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## St Thomas at the English College

### Abstract:

Thomas of Canterbury has very particular associations for the the Venerable English College in Rome, the Roman Catholic Seminary originally founded in the sixteenth century in the properties of the medieval pilgrim hospice. The archbishop came to have physical, spiritual and political associations with the institution as a result of his exile from England and royally sanctioned murder, so much so that the English and Welsh national church in the papal city is now dedicated to him. In the context of the Protestant Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in Britain, students and exiled priests studying at the Roman college looked to Thomas's example of resistance to secular interference which was reinforced by means of relics and depictions of Thomas in a highly charged pictorial scheme in the College church.

### Keywords:

English College; Rome; Durante Alberti; Niccolò Circignani; Giovanni Battista da Cavalieri; *Ecclesiae Anglicanae Trophaea*; ecclesiastical immunities

In 1162–3 Peter de Mizo, cardinal deacon of Sant'Eustachio, wrote to Thomas Becket informing him of the impoverished state of the Saxon hospice in Rome, the *Schola Saxonum*.<sup>1</sup>

We do not believe that a man of your experience and discernment can be unaware that the church of St Mary of the Saxon in Rome has been assigned by the prudent care of the Roman pontiffs especially for the reception of Englishmen visiting the threshold of the Apostles, where they can find and receive relief, comfort, and charitable service, after the manifold trials of their journeys, as if they were in their own homes. The hospice has fallen into such poverty, because of our sins, that scarcely any clergy and almost no laymen are found there for the service of the church or the succour of pilgrims.<sup>2</sup>

The *Schola Saxonum* was the original institution for English pilgrims travelling to Rome, established with royal support by the end of the 8th century. Royal patronage continued until the 11th century but suffered as a result of the Norman conquest of England. The new Norman overlords resisted close relations with the papacy and deliberately obstructed pilgrimage to Rome, which subsequently required formal permission. Cardinal de Mizo therefore urged Becket to add his voice to that of the pope, who had written to the English Church requesting support. But the English bishops responded in 1165 that all their resources were taken up 'because the lawsuits and exactions of the King's men have swept away all our ready money'.<sup>3</sup>

Although not known for certain, one account suggests Becket visited Rome during his exile from England between 1164 and 1170 and taught at the *Schola Graecorum* at Santa Maria in Cosmedin during his exile.<sup>4</sup> But not long before his death in 1170, Thomas had to disown the problem of the *Schola Saxonum*, telling Alexander III that it was not his fault if the English were no longer travelling to the Holy City.<sup>5</sup> In early December 1170, Thomas wrote to the pope, already reconciled to his fate:

seeing such great and irreparable damages to the Church, and fearing worse ... we have decided to return to our lacerated and overthrown church, so that, if we should not be able to raise her up and restore her, we could at least more confidently perish as she perishes and give up our life for her.<sup>6</sup>

As Anne Duggan puts it, ‘if *Magna Carta* represents the rights of the “people”, the *causa beati Thome*, became the symbol of the rights of the church’.<sup>7</sup> Becket’s words would have resonated deeply for the first students to join the English College in Rome in the late 1570s and early 1580s, when part of the old hospice was converted to support the training of priests who could no longer study openly in Elizabethan England. With open expression of Roman Catholic faith in England made almost impossible in the 16th century, Thomas Becket became totemic for his stand against state interference in ecclesiastical affairs. The English College and Hospice in Rome were thus positioned at the heart of a cause that resonated across Early Modern and Modern Europe.

Throughout his conflict with Henry II, Becket stressed that he was asserting ecclesiastical precedence and immunity from lay—especially royal—interference. He repeatedly warned the pope, Alexander III, that seemingly minor incursions into the power of the Church and any interruption of long and often hard-won precedents endangered the entire edifice. As a result, Thomas’s persistence and his ultimate sacrifice soon came to represent nothing less than the Church’s preservation. In Norway, Thomas’s feast and liturgy was adopted very quickly under the influence of Archbishop Eystein of Trondheim (died 1188) who resisted the interference of King Sverre and was forced into three-years’ exile in England. As a result, Thomas Becket became Norway’s second saint, after St Olaf.<sup>9</sup> The cult spread steadily in subsequent centuries: ‘Three Thomas’ sagas were composed in Iceland in the 13th and 14th centuries and, in Poland, the end of hostilities between Bishop Thomas II of Wroclaw and Prince Henry IV were marked with the foundation of a church to Thomas Becket in Racibórz in the late 13th century. The marriage alliances of King Henry II’s three daughters carried his relics and imagery to Saxony and Spain, while Thomas’s own Norman lineage ensured his commemoration in France. In Italy, early papal support for the canonisation and cult explains images in Anagni, Rome, at San Martino ai Monte, Subiaco and Padua among others.<sup>10</sup>

In the words of Augustine of Hippo, it was the cause and not the blow that made the martyr.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Thomas Becket, the struggle to preserve ecclesiastical independence resonated widely. Writing to the notary Gratian, nephew of Eugenius III, on 5 April 1170, Becket declared ‘we are and always shall be his, ready to bear witness for the Church’s liberty, exile, proscription, and every worldly disadvantage, as long as it seems proper to him. We hope that we who suffer for justice are found worthy’.<sup>12</sup> Like the first martyr of the English College in Rome, Ralph Sherwin, who was executed for treason at Tyburn on 1 December 1581 alongside Edmund Campion and Alexander Briant, Becket died to uphold ecclesiastical immunity from secular interference and the primacy of the papacy over all other earthly power.

Thomas was the standard against which others’ sacrifice was measured: reacting to news of John Fisher’s execution in 1535, Pope Paul III put Fisher above Thomas of Canterbury for “defending not merely the particular rights of one only man ... but the truth of the universal church”.<sup>13</sup> Likewise Nicholas Harpsfield argued for Thomas More’s precedence over Becket because his cause stood for the Church universal, pointing out that the former Lord High Chancellor had chosen to die on the eve of the feast of the translation of Thomas Becket’s relics, 6 July.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Stapleton’s 1588 publication *Tres Thomae* was a much extended sermon originally delivered at Douai on the feast of Thomas the Apostle, 21

December, in 1586.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, Stapleton's text was published in the same year that canonisation officially resumed following the Council of Trent, and therefore positioned Thomas More's nascent cult before the authorities (although he was not canonised until 1935). Stapleton explicitly aligned Sir Thomas More with Becket because both had died out of obedience to the pope.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, a contemporary silver medallion with Thomas More on one side and Becket on the other depicted them as literally two sides of the same coin.<sup>17</sup>

Thomas Becket therefore became a yardstick against which loyalty to secular versus religious authority might be measured. Thomas became even more important in the context of the Protestant Reformation despite the determined campaign to erase all traces of his memorial in England.<sup>18</sup> The destruction of his shrine at Canterbury and expurgation of his cult only served to remove the physical focus of his commemoration to Rome, where his example came to embody ecclesiastical immunity from state persecution in a more formal capacity, centred on the English Hospice and College there.

### **Thomas Becket and the English Hospice in Rome**

By the middle of the 14th century the resident English community in the city of Rome numbered some 100 souls clustered around the Via dei Coronari, which runs into the Via Pellegrino, the main artery that connected St Peter's and St John Lateran. Many of them were merchants and tradesmen, including rosary sellers who supplied the lucrative pilgrim trade.<sup>19</sup> A physical centre for the national group was established in 1362 when the rosary sellers, John and Alice Shepherd, sold their property, which adjoined the convent of St Bridget of Sweden in the area of the Tiber bend, to the English Guild. From this modest beginning the complex expanded to five adjoining properties and three plots of land, enduring to this day to occupy a substantial block just off Piazza Farnese.<sup>20</sup>

Margaret Harvey points to important links between Thomas Becket and English mercers and merchants that explain why the archbishop was associated from the start with their Rome hub. Thomas Becket's father was a cloth merchant, and by the late 14th century the London mercers met in the church of St Thomas of Acon. Thomas Becket was also the most commonly adopted patron for 'Adventurers' or English merchants whose trade took them abroad.<sup>21</sup> This made his image particularly common and therefore a conspicuous target for Tudor erasure. The enthroned St Thomas that had been the London mercers' seal was replaced with the city arms in the late 1530s, although frequent attempts were made to reinstall the archbishop's statue over the guild's chapel door into the 1550s.<sup>22</sup> John Foxe, however, gleefully records that on the last attempt the image only lasted intact for two days, before first its fingers, and then its head were broken off.<sup>23</sup> The Holy Trinity dedication of the English hospice and the community's first chapel might, Harvey suggests, likewise be explained by the dedication of the mercers of York, who were also well represented in the English community in Rome alongside their London brethren.

By 1373 the guild's hospital was known as that of St Thomas of Canterbury, after the confraternity of Englishmen that ran it, and by 1377 his feast on 29 December was observed 'every year with honour' in Rome.<sup>24</sup> But although the church of the English College was formally dedicated to the Holy Trinity, by the 16th century it was being associated more directly with the archbishop. John Stow, for example, in his *Chronicles of England, from Brute unto this present yeare of Christ, 1580*, which was expanded into *The Annales of England* (1592, 1601 and 1605 editions), claimed that the English hospice in Rome was built 'in the place where Thomas Becket Archbishop of Canterbury, had some time builded a chapel of the Holy Trinity', presumably when he was in exile from England in the 1160s.<sup>25</sup> In

actual fact, the house sold by John Shepherd in 1362 to the guild of Englishmen had only been in his possession for a matter of months, so such a long association is unlikely.<sup>26</sup> What matters here is not so much the accuracy of Stow's reminiscence as the contemporary associations it draws between Thomas Becket and the physical location of the English hospice in Rome.

By the 16th century any association with Thomas Becket could not have been more politically sensitive. When the archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham, in a brief moment of resistance to Henry VIII's religious whims, was accused of Praemunire—the illegal introduction of foreign or papal interference into England—he invoked the example of St Thomas:

It were indeed as good to have no spirituality as to have it at the prince's pleasure ... And if in my case, my lords, you think to draw your swords and hew me in small pieces ... I think it more better for me to suffer the same than against my conscience confess this article to be a praemunire, for which St Thomas died.<sup>27</sup>

For the jubilee year of 1500 the Rome hospice received 750 pilgrims, sleeping up to 100 at a time, and giving money to those who could not be accommodated. The hospice also took in the sick and was able to bury in its own cemetery those who died, among them, in 1483, eighteen plague victims.<sup>28</sup> For the feast of St Thomas of Canterbury, all the English resident in Rome were welcomed to High Mass and a feast. But English pilgrim numbers once again dwindled in the 16th century just as they had done in Thomas Becket's own day as a result of European wars and Church-state relations: in 1525 the pilgrims received for that year numbered 439.<sup>29</sup> By this point the English hospice was as much a political as a religious institution: Henry VII's patronage led to it being known as the 'King's Hospice' and the English Ambassador to Rome was appointed the hospice's chief staff, supplanting what had always been the right of the confraternity.<sup>30</sup> This lasted until 1538, when Pope Paul III gave the hospice's administration to Cardinal Reginald Pole and his community of English exiles, who were duly admitted to the confraternity.<sup>31</sup> In the trial in England on 3 December 1538 of Reginald Pole's elder brother, Henry Pole Lord Montague, and Henry Courtenay Marquis of Exeter, his cousin's husband, Pole and the other new confreres of the English Hospice were accused that they did

falsely, maliciously, and traitorously betake themselves to the same Roman pontiff in parts beyond the sea, and maliciously, falsely and unnaturally, and traitorously renounce their natural prince; and the said Pole without license of the King, sought or obtained, assumed the dignity of a cardinal of the said Roman pontiff.<sup>32</sup>

Henry Pole was executed at Tyburn on 9 January 1539; his mother, Margaret Pole, the 67-year-old Lady Salisbury and the last of the Plantagenets, was beheaded on 27 May 1541. The frontispiece in the account book itemising business at the hospice in this period continues the preceding book under Bishop Clark, depicting the Holy Trinity supported by Thomas and Edmund (Fig. 1).<sup>36</sup> The similarity of these Catholic exiles' experience with that of Thomas Becket was not lost on them. John Leghe reported to the Privy Council in May 1540 that, following the admission of Pole and his brethren to the hospital, the cardinal made explicit the political implications of the institution, saying that 'the hospital was founded in the name of Thomas of Canterbury, whom the King had pulled out of his shrine'.<sup>37</sup> And, following his death on the same day as Mary Tudor—17 November 1558—Pole was buried in the Corona chapel of St Thomas in Canterbury cathedral.<sup>38</sup>

When, in 1576, the English hospice received an official visitation to inspect its facilities and resources, monuments to two important 16th-century English cardinals were

recorded in the church's sanctuary: that of Christopher Bainbridge who had died in Rome in 1514 and Reginald Pole. Bainbridge was commemorated with a fine white marble effigy, positioned immediately in front of the high altar. The altar of St John the Evangelist to the right of the high altar had been endowed by Cardinal Morone as a chantry for Pole, likely due to the precarious state of his original burial location and commemoration in Canterbury.<sup>39</sup> Morone had worked closely with Pole at the Council of Trent and his endowment for the altar in Rome was designed to endure: it included fifty gold ducats along with a house near St Peter's, the rental from which would provide a perpetual chaplaincy. Mass was also said every Sunday for the souls of the hospice's benefactors at the altar of the Holy Cross and at the altar of St Edmund in the westernmost part of the nave, thus keeping the history and tradition of the institution alive.<sup>40</sup> With the painted embellishment of the English church in Rome in the 1580s, the institution came to represent all that was left of the sacred landscape of Catholic England. The first engraving of the English College's decorative scheme, published shortly after a new altarpiece and fresco cycle were completed in 1583, is accompanied by a text that declares it to be 'the last English Catholic church in the world' (fig. 2).

## Relics

Shock at the murder of Thomas Becket had quickly turned into a cult, and Rome was involved from the start. The cardinal legates, Albert and Teodwin, who were sent to England to investigate the murder, returned to Rome with relics that were deposited at Santa Maria Maggiore.<sup>42</sup> When Thomas was canonised at Segni to the south of Rome on Ash Wednesday, 21 February 1173, just three years after his death, letters were sent out stressing the event's significance in England, France and throughout all regions. An inscription survives in Segni cathedral commemorating the occasion, along with the canonisation of Bruno of Segni whose elevation followed slightly later, in 1181.<sup>43</sup> Gregory Martin, a member of William Allen's staff at the first of the English continental seminaries, and the main translator of the English New Testament published at Douai in 1583, was in Rome from late 1576 until July 1578, helping to settle Douai students sent from Northern France to continue their studies in the papal city. After his return to Reims he described in his 'Roma Sancta', written in 1580 and 1581 and circulated in manuscript copies, the many relics that made the city such an important pilgrim destination. Foremost were those of Thomas Becket preserved in Santa Maria Maggiore, 'the dalmatica that St Thomas of Canterbury wore, when he was martyred, of his arm, his blood, his brains, his haircloth, and other relics'. Martin continues that Thomas Becket's commemoration in Rome rather than in England was a matter of national disgrace: 'our countrymen may be ashamed to their condemnation, if Rome honour and esteem this English saint and glorious martyr [more] than they'.<sup>44</sup> Santa Maria Maggiore's relic of the arm was donated on behalf of Gregory XIII to the newly founded English college shortly after Martin's visit, four centuries after it had been brought to Rome.

In his 1575 exhortation to pilgrims, Carlo Borromeo, cardinal and Archbishop of Milan, asserted the contemporary relevance of pilgrimage: it was not simply an act of personal piety but a public demonstration of loyalty to Rome. Martin drew particular attention to this point by quoting extensively from Borromeo's address in 'Roma Sancta':

It was an old custom and practise of good Christians, with great religion, to make concourse from all parts to the places where the Relics of Saints and other their monuments were: but specially to Rome, where because the B. Apostles Peter and Paul other innumerable saints of God were martyred, and their sacred bodies and relics rested there, great multitudes of all nations went thither to obtain the prayers of

them and intercession to God, and to honour also those bones and those limbs, which when they lived in flesh, were the habitation and temple of the Holy Ghost, and which were to be raised again most gloriously into immortal life ... And though in these our unhappy times, when Heresy impugns this holy work, the religious devotion of Pilgrimage be somewhat cooled and diminished: you may not for this, my dearest, shrink back, but rather so much the more be encouraged and inflamed thereto, this being the time wherein true Catholics and the obedient Children of the Church, ought to show their zeal of faith and piety ...<sup>45</sup>

To mark and bolster the new foundation of the English College in the hospice properties, on 22 April 1580 the canons of Santa Maria Maggiore gifted relics of St Thomas of Canterbury which were formally received by Agazzari, the college's first Jesuit rector.<sup>46</sup> From November 1580, a plenary indulgence was available to all those who prayed for the reconversion of England on the feast of St Thomas of Canterbury and on Trinity Sunday. When the papal Bull of Foundation finally arrived at the English hospice and college on 29 December 1580, the pilgrim book was restarted with the first entry that of yet another Thomas, Thomas Arundel, future Lord Arundel of Wardour and a member of one of the most prominent of the old English Catholic families.<sup>47</sup> More relics soon followed, procured from the execution of Catholics in Elizabeth I's England, thus physically joining these Tudor martyrs with Thomas of Canterbury. In May 1582, for example, five months after Campion's death on 1 December 1581 at Tyburn in London, William Allen sent fragments of the Jesuit's remains to Rome.<sup>48</sup> This was despite the careful procedure of execution by hanging, drawing and quartering, a process designed to obliterate all earthly remains.

The desecration and destruction of Thomas's shrine and relics at Canterbury became totemic for English iconoclasm under Henry VIII and Edward VI. Moreover, the eradication of the physical remains of Thomas's cult was accompanied by a parallel campaign to undermine the history and reputation on which the material cult was based. Erasmus of Rotterdam poked fun at the gullibility of Canterbury pilgrims in 'The Pilgrimage of Pure Devotion', translated into English in 1536–7, possibly at the behest of Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chancellor.<sup>49</sup> The royal proclamation of 16 November 1538 rewrote the hagiography and asserted that Becket's death occurred during a riot provoked by the arrest of a servant whom the archbishop sought to protect.<sup>50</sup> It was therefore his violent resistance to the enactment of the king's justice that brought death on his own head. As Judith Champ reminds us, 'this was not only a clash of jurisdictions, as in Becket's time, but a fundamental and theological rejection of all that Rome represented'.<sup>51</sup> Henry VIII was finally cut off from Mother Church by Paul III on 17 December 1538 in the papal bull of excommunication that singled out the violence done to Thomas's Canterbury relics and shrine.<sup>52</sup> Nicholas Harpsfield in his *Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, written around 1557, pointed out that More, like the other Tudor martyrs, gave up his life for a cause even greater than that served by Thomas Becket. Henry VIII's separation from Rome was not a temporary setback but a seemingly permanent break in the unity of the Church and therefore a denial of the sacrifice represented by Christ's broken body, depicted so emotively on the English College's high altarpiece, discussed below (Fig. 3).<sup>53</sup>

The Protestant campaign to undermine every aspect of Thomas's cult continued in the multiple editions of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* published in the second half of the 16th century. Significantly Foxe's version of Thomas's death removes the controversial implications of a priest slain at his altar, instead asserting that he was killed on the stairs on the way into the church. The argument that drove the four soldiers to this desperate act was the archbishop's repeated treason in setting the pope against the king's rightful power in his own domain. But the soldiers were then pardoned by the pope himself, hardly the fate of

guilty men.<sup>54</sup> While Foxe admitted that ‘to die for the church is a glorious matter’, the Church, he argued, cannot be concerned with anything but spiritual matters. ‘Possessions, liberties, exemptions, privileges, dignities, patrimonies and superiorities’ belonged only to the temporal domain and Thomas’s death was his temporal punishment for his ‘temporal deserts’, namely treason against the king.<sup>55</sup> This was precisely the point of divergence, and the remit reasserted at the English College in Rome: the Church’s affairs should be immune from secular interference. Foxe’s calendar even replaced Thomas of Canterbury on his feast day of 29 December with Philip Melancthon, Luther’s close associate, who had died in 1562. In the context of the Protestant Reformation, both the physical and the historical vestiges of Thomas Becket therefore had to be preserved in Rome as a matter of urgency. The church of the English hospice and college in Rome fulfilled that important role. The image of Thomas at the English College could not be clearer in countering Foxe: the archbishop was murdered at the altar (Fig. 4).

### **St Thomas in the English College**

The English College in Rome was a very young institution when a series of images was to the pre-existing church of the Holy Trinity and thereby heighten its political relevance. The church consisted of six altars, three in the sanctuary at the east end, and three close to the west end. The altar dedicated to Thomas of Canterbury stood in the north-west corner of the church, facing that of Edmund of East Anglia in the south-west. The 1576 Apostolic Visitation that had inventoried the hospice’s resources, with the implicit intention of supporting a community of students, described the church as devoid of images and ordered that a high altarpiece be provided. This took place shortly after the college’s official foundation when Durante Alberti, an established artist employed by both the Jesuit and Oratorian communities, was given the commission.<sup>56</sup> Completed in August 1581, events just a few months later dramatically changed the tone of the altarpiece and refocussed efforts to expand the scheme: on 1 December 1581 Edmund Campion, Alexander Briant and Ralph Sherwin were dragged to Tyburn on hurdles and then hung, drawn and quartered. Although part of a larger group arrested that summer, the three singled out, tortured and tried for treason stood for the different groups of English Catholics conspiring to realign England with Rome on the Continent: Campion represented the Jesuits, Briant the students at Douai and Sherwin those at the college in Rome.

In the altarpiece, beneath the representation of the Trinity, Alberti depicted the institution’s two other patrons, Thomas of Canterbury and Edmund of East Anglia (Fig. 4). Edmund represented another, smaller English hospice in Trastevere, subsumed by the older and larger institution, its mass obligations eventually transferred in 1664.<sup>57</sup> Thomas, on the left-hand side of the altarpiece, like Edmund on the right-hand side, appears to beckon to those standing before the vision of Christ on the Cross supported by God the Father, as though imploring the viewer to make the same sacrifice for the unity of the Church represented by the three persons of the Trinity. Both saints also gesture in the direction of their respective altars in the church aisles. Like Thomas three centuries later, Edmund of East Anglia, who was killed in 869, died because he would not compromise his faith or loyalty to Rome, this time as a result of a challenge by the Vikings. Subsequently, the Abbey at Bury St Edmunds, reputed to be the third largest church in Christendom after St Peter’s in Rome and Köln Cathedral, became a case study in avoiding state interference and taxes, and the king’s hagiography evolved to exemplify ecclesiastical immunity. When Edmund’s father, Sweyn, was seemingly punished with an untimely death for imposing taxes on his son’s shrine, King



Canute atoned with generous gifts and granted a Charter of Liberties exempting the abbey from English control: the abbey was answerable only to Rome.<sup>58</sup>

The feast of Thomas Becket, on 29 December, was a significant event in the Roman religious and social calendar, with cardinals and bishops in attendance annually from at least 1502 when the event was recorded by Johannes Burcardus, the papal master of ceremonies. In the context of Tudor Catholic suppression, the significance of the feast of St Thomas was no longer specific to the English College's national identity but to the martyr's embodiment of Church-state relations more generally. Thomas's feast was preceded on 26 December by that of St Stephen, when, from 1580 or 1581, one of the English students preached before the pope at the Vatican or, later in the 17th century, at the Quirinal.<sup>60</sup> The vigil of Thomas of Canterbury took place on the feast of the Holy Innocents, on 28 December. The image that follows Thomas's in the series of engravings that recorded the original fresco cycle depicts the child-martyrs, William of Norwich (†1144) and Hugh of Lincoln (†1255), who stand in for the Holy Innocents (Fig. 5). In the lower right-hand side of the same scene is Thomas Hales of Dover, a Benedictine monk who died in 1295 protecting the valuables of Dover priory, the rest of his more able-bodied brethren having fled.

By setting the image of Thomas Becket alongside that of William and Hugh questions are raised about individual versus group culpability. The altar to the right of that of Thomas of Canterbury was that of the Holy Cross, at or at least near to which was the child-martyrs' image, both depicted hanging on their mocking crucifixes. The cults of William of Norwich and Hugh of Lincoln were among the earliest of those dedicated to a small group of European children whose violent deaths were ascribed to the Jewish community as a whole, evidence for the guilt of an entire race, just as the Jews were held responsible for Christ's death.<sup>61</sup> This established the legal precedent of blood libel whereby an entire group might be made responsible for the acts of a few.<sup>62</sup> With Thomas the same questions could be raised: was the archbishop's murder the act of a few individuals, or did it represent the actions of the state versus the Church? With Henry II's admission and atonement for his archbishop's murder, the focus was shifted away from his knights as the monarch implicated himself and the English Crown in the controversy.

The images of Thomas of Canterbury, whose martyrdom came to represent the freedom of the whole Church, and of William and Hugh, whose stories were elaborated to warrant the guilt of an entire race, immediately precede the last sequence of scenes. These are dedicated to the sacrifices of English Catholics in the 16th century, from John Fisher and Thomas More to the college alumni for whom there was no end in sight for the executions at Tyburn in the mid-1580s. The implication is therefore that Elizabeth I, her ministers, and all her loyal subjects were culpable for the ongoing persecution of Catholics, even if they did not wield the implements of torture or execution themselves.

Celebration of the feast of Thomas of Canterbury at the English College continued as a regular fixture.<sup>63</sup> The festivities for 1586 were attended by no less than eight cardinals, as Sixtus V, Gregory XIII's successor, consolidated efforts to preserve the Church's independence.<sup>64</sup> To this end, Sixtus V established a congregation to oversee the rights of sacred immunity, part of his wholesale reorganisation of the papal court. In 1626 Urban VIII instituted the Congregation for Ecclesiastical Immunities for which the College of Cardinals celebrated mass at the English College on the feast of Thomas of Canterbury.<sup>65</sup> In 1644, John Evelyn was in attendance with about fifty others at 'their great feast of St Thomas of Canterbury', after which they were entertained by 'an Italian comedy acted by their alumni before the Cardinals'.<sup>66</sup> The English College was already renowned for its plays, several on Thomas Becket, written by Jesuit staff to showcase their students' abilities.<sup>67</sup> In 1721 the

pope, Clement XI, celebrated mass at the English church before the exiled Stuart king, James III, and in 1815 Cardinal Pacca, Dean of the College of Cardinals, shifted the event to San Silvestro in Capite for the reason that the English College church was derelict following Rome's occupation by Napoleon's troops. Still, the cardinals in attendance belonged to the 'congregation of ecclesiastical immunities'.<sup>68</sup>

The second last statement of the long Council of Trent on 4 December 1563 underlines the significance in the 16th century of ecclesiastical immunity, which 'rests on the Divine command' and therefore has nothing to do with secular law (its implications are underlined by the very last statement of the Council that followed it, declaring that the authority of the Apostolic See shall remain untouched):

It admonishes the emperor, kings, republics, princes, and all and each of whatsoever state and dignity they be, that, the more bountifully they are adorned with temporal goods, and with power over others, the more religiously should they respect whatsoever is of ecclesiastical right, as belonging especially to God, and as being under the cover of His protection; and that they suffer not such to be injured by any barons, nobles, governors, or other temporal lords, and above all by their own immediate officers; but punish those severely, who obstruct her liberty, immunity, and jurisdiction; being themselves an example to them in regard of piety, religion, and the protection of the churches, in imitation of those most excellent and religious princes their predecessors, who not only defended from all injury from others, but, by their authority and munificence, in a special manner advanced the interests of their own church. Wherefore let each one herein discharge his duty carefully; that so the divine worship may be devoutly celebrated, and prelates and other clerics remain, quietly and without hindrances, in their own residences and in the discharge of their duties, to the profit and edification of the people.<sup>69</sup>

In his annotated revision to the Roman Martyrology, published in 1586, Cesare Baronio, the great Oratorian historian, celebrated Thomas as the most holy of saints whose example had inspired 'so many most noble English men to receive the crown of martyrdom not only for the liberty of the Church (as Thomas had) but also to uphold the Catholic faith itself'.<sup>70</sup> Baronio explicitly mentioned the English College students who died in his name.

Thomas Becket's prominence made him the focus of fierce debate at the turn of the century between Sir Francis Hastings, English Puritan politician, and Robert Persons, the influential English Jesuit polemicist and, from 1599, rector of the English College in Rome. For Hastings, who relied on Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* to caution his compatriots against letting their guard down against Catholics, Thomas Becket's 'treasons to his Prince were apparent and manifest: and yet after his death was he canonised a Saint by the Pope'.<sup>71</sup> Persons countered that Becket's cause paralleled that of John the Baptist against Herod, and St Ambrose against Theodosius.<sup>72</sup> And in his report of 1626 on 'English colleges in foreign parts', Lewis Owen, religious controversialist and spy, described ships sailing from Spain and Portugal for the West Indies carrying alms boxes, for which only the rector of the English College in Seville had a key, bearing Thomas Becket's image attached to their main masts to support English Catholic refugees.<sup>73</sup>

### Canterbury Corner

In 1583, two years after the completion of Durante Alberti's high altarpiece, an extensive programme of frescoes was added from floor to ceiling to the church of the English College, wrapping around the nave and aisles.<sup>74</sup> It was the third of three fresco cycles painted in Rome

by Niccolò Circignani, an important artist, albeit less well known today, who also worked at the Vatican.<sup>75</sup> Like the other two series, the English College images were subsequently issued as volumes of engravings. These were cut by Giovanni Battista da Cavalieri, who started working on them at the end of the same year, 1583, and were published in 1584 as the *Ecclesiae Anglicanae Trophaea*.<sup>76</sup> The two sister series, at Santo Stefano and at Sant'Apollinare, were for Jesuit institutions and depicted early martyrs patiently enduring their deaths depicted in gruesome detail. Although the English College was never a Jesuit college, it was run by Jesuit staff up until the suppression of the Society in 1773. The Jesuits had reluctantly assumed responsibility in 1579 when tribal warfare broke out between the English and Welsh students, and the new regime undoubtedly refocused and galvanised the institution into undertaking an overt visual declaration of England's Catholic landscape.

Circignani's frescoes were finally lost in the second decade of the 19th century, so all that now remains of the images are Cavalieri's engravings. Unlike the series for Santo Stefano and Sant'Apollinare, which represent the persecution of Christians under the Roman emperor, the English College images portray England as a country of martyrs, missionaries and monarchs, loyal to the Church. In one of the first scenes, for example, King Lucius, who sought Pope Eleutherius's aid in converting his kingdom, is martyred having embarked on a mission to the Continent. The narrative then wends through Constantine, who learned he was emperor at York, followed by his British mother, Helena, and on to the significant Englishmen who set out to Scandinavia and Germany to convert the Saxons. The final ten of the thirty-four images are devoted to events in the 16th century under the Tudor monarchs, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

Immediately preceding the 16th-century images is a small group I call the 'Canterbury corner'. When the frescoes were still extant, these probably framed the altar of St Thomas in the north-western corner of the church. The group of three images, according to the evidence left by the engravings, position Thomas in relation to a longer narrative trajectory for the archdiocese. As elsewhere in the pictorial scheme, these images demonstrate knowledge of , but transported to, and preserved in Rome. Cavalieri's engraving Alphege while in the background Canterbury is shown burning, the revenge enacted by the Vikings on Alphege's see (Fig. ). Thomas Becket's murder is therefore presented in the context of the longer trajectory of resistance to external, secular interference at Canterbury, England's foremost diocese.

We are very fortunate to have an extant drawing by Circignani which relates to the original fresco cycle (Fig. 8). Unlike Cavalieri's engraving (Fig. 4), it is of landscape rather than portrait format, underlining the gap in our knowledge of the appearance and arrangement of the original scheme. The product of the erudite and motivated—even desperate—community at the English College, which comprised Jesuits, English dons and the children of nobility, the scene includes details that bring together a range of sources: hagiographic, cultic and liturgical, visual and verbal. Between the drawing and the engraving, the position of Edward Grim has shifted so that he is much more prominent, tucked in next to the altar at which Thomas kneels. Grim, who has tried to shield Thomas with his arm and instead receives the blow, is told to save himself by the archbishop. Thomas's command (according to Herbert of Bosham) to 'Let my people go' in this moment also refers to the immunity of Church affairs from state interference.<sup>78</sup> Thomas chooses his death:

... sensing that the sacrifice had not begun, as soon as that cap that he was accustomed to wear on his head had fallen, lifting up his eyes to heaven, his knees bent and his hands now joined in prayer before him, in the temple before the altar the priest offered himself as a living sacrifice to God.<sup>79</sup>

Commending himself to God, the Blessed Mary, St Denis, and St Alphege, the crown of his head is cut off and part of the broken sword left embedded in his skull.<sup>80</sup> Herbert of Bosham interpreted this as a sign that, although broken in flesh, Thomas could not be broken in spirit.<sup>81</sup> Symbolic of his anointment during ordination, as priest and bishop, the cap could be interpreted as either the episcopal mitre that has fallen to the ground and is included in the drawing and engraving lying on the altar step before him, or to the crown of his head. To add insult to injury, not only was Thomas's head split open at the crown, but Hugh of Horsea (Mauclerc) braced his foot on Thomas's neck so that he could gouge out the brains onto the floor of the chapel. The liturgies describe how the knight

searched with the point of his sword for the remaining brain in the remnant of the skull of the now lifeless head, and scooped it out, scattering it on the ground, not so much to remove lingering doubts about death ... as rather to allow his frenzied cruelty to satiate itself.<sup>83</sup>

In the left-hand corner of the fresco, labelled 'D' in the engraving, the monks of Canterbury gathered up their archbishop's blood and brains, using whatever vessels were to hand (Fig. 4). This stresses the valid accumulation of relics at the scene of the crime: 'his blood and brains thrown into the corner of the church, produced a water spring, which once turned into milk and four times into blood'.<sup>84</sup> This incorporation of several discrete actions into a single narrative is typical of Thomas's iconography.<sup>85</sup> The image of Thomas in the church of the English College is, not surprisingly considering the community there, closest to the liturgical rendition of the story.

Thomas of Canterbury continues to stand for all the martyrs today in the English College in Rome, just as he did in the now lost visual scheme. Around 1700 Girolamo Troppa painted an altarpiece which is now located in the chapel designed by Andrea Pozzo and known as the Martyrs' Chapel (Fig. 9).<sup>86</sup> The Martyrs' Chapel was still used by the Congregation for Ecclesiastical Immunities in the 19th century, probably because of the relatively poor state of the original English church of the Trinity, which was finally demolished 1819–20, taking all evidence of the original frescoes with it. Thomas nevertheless continued to stand for secular interference in matters ecclesiastical: in 1791 Pius VI compared the French national assembly with Henry II and set Thomas Becket against Thomas Cranmer, Henry VIII's reforming archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>87</sup> Then, on 6 February, 1866, when Pius IX laid the foundation stone for the English College's new church, despite his own Risorgimento troubles, he invoked the example of Thomas Becket 'to whom this church is about to be dedicated' bemoaning 'how far grander and higher a title did [England] once enjoy when men named her the Land of Saints'. But, Pius IX added, Thomas's message 'penetrated to the hearts of hundreds of Englishmen who will not leave imperfect this their pious work', namely the reconversion of England.<sup>88</sup> And so Thomas Becket, the most English of saints, continues to represent the complex and often fraught relationship of Britain with the Continent.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Champ, *English Pilgrimage to Rome* (Leominster 2000), 31.

<sup>2</sup> A. Duggan ed. and trans., *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket Archbishop of Canterbury 1162–1170*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford 2000), letter 9, 25–27.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Foliot, quoted in A. Gasquet, *A History of the Venerable English College, Rome* (London 1920), 31.

<sup>4</sup> A.D. Tomei, 'Some Memorials of St Thomas of Canterbury in Italy', *The Venerabile*, 6 (1932), 59.

<sup>5</sup> *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, ed. J. C. Robinson and J. B. Sheppard, 7 vols (Rolls Series, LXVII, 1875–85), IV, 241; Gasquet, *History*, 20–21.

<sup>6</sup> Duggan, *Correspondence*, Thomas to Alexander III, 5 December 1170, letter 326, 1347.

- <sup>7</sup> A. Duggan, 'The Cult of St Thomas Becket in the Thirteenth Century', in *St Thomas Cantilupe Bishop of Hereford: Essays in his Honour*, ed. M. Jancey (Hereford 1982), 21-44, at 30.
- <sup>9</sup> On this and other European examples, see *ibid.*, 24-26.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 29; Borenus, *St Thomas Becket in Art* (London 1932).
- <sup>11</sup> Augustine of Hippo, Ep, 89: 'Martyrem non facit poena, sed causa'.
- <sup>12</sup> Duggan, *Correspondence*, Thomas to the notary Gratian (nephew of Eugenius III), 5 April 1170, letter 279, 1191, referencing Matthew 5:10.
- V. Houlston, 'St Thomas Becket in the Propaganda of the English Counter-Reformation', *Renaissance Studies*, 7 (1993), 43-70 at <sup>14</sup> N. Harsfield, *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E.V. Hitchcock and R.W. Chambers, Early English Text Society o.s. 186 (London 1932), 214-17.
- <sup>15</sup> W. Sheils, 'Polemic as Piety: Thomas Stapleton's *Tres Thomae* and Catholic Controversy in the 1580s', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 60 (2009), 74-94, at 76; S. Ditchfield, "'Historia magistra sanctitatis'?" The Relationship between Historiography and Hagiography in Italy after the Council of Trent (c.1564-1742)', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3 (2006), 159-184.
- <sup>16</sup> T. Stapleton, *Tres Thomae seu de S. Thomae apostoli rebus gestis. De S. Thoma Archiepiscopo Cantuariensi et Martyre. D. Thomae Mori Angliae quondam Cancellarii vita* (Douai 1588); Sheils, 'Polemic'.
- <sup>17</sup> Houlston, 'St Thomas Becket in Propaganda', 50.
- <sup>18</sup> R.E. Scully, 'The Unmaking of a Saint: Thomas Becket and the English Reformation', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 86 (2000), 579-602.
- <sup>19</sup> Champ, *English Pilgrimage*, 45-46.
- <sup>20</sup> J. Allen, 'Englishmen in Rome and the Hospice', *The Venerabile*, 21, special issue printed as *The English Hospice in Rome* (1962), 43-81, at 54.
- <sup>21</sup> M. Harvey, *The English in Rome, 1362-1420: Portrait of an Expatriate Community* (Cambridge 1999), 56.
- <sup>22</sup> Houlston, 'St Thomas Becket in Propaganda', 47.
- <sup>23</sup> J. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London 1576), book 11, 1482.
- <sup>24</sup> Harvey, *The English in Rome*, 56.
- <sup>25</sup> Stow, *Annales, or a General Chronicle of England* (London 1631), 334; B. Linares, 'The Origin and Foundation of the English Hospice', in *The English Hospice in Rome*, 15-42, at 24-25.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>27</sup> Discussed in Scully, 'Unmaking', 587.
- <sup>28</sup> XXX in *The English Hospice in Rome*, XXX-XX, at 102.
- <sup>29</sup> XXX in *The English Hospice in Rome*, XXX-XX, at 330.
- <sup>30</sup> M. Williams, *The Venerable English College, Rome* (London 1979), 1-2.
- <sup>31</sup> B. Newns, 'The Hospice of St Thomas and the English Crown 1474-1538', in *The English Hospice in Rome*, 175.
- <sup>32</sup> *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie, 21 vols (London 1862-1910), XIII/2, no. 979, 417-18; Newns, 'Hospice', 176.
- <sup>36</sup> English College Archives (Archivum Venerabilis Collegii Anglorum de Urbe), hereafter AVC, Liber 23, *Liber Rationarius Hospitalis 1548-1559*.
- <sup>37</sup> *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, XV, no. 721, 336-37.
- <sup>38</sup> Houlston, 'St Thomas Becket in Propaganda', 44.
- <sup>39</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome, Vat. Lat. 12159, 180r: Spetiano's Visitation of 1576.
- <sup>40</sup> Venerable English College, Rome (VEC), Liber 34, Inventory of Sacristy 1585.
- <sup>42</sup> Champ, *English Pilgrimage*, 34-35.
- <sup>43</sup> '... tam in Anglia quam in Gallia, nec non in aliis regionibus', *Materials*, VII, 545-49, in B. Bolton, 'The Absentee Lord? Alexander III and the Patrimony', in *Pope Alexander III: The Art of Survival*, ed. Anne Duggan (Farnham 2012), 170.
- <sup>44</sup> Gregory Martin, *Roma Sancta*, ed. George Bruner Parks (Rome 1969), 41.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-25.
- <sup>46</sup> AVC, Liber 303, part 2 in National Archives, PRO 31/9-13 part 3, 4. The tunic of Thomas of Canterbury remains at the basilica: Gasquet, *History*, 85.
- <sup>47</sup> AVC, Liber 282; Champ, *English Pilgrimage*, 73.
- <sup>48</sup> E. Duffy, 'William, Cardinal Allen, 1532-1594', *Recusant History*, 22 (1995), 265-305, at 279.
- <sup>49</sup> Erasmus, 'The Pilgrimage of Pure Devotion' in *Tudor Translation of the Colloquies of Erasmus*, ed. D. A. Spurgeon (Delmar NY 1972), 1-97; Houlston, 'St Thomas Becket in Propaganda', 44.
- <sup>50</sup> Scully, 'Unmaking', 595.
- <sup>51</sup> Champ, *English Pilgrimage*, 63.
- <sup>52</sup> L. von Pastor, *History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, 40 vols (London 1891-1953), XII, 468-69.

- <sup>53</sup> N. Harpsfield, *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E.V. Hitchcock and R.W. Chambers, Early English Text Society 186 (London 1966), 214–17; Houlston, ‘St Thomas Becket in Propaganda’, 50.
- <sup>54</sup> Foxe, *Acts*, book 4, 251.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, book 4, 231.
- <sup>56</sup> C.M. Richardson, ‘Durante Alberti, The Martyrs’ Picture and the Venerable English College, Rome’, *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 73 (2005), 223–63.
- <sup>57</sup> J. Ibbett, ‘The Hospice of St Edmund in Trastevere’, in *The English Hospice in Rome*, 82–98.
- <sup>58</sup> S. J. Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge 1990), 227.
- <sup>60</sup> Gasquet, *History*, 187.
- <sup>61</sup> A. Bale, *Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages* (London 2010), 51–55; J. Luxford, ‘The Iconography of St William of Norwich and the Nuremberg Chronicle’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 47 (2016), 240–246.
- <sup>62</sup> E. M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe* (Oxford 2015).
- <sup>63</sup> G. Moroni, *Le Cappelle Pontificie: cardinalizie e prelatizie: Opera storico-liturgica* (Venice 1841), 385–86.
- <sup>64</sup> V. Houlston, G. Crosignani and T. McCoog ed., *The Correspondence and Unpublished Papers of Robert Persons, 1574–1588* (Turnhout 2018), 650.
- <sup>65</sup> G. Moroni, ‘Immunità’, *Dizionario di Erudizione Storico-Ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni*, 103 vols (Venice 1840–61), XXXIV, 22–39.
- <sup>66</sup> *Evelyn’s Memoirs* in Gasquet, *History*, 191.
- <sup>67</sup> S. Gossett, ‘Drama in the English College, Rome, 1591–1660’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 3 (1973), 60–93.
- <sup>68</sup> Gasquet, *History*, 190.
- <sup>69</sup> Council of Trent, Session 25 ‘On Reformation’, chapter 20, 4 December 1563.
- <sup>70</sup> C. Baronio, *Martyrologium Romanum ad Novam Calendarii Rationem, & Ecclesiasticae Historiae Veritatem Restitutum, Gregorii XIII. Pont. Max. Iussu Editum . . . Accesserunt Notationes atque Tractatio de Martyrologio Romano* (Venice 1587), 580–81.
- <sup>71</sup> F. Hastings, *A Watch-Word to all Religious, and True Hearted English-Men* (London 1598), 14.
- <sup>72</sup> R. Persons, *The Warn-Word to Sir F. Hastings Wast-Word* (Antwerp 1602), part 2, chapters 10–11; Houlston, , ‘St Thomas Becket in Propaganda’, 52; V. Houlston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons’s Jesuit Polemic* (Aldershot 2007), 95–96.
- <sup>73</sup> L. Owen, *The Running Register. The State of the English Colledges in Forraine Parts* (London 1626), 68.
- <sup>74</sup> The cycle is the focus of my forthcoming book, *The Last English Catholic Church in the World*.
- <sup>75</sup> L. Korrick, ‘On the Meaning of Style: Nicolò Circignani in Counter-Reformation Rome’, *Word & Image*, 15 (1999), 170–89.
- <sup>76</sup> V. Pagani, ‘The Dispersal of Lafreri’s Inheritance, 1581–89—II Pietro de Nobili’, *Print Quarterly*, 25 (2008), 396–93, at 365 and 372.
- <sup>78</sup> Luke 6:29; M. Staunton, *Thomas Becket and his Biographers* (Suffolk 2006), 208.
- <sup>79</sup> Herbert of Bosham, in *Materials*, III, 498–9; Staunton, *Thomas Becket and his Biographers*, 207.
- <sup>80</sup> K.B. Slocum, *Liturgies in Honour of Thomas Becket* (Toronto 2004), 68. See Anne Duggan’s essay in this special issue.
- <sup>81</sup> Herbert of Bosham, *Materials*, III, 508; Staunton, *Thomas Becket and his Biographers*, 211.
- <sup>83</sup> Slocum, *Liturgies*, 69.
- <sup>84</sup> G.B. Cavalieri, *Ecclesiae Anglicanae Trophaea* (Rome 1584), plate 26: D: Eius sanguis ac cerebrum in templi angulo proiecta, fontem aquae producent; qui semel in lac, quater in cruorem versus est.
- <sup>85</sup> See Anne Duggan’s essay in this special issue.
- <sup>86</sup> A. Busiri Vici, ‘Un dimenticato pittore del tardo Seicento, Gerolamo Troppa’, *L’Urbe*, n.s. 43 (1980), 22–27. With thanks to Karin Wolfe for this information. C. M. Richardson, ‘Andrea Pozzo e il Venerabile Collegio Inglese a Roma’, in *Artifizi della Metafora: Saggi su Andrea Pozzo*, ed. R. Bösel and L. Salviucci Insolera (Rome 2011), 116–125.
- <sup>87</sup> A. Duggan, *Thomas Becket* (London 2004), 242.
- <sup>88</sup> H. E. G. Rope, *The Schola Saxonum, The Hospice, and the English College in Rome* (Rome 1951), 101.