modern Catholic Church.

The end of Pole's life was complicated once again by politics at the highest levels. Pope Paul's suspicions of Pole's involvement with the *spirituali* fed his distrust of Mary and Philip. In April 1557, the pope withdrew Pole's legatine powers and recalled him to Rome. Mary refused to allow him to go, and the last months of her reign were overshadowed by Rome's hostility. In the concluding chapter, '"Some terrible dream": Pole's Legacy to Harpsfield and Sander', Gerard Kilroy describes how Pole's *De unitate* contributed to Catholic martyrologies, featuring More and Fisher.

The books that Pole commissioned continued to encourage the Counter Reformation long after his death. In 1554, he made Nicholas Harpsfield his archdeacon of Canterbury, perhaps on the strength of Harpsfield's close relationship with the surviving members of More's family. Harpsfield was one of the regime's most important polemists. Although best remembered for his 1557 account of the life and death of Sir Thomas More, he also wrote denunciations of Cranmer and the 'pretended divorce' of Henry and Katherine. Although imprisoned in Elizabeth's reign, Harpsfield continued to wage war against heresy in works that criticized Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and that attacked the queen's legitimacy.[51] His views inspired Nicholas Sander in his own energetic writing campaign, which was terminated when he died in the violent aftermath of a Spanish attempt to invade Ireland in 1580.

Although the contributions to *Reformation Cardinal* are varied in subject and approach, the volume is unusually harmonious. Each essay stands alone on its own terms. Although some overlap between

[51] See Thomas S. Freeman, 'Harpsfield, Nicholas, 1519-1575', *ODNB*, online edition September 2004 [https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12369 (Accessed 25 June 2024)].

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chapters is unavoidable, every essay is driven by its own purposeful narrative. Two observations from the book frame how Pole can be understood today. Brigden's reference to Pole's 'ruined inheritance' (p. 7) highlights how much he was able to achieve despite the disadvantages of a family history that limited his options as well as his resourcefulness.

Dillon's attention to Pole's 'ideal of martyrdom' (p. 65) is also key. Like Pole's mother, Cranmer was a reluctant martyr. At his execution in Oxford, the preacher told the waiting crowd that Cranmer's death was necessary to make up for the sacrifice of the incomparable Bishop Fisher.[52] As successive governments bitterly contested the meaning of faith, just who was worthy of the title of martyr also became a matter of dispute. Debts and sacrifices were created at all levels of society. Thus, 'every martyr beckons another in death'.[53]

In his recent study *Heretics and Believers*, Peter Marshall has argued that the traditional assessments that used to drive the narratives of the Reformation in England once had merit. However, today we can understand that the world of faith had been splintered in the sixteenth century, and that too many important issues remained unresolved. The government's ability to command was eroded, because the English people were empowered to make decisions for themselves. Paradoxically, 'the imposition of the Reformation was the pyrrhic victory of the English state'. Not the elusive victories, but rather the national conversations that resulted from the struggle, mattered most.[54]

[52] Wabuda, *Cranmer,* 237.
[53] Miri Rubin, 'Choosing Death? Experiences of Martyrdom in Late Medieval Europe', in Diana Wood, ed. *Martyrs and Martyrologies, Studies in Church History*, vol. 30 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993),153-183, quotation at 182.
[54] Marshall, *Heretics and Believers*, x-xix (quotation at xii), 574-9.

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