

'Dowting of ye Cupp': Disbelief about the Eucharist and a Catholic Miracle in Reformation England

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This essay is inspired by an intriguing late sixteenth-century Catholic liturgical object, the Bosworth Hall burse. It commemorates a vision of the crucified Christ seen by the missionary priest (and later martyr) John Payne in Douai in 1575, which apparently dispelled a moment of doubt about the real presence in the consecrated eucharist. The incident is situated in the context of the heated Catholic and Protestant controversies about the doctrine of transubstantiation in post-Reformation England and against the backdrop of similar medieval miracles designed to counter disbelief, including the Mass of St Gregory and the miracle of Bolsena of 1263. The essay illuminates the persistence and transformation of anxieties about the sacred in the sixteenth century, considers the part they played in private and public crises of faith, and explores the mechanisms by which they were resolved. It also investigates how the memory of Payne's miraculous vision was crystallized in a material object.

The stimulus and starting point for this essay is an intriguing liturgical object known as the Bosworth Hall Burse (Fig. 1). A burse is an embroidered case for storing and carrying the corporal, the white linen cloth upon which the host and chalice are placed during the celebration of the eucharist. Dating from the late sixteenth century and worked in silk in double feather-stitch, it shows a chalice, inside of which appears the naked figure of Christ crucified. Beneath is a stylized image of the vernicle, the famous veil of St Veronica upon which the Saviour's face was believed to have been supernaturally imprinted. On either side are two representations of the Holy Name of Jesus, the sacred monogram IHS. The verses embroidered around the edge of the burse reveal that it commemorates a miracle:

AT GWINS FIRST MASS
JOHN PAINE ONCE WAS
Where dowting of ye cupp,

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Figure 1. (Colour online) The Bosworth Hall burse, photograph from the Bernard Payne Papers, Ushaw College, Durham, UC/P14/1/24-29. Reproduced by permission of Durham University Library.

Christ God and man
Rebukt him than
and made hime thus geve uppe.¹

The verses refer to a vision experienced by John Payne when he was a young man in training as a missionary priest at Douai College in 1575. Attending the first mass celebrated by a fellow student, the Welshman Robert Gwyn, at St Nicholas's Church, Payne seems to have experienced a moment of hesitation about the real presence of Christ's blood in the wine. But at the same instant as the chalice was raised by the priest, the Saviour appeared to dispel Payne's disbelief and castigate his lack of faith.² After his own ordination, Payne returned to England to succour the faithful, before being arrested in

¹ Ethelbert Horne, 'The Bosworth Hall Burse', *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 43 (1923), 80–1, 85.

² On Payne and Gwyn, see Godfrey Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests: A Dictionary of the Secular Clergy of England and Wales 1558–1850*, 1: *Elizabethan 1558–1603* (Ware and Durham, 1968), 266–7, 140–1 respectively; B. C. Foley, 'Bl. John Payne, Seminary Priest and Martyr – 1582', *Essex Recusant* 2 (1960), 48–75; James E. Kelly, 'Conformity, Loyalty and the Jesuit Mission to England of 1580', in Eliane Glaser, ed., *Religious Tolerance in the Atlantic World: Early Modern and Contemporary Perspectives* (Basingstoke, 2014), 149–70, at 152–6. See also n. 7 below.

1581. Betrayed by the turncoat George Elliot and accused of plotting the queen's assassination, he was charged with high treason, tortured, and executed the following year.³ Once in the possession of Payne's Catholic patrons in England, the Petres of Ingatestone Hall in Essex, some time later the burse was transferred to the private chapel of Bosworth Hall, in Leicestershire, where it was revered as a remnant of the martyr.⁴

This essay explores the context and significance of Payne's spiritual vision, using it as an opportunity to investigate the doubts that accumulated around the eucharist in post-Reformation England. The sacrament of the altar was not merely the focal point of heated disputes between Catholics and Protestants; it also precipitated frictions which hardened into lasting denominational divisions between Lutherans and the Reformed. These doctrinal debates were built on the substantial bedrock of scholastic medieval theology, which had sought to resolve the bewildering puzzles and paradoxes that surrounded this central Christian mystery – to explain the metaphysical status of the bread and wine consecrated during the rite and to clarify the complex epistemological question of how precisely Christ could be said to be present in these material species.⁵ The aim here is to illuminate the re-emergence and evolution of anxiety about these thorny issues in the sixteenth century, as well as to contribute to current work that is reassessing what Lucien Febvre called 'the problem of unbelief' by underlining the symbiotic rather than oppositional relationship between faith and doubt in the late medieval and early modern period.⁶ It will be suggested that the conflicts and schisms

³ For Payne's activities after his arrival in England and arrest, see J. H. Pollen, ed., 'Father Persons' Memoirs (concluded)', *Miscellanea IV*, Catholic Record Society 4 (London, 1907), 1–161, at 39, 47–9.

⁴ The burse came to Bosworth Hall through the Petre family and was in the possession of Mrs David T. Constable Maxwell in the 1970s, who loaned it to the Leicester Museum between 1949 and 1957. In 1977 it was once again at Bosworth Hall: see Durham, Ushaw College, Bernard Payne Papers, UC/P14/1/24–29. I am grateful to James Kelly for his assistance in facilitating access to this material.

⁵ See James F. McCue, 'The Doctrine of Transubstantiation from Berengar through Trent: The Point at Issue', *HTbR* 61 (1968), 385–430; Gary Macy, *Treasures from the Storeroom: Medieval Religion and the Eucharist* (Collegeville, MN, 1999), especially chs 5, 8; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), ch. 1.

⁶ Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, transl. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1982). For recent revisionist work, see John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London, 2005), 216–30; Alec Ryrie, 'Atheism and Faith in Early Modern Britain' (forthcoming). See also Keith Thomas,

engendered by the Reformation served simultaneously to exacerbate and complicate the uncertainties people experienced as internal struggles converged with the formation of confessional identities.

Born in Peterborough, John Payne appears to have been a convert from Protestantism who entered the Douai seminary in 1574 as a mature student, serving for a period as its bursar.⁷ Apart from the burse, the only other evidence of the incident that occurred during the mass celebrated by Robert Gwyn is a Latin letter sent by the exiled theologian Gregory Martin to his Jesuit friend Edmund Campion, then residing in Rome, on 20 December 1575. Celebrating God's mercies to the English College, a new Oxford beyond the seas, he described how after adoring the consecrated host 'there came into [Payne's] mind this thought that if the whole Christ were contained also in the second species of wine it would seem that it could be addressed and saluted in the same words as the first. And while he hesitated rather than doubted he saw most clearly, his eyes piercing to the interior of the chalice then being elevated, the venerable form therein of a naked man'.⁸ Payne's confessor regarded this as a miracle in

Religion and the Decline of Magic (Harmondsworth, 1973 edn), 198–206; David Wootton, 'Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period', *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988), 695–730; idem, 'Unbelief in Early Modern Europe', *History Workshop* 20 (Autumn 1985), 82–100; John Edwards, 'Religious Faith and Doubt in Late Medieval Spain: Soria circa 1450–1500', *P&P* 120 (1988), 3–25; Susan Reynolds, 'Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval Scepticism', *TRHS* 6th ser. 1 (1991), 21–41.

⁷ At his trial Payne described his brother as having been 'a very earnest Protestant': William Allen, *A Briefe Historie of the Glorious Martyrdom of Twelve Reverend Priests: Father Edmund Campion and his Companions* (London, 1908; first publ. 1582), 95.

⁸ 'Memoriam fecit mirabilium suorum misericors et miserator Dominus. Quorsum haec? Ecce enim, ut haesitantem multorum parvulorum fidem corroboraret, non reliquit eos sine miraculo. Quod te nullo modo celare debeo, quia sacramentum regis abscondere bonum est, opera autem Dei revelare et confiteri honorificum est. In basilica Sancti Nicolai quae adhaeret templo D. Jacobi, dum quidam ex nostris prima sacra faceret, aderat inter caeteros Anglicanae nostrae societatis oeconomus, vir prudens, gravis, maturus, religiosus; cujus in mentem post primae speciei adorationem cum illa venisset cogitatio, ut si totus Christus in secunda quoque vini speciei contineretur iisdem quoque verbis quibus prima compellari et salutari posse videretur, jamque haeretet potius quam vacillaret, certissime vidit oculis penetrantibus elevatum calicem venerabilem formam quasi nudi hominis. Attonitus novitate rei valdeque anxius, postquam confessario suo, Societatis vestrae gravissimo viro, id ita esse sanctissime affirmasset homo minime levis aut superstitiosus, jamque ipse Alanus tantum habere momenti ad honorem Dei et nostrorum aedificationem existimasset ut palam pro concione declaraverit, tandem ita coeptum est celebrari hoc miraculum ut illius causa in ea ecclesia publice supplicatio fieret et ad populum sermo exhortatorius. Rident ist qui sancta omnia rident, et nisi quod palpari queat nihil volunt credere ... denique cum Apostolus dicat, Charitas omnia credit; nos quid

support of the Catholic doctrine of the mass, and when William Allen was informed he made it the subject of a public discourse ‘for the honour of God and the edification of our men’. Special devotions were accompanied by a sermon of exhortation to the local people as the fame of the miracle spread in Douai and beyond. For Gregory Martin, Payne’s vision was just one of the wonderful works the Lord had wrought ‘to confirm the hesitating faith of many little ones’ in a time of profound religious turmoil. Tellingly, he invoked the text of Matthew 14: 31, Jesus’s castigation of the fear that led Peter to sink as he walked towards him on the Sea of Galilee: ‘O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?’⁹

Nothing is more emblematic of the idiosyncratic character and theological mutability of the English Reformation than the successive reorientations of official teaching about the eucharist that marked the first half of the sixteenth century. Henry VIII condemned the heresy of sacramentarianism and sent several Lollards to the stake for rejecting the real presence. Denial of transubstantiation became orthodox doctrine under his evangelical son Edward VI, whose second Prayer Book of 1552 bore the imprint of the memorialist understanding of this sacrament promoted by the Swiss reformers and reflected the gradual eclipse of Lutheran opinion on this and other issues in England. Under Mary, the idea that the eucharist was a mere symbol and sign of Christ’s sacrifice rather than a miraculous re-enactment of it was proscribed and vilified once more. The accession of Elizabeth I did little to clear up the confusion created by the rapid theological reversals of the previous decades. The Thirty-Nine Articles declared transubstantiation ‘repugnant to the plain words of Scripture’ and the source of many ‘superstitions’, but the ambiguous wording of the revised liturgy, together with the omission of the black rubric, provided room for a range of views to persist within the newly reinstated Church of England. The Catholic practice of reserving the cup to the priest was, however, firmly repudiated.¹⁰

tentamus Deum ut audiamus, Modicae fidei quare dubitastis?': T. F. Knox, ed., *The First and Second Diaries of the English College, Douay: And an Appendix of the Unpublished Documents* (London, 1878), 311.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Lucy E. C. Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2000), 166–76. For the Thirty-Nine Articles and their predecessors, the Forty-Two Articles of 1553, see Gerald Bray, ed., *Documents of the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1994), 301–2. The black rubric explained that although the eucharist was to be received by

Dismissing the precept that the bread and wine were actually transmuted into Christ's body and blood as a vain 'dream' and an invented tradition, John Jewel's challenge sermon and *Apology* (1562) initiated a new phase in the ongoing battle about beliefs and practices connected with the eucharist.¹¹ From Louvain, Thomas Harding, John Rastell and Thomas Dorman launched vigorous counterattacks defending the doctrines of transubstantiation and the real presence, which had been reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in 1551.¹² Others devoted entire treatises to vindicating the Catholic position, notably Nicholas Sander in his *The Supper of Our Lord* (1566), Thomas Heskyns in *The Parliament of Chryste* (1566) and Robert Pointz in *Testimonies for the Real Presence* (1566).¹³ In turn these evoked Protestant ripostes by Alexander Nowell and William Fulke.¹⁴ The sheer volume of ink spilt on this issue in English as well as Latin testifies to the concern of clergy on both sides that lay people might be drawn into a quagmire of error and uncertainty by their enemies' arguments. Harding hoped that by reading his *Confutation* those 'which stumble and slyde, may fynde wherwith to stave them'; Pointz's book was initially

communicants kneeling, this did not signify 'any reall and essencial presence'; the bread and wine remained in 'styll in their verye naturall substaunces, and therefore may not be adored, for that were Idolatrye to be abhorred of all faythfull christians'.

¹¹ John Jewel, *An Apology of the Church of England*, ed. J. E. Booty (Ithaca, NY, 1968), especially 31–4.

¹² Thomas Dorman, *A Proufe of Certeine Articles in Religion, Denied by M. Juell, Sett Furth in Defence of the Catholyke Beleaf therein* (Antwerp, 1564); John Rastell, *A Replie against an Answer (Falselie Intitled) in Defence of the Truth* (Antwerp, 1565); Thomas Harding, *An Answer to Maister Juells Challenge ... Augmented with Certaine Quotations and Additions* (Antwerp, 1565), especially fols 50^r–71^r, 126^r–130^v, 135^v–141^v, 161^r–162^v; *A Confutation of a Book Intituled an Apologie of the Church of England* (Antwerp, 1565), especially fols 91^a–106^a; *A Rejoinder to M. Jewels Replie against the Sacrifice of the Masse* ([Louvain], 1567). For a helpful bibliographical guide to these debates, see Peter Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age: A Survey of Printed Sources* (Aldershot, 1977), ch. 1. For these controversies in their European context, see Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge, 2006), ch. 5.

¹³ Nicholas Sander, *The Supper of our Lord Set Forth according to the Truth of the Gospell and Catholike Faith* (Louvain, 1566); Thomas Heskyns, *The Parliament of Chryste Avouching and Declaring the Enacted and Received Truth of the Presence of his Bodie and Bloode in the Blessed Sacrament, and of other Articles Concerning the Same* (Antwerp, 1566); Robert Pointz, *Testimonies for the Real Presence of Christes Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament of the Aultar Set Forth at Large* (Louvain, 1566).

¹⁴ Alexander Nowell, *A Confutation as wel of M. Dormans Last Boke entituled A Disproufe. &c. as also of D. Sander his Causes of Transubstantiation* (London, 1567), fols 151^r–243^r; William Fulke, *D. Heskyns, D. Sanders, and M. Rastel, Accounted (among their Faction) Three Pillers, and Archpatriarches of the Popish Synagogue* (London, 1579).

prepared to satisfy the worries of a friend, before being published for the benefit of those ‘wavering, being uncertaine which syde to sticke unto’.¹⁵ Lamenting the ‘instability of belief’ that marked this tempestuous age, Thomas Butler’s translation of Antonio Possevino’s *Treatise of the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar* (1570) was intended to prevent the defection of people who might be ‘lightly seduced to geve eare to Luther, or his Maister the Divil, or any of their scholars, as Musculus, Calvin, Peter Martyr, Beza, Jewel, Latimer, Bale, Horne, and others of their sect, and new devised Parlamente Religion’.¹⁶ And in his handy manual entitled ‘Motives’, first printed in 1574, Richard Bristow addressed himself particularly to those that ‘stande in doubt betwene God and Baal’, seeking to provide them with ‘diverse plaine and sure wayes’ to discover ‘the truthe in this doubtful and dangerous time of Heresie’.¹⁷

Such books examined the many points of eucharistic theology over which medieval nominalists and realists had squabbled and which were now in renewed dispute. At root, the debate revolved around the interpretation of the critical passages in the New Testament in which Jesus declared to the disciples ‘this is my body’: it turned in large part on ‘the true sense and meaning’ of the words he had uttered at the Last Supper, out of which, admitted Pointz, ‘ariseth al the strife’. Catholics – and indeed Lutherans – tied themselves in knots insisting that this phrase should be understood literally, by contrast with John 15: 15, in which Jesus says ‘I am the true vine’, which was to be interpreted metaphorically.¹⁸ Discussing the ancient Aristotelian distinction between accidents and substances, Catholics had no less difficulty explaining why the bread and wine still retained their original appearance and shape after they were transubstantiated. Christ’s body was really and corporeally present even though it was not ‘outwardly perceptible’ to sight. Understanding such transmutations lay beyond the capacity of human reason. The devout Christian

¹⁵ Harding, *Confutation*, sig. 12^r; Pointz, *Testimonies*, sig. A3^v.

¹⁶ Antonio Possevino, *A Treatise of the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, Called the Masse*, transl. Thomas Butler (Louvain, 1570), sig. A5^v.

¹⁷ Richard Bristow, *A Briefe Treatise of diverse Plaine and Sure Ways to Finde out the Truthe in this Doubtful and Dangerous Time of Heresie in Conteyning Sundry Worthy Motives unto the Catholike Faith, or Considerations to Move a Man to Believe the Catholikes, and not the Heretikes* (Antwerp, 1574), sig.*3^r and title page.

¹⁸ Pointz, *Testimonies*, fol. 5^v. See also Harding, *Answers*, fols 126^r–130^v; Sander, *Supper*, fols 2^r–^v, 5^v–6^v, and bk 4; Heskyns, *Parliament*, bk 2, ch. 14; bk 3, ch. 8; Nowell, *Confutation*, especially fols 151^r, 155^r, 198^r; Fulke, *D. Heskyns*, 291.

would heed the Church Fathers like Chrysostom who had warned 'in this high mysterie, not to trust therefore to our own sensual judgement'.¹⁹ The example of the Capernaïtes in John 6: 52, who, when Christ claims to be the bread of life, ask how he can give them his raw flesh to eat, was frequently discussed by Catholic writers, who condemned their 'gross imaginations' and 'carnal reasoning'.²⁰ On the other hand the 'Judaicall questions' many Protestants asked about the real presence betrayed no less lack of faith: 'How can one body of Christ be in a thousand places at once? How can it be dayly eaten and never consumed? How can ther be true flesh and blood seing the same is neither seen, felt, nor tasted ... ?'²¹ The 'wicked heresie' of 'phantasieng' the Lord's body without blood not only constituted 'a great Sacriedge', it also showed how these 'signe makers, and figure feigners' 'streigned oute a gnate, and swallowe[d] ... a Cammell ... stumble[d] at a strawe, and leap[t] over a blocke'.²²

Although their aim was to lead lay people safely through these linguistic and philosophical labyrinths, such texts possibly did less to extinguish than they did to augment the perplexities of their readers. The sceptical questions they listed in order to refute may ironically have served to reanimate these same strands of disbelief. Indeed, some Catholic and Protestant divines began to turn away from the task of producing works of controversy towards devotional tracts because they observed that both the educated and uneducated were 'brought many-times to be more doubtfull therby then [they were] before'.²³ Could books such as these have played a part in persuading John Payne to drift away from conformity to the Church of England and embrace the Catholic faith? And might the disputes about the eucharist which they fuelled help to explain the hesitation he felt during Robert Gwyn's mass in December 1575?

The exact nature of Payne's difficulty is hard to unravel from Gregory Martin's letter, though it appears to be linked with the doctrine

¹⁹ Pointz, *Testimonies*, fol. 48^v; Harding, *Answers*, fols 130^v, 158^v–162^v.

²⁰ See Sander, *Supper*, fols 86^v–87^r; Pointz, *Testimonies*, fols 10^f, 14^v; Heskyns, *Parliament*, sig. Aa1^v. For a Protestant response to this point, see Fulke, *D. Heskyns*, 217–22.

²¹ Pointz, *Testimonies*, fol. 92^r, and see also fols 14^v, 15^f–16^f. For Protestant emphasis on the evidence of the senses in refuting the real presence, see Nowell, *Confutation*, fol. 183^v; Fulke, *D. Heskyns*, 282.

²² Heskyns, *Parliament*, sigs Rr4^r, T4^v, M5^f.

²³ Robert Persons, *A Review of Ten Publike Disputations* (St Omer, 1604), 20; see also Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580–1625* (Cambridge, 1996), ch. 2.

of concomitance: the idea that the body of Christ is present whole and undivided in both the bread and the wine. Commonly invoked to justify the Catholic practice of distributing the communion to the laity in only one kind, this meant that communicants obtained full sacramental grace from the host alone.²⁴ Yet Payne's worry does not seem to be about the legitimacy of the tradition of withholding the cup, but rather about the necessity of two distinct consecrations, an issue that had exercised medieval theologians such as Peter of Poitiers too. It perhaps reflects less a moment of doubt about the real presence than a more arcane concern regarding the compatibility of the ritual procedure and the custom of elevating the host for adoration with what Payne had been taught in his theological training as a priest.²⁵ Arguably it was a product of the very intensity of his meditative focus on the eucharist itself. In turn his vision might be seen as a mystical gift facilitating an existential transition to a deeper level of faith rather than a miracle sent to stop him from succumbing once again to Protestant error and becoming an apostate. The form it took may owe something to the topos of *nudus nudum Christum sequi*, which first appeared in the homilies of St Jerome and became one of the most popular expressions of the desire to imitate Christ in the later Middle Ages.²⁶

The apparition of a figure of the crucified Christ during Gwyn's mass must also be situated against the backdrop of the many miracles vindicating the real presence and transubstantiation that fill the pages of medieval compilations of sermon *exempla* and which supplied the

²⁴ On concomitance, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011), 208–9, 212–13. For contemporary discussions, see Harding, *Answers*, fols 50^r–71^r; Heskins, *Parliament*, bk 3, chs 67–8; Fulke, *D. Heskins*, 302–17, especially 309.

²⁵ For medieval speculations on this point, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 54–8. Eamon Duffy comments that the custom of elevating the host emerged to counteract the view that the consecration of both elements was incomplete until the words of institution had also been said over the chalice: *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1992), 95–6. See also Bede Camm's comments on the case: Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Downside Abbey, Bede Camm Papers (Files on the English Martyrs: Payne). The rite used was presumably that prescribed by the Tridentine missal, which had been issued in 1572: see Wandel, *Eucharist*, 237–9. I am grateful to Catherine Pickstock, Aidan Bellenger and Charlotte Methuen for their advice on this complex issue.

²⁶ I owe this suggestion to Dermot Fenlon; Giles Constable, 'Nudus nudum Christum Sequi and Parallel Formulas in the Twelfth Century', in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams on the Occasion of his 68th Birthday*, ed. F. Forrester Church and Timothy George (Leiden, 1979), 83–91.

inspiration for artists, sculptors, woodcarvers and print makers. Coinciding with the rise of the cult of Corpus Christi, the period from c.1200 to 1500 saw a proliferation of stories about hosts that bled or turned into raw flesh and of masses in which a sacred infant or the crucified Christ appeared. Some of these were vehicles for anti-Semitism and a number of their locations became centres of thriving pilgrimages, notably the famous shrine at Wilsnack.²⁷ As Caroline Walker Bynum has argued, these visions and miraculous transformations of holy matter were a measure both of the vitality of late medieval devotion and of an underside of unbelief: a contemporary crisis of confidence about the sacred that found expression both in the rise of 'animated materiality' and in the ambivalent fascination it engendered.²⁸ What we miscall 'credulity' was constantly accompanied by suspicion that these phenomena might be diabolical illusions or examples of human fraudulence. Frequently displayed to rebuke sceptics and disbelievers, they also illustrate Eamon Duffy's observation that '[e]ucharistic piety was underscored by the problem of doubt'.²⁹ And this doubt, as John Arnold has demonstrated, was often rooted in a 'nexus of practical experience and quotidian reality'. It was prompted less by the intellectual heresies of John Wyclif than by mundane reflection on the physical properties of the eucharist, by a sense that what looked, smelt, tasted and felt like bread might not hide a sublime mystery and might indeed just be a wafer made out of wheaten flour and water.³⁰

²⁷ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 108–29. On medieval eucharistic miracles, see Jules Corblet, *Histoire dogmatique, liturgique et archéologique du sacrement de l'eucharistie*, 2 vols (Paris, 1885), 1: 447–515; Peter Browe, *Die eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters* (Breslau, 1938); G. J. C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist* (Leiden, 1995), 310–19. For the story of 'a priest who felt a doubt in saying the canon and beheld raw flesh' in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogue on Miracles* (c.1220–35), see John Shinnars, ed., *Medieval Popular Religion: A Reader* (Peterborough, ON, 1999), 90. See also Charles Zika, 'Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany', *P&P* 118 (1988), 25–64.

²⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages', *CbH* 71 (2002), 685–714; eadem, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, PA, 2007), esp. 3–5, 86–90, 138–41; eadem, *Christian Materiality*, especially 139–45, 157–9, 224. On miracles as a mechanism for dispelling doubt, see also Michael E. Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150–1350* (Aldershot, 2007), ch. 4.

²⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 102–7, at 102.

³⁰ John H. Arnold, 'The Materiality of Unbelief in Late Medieval England', in Sophie Page, ed., *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain* (Manchester, 2010), 65–95, at 73.

Payne's vision has two particular medieval parallels. The first is the miracle of Bolsena or Orvieto of 1263, when a priest called Peter of Prague was relieved of his doubts about the real presence by blood which dripped onto the corporal from the host he consecrated.³¹ Secondly, it is reminiscent of the cluster of stories about the Mass of St Gregory. An early eighth-century version preserved in Jacobus de Voragine's famous *Golden Legend* tells of the woman who laughed when the famous pope was celebrating the eucharist, saying to her companion that she could not believe that the bread she had baked herself was now the body of Christ, only to be convinced when the host was miraculously transformed into a bleeding finger.³² In later variants of the tale, the housewife is displaced by a group of deacons, and the finger by a vision of Christ as the Man of Sorrows. One of the best known iconographical tropes of the later Middle Ages, the Mass of St Gregory was depicted in altarpieces, paintings and books of hours. After the advent of the mechanical press it infiltrated the homes of laypeople in the guise of indulgenced prints (Fig. 2). As well as reflecting the privatization of the liturgy, the devout meditation of lay people upon such images embodied the assumption that seeing itself was salvific.

For many contemporaries the Mass of St Gregory was a compelling emblem of the miracle of transubstantiation that occurred every time the eucharist was celebrated.³³ In the wake of the

³¹ On this miracle, see Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 119, 135, 149, 304 n. 87; eadem, *Christian Materiality*, 143, 144, 259, 278, 340 n. 62.

³² For an eighth-century image of the 'doubting matron', see Michael Heinlen, 'An Early Image of a Mass of St Gregory and Devotion to the Holy Blood at Weingarten Abbey', *Gesta* 37 (1998), 55–62. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, transl. W. G. Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 1: 179–80.

³³ On the Mass of St Gregory, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 238–9; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 308–10. A database relating to the subject can be found at: <<http://gregorsmesse.uni-muenster.de>>. See also Alan Shestack, *Fifteenth-Century Engravings of Northern Europe from the National Gallery of Art Washington DC* (Washington DC, 1968), nos 213–15. For indulgenced prints of the Mass of St Gregory, see Kathleen Kameron, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350–1500* (New York, 2002), 169–72; Christine Göttler, 'Indulgenced Prints of Saint Gregory's Miraculous Mass', in eadem, *Last Things: Art and the Religious Imagination in the Age of Reform* (Turnhout, 2010), 31–69. For a late medieval stone relief of the Mass of St Gregory, see G. McN. Rushforth, *The Kirham Monument in Paignton Church, Devon: A Study in Mediaeval Iconography and in Particular of the Mass of St Gregory* (Exeter, 1927), especially 21–9 and fig. 1. Caroline Walker Bynum argues that later versions of the image were not designed to explicate the doctrine of transubstantiation or dispel doubt: 'Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St Gregory in the Fifteenth Century', in Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché,

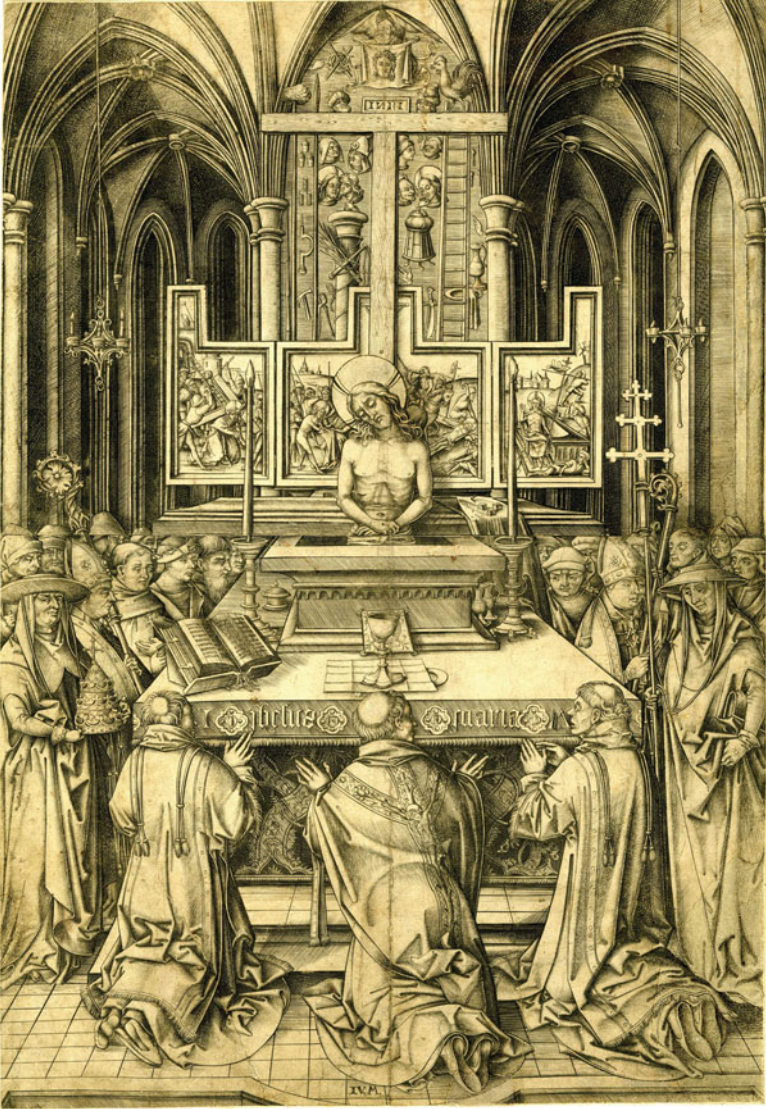


Figure 2. (Colour online) Fifteenth-century print of the Mass of St Gregory by Israhel van Meckenhem, British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings, E, 1.112AN52735001. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

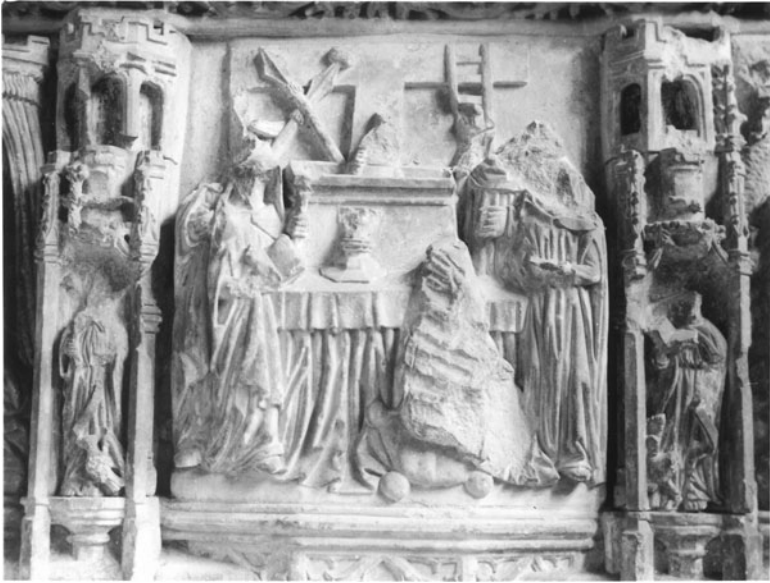


Figure 3. Defaced stone reredos of the Mass of St Gregory, Bishop Oldham's chapel, Exeter Cathedral, 1513. Reproduced by permission of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral.

Reformation, it is not surprising that depictions of it, such as the reredos on this theme in Bishop Oldham's chapel in Exeter Cathedral dating from 1513, were the targets of iconoclastic violence: such attacks reveal how it was transformed into a symbol of popish idolatry itself (Fig. 3).³⁴ The multiple representations of the Mass of St Gregory that circulated on canvas and paper and in stone and wood surely supplied a template to which John Payne (and the creator of the Bosworth Hall burse) retrospectively assimilated the interior vision which he had experienced. They provided a repertoire of mental and physical images that shaped and coloured contemporary perception and cognition. In many sculptures, paintings and pictures, the naked Christ appears surrounded by the instruments of the passion, and, as on the burse, by St Veronica's veil.

eds, *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 2006), 208–40.

³⁴ Göttler, 'Indulged Prints', 69. I am grateful to Olive Millward and Ellie Jones for their assistance in obtaining a photograph of the Bishop Oldham reredos.

As Gregory Martin's letter reveals, Payne's own initial reaction to the startling sight of Christ in the chalice was one in which astonishment was mingled with intense anxiety. It was apparently only after consultation with his Jesuit confessor that he recognized it as an authentic divine vision. This reflects a climate in which apparitions of all kinds were coming under increasingly critical scrutiny. In the wake of philosophical developments that were destabilizing their ontological status, and of religious changes that were undermining people's ability to distinguish truth clearly from falsehood, there was growing concern that many visions were merely 'vanities of the eyes'. They might be optical illusions engendered by that arch-magician and scientist Satan, figments of the imagination created by mental or physical illness, or counterfeit effects wrought by human ingenuity. The doubts and dangers surrounding the medieval discernment of spirits were intensified and complicated by the Reformation and on both sides of the confessional divide individuals were taught to respond to experiences of this kind with caution and trepidation.³⁵ They could also be liabilities in the polemical wars provoked by the schism of Christendom. As Peter Marshall has shown, Protestantism's preoccupation with detecting Antichrist's lying wonders fused with a current of humanist scepticism about feigned miracles epitomized by Erasmus's *Colloquies* and Sir Thomas More's *Dialogue concerning heresies* (1529), which included the notorious case of the Dominican friars of Berne who had deluded local people with a fabricated vision in support of the Immaculate Conception in 1507. According to the rhetoric of forgery deployed by reformed writers, transubstantiation was simply a piece of juggling and trickery. The priest at Paul's Cross who faked a bleeding host miracle by pricking his finger in 1545 was just one of the damaging scandals that played into the hands of Protestant propagandists.³⁶

Mid-sixteenth-century Catholics shared in this mood of unease and distrust, and until the 1560s the champions of the Church of Rome were wary of publicizing miracles lest these expose them to

³⁵ See Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eyes: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford, 2007); idem, 'The Reformation of the Eyes: Apparitions and Optics in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe', *JRH* 27 (2003), 143–60.

³⁶ Peter Marshall, 'Forgery and Miracles in the Reign of Henry VIII', *P&P* 178 (2003), 39–73, at 66; *The Complete Works of St Thomas More*, 6/1: *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, ed. Thomas M. C. Lawler, Germain Marc' Hadour and Richard C. Marius (New Haven, CT, and London, 1981), bk 1, chs 9–10, 14–15, at pp. 87–8.

fresh volleys of sarcasm and ridicule. Heskyns's *Parliament of Chryste* included a chapter on supernatural interventions that confirmed Catholic teaching on the eucharist, including visions of the infant Jesus and the 'doubting Chrystian' in whose hands the sacrament turned to 'verie bloodie flesh'. He declared: 'Let not the Adversarie by scorning travaill to reiecte this miracle or avoide the force of yt by slander, saing that some papist hath invented yt', and defended it as having been recorded within four hundred years of Christ's death – the period which Protestants themselves heralded as a time of primitive purity. He implored his readers not to be dissuaded when 'Sathans scholers' engaged in 'mocking or skorning' the other miracles reported by Cyprian, Ambrose and Gregory he mentioned in his text. William Fulke, however, dismissed all these stories as 'feigned fables' deliberately devised to buttress the false and invented doctrine of transubstantiation.³⁷ Bristow's *Motives and Demaundes* listed both miracles and visions as marks of the true Church, and recounted the story of the foul black dog that appeared to rebuke a wavering Catholic who agreed to receive the heretical communion, as well as the recent vision experienced by a certain Mr Allington, 'a thing most famously knowne' and endorsed by witnesses. But he too anticipated that some Protestants would retort with 'peevisch scoffing' at 'uncertaine' and 'false miracles' culled from the *Legenda aurea* and other 'such apocryphall writings' and observed that 'dreames to certaine seeme ridiculous, and Visions foolish: but verily to suche as had rather to believe against Priests, then to beleeve the Priest'.³⁸ In concluding his account of Payne's remarkable vision, Gregory Martin displayed similar contempt for Protestant incredulity. Alluding to the case of doubting Thomas in John 20: 24 he said: 'Let those laugh who laugh at everything which is holy, and will not believe in anything they cannot handle'.³⁹ Catholics knew that miracles had the capacity to backfire against them and to stain the integrity of their embattled faith, but they also embraced them as a powerful weapon in the war against disbelief and heresy.⁴⁰

³⁷ Heskyns, *Parliament*, bk 3, ch. 42, at sig. Ooo6^r; Fulke, *D. Heskins*, 462–7.

³⁸ Bristow, *Briefe Treatise*, fols 15^r–39^v, at 16^r, 38^r–39^v; *Demaundes to be Proponed of Catholiques to the Heretikes* (Antwerp [Douai], 1576), fols 29–32, 35–6.

³⁹ Knox, ed., *First and Second Diaries*, 311.

⁴⁰ See my 'Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England', *HistJ* 46 (2003), 779–815, especially 805–8. For Protestant mockery of a seventeenth-century miracle involving Robert Persons, in which the host received by an English gentilewoman in Rome

Finally, we must return briefly to the Bosworth Hall burse. It remains unclear precisely when and by whom this item was made. The reformers repudiated the traditional paraphernalia of the mass and with the advent of Protestantism many vestments and liturgical items were burnt, defaced, cut up or put to 'profane use'. Stolen from churches by conservatives who preserved them in the hope of a Catholic restoration, some were returned during Mary's reign, before being rescued and hidden again after Elizabeth's accession. Much of this popish 'pelfry', 'trumpery' and 'linen bagidg' was probably shipped overseas, but in other cases it remained in the safe-keeping of church papists and recusants.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the first missionaries found the households in which they said mass ill equipped. Like the itinerant Lancashire priest Edmund Arrowsmith, they resorted to transporting chasubles, altar cloths and chalices around with them in chests resembling those carried by travelling salesmen. But as time progressed, the recusant families with whom they resided as chaplains acquired their own apparatus, as raids on their properties reveal. Pious widows and chaste spinsters dedicated themselves to the art of sacred embroidery. Reminiscent of those made by devout medieval ladies, the vestments manufactured by Catholic women such as Helena Wintour were in some sense forms of prayer: they were designed to provoke meditation or to give thanks for a miraculous intervention.⁴² One surviving chalice veil, for instance, commemorates the cure of Roger Bodenham following a visit

turned into a piece of 'red flesh', see John Gee, *The Foot out of the Snare* (London, 1624), sigs E4^v–F1^v.

⁴¹ On vestments, see Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London, 1984), ch. 5 and p. 75; Pauline Johnstone, *High Fashion in the Church: The Place of Vestments in the History of Art from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (Leeds, 2002), especially chs 4–5. For evidence of the survival, adaptation and destruction of Catholic vestments, see Edward Pecock, *English Church Furniture, Ornaments and Decorations, at the Period of the Reformation: As Exhibited in a List of the Goods Destroyed in Certain Lincolnshire Churches, AD 1566* (London, 1866), especially 30, 33, 36, 39, 40–1, 43, 48, 49, 56–7, 66–7, 71, 77, 80–1, 86, 94, 107–8, 119, 131–2, 144, 147, 159, 165.

⁴² See Virginia C. Raguin, 'Liturgical Vestments', in eadem, ed., *Catholic Collecting: Catholic Reflection 1538–1850* (Worcester, MA, 2006), 61–8. For Arrowsmith's chest, now preserved at Stonyhurst College, see Maurice Whitehead, ed., *Held in Trust: 2008 Years of Sacred Culture* (Cirencester, 2008), 70–1, also *ibid.* 80–3; Sophie Holroyd, "'Rich Embroidered Churchstuff': The Vestments of Helena Wintour", in Ronald Corthell et al., eds, *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN, 2007), 73–116; eadem, 'Embroidered Rhetoric: The Social, Religious and Political Functions of Elite Women's Needlework, c.1560–1630', 2 vols (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2002), 148–252.

to St Winifred's well in 1606.⁴³ If the creation of objects of this kind can be described as 'subversive stitchery',⁴⁴ their preservation likewise entailed overt defiance of the Protestant regime: corporals and chalice veils were rendered holy by their association with the sacred vessels and consecrated species of the mass, the celebration of which was a capital crime. Items that touched the sacramental body of Christ and were in turn touched by believers could function as powerful evocations of the sacred and surrogates for the eucharist in situations where visits from priests were rare or irregular.

Perhaps the Bosworth Hall burse was the work of Payne's patron at the base he established on his arrival in England in 1576 at Ingatestone Hall: Lady Anne Petre, wife of the well-known church papist Sir John. The IHS monograms it bears are suggestive of the intimate connections of Payne and the Petre family with the Jesuits.⁴⁵ Another member of the Society, John Floyd, dedicated his translation of Antonio de Molina's *Treatise of the Holy Sacrifice of the Masse* to Anne's descendant Mary in 1623.⁴⁶ In the later seventeenth century William, fourth Lord Petre, commissioned a series of silver chalices for the use of the missionaries of the Jesuit district of the College of the Holy Apostles.⁴⁷

While the precise provenance of the burse remains a mystery, Payne's execution at Chelmsford in 1582 ensured that it became a poignant relic. The doubts he experienced as a novice priest found no place in the public account of his martyrdom prepared by Cardinal William Allen and published as part of his *Brief Historie of Twelve Reverend Priests* later that year; nor in Richard Challoner's influential eighteenth-century *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*. But in both texts there appears to be a tantalizing reference to the item itself: raised from his bed by the lieutenant of the Tower of London to be transported to Essex, he 'desired leave to returne to his chamber to make himselfe ready and to fetch his purse', but his request was denied and he was

⁴³ Whitehead, ed., *Held in Trust*, 84–5.

⁴⁴ Rosina Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London, 1984).

⁴⁵ See Kelly, 'Conformity, Loyalty and the Jesuit Mission', 152–6.

⁴⁶ Antonio de Molina, *A Treatise of the Holy Sacrifice of the Masse, and Excellencies Therof*, transl. I. R. [John Floyd] ([Saint-Omer], 1623).

⁴⁷ Virginia C. Raguin, 'Liturgical Vessels', in eadem, ed., *Catholic Collecting*, 49–59, at 53–4.

led away in his cassock.⁴⁸ Kept by the Petre family for hundreds of years, the burse is a compelling memorial of the miraculous vision which resolved a niggling worry and strengthened his faith. It is a material object in which the memory of a mystical inner experience has been captured and crystallized, but also subtly remodelled to fit a familiar mould.

This essay has traced the process by which an opaque and private moment of hesitation became a symbol of the dogmatic certainties that solidified into permanent confessional barriers: of the doctrinal conflicts over transubstantiation and the real presence that divided Wittenberg, Geneva, Rome and Lambeth. It has investigated the theological controversies that surrounded and perhaps helped to stimulate Payne's perplexity and the textual and iconographical precedents that conditioned the form that his vision dispelling it took. Probing the intrinsic connection between doubt and faith in late medieval and early modern society, it has shown how a pre-existing substratum of disbelief about the eucharist resurfaced and was transfigured in the wake of England's contested and plural Reformations.

⁴⁸ Allen, *Briefe Historie*, 89–97; Richard Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests* (London, 1924 edn), 39–44. Challoner or the manuscript from which he derived this account appears to have mistranslated 'burse' as 'purse'.