



*Cardinal Reginald Pole:
Questions of Self-Justification
and of Faith*

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Abstract: Cardinal Reginald Pole served as a papal legate for almost twenty years. He was a leading figure in the Catholic Reform movement, and a prominent political figure both in England and in Europe in his own right. Despite the survival of an unusually vast correspondence and his large literary oeuvre, Pole has remained an elusive figure, often disparaged; his achievements often dismissed; his stature as a leading figure of the century often diminished. How it was that by the middle of the sixteenth century Pole, a lone Englishman, was so pre-eminent in the religious affairs of Europe, especially as he had achieved this prominence in the teeth of the unrelenting hostility of his king and kinsman Henry VIII, who once had been his patron and greatest champion? Pole's career is also an exemplar of how ignoble dynastic self-interests hampered the noble ambitions of genuine ecclesiastical reformers on both sides of the confessional divide at almost every turn in these early years of the Reformation. This article argues that Pole's return to England in 1554 as legate *a latere* has often overshadowed consideration of the other elements of his service, both as a reforming cardinal-deacon, and as a legate *a latere* in other capacities. While these previous experiences shaped the character of his final legation in England, they also shaped the "Roman" character of the "Catholicism" that was to emerge in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Keywords: Reginald Pole, legate a latere, Paul III, Julius II, Paul IV, Henry VIII, Council of Trent, Edward VI, Mary I, Stephen Gardiner

Cardinal Reginald Pole was the fourth of the five English cardinals of the first half of the sixteenth century.¹ Born in 1500 and dying in November 1558, Pole's life and times straddle the confessional fault-line Martin Luther's Wittenberg earthquake opened early in the sixteenth century that, by the century's close, had divided the Christians of the Latin tradition into two opposing and hostile denominations: Protestants and Roman Catholics. It is thus unsurprising that what contemporaries made of Pole both reflected the temper of the age, and the side of the confessional divide that they stood.

Pole's confessional antagonists suspected his good character. For example, Sir William Cecil (to whom Pole bequeathed a small gift in his will) was one of those who virtually

¹ The five English cardinals were Richard Bainbridge, Thomas Wolsey, John Fisher, Reginald Pole, and William Peto. Additionally, the interests of the English crown were represented in the Curia and Consistory by the Cardinal Protectors, who were named by the pope but endorsed by the crown. Significantly, Cardinal Giulio de Medici, the future Clement VII, was the Cardinal Protector of England from 1514 to 1523. Clement was therefore well known to the king and his principal minister, which is partly why both Henry VIII and Wolsey had such high hopes of persuading him to their cause over the divorce from Catherine of Aragon.

ransacked Lambeth Palace in the days immediately after the cardinal's death in a fruitless search for the fortune in gold, plate, and treasure that Cecil and his co-religionists erroneously believed Pole had amassed.² As Archbishop of Canterbury, and as a leading Privy Councillor, the cardinal was bound inextricably to the politics and policies of the religious restoration of Mary I's brief reign: both of which were demonised in John Foxe's *Martyrology*, first published in the early 1560s. Informed by this hindsight, many English Protestants believed Pole's spiritual credentials, such as they were, went up in smoke with the fires of Smithfield.

The first printed accounts from the opposite confessional side were published after Foxe's *martyrology*. Pole's long association Rome, with the "King's Hospice",³ and his personal friendship with Bishop Thomas Goldwell,⁴ all played their part in sponsoring inspirational and semi-hagiographical accounts of Pole's life, which placed the cardinal in the heroic lineage of the English Catholic martyrs: Thomas More, John Fisher, and the cardinal's own mother, Margaret Pole. From that point, what for some was the odour of sanctity for others became the stench of hypocrisy.

That these favourable accounts of Pole's life and times were published after Foxe reflected another complicating consideration: for much of his time in Rome from the mid-1530s, Pole had been associated with the influential reforming group in the papal court and, therefore, some of his co-religionists accused the cardinal of secretly believing in Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, and denying the traditional doctrine of Purgatory. The leading antagonist amongst that group of doctrinal purists was Cardinal Giovanni Pietro Caraffa,⁵ who had been elected pope in 1555 as Paul IV. From 1557, Caraffa relentlessly pursued—with what many in the curia regarded as an unreasonable zealotry—Cardinals Pole and Morone, and any others he considered heretical proto-Lutherans. Those favourably disposed to Pole were not welcomed in Rome until the next pontificate, that of Pius IV, when the Inquisition cleared both Pole and Morone of the taint of heterodoxy.

This attention to his faith has stimulated historians and biographers to consider whether Pole was truly orthodox or not, and to examine every detail of the twists and turns of his career to elucidate the riddle of the cardinal's personal belief. Pole's cautious linguistic

² J. Edwards, *Archbishop Pole* (Dorchester, 2014), 248-250, discusses the immediate aftermath of Pole's death.

³ The English Hospice in Rome (dedicated to St Thomas a Becket) was under the crown's direct control until the middle of the 1530s. It had acted as the 'embassy' in Rome for most of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but after Henry VIII's excommunication, Paul III transferred it to papal jurisdiction and made Pole its Warden. Eventually, it was remade into the Venerable English College under Gregory XIII. Under Cardinal Thomas Allen, from the late 1570s, it sponsored Catholic missionary efforts into England, which later included such luminaries as Robert Persons and John Southwell.

⁴ Thomas Goldwell was Pole's chaplain: he served as Bishop of St Asaph under Mary I, where he led a striking Catholic restoration in Wales. Papers had been drawn up for him to become Bishop of Oxford, but the queen died before they were enacted. Goldwell was a prominent figure in the cardinal's entourage after he arrived in 1554, and he was later co-consecrator of Pole as archbishop in March 1556. Goldwell was present at the cardinal's bedside in his last days and he personally gave Pole the last rites. Goldwell fled England early in 1559, returning to Italy where he became Provost of the Theatine Convent in Naples, and Bishop of the English Hospice in Rome. There were a considerable number of Welsh clergy at the hospice and this later caused conflict. Goldwell was the only English bishop at the Third Session of the Council of Trent. A close friend and admirer of the cardinal and deeply influenced by his spirituality, Goldwell was hugely influential in shaping how Pole's life was to be seen from a Catholic perspective. M. E. Williams, *The Venerable English College in Rome* (Leominster, 2008), 1-34.

⁵ He is more commonly known by the diminutive Gian Pietro Caraffa.

distinctions, even in his will, have raised doubts over his faith. For some critics, inconsistencies in the cardinal's recollections amount to intellectual duplicity. For others, his fine distinctions are little more than ambiguous evasion. Much as Pole never quite shook off the accusations of heresy before he died, these doubts still cling to his reputation.

Additionally, English historians have tended to evaluate Pole's entire career and contribution to the events of the sixteenth century from the perspective of his last four years, serving Mary as papal legate, and as Archbishop of Canterbury. Inevitably, many of those judgements have not only reflected the confessional temper of their authors and the prejudices of their times, but they also tend to regard Pole's career prior to his return to England as something of a prelude to this defining concluding chapter of his life. That view entirely discounts the fact that Mary had unexpectedly come to the throne in July 1553, and that Pole could hardly have anticipated those events, let alone that they would result in his becoming Archbishop of Canterbury. They also neglect the fact that Pole was in poor health from the later 1540s until his death.

Most recently, Thomas Mayer has found the self-justifications in Pole's reconsiderations, the hesitations in his decisions, and the lack of administrative aptness in his actions, to be the (self)-deceptions of a man in as much denial about his true past as about his true (homosexual) nature.⁶ Ultimately, Mayer has argued, Pole was too self-aware to be unaware that at the heart of this dishonesty about his true self lay a repressed guilt about his sexual desires—although Mayer accepts that Pole and his contemporaries would not have understood human sexuality in modern terms. John Edward's recent biography challenges Mayer's thesis but still—as the title suggests—persists with the preoccupation of English historians in seeing Pole's career through the prism of his final years as Archbishop of Canterbury.

The fact Cardinal Pole was a prolific writer not only of books, sermons, and public discourses, but also of letters, has made him readily accessible to scholars. However, this embarrassment of riches is double-edged. Any correspondence conducted over a quarter of a century will inevitably include contradictions and conceits. Inevitably, many letters will reflect unflattering aspects of personality and flaws of character. There is bound to be the pride of rank and prejudices of personality both of writer and addressee for the historian to consider. With a subtle, prolix correspondent like Pole, having so much to read can obscure as much as it reveals: it can make straightforward motives appear ambiguous, and it can give the strongest character an enigmatic and elusive quality.

Questions about Pole's character and spirituality, as well as perceptions of his career being largely defined by the period between 1554 and 1558 when he was masterminding the Catholic restoration in England, have combined to obscure Pole's role in the development of Papal policy from the middle of the 1530s. In turn, this view has underestimated his part in bolstering the papacy in its intellectual, institutional, and doctrinal crises in the early 1530s, and undervalued his role in setting the spiritual tone of the entire Council of Trent—even though he was himself only legate *a latere* at the first opening session in 1545-46.

⁶ Thomas F. Mayer, *Reginald Pole: Prince and Prophet* (Cambridge, 2007), 439-51. Mayer and Edwards are not the only recent biographical treatments of Pole. Michael Hutchings's *Reginald Cardinal Pole* (Midhurst, 2008) has offered another, briefer study. The three biographies paint wildly contrasting portraits of the man and his mission.

Cardinal and Legate

Reginald Pole's reputation was so high in the middle decades of the sixteenth century that he was the favourite for the papal tiara in three successive conclaves; indeed, he had almost been elected pope in January 1550.⁷ In 1555, it was widely held that if Pole had chosen to return to Rome—even after the unexpected death of Marcellus II—he would almost certainly have been elected Pope.⁸ Even in England, despite the fact Pole's family had been executed for treason, and although Pole himself had been under attainder as a traitor since 1539, such was the cardinal's reputation that in July 1549, the Western Rebels list of demands issued from their encampment outside the city of Exeter (where Pole had once been dean, *in absentia*) included:⁹ "Item: We think it very meet because the lord Cardinal Pole is of the king's blood should not only have his free pardon but also be sent for to Rome and promoted to be first or second of the king's council".¹⁰ Although Pole had had direct contact with the government of Protector Somerset on several occasions after Henry VIII's death in 1547, the mention underlines Pole's fame.

This mention by the rebels is hardly surprising given the range of Pole's activities by then in the wider context of European affairs. In addition to various peripatetic missions in the late 1530s to Francis I and Charles V as legate *a latere*¹¹—aimed ultimately at supplanting Henry VIII, and restoring England to her place in the Catholic world—Pole had participated in establishing the reform agenda adopted by Pope Paul III in January 1537. He had been the pope's liaison with his old friend and mentor, Cardinal Gasparo Contarini, while Contarini was legate *a latere* to the Colloquy of Regensburg. Afterwards, in August 1541, Pole was himself appointed legate to the Patrimony of St Peter (in Tuscia) where he acquired a reputation as a reformer.¹² Finally, Pole was appointed as one of the legates to the Council of Trent in 1545-46. Later, shortly after Mary I's unexpected accession, Pole served from August 1553 as legate *a latere* to Mary, legate to England, and as legate for the Peace to Charles V and Henri II of France. After England's formal Reconciliation in November 1554, Pole continued as legate with his brief again further expanded. He also continued to serve as legate for the Peace.

Since the twelfth century, popes generally had used their cardinals and especially their legates *a latere* as a means of pursuing policy objectives. For the first twenty-five years of the sixteenth century, the multiple interests of the papacy had been seen by those occupying Peter's Chair largely through the prism of the jostling interests of Italian principalities and city-states of which the Papal States were only one. By 1518, that competition itself had become

⁷ Thomas F. Mayer, *Cardinal Pole in European Context: A via media in the reformation* (Aldershot, 2000), 1-21; Mayer, *Reginald Pole*, 176 also makes a brief mention of the conclave. Pole himself gave a personal account in a letter. See *The Correspondence of Reginald Pole*, ed. Thomas F. Mayer, 4 volumes (henceforth *Pole I, II, III*, etc.) *Pole II*, no. 573.

⁸ J. Edwards, *Mary I: England's Catholic Queen* (New Haven, 2013), 272-76, discusses the circumstances of the two conclaves of 1555.

⁹ W. T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter, 1540-1640* (Cambridge, MA, 1975) continues to offer insight into how a tightly knit and self-contained society like provincial Exeter responded to the urgings of royal government (203-245).

¹⁰ Anthony Fletcher, *Tudor Rebellions* (Longman, 1983), 116.

¹¹ The full title is *Legatus a latere Sedis Apostolicae*: literally, emissary from the arm of the Apostolic chair.

¹² The Patrimony of St Peter in Tuscia was often given by the Renaissance popes to Cardinal-Nephews to administer, and from which no small number of them made themselves and their respective families immensely rich.

bound-up with the wider dynastic rivalries of the Valois and the Hapsburgs. Popes found themselves drawn into that rivalry—sometimes as honest-brokers, sometimes as wishful authors or sponsors of a European Peace, but as often as not as allies of one side against the other. In this political and diplomatic crossfire, the firestorm set off by Martin Luther quickly took hold. Neither Leo X nor Clement VII could wield the political heft, or engineer the diplomatic leeway, to meet the Lutheran challenge. Hence, the nascent reform of the early sixteenth century, whose champions rode together on the steeds of intellectual optimism fathered by Humanist enquiry, by the later 1520s, had galloped off in two divergent directions.

In 1534, the election of Paul III in succession to Clement VII promised more of the same. However, despite poor health and advanced age—Paul was seventy-nine at his election—the new pope was surprisingly seized of the profound need for the church to engage meaningfully with institutional reform. From his election, the papacy’s central policy objective became to convene a General Council of the Church to effect reform, and to engage with the evangelicals and Lutherans: thus restoring the religious unity of Christendom. This objective took precedence over the papacy’s other political and dynastic considerations. To this end, Paul III set about promoting leading figures in the wider reform movement in the church, and this led his papacy to embrace their wider agenda for wholesale institutional reform; Reginald Pole was amongst that cadre of reforming cardinals.

Pole’s elevation to the Sacred College in 1536 had come as a surprise. He had only been a few months in Rome. His promotion was unsupported by the English sovereign, Henry VIII. Indeed, if anything, Pole’s nomination was a snub and a provocation to the king.¹³ If he had a golden intellectual reputation from his days in Padua and Paris, Pole’s spiritual credentials rested largely on a single, unpublished, uncompromising apologia in defence of papal primacy: *De Unitate*.¹⁴ Pole had little practical experience either as a diplomat or ecclesiastic,¹⁵ even if he had been associated since his days at university in Padua with prominent figures in the Catholic Reform movement who were suddenly in the ascendancy within the curia.¹⁶

¹³ Paul III had made Bishop John Fisher a cardinal in the consistory of April 1535, an action that provoked Henry VIII to execute the bishop. Fisher was the first martyr of the Sacred College. In that consistory of 1535, Fisher’s close friend Desiderius Erasmus was also named but he declined the honour claiming he was too frail.

¹⁴ R. Pole, *A defence of the Unity of the Church (1536)* ed. J. G. Dwyer, (Newman Press, 1965).

¹⁵ Pole was named in the same consistory which saw the elevation of a number of reforming cardinals: Giovanni Domenico de Cupis, Gianpietro Caraffa, Alessandro Cesarini, Giovanni Maria del Monte, Bartolomeo Guidiccioni, Marino Grimani, Girolamo Aleandro, Nicolò Ridolfi, Gasparo Contarini, Girolamo Ghinucci, and Marcello Cervini.

¹⁶ According to M. Haile, *Life of Reginald Pole* (London, 1910), 187-188, Pole believed he had convinced Paul III not to make him a cardinal, but “when the pope was in consistory he suddenly changed his mind, and sent Monsignor Durante, his *camariere secreto*, to Signor Reginaldo’s apartment, to tell him that in virtue of holy obedience he must prepare himself to receive the cardinalate at once, and to give him the tonsure... Monsignor Durante appeared, with the barber behind him to make the tonsure”. If true, this account implies Pole was not a deacon before his elevation to the Sacred College. Clerks in minor orders could hold minor ecclesiastical benefices—that is benefices normally bestowed by a bishop or mitred abbot. To hold major benefices—those normally bestowed by the pope—required at least ordination to the diaconate. There is no other evidence Pole took orders before being named cardinal in the consistory of 22 December 1536. He received his red hat 23 December. He was named deacon of Ss. Nereo ed Achilleo on 15 January 1537.

Pole's Early Career

However, by his birth and upbringing, Pole owned another essential quality: the ease of one familiar with the company of princes and the etiquette of courts. It might be said that an accident of birth fitted Pole for his entrée into the counsels of popes and emperors. Reginald Pole had been born into that most exclusive of sixteenth century clubs: the princely caste that sat atop Europe's aristocratic governing elite.¹⁷

Pole was a first cousin to Henry VIII: but as a Yorkist prince, he was never above suspicion. He was the second son of Richard Pole and Margaret Plantagenet,¹⁸ and thus also a direct descendant of the Neville family via his mother, who was the daughter of Edward IV's attainted younger brother, George, Duke of Clarence; and Clarence's wife, the Neville heiress Isabel, daughter of Richard, Earl of Warwick ("the kingmaker"). Margaret's royal lineage had made her heir to Henry VII's mistrust, which her marriage to one of the Tudor king's principal advisers, Sir Richard Pole, never fully assuaged. The involvement of her brother Edward, Earl of Warwick, in the attempted escape of Perkin Warbeck in the later 1490s revived Henry VII's suspicions of his Yorkist kin. Her brother was promptly executed. Margaret survived, but never thrived in Henry VII's court.

Margaret's descent, however, fitted her for the role of lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon, on her marriage to Henry VII's eldest son, Prince Arthur. With the sudden death of Arthur, Margaret's service was ended as Catherine had little need for ladies in her isolation in the Benedictine convent at Sion. However, on the death of Richard Pole in 1504, Margaret found herself similarly exiled to the same convent. It was there the two women struck up a life-long friendship.

After Henry VIII's accession in 1509, and his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, the Poles were restored in blood and in favour. Margaret was ennobled Countess of Salisbury in her own right. Her eldest son, Henry, quickly distinguished himself in the early wars of the reign, and Henry made him Baron Montague in his own right, once again uniting many of the old Neville lands in the hands of their Pole descendants.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Henry VIII virtually adopted Margaret's precocious younger son, Reginald, and the king personally oversaw and paid for Reginald's education. Reginald's intellectual aptness royally repaid Henry's royal investment: he gained an exhibition to Magdalen College where he thrived, and thereafter his star was firmly on the rise.

Therefore, both as the ultimate insider, and as a man of great intellectual gifts, it appeared that Pole was simply destined to play a principal part in Europe's grand affairs. However, behind the grace and favour of his patron and royal kinsman, Pole's Yorkist princely blood was very much a double-edged sword in the double-dealing autocracy of the Tudor

¹⁷ In 1537, Pole was deeply affronted by the refusal of Francis I to meet him: he felt it a snub to his status by birth as much as the pope's plenipotentiary.

¹⁸ After her execution in 1541, Pole's mother was widely regarded as a martyr, which only added to Pole's princely lustre. She was beatified in 1886 by Pope Leo XIII. Margaret was naturally pragmatic and fought to protect her family from ruin. Under pressure from Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII, she wrote to her son begging him to do his duty by the king. She was arrested in 1538 with her son Henry.

¹⁹ The Neville lands were lost on the attainder of George, Duke of Clarence. The titles Salisbury and Montague had been the junior titles of the Neville Earls of Warwick. These were also lost with the attainder of Margaret's brother, Edward.

monarchy. The fall of the brightest star of the English nobility, the Pole family kinsman, Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, was a reminder to the Poles of how fickle family fortune was at the English court.

After Oxford, and again at Henry's personal expense and under Cardinal Thomas Wolsey's personal direction, Pole spent much of the early 1520s in university at Padua, where he shone as a scholar and aristocratic grandee. It was there that Pole was drawn towards the spiritual renewal inspired by men of his acquaintance like Gasparo Contarini, who followed the *Devotio Moderna*. If Pole made a gratifying string of important acquaintance with men who were destined to shape his future and the future of the Catholic Church and, if under their influence, the young Pole's intellect had flowered and his interest in theology as a discipline was initiated, it was his intellectual sensitivity for Classics and Greek that excited an admiration verging on the adulatory.²⁰ For example, his mentor Leonico²¹ dedicated some of his translations to the young Pole.²² It was from amongst this close-knit group that Pole made a series of his closest friendships with "amicitia", like Alvise Priuli.²³ It is these friendships that have latterly inspired Mayer's speculation about Pole's sexuality.

The suspicions of modern scholars, however, find no echo in the wider archive. This stands by way of vivid contrast with, for example, Cardinal del Monte—later Pope Julius III—whose peccadillos for handsome young men were widely known, freely satirised, and openly commented upon.²⁴ Similarly, the homosocial speculations of some of Erasmus's close friendships, is at least supported by a passionate—if somewhat chaste—correspondence.²⁵ Pole's correspondence seldom acquires any intensity, save when he is defending his own reputation. However, it should be noted that Pole's loquacious reticence does not preclude a degree of self-conscious calculation, even if it often also owns a genuine, and at times highly charged, spiritual dimension. Unlike the conjectures about the cardinal's sexuality where

²⁰ For example, Clement VII to Pole: "your letters testify your learning and love for us. Thanks for your congratulations for our election...attend your studies" (*Pole II*, no. 15).

²¹ Niccolo Leonico Tomeo was a much-admired Aristotelian and gifted classicist at the University of Padua. He and Pole struck up a warm friendship: "a friend asks me to enquire whether you would like to hear a boy preaching Saint Antonia here will stop he is judged an amazing orator. If you were free, wait for me at home and I will collect you" (*Pole I*, no. 10). This is a reference to the boy bishop's preaching on the feast of Holy Innocents (28 December). Pietro Bembo was another in this group of students destined for the scarlet (1539). Bembo was a noted classicist with a history of almost 'pagan' morality of many of the Humanist school but after his elevation he was literally a reformed figure - a strict, spiritual, moralist and an active reformer and resident bishop. He wrote a notable history of Venice (1551) and dialogue on Platonic love "Gli Asolani" (Venice, 1505). The latter does not establish the 'homosocial' nature or otherwise of Pole's "amicitia". Mayer, *Reginald Pole*, 46-61 discusses Pole's early days in Padua.

²² *Pole I*, no. 16.

²³ A Venetian noble whom Pole probably first met in Padua. He served the cardinal in Viterbo and in England until 1558. Priuli to Pole is alike Cavendish to Wolsey: additionally, Priuli offers intimate insights into the spiritual life within Pole's household. Priuli returned to Italy after the death of Pole but only went back to Rome in 1564 after the death of Paul IV and the closure of the investigations of the Inquisition into his conduct as an adjunct to the proceedings against Cardinals Morone, Pole, and Seripando.

²⁴ A contemporary Venetian diplomat Onofrio Panvinio wrote that Julius was "excessively given to intemperance in a life of luxuriousness and to his libido", and, more explicitly characterized him as "puerorum amoribus implicatus" ('tangled in love for boys') Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon, *Who's Who in gay and lesbian history: From Antiquity to World War II* (New York, 2002), 278.

²⁵ The letters of Erasmus to Servatius Rogerus and Damião de Gois are most often cited in this respect.

evidence is scant, the historical record is much clearer when it comes to Pole's tendency to justify his actions *ex post facto*. This is most profoundly evident in his recollections of his part in the events in England after 1530.

Upon his return to England in 1527, despite his intellectual grace, his reforming credentials, and only being in minor orders, Pole accepted various ecclesiastical benefices, *in commendam*: a fellowship in absentia at Corpus Christi; a deanery at Wimborne; a canonry at Salisbury; and later a canonry, then a deanery, in Exeter; and later, he held a collegiate stall in Knaresborough, and a rectory in Puddletown in Dorset.²⁶ To hold these offices together Pole required episcopal dispensations, and to hold them in minor orders also required dispensation from each diocesan. Thus, the shining knight of the *New Learning*, upon return to England and to the English court, although now enamoured of spiritual renewal, the *Devotio Moderna*, and ecclesiastical reform, remained in this respect, at least, an exemplar of the old ways. As a grateful recipient of royal largesse, Pole was expected to do his king's bidding. And here too Pole followed public and royal expectation.

The Moment of Decision

From the late 1520s, most of Henry VIII's bidding increasingly involved assisting the king with his 'Great Matter'. Pole studied Hebrew, which could assist in elucidating the Levitical prohibitions that the king wished to rest his case for a divorce on. Like many others of his cast of mind—and despite doubts, he like others, almost certainly held—Pole kept his head down and his opinions to himself. As required, Pole assisted with various projects associated with the divorce from Catherine of Aragon,²⁷ and even maintained a silence over the establishment of the Royal Supremacy over the English church.²⁸

Later, Pole recounted how Henry VIII had sent the Duke of Norfolk to tempt him: "I was offered the ... archbishopric of York²⁹ if I could support the divorce... I thanked the King for his liberality to me... I could see no way back but to refuse with such a condition attached".³⁰ Subtly taking Pole's demur to be a sign the courtly scholar needed only to be better persuaded, Norfolk cajoled: "could I not find a way to satisfy both the king and my conscience?"³¹ Pole continues in this version of events to describe how Norfolk was then sent to work on his brother.³² The Pole matriarch and her sons were inclined by duty and instinct to

²⁶ Edwards, *Archbishop Pole*, 243-44.

²⁷ Henry's genius was to be persuasive: he persuaded More or Fisher as much as Pole that his scruples over his marriage were genuine, and his attitude was one of open-mindedness. Both Cardinal Wolsey and later Thomas Cromwell better understood the closed nature of king's mind on this subject. G. W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven, 2005), 9-72 offers a compelling account of the divorce proceeding.

²⁸ Amongst the many consequences of Henry VIII's unilateral action was the composition of two most striking works on papal primacy of the sixteenth century: Stephen Gardiner's *De Vere Obedentia* (1535) defended the king's action, to which Pole's reply, *De Unitate* (1536) defended papal authority.

²⁹ *Pole I*, no. 155. Pole gives another account of the offer of York in his letter to the Privy Council composed in February 1537. There are differences in detail but also striking similarities in the two accounts.

³⁰ *Pole II*, no 601. Pole writes about these events in 1537, 1539, and again and at greatest length in 1552.

³¹ *Pole II*, no 601.

³² The Norfolk who emerges from Pole's recollection is anything but the dull soldier. The Duke we meet through Pole is very much a master of tactics—political, as well as military. At the end of his letter, Pole calls on Norfolk

bow to the king, even if they also maintained as best they could their obligations to his former queen. Meanwhile, Pole received a variety of apologia making the case for the royal divorce before finally, according to this same recollection, being summoned to an audience with the king.³³

Pole's version of events is uncorroborated from other sources, although some echo can be found in the reports of the Imperial Ambassador—including the notion Pole was offered York.³⁴ However, if this interview took place and ended as unhappily as in his recall, it should be admitted that the Pole's words cannot have been as crystal clear as they later came to sound in his retrospect. For example, it is certain that when Pole was in Paris—which must have been shortly after this confrontation—he was still actively engaged in securing a favourable opinion on the divorce from the university.³⁵

After he returned from Paris, mission accomplished as it were, Henry permitted Pole to return to Italy in 1532. It is possible that the king expected Pole to perform the same service in Padua as in Paris. Certainly, Pole's old friend and mentor Leonico did indeed canvass widely in Padua and beyond on behalf of Henry.³⁶ It seems unlikely that Henry would have been so generous if Pole's position *vis-à-vis* the divorce and the Supremacy were categorically negative. It could be, however, that Pole did indeed reduce the king to tears—although Henry's tears were most likely crocodile. The king was a consummate performer and better than most at feigning his true feelings behind counterfeit emotion when it suited him. Perhaps the strongest circumstantial evidence of the truth of Pole's version is that none of his correspondents from the Council to the king, from the Duke of Somerset to Edward VI, or from Mary I to her lord chancellor, Bishop Stephen Gardiner, contradicted these aspects of Pole's account of his part in events.

Nevertheless, Mayer has very serious doubts about the accuracy of any of Pole's subsequent recollections about the events of these years, including the offer of the archbishopric of York as a bribe.³⁷ Moreover, it is also true that Pole's letters contain various versions of these events that differ in detail—although they repeat some points, including the offer of York and the final audience with Henry VIII. Here, the fact that Pole's mother's

to be witness to the truth of his account. Norfolk was still alive in 1552, resident in the Tower with Gardiner, Tunstall, Heath, and Edward Courtenay (who, with Pole, was the very last of the Yorkist dynasty) and Anne Stanhope, Duchess of Somerset. They were all released by Mary I in 1553 with the famous exclamation, "these are my prisoners". Mary restored Norfolk in blood and made him her Earl Marshal. His last hurrah came early in the Wyatt rebellion when he failed to stop the rebels. It was an inglorious end to his military career. Mayer thinks Norfolk would have added nothing to Pole's recollections as they were little more than the cardinal's self-aggrandising fictions. Nevertheless, the Norfolk who emerges from Pole's account would certainly have been well suited to partner Bishop Gardiner in the factional struggles at the Tudor court of the late the 1530s and 1540s.

³³ "I said everything which attacked his opinion...the king...could bear no more...I left in tears" (*Pole II*, no. 601).

³⁴ Eustace Chapuys was the ambassador in question. He suggested Henry would offer Pole either Canterbury or York. *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, ed. Pascual de Gayangos (London, 1888), IV: 888.

³⁵ *Pole I*, no. 54; no. 55; no. 57; and especially no. 58, demonstrate that throughout 1530, Pole actively assisted in procuring a favourable opinion on the divorce from the University of Paris. *Pole I*, no. 60, demonstrates Cranmer at least suggested Pole had argued against the divorce in a written opinion.

³⁶ Edwards, *Archbishop Pole*, 40-44, gives a full account of Pole's second time in Padua.

³⁷ Mayer, *Reginald Pole*, 58-60. There are discrepancies in detail in the various accounts Pole gives of these events. See for example *Pole II*, no. 555 and no. 601. Pole's memory may have been self-serving in detail but to imply he does this deliberately to deceive is unproven.

chaplain, Thomas Starkey, was sent by Thomas Cromwell with a new work on the primacy of the pope by Richard Sampson for Pole's consideration, indicates instead that Henry had not entirely given up on persuading Pole to his side. Pole's letter of July 1536 indicates that he returned some brush-off of Sampson's work, and shortly thereafter news reached Italy that Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn, had been divorced and executed.³⁸ By this time, Catherine of Aragon had herself been dead six months. Once again, a moment rapprochement beckoned; but it was a mirage.

If Pole had nailed his colour to the mast with *De Unitate*, it was not until he crossed the Alps in 1537 that he finally comprehended that there could be no turning back. The intense emotion of the step he was taking in his first legatine embassy brought an unusual outburst of personal emotion: "When going through the Alps ... cried ... these are ... son's tears ... I prayed they could be Henry's instead of mine ... seem to hear the voice the prophet³⁹ ... whimpering for his king".⁴⁰ Despite the high emotion of Pole's Alpine pass, the English cardinal had already given vent to his true feelings both on Stephen Gardiner's treatise on the nature of true obedience,⁴¹ and on Henry VIII's response to the Pilgrimage of Grace.⁴² Henry VIII, for his part—once safe from the rebels' cause—had Pole's entire family arrested under accusations of treason. And perhaps, the ultimately fatal consequences of his actions on his family tormented Pole, and caused him to revisit repeatedly the circumstances of this fatal rupture. Even in 1552, Pole remains torn: "what first appeared glorious and useful ... was really false and pernicious".⁴³

Establishing the parameters of Catholic Reform

If the events of these years cast a shadow of self-doubt—and guilt—over his personal life, the years that immediately followed from them were Pole's most creative, both as cardinal and as legate. After the failure of Regensburg, Pole was made legate *a latere* to the Patrimony of St Peter. It was while resident at Viterbo that Pole emerged as a significant patron of the 'spirituali'—a group that, in addition to several leading cardinals led by Sadoletto, Morone, Caraffa, and Contarini, also included: Vittore Soranzo; Pietro Carnesecchi; Apollonio Merenda, who became Pole's chaplain; Pietro Antonio di Capua; Alvise Priuli; Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, famously a patron of Michelangelo who also gave Pole gifts of jewellery; and Countess Giulia Gonzaga.

This group circulated a number of unpublished humanist works, most especially those

³⁸ *Pole I*, no. 102.

³⁹ An allusion to the Prophet Samuel: Pole continues the idea with a reference to Saul and David.

⁴⁰ *Pole II*, no. 601. Pole's affection for the king endured despite everything. He admits to Edward VI that he "loved him more than a citizen should king...more than human love...why should I lie, when the strength of my love redounds to his glory?"

⁴¹ Pole noted in a series of letters in January 1536 to Cardinal Contarini that he had read Stephen Gardiner's apologia *De Vere Obedentia*: "his book compels me to deal with these very serious arguments in which my opinion is the same as the church's and must be made plain to the people" (*Pole I*, no. 88). Contarini made some amendments to Pole's reply *De Unitate*. It has had mixed reviews both as a polemic and as theology—especially from historians of England.

⁴² R. Pole, *A defence of the Unity of the Church (1536)* ed. J. G. Dwyer, xx. Pole denounced Henry in no uncertain terms: "Anyone resisting your lies is punished by death.... Your miserable apes of Sophists talk nonsense.... Your pestilential flatterers happen on such tricks... the succession of the kingdom is called into doubt".

⁴³ *Pole II*, no. 601.

by Spanish reformer Juan de Valdés on the notion of justification based only on faith—as opposed to faith *alone*—an idea that had earlier been adopted by Marcantonio Flaminio. It is noteworthy that before the Sack of Rome in 1527, Rome was a locus of several circles of scholars and humanists. Sant’Andrea della Valle was associated with Cardinal Cajetan and the Theatines, while Luxembourger Johannes Goritz, another wealthy and successful member of the Papal curia, was active in the Basilica of St Augustine. Luther therefore was not the only (Augustinian) ‘reformer’ reading St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.⁴⁴

The culmination of Pole’s role as a ‘reformer’ came in his service as legate at Trent. There, his treatise, *De Concilio*,⁴⁵ set the tone for many of the debates at the first session and particularly the third session of the council. His impressive *Admonitio Legatorum ad Patres Concilii*, given in January 1546, was subsequently used in all three of the separate sessions of the Council.⁴⁶ In this address, Pole is uniquely succinct. His argument is passionate and deeply felt.⁴⁷ The call for repentance, which was to be a repeating motif in his public and private addresses,⁴⁸ climaxes in this self-revelatory moment: “Our ambition, our avarice, our cupidity ... wrought all these evils on the people ... the property of the church which is the property of the poor, stolen, and the priesthood given to the unworthy”.⁴⁹ Significantly, Pole was merely a deacon when he delivered this address.⁵⁰ Here, perhaps, lies the explanation for Pole’s reluctance both to serve as pope, and later to serve as Archbishop of Canterbury. In January 1556, he wrote this telling phrase to Philip II: “I have my bull for Canterbury, an office that scares me”.⁵¹ Perhaps his reticence to take Holy Orders reflected a deeper uncertainty. Perhaps this uncertainty accounts for his refusal to accept papal election *per adorationem* at the conclave after the death of Paul III in November 1549.

Pole had entered the conclave as a favourite. His suitability for the papal tiara was widely acknowledged. His defence of the papacy—both as an institution, and as an indispensable guarantor of the Catholicity of the church in *De Unitate*—were powerful factors

⁴⁴ St Paul’s epistles to the Romans and Galatians were the principal texts of the Justification debate.

⁴⁵ After the close of first session, and its reopening in 1545, Pole wrote *De Concilio*, in which he reflects on the characteristics of an ideal church council. The opening sermon to the Council was delivered on 7 January 1546. T. F. Mayer, “A Reluctant Author: Cardinal Pole and his Manuscripts”, in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* (1999), 89:4. J. W. O’Malley, *Trent: What happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 77-126, offers clear analysis of the first session.

⁴⁶ Reginald Pole, *Causes of Christian Disunion: Cardinal Pole’s legatine address at the opening of the Council of Trent, 7th January 1546*. (London, 1936), 548-53.

⁴⁷ “We greatly hope that the Spirit whom we have called on has come to us. We have this greatest pledge of the Divine Mercy, this very opening of a council to which we have come for the setting-up and rebuilding of the almost ruined Church as the old church after its long captivity abroad came back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple” (Pole, *Causes of Christian Disunion*, 11).

⁴⁸ Pole, *Causes of Christian Disunion*, 10.

⁴⁹ Pole, *Causes of Christian Disunion*, 10. The critique is so startling and heartfelt it can be understood why this document was used again at the beginning of each subsequent session of the council.

⁵⁰ Deacons may read the Gospel; may preach; and may distribute Holy Communion. They cannot say Mass. In the sixteenth century, rather like princes in chapels royal, cardinal-deacons as legates *a latere* “presided” at Pontifical Mass from the chair (i.e. the cathedra), sitting in person of the pope. In November 1554, as Pole was only a deacon, Bishops Gardiner and Bonner sang the Mass of Reconciliation at St Paul’s, while Pole presided from the throne. It was, therefore, a singular distinction when Pole also bestowed his right to preach the sermon on Bishop Gardiner.

⁵¹ *Pole III*, no. 1482.

supporting Pole's candidacy. His series of legations had made him a well-known figure in Europe's courts. Pole's correspondence from these years reads like a who's who of Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century: popes and emperors; kings and queens; dukes and princes, including the Guise in France as well as fellow cardinals; prelates and priests; secretaries and fellow diplomats; gentlemen about the courts of Europe; scholars like Erasmus; saints like More and Loyola; sinners like Innocenzo del Monte; theologians like Contarini. In the early ballots, he was only a single vote short. Pole could have followed through his advantage by seeking election *per adorationem* in the Pauline Chapel at the end of the day's balloting. This form of acclamation was the commonest form of papal election in the sixteenth century. Pole offered this account shortly after the conclave ended:

I never felt that role more strongly than on the night two cardinals came and asked me in the name of the majority to come to the Pauline Chapel ... they would then have adored me⁵² ... the ass Christ rode into Jerusalem came to mind ... I felt like that ass ... I said the matter demanded light.⁵³

If he was reluctant to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1556, it is fair to conclude that Pole did not want to be elected Pope, neither in 1550, nor later in 1555. Those who had Petrine ambitions, like Clement VII, Paul III, and Paul IV, happily and not dishonourably seized the hour, even if it came *per adorationem*.

In the aftermath of the conclave, Pole withdrew from Rome, retiring to a Benedictine convent near Lake Garda. Shortly thereafter he resigned from the Roman Inquisition.⁵⁴ He filled his days with prayer and occasional discourses with scholars who stopped by en route to somewhere more important—men like the historian Giovanni Michele Bruto, or the Italian-Hungarian diplomat and ecclesiastic Andrea Dudith (Sbardellati). He did not, however, seek to take orders as a full member of the community. His was a modest spirituality, but his reputed sanctity was itself no shield from nagging rumours about his orthodoxy, which had briefly surfaced in the conclave itself. A Dominican priest, De' Bartoli, also claimed both Cardinals Pole and Morone held Lutheran views on Justification and Purgatory.⁵⁵ These accusations of heresy haunted Pole and in 1557, as aforementioned, Paul IV directed the Roman Inquisition to examine Pole's views on Justification.⁵⁶

The conclave had ultimately elected Cardinal Giovanni Maria del Monte, who took the

⁵² That is, elected Pole "*per adorationem*". Adoration was the commonest form of election in the sixteenth century. When a candidate was a few votes shy of the necessary two thirds majority, and after the last ballot of the day was cast, his supporters would gather in the Pauline chapel and select two cardinals to fetch their candidate to the papal chair which was placed in there at the start of each conclave. After a suitable show of reluctance, the candidate would be seated in the chair to receive homage from his supporters. The ceremony created a stampede effect, which usually brought the necessary waverers over, and this was taken for formal election by public vote. After the reforms of Gregory XV, "*per adorationem*" ceased to be a canonical form of election and the homage was performed, as it is today, once a candidate has been canonically elected by ballot and has accepted his election.

⁵³ *Pole II*, no. 573. Pole clearly references the events of Palm Sunday, when Christ sent two disciples to fetch the ass on which Jesus entered Jerusalem in fulfilment of the Prophecy of Zechariah "he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" Zechariah 9:9 (KJV).

⁵⁴ Mayer, *Reginald Pole*, 192.

⁵⁵ Mayer, *Reginald Pole*, 190-91. These accusations of doctrinal heterodoxy were a consequence of Pole's work with Contarini.

⁵⁶ Mayer, *Reginald Pole*, 330-40, discusses Pole's last struggle with Paul IV. Edwards, *Archbishop Pole*, 93-105, summarises the current thinking.

name Julius III.⁵⁷ Genial; a deft diplomat, also a former legate *a latere* to Trent; shrewd, venal, and yet also a reformer of sorts with all sorts of personal flaws and peccadillos, del Monte embodied many of the contradictions of the late Renaissance curia and papacy. Julius III is remembered for appointing the glorious Palestrina to the papal chapel and the notorious Innocenzo del Monte to the Sacred College. Innocenzo was neither truly a del Monte nor truly a nephew and, whatever the precise nature of his personal duties, Julius III denied Innocenzo nothing, including scandalous access to his bedchamber.

Innocenzo's appointment drew a severe and revealing rebuke from Pole. He warned Julius to consider consequences of "evil suppositions to which the elevation of a fatherless young man ... give rise".⁵⁸ He wrote to Innocenzo himself: "were it not for the Pope's paternal affection I would not dare to congratulate you—but pray God will lead you to recognise how important this office is. You must show every day his holiness made a good choice".⁵⁹ In the immediate context of the conclave, these were significant words. They echoed his admonition to himself and the assembled Fathers at Trent: those seeking office in the church should neither be motivated by personal acquisition, nor mar priestly office with personal vice. Pole's spiritual journey had indeed carried him some distance from the effortless pluralism of this youth.

Julius III eventually persuaded Pole to return to Rome. The circumstances surrounding his return to the Curia are unclear, and his return resulted in another telling, if very curious incident. Pole decided to send the young English king, Edward VI, a copy of *De Unitate*, together with a personal preface in the form of a letter. Written late in 1552, Pole's letter unfortunately coincides with the young king's ceasing to keep his personal Chronicle.⁶⁰ Pole chose this moment because Edward had entered his majority, and despite good advice to the contrary,⁶¹ since *De Unitate* made a less than veiled attack on the very legitimacy of Edward's kingship.⁶² If this was intended as an attempt at a diplomatic approach it surely missed its

⁵⁷ Del Monte took the name in honour of his family's former patron, Julius II.

⁵⁸ Del Monte's relationship with Innocenzo has been of interest and scandal since the 1550s. The cardinal came across the bastard Innocenzo on the street and was swept away by his charms. He placed him in his brother's household. Joachim du Bellay put it in these terms: "Yet seeing a footman, a child, a beast, a rascal, a poltroon made a cardinal for having taken care of a monkey well, a Ganymede wearing the red hat on his head" (Aldrich and Wotherspoon, *Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian History*, 278).

⁵⁹ *Pole II*, no. 569. Despite misgivings, Pole dealt with Innocenzo in his new capacity.

⁶⁰ *The Chronicle and Political Papers of Edward VI*, ed. W. K. Jordan, (London, 1966). The last entry is dated 28 November. S. Alford, *Kingship and Politics in the Reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge, 2002), 32-64, considers kingship in detail. In France, majority would have been manifest in the king's presiding formally at council. Edward sporadically attended council in 1550 and 1551, but he informally but effectively presided over business from the privy chamber. J. Murphy, "The illusion of decline: the Privy Chamber 1547-1558", in *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, ed. D. Starkey (London, 1987), 119-146.

⁶¹ "Many try to dissuade me from writing but the good reports about you from all who come here made me decide to write to you anyway" (*Pole II*, no. 601). It is quite possible that Edward's reputation reminded Pole of Henry VIII at the start of his reign. This letter includes Pole's last recapitulation of his part in the events of the early 1530s.

⁶² Scholars continue to debate when Edward became effectively 'king' (See Alford, *Kingship and Politics in the reign of Edward VI*, 151-71). Whatever historians' doubts, significantly, they were not shared by Pole: "entering adolescence you have come to Hercules' crossroads as fables foretell...where you can follow your father's example in religion or your grandfather and ancestors...everyone who has talked to you about the manner in reason of governing has made it harder for you to make the right choice ... All in the Kingdom have the same opinion;

mark. It would appear that although well briefed, Pole understood very little about the character of Edward VI.⁶³

Spiritual Endeavour in England

Edward VI's death and the accession of Mary I came *Deus ex machina*. If it was seen by Catholic, Protestant, and even by hardened Machiavellians to reveal the hand of God, from the outset, nothing was straightforward for Pole. The pope saddled Pole's legatine ass, albeit for the best of reasons, with conflicting commissions: as legate *a latere* to Mary I, and legate *a latere* to England on the one hand; and on the other, as legate *a latere* for the Peace to Charles V and Henri II. Pole later observed: "for me, I work three jobs".⁶⁴

The pope well understood that Catholic monarchs were bound by their own dynastic interests; but, rather naively, he expected Mary, as a woman, to be more pliable.⁶⁵ Sharing the pope's prejudices, Pole repeatedly counselled the queen to remain unmarried until he arrived in England,⁶⁶ and he even pressed Mary's former chaplain, William Peto, to support him.⁶⁷ If Pole and legate correctly grasped the fact that Mary's religious sympathies were critical in their religious endeavour, they both misread Mary's capacity to act otherwise with ruthless dynastic self-interest.

In the event, Pole did not set foot on English soil until November 1554. By then, Mary had weathered Wyatt's military challenge, and curbed the pretensions of the kingdom's largely male political elite. Her policy objectives were also broadly settled, and she had married Charles V's son and heir, Philip. Thus, the Reconciliation with Rome, which was embodied by Pole's physical presence in London was, at least politically, the very last piece of the queen's domestic jigsaw. Moreover, Pole was still legate in several capacities: as legate to England, legate for the Peace to the Holy Roman Emperor (Charles V), and to the King of France (Henri II) (1553-4), and finally as legate in England (1554-6). His powers, which included that of papal proctor, were extensive but, nevertheless, they were altered and extended several times by Julius III. They were reconfirmed upon the accessions of Marcellus II, and then in turn by Paul IV. Even so, to deal with Thomas Cranmer's (forsworn) protestation prior his consecration as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1532, Paul IV was called upon further to extend Pole's commission.⁶⁸ After Cranmer's deprivation, Pole succeeded to Canterbury.⁶⁹ From then until March 1557, Pole served both as legate *a latere* and Archbishop of Canterbury. After the

seduced by lucre or fear" (*Pole II*, no. 601).

⁶³ *Pole II*, no. 602.

⁶⁴ *Pole III*, no. 1483 Pole is referring to his three parallel legatine commissions.

⁶⁵ *Pole II*, no. 690.

⁶⁶ *Pole II*, no. 797.

⁶⁷ Peto was a Friar Observant who preached against the divorce and fled England. Subsequently he was created Bishop of Salisbury by the pope—in succession to Cardinal Campeggio. He returned to England in 1553 and re-established himself in Franciscan convent in Greenwich. Paul IV named him cardinal priest in the consistory of 14 June 1557 and then named *legate a latere* to England. He never received his red hat. He refused his promotion because of his age. He died in April 1558. Consequently, Peto rather than Pole, is notionally England's last resident cardinal *legate a latere* until the nineteenth century Catholic Restoration.

⁶⁸ J. M. Gray, *Oaths and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2012), 102-04.

⁶⁹ Given the association of Mariology with the queen, Pole's choice of the Feast of the Annunciation to receive his pallium and preach his first sermon as Archbishop was surely not accidental.

revocation of his legatine powers, and his recall to Rome in 1557, he served until his death in November 1558 as archbishop, primate, and *legatus natus*.⁷⁰ In the final analysis, Pole's unique position *vis-à-vis* both Mary I and Philip II as a kinsman, and as their *unofficial* legate, meant that the cardinal remained central in Imperial, English, and latterly Spanish policy—even if Paul IV officially excluded him. By the second half of 1558, with peace talks mooted, the pope begrudgingly permitted episcopal nominations to be considered in Consistory. The pope's change of heart came too late to have any practical impact, as by November 1558 both Mary and Pole would be dead.

Historians should also consider the practical distinctions between the function and interests of resident legates *a latere*, and those merely sent into a jurisdiction to fulfil a specific plenipotentiary purpose. In this former role, Pole was inexperienced. Until his arrival back in England, he primarily had been the Pope's legate; after his entry into London, he became *de facto* Mary I's (and Philip's) legate. Instead of merely representing the interests of the Holy See in England, he now also represented the interests of England, as well as those of Mary and of Philip in their separate monarchical capacities. It is a nice, but telling, distinction. However, Pole's various roles did share an over-riding objective: namely, ending the Schism, and restoring communion between the Church in England and Rome.

Historians, nevertheless, must reverence the fact that Pole's roles were not precisely the same. Moreover, it was not until he reached England that Pole properly became aware of the scale of this undertaking. Then, the failure of the queen's pregnancy in the middle of 1555, and the subsequent catastrophic loss of Bishop Stephen Gardiner (who died in November 1555), placed on Pole's shoulders executive burdens for which he was hardly fitted by experience, and for which he was disinclined by temperament.

That said, in the early months of 1556, Pole's self-doubts about his suitability for episcopal office had not dimmed his legatine ambitions for a reformation of the English church. In a series of letters, Pole outlined a comprehensive reform agenda for the forthcoming Synod: he supported the Pope's choices of new cardinals,⁷¹ and promoted other Imperial candidates to Cardinal Morone.⁷²

Some historians have been tempted to see Pole's brief time as Archbishop of Canterbury as prototype for the model activist reforming prelate which, in the post Tridentine church, possibly was to be best characterised by Charles Borromeo in Milan.⁷³ While it is true that Pole's famous diocesan synod set a reform agenda that included the novelty of diocesan seminaries for the education of priests—an idea that was later picked up at the third session of

⁷⁰ Paul IV revoked Pole's *legatus natus* status as metropolitan and Archbishop, but the revocation was never legally recognised, as Mary refused to give Paul IV's emissary a passport from Calais. The loss of Calais further and usefully muddied the ecclesiastical diplomatic waters.

⁷¹ *Pole III*, no. 1489.

⁷² Cardinal Morone was named as Cardinal Protector of England by Paul IV in 1555. Mary I never confirmed his nomination: perhaps not wishing to diminish in any way Pole's unique status. It may explain why Pole used Morone as his agent. Morone later was referred by the pope to the Roman Inquisition, accused, like Pole, of subscribing to Lutheran doctrine of Justification.

⁷³ Charles Borromeo was a (maternal) nephew of Pius IV. Borromeo gave Tridentine Catholic churches two of their most enduring motifs: the Tabernacle at the High Altar, and the double-boxed Confessional. Borromeo borrowed the former idea from his copy of Pole's Decrees. R. Pole, *The reform of England by the Decrees of Cardinal Pole*, trans., H. Raikes (London, 1839), 21. J. W. O'Malley, *Trent: What happened at the Council*, 248-278, discusses the outcomes of the 25 sessions over 18 years.

the Council of Trent—it is equally true that the synod met only once in 1556, and while adjourned to May 1557, it never re-assembled, and its decrees were never fully implemented.

Pole lacked practical diocesan experience and administrative flare. Normally, this would have mattered very little, for he could have used experienced ecclesiastical surrogates to exercise those functions on his behalf—as to some extent he was able to do in Viterbo—and concentrate his efforts upon the things he was good at, such as: preaching, inspiring spirituality in others, leading educational projects, and overseeing a program of institutional reform. These were the very things that a conscientious cardinal-deacon could perform. They were the duties that Pole had devoted time and effort to in his decade in high office.

Given the restraints of time that were imposed upon the queen and her legate, it is most likely that Pole's qualities would never have been enough for an institution in post-revolutionary chaos. On his arrival in 1554, the English Church lacked institutional coherence: its finances were compromised, its buildings wrecked, its episcopate undermined, its clergy without discipline, its administration laicised, its procedures unsound, its mission confused, its doctrine uncertain, its ministry tainted, and its worship corrupted. In essence, all its actions since 1533 were mired in differing degrees of canonical illegality and sacramental illegitimacy.

Pole's agenda unflinchingly pursued the principles he had enunciated in the Admonition to the Fathers at Trent. He actively sought to re-employ ecclesiastical property in the interests the poor and for the better education of the priesthood. He called upon the beneficiaries of the past monastic dissolutions to do their duty.⁷⁴ Most of the governing caste, who had gained so much, were disinclined to put their hands in their pockets.

A Measure of Failure, and a Measure of Success

For Pole, these were the bitter fruits of the Henrician schism: the “root of all trouble” for the English church originated from “lack of obedience to the Roman church and its head that let in all impiety and injustice”.⁷⁵ And as a testament to that judgement, Pole's will gave final clarity of his purpose. Despite all the tribulations Paul IV had put him through after 1557, to the end Pole remained the papacy's faithful defender.

Reginald Pole died on 17 November 1558, at seven in the evening in Lambeth Palace. His death came a little over twelve hours after that of his final patron, Mary I. He was buried as he ordered in his will in Becket's Corona, in his metropolitan cathedral in Canterbury. The painted tomb he planned was never built, and the masses at chantry chapels he endowed were never said.

If the brevity of Mary I's reign leaves it bedevilled by unanswerable ‘what if’ questions, then most surely it is even more the case for Pole's even briefer tenure as archbishop. If some recent historians and biographers have been as apt as their confessional predecessors to judge Pole harshly for his personal flaws of character, his advocates perhaps have always been too eager to present him as a saint. Pole was a cardinal, a legate, and a churchman: he owned many of their flaws. However, the suspicion that he was never wholly straightforward and honest about his beliefs is unfair upon Reginald Pole.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Pole II*, no. 394.

⁷⁵ *Pole II*, no. 665.

⁷⁶ Pole's will makes clear his orthodoxy on Justification and Goods Works, and on the Mass and Purgatory. It is

Although everything about Pole's career was edged with advantage, ultimately his is the story of a consummate outsider. Reticent, Pole sought to keep the world at a safe distance, while also wanting the world to understand him. Sometimes, as his correspondence conveys, Pole also wanted the world to think well of him. It is a very human flaw.

History has glimpsed the man through his final period as legate *a latere* in England. Yet, the cardinal arrived in London some seventeen months into Mary I's reign, when in fact so much was already settled. The queen had defeated Wyatt's rebellion and had settled the terms of her government. From this position of strength, she had subsequently married Philip—the newly minted king of Naples and Jerusalem in his own right—in a grand ceremony at Winchester Cathedral on St James's Day in 1554. By the time Pole's feet touched the jetty at Whitehall Palace it appeared, almost as miraculously, that Mary was pregnant.⁷⁷ What was then not to be—Mary would have no heir—determined the future more than anything Pole did thereafter.

The cardinal's earlier contributions fared better. *De Unitate* was to greatly influence the emergent Roman Catholicism of the second half of the century, and to colour the religion of the missions into England from the 1580s. Pole's *Admonition to the Fathers at Trent* provided the Catholic reformers with what might today be called a mission statement. The address was both a personal credo and an ecclesial manifesto, and immediately it was acknowledged so to be. It is hardly difficult to draw a direct line from this address through to the conclave of 1550, and then on to his final legation in England in the middle 1550s. This, and his tireless work at Viterbo, led to the apex of Pole's career at the conclave of 1549-50.

His moment came because of selfless endeavour. It went because of Pole's self-doubt about his suitability for the highest office. At the heart of those doubts lie the doubts of historians and biographers. That conclave was also the high-water mark for the *spirituali*, that group of Catholic reformers amongst whom Pole had long been prominent, renowned, and universally admired. Their work had saved the papacy from itself, and ultimately its survival enabled its renewal. That relative success turned out to be a greater achievement than the relative failure of the English restoration in the later 1550s.

worthy of reading in its entirety. *Pole*, III no. 2286: "I hope to be aided to the maximum degree by the prayers of the most Blessed Virgin Mary and the whole Church both Triumphant and Militant... and I pray in fear and trembling respecting my unworthiness", continuing on to "wish and ordain that two Chantries be established in which two priests... will perpetually pray for my soul, the souls of all my dead relatives and the dead faithful ... and mass will be celebrated daily in turn".

⁷⁷ *Pole II*, no. 998. Pole greeted the pregnant queen with the Angelic Salutation, by which Archangel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary the Incarnation in the Gospel of Luke: "Ave Maria, gratia plena Dominus tecum". Marian referencing was a recurring motif throughout Mary's reign and her Chapel commissioned several settings of the Ave Maria—perhaps most famously that of Robert Parsons.

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