

# From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ

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That Jews constitute a threat to the body of Christ is the oldest, and arguably the most unchanging, of all Christian perceptions of Jews and Judaism. It was, after all, to make precisely this point that the redactors of the New Testament reassigned responsibility for Jesus's crucifixion from the Roman governor who ordered it, to an implausibly well-organized crowd of "Ioudaioi" who were alleged to have approved of it.<sup>1</sup> In the historical context of first-century CE Roman Judea, it is by no means clear who the New Testament authors meant to comprehend by this term *Ioudaioi*. To the people of the Middle Ages, however, there was no ambiguity. *Iudaei* were Jews; and the contemporary Jews who lived among them were thus regarded as the direct descendants of the *Ioudaioi* who had willingly taken upon themselves and their children the blood of Jesus that Pilate had washed from his own hands.<sup>2</sup>

In the Middle Ages, then, Christians were in no doubt that Jews were the enemies of the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup> There was considerably more uncertainty, however, as to the nature and identity of the body of Christ itself. The doctrine of the resurrection imparted a real and continuing life to the historical, material body of Christ; but it also raised important questions about the nature of that risen body, and about the relationship between that risen body and the body of Christian believers who were comprehended within it.<sup>4</sup> So far as we know, it was Paul who first declared the risen Christ to be the head of the Christian body which was the church.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the fourth century this notion of the Church as the *corpus verum Christi*, the true body of Christ, had become a commonplace in Christian discourse.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside this identification of the Church with the body of Christ another

idea was also developing, the full consequences of which would be worked out during the Middle Ages. This idea had to do with the bodily presence of Christ in the Mass.<sup>7</sup> The Church embodied Christ in the world; as the true body of Christ, the Church was thus the repository of the same salvific power that Christ himself had introduced into the world in and through his historical body. Through its sacraments, the Church, the body of Christ, administered to the world the salvific power of the crucified and resurrected body of Christ in a regular, continuing, and predictable way. Nowhere was this sense of bodily identification between Church and Christ felt with more immediacy, however, than in the sacrament of the Mass, when the body of Christ, i.e., the Church, relived the historical sacrifice of Christ's own body through the bread and wine that Christ himself had declared to be his body and blood. In the Patristic era, then, to declare that Christ's body was present in the Mass was almost a tautology. Through the Mass, the body of Christ relived the sacrifice Christ had made in and through his own body. How then could Christ's true body not be fully and physically present in such a sacrifice?

In the early Middle Ages, however, as the Mass came to be viewed less as a corporate reliving by the Church, and more as a sacrifice offered *by* a priest *on behalf* of the church, the real presence of Christ's body in the eucharistic elements came to take on a very different meaning and significance.<sup>8</sup> Here too, Paul laid the foundations for these developments when he asked of the Corinthians: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we many are one body, all of us who share in one bread."<sup>9</sup> By the Carolingian period, the doctrine of the real presence of Christ's body in the eucharist had developed so far as to pose inescapable questions not only about the nature of this presence, but also about "the relation of the eucharistic body of Christ to the historical body of Christ" on the cross.<sup>10</sup>

By the early twelfth century, general agreement had been reached in Latin Christendom that the eucharistic body and the historical body of Christ were identical, although the precise nature of that identity would continue to be debated and refined for at least another century.<sup>11</sup> There was also general agreement that the body of Christ could therefore be understood in three distinguishable, but interdependent, ways. In the words of Alger of Liege, these were "the body of Christ in human form, the body of Christ in the Sacrament [of the eucharist], and the body of Christ in the church. Those who are unable to distinguish among these ways in the Holy Scriptures fall into great confusion, so that what is said about one 'body of Christ' is taken to refer to another."<sup>12</sup>

These distinctions, however, were far from clear, Alger of Liege notwithstanding; and they became even more confused as eucharistic debate

increased during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Carolingian theologians, attempting to distinguish between the various senses of the body of Christ, had introduced the term *corpus mysticum Christi* to refer to the mystical presence of Christ's body in the Mass. This new term was necessary because, in keeping with Patristic precedent, they reserved the term *corpus verum Christi* for the Church. "From the mid-twelfth century onward, however, something of a reversal took place."<sup>14</sup> Concern to emphasize the real presence of Christ in the Mass led theologians increasingly to insist that the eucharist was the "true body of Christ," the *corpus verum Christi*, and to speak therefore of the Church as the mystical body of Christ, an *aggregatio fidelium* that soon took on the juristic overtones of a Roman law corporation.<sup>15</sup> By the end of the thirteenth century, this reversal was substantially complete. The true body of Christ was now the eucharist; the mystical body of Christ was the Church; and both were embodiments of the historical body of Christ on the cross. The late medieval Corpus Christi feast, so well studied by Miri Rubin, could thus simultaneously celebrate the body of Christ in the Mass and the resulting unity of Christian believers in their multiplicity of social bodies.<sup>16</sup> It was not by accident, then, that the feast of Corpus Christi also became a principal occasion on which to celebrate the triumph of the body of Christ, ecclesiastical and eucharistic, over those perpetual and inveterate threats to Christ's bodily integrity, the Jews.<sup>17</sup>

As actors in a drama of Christian devising, this was by no means a new role for Jews to be assigned to play. The New Testament redactors had long ago appointed Jews to be the enemies of Christ's historical body, while St. John Chrysostom and many other Patristic authors had presented Jews (and the Judaizing Christians whom they inspired) as primary threats to the integrity and unity of the body of Christ which was the Church.<sup>18</sup> Agobard of Lyons followed firmly in this patristic tradition, as did Rather of Verona and Rupert of Deutz. With Rupert, however, who wrote in the early decades of the twelfth century, we begin to see Jews taking on a new role, as enemies not only of the body of Christ on the cross and of the body of Christ in the Church, but also as the enemies of the body of Christ in the eucharist.<sup>19</sup> This is, quite obviously, the notion that lies behind the host desecration charge – that Jews would torture and seek to destroy consecrated eucharistic hosts if only they could get their hands on them.<sup>20</sup> The theological foundations for the host desecration charge were thus already in place by the middle of the twelfth century. Historians, however, have generally agreed that the charge itself does not appear until the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> No explanations for this apparent "delay" have as yet been offered.

The "delay" is all the more puzzling insofar as the period between 1100 and 1300 witnessed the very rapid development of a number of dangerous and

long-lived anti-Jewish prejudices on the part of Christians. To the traditional calumnies of Christian anti-Judaism, twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologians added a new insistence that Jews were knowing and deliberate deicides; a renewed concern that the unity, integrity, and holiness of the Church was threatened by Jewish attacks; and a newly salient identification of the body of Christ, in all its aspects, with the miraculously transformed eucharistic elements in the Mass.<sup>22</sup> These theological developments helped in turn to give rise to new mythical structures into which traditional Christian anti-Judaism could be channeled: ritual crucifixion (the notion that contemporary Jews crucified and killed innocent Christian boys, just as their ancestors had killed the innocent Christ); ritual cannibalism (the notion that Jews murdered Christians and consumed their blood for magical or ritual purposes); and host desecration (see above). Together, these three myths lie at the core of what Gavin Langmuir has categorized as medieval anti-Semitism, a new creation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, distinct both etiologically and phenomenologically from traditional Christian anti-Judaism.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the obvious links between these anti-Semitic myths – and especially between the two most popular and widespread of these myths, the ritual crucifixion and the host desecration charge – historians for the most part have tended to analyze them as representing quite separate literary and devotional genres of story. And there are indeed some important thematic and contextual differences between them. Ritual crucifixion tales arise first. Most date from the period between 1144 and 1270, and the majority come from England, where the myth itself began and where it remained most popular. Host desecration tales, by contrast, arose on the Continent, although they were preached in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England too. They are also considerably later to emerge. Despite some earlier anticipations, the first fully developed host desecration narrative dates from Paris in 1290, one hundred and fifty years after the first ritual crucifixion story.<sup>24</sup>

Ritual crucifixion tales tell the story of a Christian boy who is crucified and murdered by an organized community of Jews, who act together to perpetrate this act and conceal their crime from their Christian neighbors.<sup>25</sup> The murder itself is essentially motiveless; it is simply an expression of malice toward all things Christian. Sometimes, as in *The Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich*, the Jewish perpetrators escape punishment for their deeds altogether; in other examples, such as the various accounts of the martyrdom of little St. Hugh of Lincoln or in Chaucer's "Prioress's Tale," Christian authorities punish the Jewish murderers after the concealed body of the martyr reveals itself to the Christian community in miraculous ways.<sup>26</sup> Either way, however, a triumphant closure to the story is achieved when the body of the martyred child is interred

in an appropriately public shrine, either a monastery or a cathedral, and the new saint begins to manifest his thaumaturgic powers by restoring the bodily wholeness of his petitioners.<sup>27</sup> Ritual crucifixion tales are thus not, fundamentally, dramas of vengeance. Christ, through his Church, overcomes the Jews' attack upon the Christian community, but the threat itself is not removed. At the end of these tales, the Jews remain, unconverted and malevolent, within the Christian body politic. Finally, neither Marian nor eucharistic themes feature at all prominently in twelfth- and thirteenth-century ritual crucifixion stories, although they can be traced in some fourteenth-century stories, most notably in Chaucer's "Prioress's Tale."<sup>28</sup>

Host desecration tales, by contrast, generally feature a single Jewish perpetrator, almost always male, who abuses the consecrated eucharistic host because he identifies the host with Christ himself.<sup>29</sup> The Jewish perpetrator thus acts as a very conscious and deliberate deicide. The host thereupon manifests itself as the body of Christ in miraculous ways, and the Jew is consequently discovered and executed by an enraged crowd of Christian neighbors. The miraculous host may subsequently be preserved and honored in the local parish church, but the climax of the story is typically reached when the injured host is avenged through the death of the Jewish perpetrator and the conversion of his widow and children to Christianity. Host desecration stories often borrow both motifs and themes from eucharistic and Marian miracle stories, and in the fourteenth century were commonly preached in connection with Marian feasts as well as with the feast of Corpus Christi.<sup>30</sup>

Without denying that these contrasts do exist, I want to suggest that there is, nevertheless, an evolutionary link between ritual crucifixion and host desecration charges; and that by tracing the process by which Marian and eucharistic themes began to be incorporated into ritual crucifixion stories, we may learn something not only about the origins of the host desecration charge, but also about the developing devotional significance of the body of Christ to thirteenth-century Christians.

To make this case I want to begin with a story, about the ritual crucifixion and martyrdom of Adam of Bristol.<sup>31</sup> The events of the story itself are alleged to have taken place in Bristol "in the days of King Henry, father of the other King Henry,"<sup>32</sup> but for reasons that will quickly become apparent, the story as we have it is unlikely to have been composed before the second quarter of the thirteenth century. The story survives in a unique copy in a miscellaneous volume of Harleian manuscripts in the British Library. It is written in Latin, by a practiced hand of the latter half of the thirteenth century. Although by no means a de-luxe manuscript, the text is clearly a professional production. It is partially rubricated

with red initial letters, and accompanied by two small illuminations. These illuminations were laid out in advance of the text and were carefully placed so as to correspond with the accompanying storyline, a requirement that forced the scribe to squeeze several lines of text at the bottom of folio 21v so that text and illustrations would coincide properly on folio 22r.<sup>33</sup> Behind the story may lie a tradition of dramatic performance associated with the parish church of St. Mary Redcliff, a suburb of Bristol.<sup>34</sup> If so, this parish drama would probably have been performed on the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (15 August), the date on which the action of the tale takes place. But the text as we have it was clearly conceived as a book, and is described as such by the scribe who produced it.<sup>35</sup>

The story itself begins with an address by God to the audience, commanding our attention to “what the idolatrous and garrulous Jews in England have done to me.”<sup>36</sup> Throughout the text, God will occasionally interject commentary, sometimes to interpret the action, but more often to declare to the audience that all the action being portrayed took place with his full knowledge and consent. All narrative description in the story is thus presented as coming straight from the mouth of God. This matters, because God alone knows this story: first because the story itself is retrospective, retelling twelfth-century events from the perspective of the thirteenth century; and second, because the very fact of Adam’s martyrdom has been hitherto unknown to the Christian citizens of Bristol by God’s own deliberate design, as the story now proceeds to explain.

The action begins with a Jewish man, Samuel, telling his sister (who is never named, although she is the principal character in the story) of a remarkable event that has just occurred. The first part of the story thus has a kind of double narrative frame, being told first by God the omniscient narrator, but also by Samuel, retrospectively, in an account to his sister. This rather clumsy device is not sustained, however, so that the point at which Samuel’s report to his sister ends and the direct action of the drama begins, can only be inferred by the reader. It is nowhere marked in the text.

Samuel tells his sister that he and his young son had gone into the city of Bristol the day before, where they encountered a Christian boy whom Samuel’s son invited back to their house to play and eat apples. The son tells the boy that he and his family are Christians too, but that the boy must nonetheless follow at a distance behind them when walking back to their house, and cover his face with his hood when he enters their door. Samuel’s son has been taught by his father to do all this. He knows clearly what the fate of his Christian playmate will be, his father having crucified three other Christian boys within the past year. When the boys arrive, Samuel’s wife lays out a luxurious meal for them in a rear chamber of the house, while Samuel goes outside to make sure that

none of his Christian neighbors have seen the boy enter. Samuel's wife, meanwhile, asks the boy his name, where he lives, and who his relatives are, providing Adam the opportunity to tell her (and the audience) not only his name, but also that his father is William of Wales, that he lives in the parish of St. Mary Redcliff, and that his mother has just given birth to her second child and is still on her sickbed. Samuel and his wife then compare notes, and after determining that Adam is from a sufficiently remote part of the city and that no one has seen the boy enter their house, they conclude that it is safe to crucify him. Samuel's wife then re-enters the chamber and plies the boy with beer. But when Adam insists upon going home, even after Samuel's wife has assured him she is his father's niece and that she will take him home in the morning with gifts for his mother, Samuel closes all the doors, gags the boy, ties him up, and covers him with a sheet. The Jews then depart the chamber to wait for nightfall.<sup>37</sup>

A lengthy and lurid account of Adam's crucifixion then begins, in which Samuel repeatedly identifies Adam as "the god of the Christians" or as "the body of the Christians' god," thus identifying the crucified Adam directly with the eucharist, the consecrated and broken body of Christ in the Mass.<sup>38</sup> Adam cries out for help to the Virgin Mary, and specifically to St. Mary of Redcliff, giving Samuel opportunity to demonstrate his particular odium for "that whore."<sup>39</sup> All three Jews then mock Adam. Samuel addresses him as God, and calls upon him to descend from his cross, declaring that then they will believe that he is God. Samuel's wife cuts off Adam's nose and upper lip, remarking as she does so, "Behold how beautifully the God of the Christians smiles!"<sup>40</sup> The son stabs Adam with a knife, and the three Jews then take him down from the cross and stomp on him.

Thus far Adam's tortures have taken place in the Jews' privy, located at the back of the house beyond the chamber where the boys had dined. Now, however, the Jews drag Adam's body to the front room of the house, where they proceed to bind him to a spit and roast him, "like a fat chicken," over a great fire. At this point, a loud voice booms out from the unconscious Adam's throat, declaring in Hebrew that "I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob ... whom you persecute." The Jews are astonished, and removing Adam from the spit, they attempt to revive him with beer. Samuel, however, insists on nailing him again to the cross, "and we will see if his Christ comes to liberate him from our hands."<sup>41</sup>

Adam now awakes, and questioned by the Jews tells them that while he was in the fire he was comforted by a beautiful lady and by a boy who kissed the wounds on Adam's hands and feet and called him his beloved brother. The Jews ask where this boy is now, and Adam replies that he is still with him on the

cross. They then ask who the boy is, and once again a voice booms out from Adam's throat, declaring "Jesus Christ the Nazarene is my name." Samuel again wonders why, if Jesus is God, He does not rescue Adam, and declares that if he can get his hands on the boy whom Adam has seen in the fire he will crucify him too. Samuel then stabs Adam to the heart, and Adam dies, whereupon the voices of thousands of angels are heard exclaiming, "Blessed are all the works of the lord God."<sup>42</sup>

This is too much for Samuel's wife and son, who now declare their intention to convert to Christianity and are promptly murdered by Samuel. Samuel then buries Adam's body beneath the floor of the latrine, and hides the bodies of his wife and son in his house, covering them with a woolen sheet.<sup>43</sup> The next morning, however, when he goes out to use the latrine, Samuel is confronted by an angel with a fiery sword who bars his entrance to the privy and knocks him backward out the door declaring, memorably, "Wretch! You shall not empty your bowels here!"<sup>44</sup> Thoroughly discommoded, Samuel thereupon flees his house to consult his widowed sister.

Samuel's sister laments the murder of her brother's wife and son, and is clearly puzzled by Samuel's penchant for crucifying Christians. But she accompanies him back to his house, helps him to bury the bodies of his wife and son, and proposes that they tell their Jewish neighbors that the wife and son have departed for places unknown. This does not, however, solve the problem of the angel in the privy. Samuel therefore decides to live with his sister at her house until they can figure out a way to get Adam's body (and hence the angel) transported out of the latrine.

Samuel and his sister decide that they must find a Christian priest who will, for a fee, remove Adam's body to a cemetery without revealing his actions to anyone; for, as they note, if it became known that Samuel had crucified a Christian boy, they and all the Jewish people would be destroyed by the avenging Christians.<sup>45</sup> The sister finds such a man in the person of an Irish priest, newly arrived with several companions on the first stage of a pilgrimage to Rome, and so unknown to anyone in the city. Samuel's sister brings the priest and his companions home, feeds and lodges them, pretending all the while that she and Samuel are Christians. The ruse is entirely successful; the Christians all get drunk and the priest propositions the sister's serving maid. The next morning, Samuel and his sister explain to the priest that the boy who is buried in Samuel's latrine is in fact their son, who has been crucified by Jews, but whose death they wish to conceal because otherwise the king's officials will extort money from them by falsely charging them with the murder. The priest is utterly taken in by this story and goes off with his two male companions to exhume Adam's body and remove it to a Christian cemetery.<sup>46</sup>



When the priest enters Samuel's house, however, he and his two companions are met by the odor of sanctity and the sound of an angelic choir, whose singing is described in considerable detail. But when the priest tries to enter the latrine where Adam is buried, he is barred entrance by an angel who orders him to go first to a local parish priest to confess his sins and be cleansed of them. He does so, making his confession to a married priest of the city. Returning to Samuel's house, the angel pronounces the priest's confession efficacious, and admits him into the presence of the angelic host gathered around Adam's grave in the latrine. With the angels' assistance, the priest wraps the boy's body in linen cloth. The angels then tell him to take the martyr's body back with him to Ireland to his own church and bury it there, at a place the angels will show him. The angels then instruct the priest to return to the house of Samuel's sister, to convert her and her brother to Christianity and also to prepare a coffin in which to transport Adam's body to Ireland. Interestingly, it is only now that the priest learns that Samuel and his sister are Jews.<sup>47</sup>

The priest's efforts to convert the two Jews are unavailing, but Samuel does procure some wood, out of which the priest constructs a coffin for Adam's body. Refusing to remain any longer in what he now knows to be a Jewish house, the priest returns with the coffin, collects Adam's body, and he and his companions take ship with it to Ireland.<sup>48</sup>

This is the last we see or hear of Samuel and his sister, whose crimes thus go completely undetected by any Bristol citizen. The priest, on returning to Ireland, buries Adam's body in a spot revealed to him by the angels, along with all the instruments of his martyrdom, including the cross and the nails. Every bit of the physical evidence around which a martyr's cult might form is thus concealed below ground in Ireland. The angels then order the priest to resume his interrupted pilgrimage to Rome and tell him that when he returns from Rome he will have forgotten the location of Adam's grave. This, they explain to him, is by divine decree, God the Father wishing the spot to remain hidden until the day He has predetermined to reveal the martyr's body to the world. When the priest returns from Rome, he has indeed forgotten the spot where Adam was buried; he has also forgotten the angels' words and so spends many days fruitlessly searching for Adam's grave. But as the angel has told him, "This place shall be unknown to you and to all human creatures until the day predestined by God the Father."<sup>49</sup> The text of the story ends here, followed by an *envoi*, written in red letters by the scribe.<sup>50</sup>

The eucharistic associations of this text will need little urging. Samuel addresses the crucified Adam directly as "the God of the Christians" and as "the body of the Christians' God"; Jesus himself, in the form of a young boy, declares himself

to be with Adam on the cross; and God the Father declares that it is He whom the Jews are torturing on their Cross. The Jews' roasting of Adam over a fire also has eucharistic overtones, establishing links with both the well-known "Jew of Bourges" tale, in which a Jewish father throws his own son into an oven when the son reports having seen the Christ child present in a Eucharistic host (the son is preserved, unharmed, by the Virgin Mary), and with the baking of the eucharistic host itself, prior to its consecration as the body of Christ.<sup>51</sup> The tortures inflicted upon Adam – stomping, burning, stabbing – are also typical of the abuse Jews were accused of perpetrating upon the eucharistic bread in host desecration stories. The interest shown by the text in the confessional also carries eucharistic significance. The Irish priest, no paragon of personal holiness, must first confess his sins and be absolved of them before he can approach Adam's broken and martyred body, just as Christian believers were required to confess their sins before presenting themselves to receive the eucharist. Nor should we ignore the significance of the boy's name as another way of identifying Christ, the second Adam, with the crucified child martyr.

As these eucharistic associations may suggest, the text also shows a notable and consistent concern with the proprieties of lay piety. When Adam is brought before the cross on which he is to be crucified, he immediately kneels, much to the disgust of his Jewish captor, who promises him even more dire punishment in consequence. When the Irish priest's servants arrive at the place of Adam's martyrdom, the priest instructs them to kneel and recite the prayers which lay people in the middle ages were taught to recite during Mass, the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria, identified in the text not only by their Latin opening lines, but also by their common designations as "the Lord's prayer" and "the angel's greeting."<sup>52</sup> The necessity and efficacy of confession, even when offered to a sinful priest, is another aspect of lay piety emphasized in the text.<sup>53</sup> So too are the value of special masses sung by priests on behalf of lay people.<sup>54</sup> But there is also a persistent undertone of criticism in the text, directed toward the low moral standards of the parish clergy. The lechery and drunkenness of parish priests are repeatedly emphasized, not only in the character of the Irish priest, but also in Samuel's descriptions of the Christian clergy of Bristol, many of whom he declares to be living with women and regularly drunken.<sup>55</sup> In the Irish priest's willingness to accept five marks from Samuel and his sister to bury their supposed son, there may also be an implied criticism of the clergy's greed to collect burial fees from lay people, even in highly suspicious circumstances.<sup>56</sup> Neither the tale's eucharistic associations, nor its concentration on the proprieties of lay piety, is characteristic of most ritual crucifixion stories. The classic ritual crucifixion tale was a product of the monastic house which guarded the martyr's relics and mediated his thaumaturgic power. To these purposes, the identification

our text establishes between the crucified child martyr and the eucharist was irrelevant, perhaps even counter-productive insofar as eucharistic associations might tend to break down the exclusivity of the martyr's association with a specific site and shrine. As we have seen, the point of ritual crucifixion stories was to emphasize that by their actions in crucifying the child victim, Jews as a group had launched an attack upon the body of Christ which was the Church. The child's passion was identified with the passion of Christ: this was, indeed, what constituted the child as a saint, as Thomas of Monmouth insisted in his account. But nowhere does Thomas of Monmouth, or any other monastic author of a ritual crucifixion story, identify the suffering body of the child/Christ directly with the eucharist. The attack in ritual crucifixion stories is a corporate one, by a group of Jews against the entire body of Christians which is the Church. The appropriate resolution of such an attack is, therefore, that the crucified body of the martyred child/Christ be reincorporated into the body of Christ through the construction of a shrine for the new saint inside the monastic or cathedral church. The shrine then in turn becomes a center for the restoration of the bodily integrity of the Christian people through the manifestation of thaumaturgic miracles by the saint.

Adam of Bristol's tale is quite different. It has no associations with either a monastery or a cathedral. It is associated instead with a parish church – a church, moreover, which, for reasons the story explains, held not a single relic of Adam and promoted no cult devoted to him. Indeed, the figure who stands at the devotional center of the tale is not really Adam at all, but rather the Virgin Mary, to whom the parish church at Redcliff was dedicated, and toward whom Samuel displayed a very particular contempt. Adam himself was from the parish of St. Mary's, Redcliff, while one of Samuel's earlier Christian victims hailed from the linked parish of St. Mary's, Bedminster.<sup>57</sup> When Samuel tortures Adam, it is to St. Mary of Redcliff that Adam cries out for protection, and it is Mary who subsequently protects Adam from being burned in the fire. It is Mary, dressed in purple, who leads the angelic procession to Adam's grave, accompanied by Jesus as a young boy; and it is upon the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin that Adam's martyrdom occurs. If our text did indeed begin life as a parish drama, it was almost certainly a drama intended to celebrate the power of St. Mary of Redcliff; and I venture to guess that it would have been performed by the parishioners of Redcliff on the fifteenth day of August, to celebrate the bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven.

Another element which tends to connect this story with host desecration tales rather than with traditional ritual crucifixion stories is the interest shown in Samuel's motives for crucifying Adam. These are examined in quite interesting detail, largely through the character of Samuel's sister, who is very much the

heroine of the story. It is she who directs the burial of Samuel's wife and son with all their clothing and personal effects, and who invents a story to explain their disappearance. It is she who calms her brother's panic, and who designs and executes the plan that eventually removes Adam's body and conceals her brother's crimes. At the same time, however, she is strongly critical of Samuel's murders. "Why do you hate Jesus and His mother?" she asks Samuel. "What is it to us if he has said, 'I am Christ the son of the living God?' Let us hold to our law, which God gave us by the hand of Moses and Aaron, and that is enough for us."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, God Himself interrupts the action to commend her fidelity to Jewish law; and at the end of the play, she flatly rejects the Irish priest's efforts to convert her, remarking simply: "I do not believe in the mortal man Jesus."<sup>59</sup> By her stratagems, she emerges by the end of the story as a kind of Esther or Deborah figure, saving her people from destruction by her own quick-wittedness. As a result, she, her brother, and all the Jews of England remain safe, secure, and unconverted to Christianity when the story ends.

As a Christian morality tale, this seems a highly unsatisfactory ending. It offers neither the solace of a martyr's shrine, with which a ritual crucifixion tale would ordinarily conclude, nor the satisfaction of Christian vengeance and Jewish conversion characteristic of the host desecration genre. Awkwardly but interestingly, Adam of Bristol's tale stands somewhere between these two genres. It suggests, therefore, some of the ways in which ritual crucifixion narratives were being transformed as these stories moved out of their original monastic milieu and into the new devotional world of thirteenth-century lay piety.

The associations our text establishes between eucharistic devotion, Marian miracles, and what Denise Despres has called "cultic anti-Judaism" will be familiar enough to those who have studied fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Corpus Christi sermons and dramas. "Adam of Bristol," however, is the earliest evidence so far discovered for the coalescence of these ideas around a ritual crucifixion tale. As we have seen, the text shows clearly how the new theological and devotional developments characteristic of thirteenth-century lay piety were being integrated into traditional narratives of ritual crucifixion. In that process of integration, as the ritual crucifixion story took on more explicitly eucharistic and Marian elements, we see one of the ways in which the host desecration tales of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries could have emerged out of the earlier narratives of ritual crucifixion.

This transformation of ritual crucifixion tales into host desecration tales may also offer some explanation for what has hitherto been a rather puzzling pattern of waxing and waning popularity for the ritual crucifixion charge itself. The charge took shape first in Norwich, between 1144 and 1150. It spread quickly,

being reported in both English and German sources by the mid to late 1150s.<sup>60</sup> In 1163, the charge crops up in France, when a shrine was erected in Paris to St. Richard of Pontoise. In 1168, a boy named Harold was reported to have been crucified by Jews in Gloucester. In 1171, the death of a Christian youth at Blois was quickly ascribed to ritual crucifixion by at least one of its Norman chroniclers. A decade or so later, a new shrine to a victim of ritual crucifixion was erected at Bury St. Edmunds, whose monastic community was evidently feeling the thaumaturgic competition from the nearby shrine of St. William of Norwich.<sup>61</sup> Then, between ca. 1181 and 1244 no new cults surrounding victims of ritual crucifixion arose in England or on the Continent<sup>62</sup> while, in England, even existing ritual crucifixion cults struggled to survive the enormous competition from the greatest of all healing saints, Thomas Becket.<sup>63</sup> In 1235, however, at Fulda, a new charge, ritual cannibalism, makes its first appearance. And soon thereafter, a new round of ritual crucifixion charges emerges: in London in 1244, in the 1260s, and again in 1276; in Lincoln in 1255; in Bristol around 1260; and in Northampton in 1279.

In the monastically composed accounts of post-1244 crucifixions that have come down to us, there is little or nothing to distinguish them from the traditional ritual crucifixion charges that we see during the twelfth century. As “Adam of Bristol” must suggest, however, the appearance of quiescence between 1181 and 1244 is misleading. Despite the absence of new cults, ritual crucifixion charges were clearly not losing their persuasive power during these years. Indeed, precisely the opposite seems to have been the case – by the mid-thirteenth century, Jews in England were coming under suspicion whenever a Christian child went missing in a town. What appears to have been happening, rather, is that between the 1180s and the mid-thirteenth century, ritual crucifixion tales were moving out of the monastic environs in which they originated, and into the world of lay and parish piety; and in this process, ritual crucifixion tales were being transformed by the addition of new devotional elements. A central role in such tales was beginning to be assumed by the Virgin Mary, whose own Miracles were themselves acquiring new, specifically anti-Jewish elements during these years;<sup>64</sup> and a new identification was also emerging between the crucified child martyr and the body of Christ in the Mass.

The process by which these new Marian and eucharistic themes came to be incorporated into ritual crucifixion tales needs more careful investigation than is possible here. “Adam of Bristol” shows us the results, but it only hints at the processes. The hints, however, are worth following up, if only briefly. Sermons, perhaps particularly the sermons preached by mendicant friars, must have played an important role in this transformation of the discourse of ritual murder. So too,

I would suggest, did parish dramas, of the sort that may lie behind the text of "Adam of Bristol." The Marian miracle stories themselves must also have played a role in bringing these themes together: if the Jew of Bourges would so willingly toss his own Jewish son into an oven, what more would such a man do to a Christian child? Interestingly, however, the Marian and eucharistic themes we see in "Adam of Bristol," and in the later host desecration charge, do not appear in the new ritual crucifixion stories that were being composed in English monasteries in the half-century after 1244. In the surprising absence of such themes from the surviving contemporary accounts of the martyrdom of little St. Hugh of Lincoln, we may have some measure of the gulf that was now opening up between the localized, monastically centered piety of the traditional ritual crucifixion tale, and the emerging devotional world of the later medieval laity.

In emphasizing the importance of sermon, drama, and devotional story to the renewed popularity of ritual crucifixion tales during the thirteenth century, we should not, however, overlook the influence of written texts like "Adam of Bristol" itself as both shapers and transmitters of anti-Semitic "knowledge." By the last half of the thirteenth century, a sizeable audience of literate laypeople existed in England who could and did read books for pleasure. A very significant percentage of those literate laypeople were female.<sup>65</sup> Tales like "Adam of Bristol" were among the books these literate laypeople read. And their reading, in turn, helped to shape the social, political, and religious world within which real Jews and real Christians in thirteenth century England lived and died. We see this shaping, I would suggest, in the new rash of ritual crucifixion charges which arose in England after 1244. We see it also in the story of Adam of Bristol. But we see its consequences most clearly in 1255, when the king's steward, John of Lexington, arrived in Lincoln to interrogate a Jew named Copin concerning the death of a little Christian boy named Hugh.<sup>66</sup> John must already have had a detailed knowledge of ritual crucifixions by Jews before he ever sat down with Copin. He had to have had. The entire charge was, after all, a Christian invention. Like any good inquisitor, John already knew what Copin and the Jews of Lincoln had done to Hugh, before he even began his interrogation. All he needed was for Copin to confess to what John of Lexington already knew to be true. And this Copin did, with fatal consequences for himself and the Jewish community of Lincoln.

John of Lexington was a learned man. His brothers were all clerics, and he himself had probably attended a university before becoming a knight and a royal steward.<sup>67</sup> He could have derived his knowledge of ritual crucifixions from a highly learned source. Certainly I do not suggest that he had read the story of Adam of Bristol. Our text does, however, offer us for the first time a concrete example of the kind of text from which a man like John of Lexington might have

derived the information he put to such disastrous use at Lincoln. Books played a critical role in shaping the piety of the late medieval laity from the thirteenth century on.<sup>68</sup> So too did Jews. Their historical absence from England after 1290 notwithstanding, Jews remained in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries what they had already become in the thirteenth century: a ubiquitous presence in the English imagination established largely (and after 1290, entirely) through words, texts, and images. Those of us who live constantly around books may be tempted on occasion to underestimate their power. We should know, or learn, better.

## NOTES

*Author's note:* A first version of this paper was delivered at Rice University as part of the Neil J. O'Brien Triennial Symposium in Medieval Studies, 10 and 11 November 1995. I want to express my thanks to Mr. O'Brien, the conference organizers, and especially to Professor David Nirenberg, for this invitation; and to the conference participants for their stimulating contributions concerning "The Body of Christ in the Late Middle Ages." I am grateful also to William Jordan for helpful comments on an intermediate draft of this essay.

1. E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (Harmondsworth, 1993), 273-4, and Krister Stendahl, "Anti-Semitism," in Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford, 1993), 33, represent a wide (although not universal) consensus amongst New Testament scholars on this issue. For the New Testament references, see Matthew 27:11-26 and John 18:28-19:16; and, less explicitly, Mark 15:1-15, Luke 23:1-24.
2. Matthew 27:24-25.
3. On the development of the notion of deicide, see Jeremy Cohen, "The Jews as Killers of Christ in the Latin Tradition, from Augustine to the Friars," *Traditio* 39 (1983), 1-27.
4. See now Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995).
5. For this common Pauline metaphor, see I Corinthians 6:15, 12:12; 12:27; Colossians 1:18.
6. Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1979), 82-3, following Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (London, 1960), 240-50.
7. Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origin and Development*, trans. F. A. Brunner, 2 vols. (New York, 1950), remains the standard account of the mass.
8. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine. Volume III: The Growth of Medieval Theology, 600-1300* (Chicago, 1978), 74-80, 184-204; Oakley, *Western Church*, 83-6; and see also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), 48-69.
9. I Corinthians 10:16-17, my translation from the Vulgate.
10. Pelikan, *Growth*, 75; and see also the classic work by Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: L'eucharistie et l'église au Moyen Age*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1949).
11. G. Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period* (Oxford, 1984).
12. Pelikan's translation (*Growth*, 191) of Alger of Liege, *On the Sacraments: Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, vol. 180: 790-1.

13. For what follows, see Oakley, *Western Church*, 161-3; Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 116-35; and Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957), 194-206.
14. Oakley, *Western Church*, 162.
15. *Ibid.*, 162-3; Brien Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (Cambridge, 1955), 132-53; Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 196-202.
16. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi* (Cambridge, 1991); and see also John Bossy's classic article, "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700," *Past and Present* 100 (1983), 29-61.
17. Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 63-4; and see also two important articles by Denise Despres: "Cultic Anti-Judaism and Chaucer's Little Clergeon," *Modern Philology* (1994), 413-27; and "Mary of the Eucharist: Cultic Anti-Judaism in Fourteenth-Century English Devotional Manuscripts," in Jeremy Cohen (ed.), *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 375-401.
18. Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch* (Missoula, 1978); Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (Berkeley, 1983).
19. Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Bodies in the Jewish-Christian Debate," in Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (eds.), *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester, 1994), 131-2. The standard work on Rupert of Deutz is John Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983).
20. Miri Rubin is engaged in a comprehensive study of host desecration stories. See "Desecration of the Host: The Birth of an Accusation," in Diana Wood (ed.), *Christianity and Judaism* (Studies in Church History 29, Oxford, 1992), 169-85; and her article in R. Po-chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1995).
21. Rubin, "Desecration of the Host," 169-72.
22. Cohen, "Jews as Killers of Christ," 1-27; Kenneth R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 231-51; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*.
23. I am adopting Langmuir's terminology for these accusations, which too often are lumped together under the analytically unsatisfactory heading of "blood libel." For Langmuir's understanding of medieval antisemitism, see his synthetic treatment, *History, Religion and Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990), and his collected essays, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990). I have offered my own evaluation of Langmuir's arguments in "History, Religion, and Medieval Antisemitism: A Response to Gavin Langmuir," *Religious Studies Review* 20:2 (1994), 95-101.
24. Rubin, "Desecration of the Host," 169-72.
25. Although she is not responsible for my conclusions, I must acknowledge the help of Deborah Jo Miller, Cornell University, in formulating these observations on ritual crucifixion stories. Her most important work is as yet unpublished; but in the meantime, see her Cambridge University M. Phil. thesis, "The Development of the 'Ritual Murder' Accusation in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries and its Relationship to the Changing Attitudes of Christians Toward Jews" (1991).
26. *The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich*, ed. Augustus Jessopp and M. R. James (Cambridge, 1896); Gavin Langmuir, "The Knight's Tale of Young Hugh of Lincoln," in *Toward a Definition*, 237-62; Despres, "Cultic Anti-Judaism."
27. The lengthy collection of miracle stories which follows the account of William of Norwich's life and crucifixion is thus an essential part of the *Vita et Passio Willelmi*, as Jo Miller has pointed out to me.



28. As William Jordan has noted, the saint's days for many of these child martyrs frequently coincide with Marian feast days: see his *The French Monarchy and the Jews: From Philip Augustus to the Last Capetians* (Philadelphia, 1989), 19. The stories themselves, however, do not generally accord a significant role to Mary in their narratives. She is neither a principal target for the hostility of the Jewish perpetrators toward Christianity, nor does she intervene to lessen the suffering of the child martyr. Nor is it always easy to determine the date at which a formal saint's day was assigned to these child martyrs. In some cases, for example that of Hugh of Lincoln, the official saint's day of 27 July seems to have been assigned quite late, perhaps not until the eighteenth century: see Langmuir, "Knight's Tale," 238.
29. For the analysis that follows, I am indebted to Rubin, "Desecration of the Host."
30. Despres, "Cultic Anti-Judaism," and idem, "Mary of the Eucharist."
31. The story appears in British Library Harleian MS. 957, fols. 19r-27r. A Latin transcript of the tale has now been published by Christoph Cluse, "Fabula Ineptissima: Die Ritualmordlegende um Adam von Bristol nach der Handschrift London, British Library, Harley 957," *Aschkenas: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 5:2 (1995), 293-330. I am grateful to Dr. Cluse for his generosity in sharing his work with me, after discovering that we were both simultaneously at work on this fascinating text. I hope to complete my own edition, translation and study of the text shortly.
32. Cluse, "Fabula," 305; fol. 19r. Scholars have presumed that this must refer to Henry II, whose son Henry, "the young king," died in 1183 – hence the dating of a Bristol ritual crucifixion accusation to 1183 in Michael Adler, *Jews of Medieval England* (London, 1939), 185-6, followed by Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, 3rd. ed. (Oxford, 1964), 13, and Langmuir, "Knight's Tale," 241. As Dr. Paul Brand has pointed out to me, however, the reference could conceivably be to the reign of King Henry I, who was sometimes thought in the thirteenth century to have been the father (rather than the grandfather) of King Henry II.
33. Cluse, "Fabula," 304, reproduces folio 22r with the two illuminations.
34. I have argued the case for this in "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: The Excruciating Drama of Adam of Redcliff," an unpublished paper delivered to the annual meeting of the Medieval Academy of America, Boston, 1993. A revised version of this paper will become part of my book in progress on this tale.
35. The text ends with the following comment, set off in red ink from the dark brown ink of the text: "Amen, the book is finished. Praise and glory to Christ. May the tongue of the reader bless the body of the writer." ("Amen. Finito libro sit laus et gloria Christo. Corpus scribentis benedicat lingua legentis." Cluse, "Fabula," 327; fol. 27r, but reading "benedicat" for Cluse's "benedicit". I am grateful to Dr. Adam Kosto for help with this passage.)
36. "quid fecerint michi judei in Anglia ydolatra et garula" (Cluse, "Fabula," 305; fol. 19r).
37. Cluse, "Fabula," 305-7; fols. 19r-v.
38. "Hic est deus christianorum"; (ibid., 308; fol. 20r); "corpus dei christianorum"; (ibid., 309; fol. 20v). Examples could be multiplied.
39. Cluse, ibid., 309, 311; fols. 20v, 21v.
40. "Ecce quam pulcre ridet deus christianorum!"; (ibid., 309; fol. 20v).
41. Ibid., 310-11; fol. 21r.
42. Ibid., 311-12; fol. 21v.
43. I'm grateful to Professor Laura Hodges, formerly of Rice University, for advice on *stamen*.
44. "Miser, hic non purgabis ventrem!" Cluse, "Fabula," 314; fol. 22v.
45. Ibid., 317; fol. 23v.
46. Ibid., 317-22; fols. 23v-25r.

47. *Ibid.*, 322-5; fols. 25v-26v.
48. *Ibid.*, 325-6; fols. 26v-27r.
49. *Ibids.*, 326-7; fol. 27r. "Locus iste ignotus erit tibi et omni humane creature usque in diem prefinitam a deo patre."
50. For the text of this *envoi*, see note 36 above.
51. On the "Jew of Bourges" tale, see Rubin, "Desecration of the Host," 173 and references cited there.
52. Cluse, "Fabula," 322; fol. 25v: "Ad quem sacerdos: 'Tace ne loquere unum solum verbum. Sedete hic donec veniam ad vos et dicite Pater Noster, dominicam scilicet orationem, et Ave Maria, salutacionem videlicet angelicam, et nolite egredi a loco isto.'" On the centrality of these prayers to later medieval English devotion, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven, 1992), 53-5, 80, 219.
53. Cluse, "Fabula," 323; fols. 25v-25r.
54. When Samuel's sister sends the Irish priest and his companions off to church in the morning, she gives the priest 3 pennies, telling him to have three priests each say one Mass of the Holy Spirit, "ut omnia nobis prospera sint," with the priest himself saying a fourth Mass. The church of St. Mary, Redcliff, had a Chapel of the Holy Spirit on its grounds, for which I have not yet determined the foundation date.
55. Cluse, "Fabula," 317; fol. 23v.
56. *Ibid.*, 319, 321; fols. 24r-24v, 24v-25r.
57. On the links between Redcliff and Bedminster, both held in the twelfth century by the Fitz Harding family, see the article on Bristol in M. D. Lobel (ed.), *Historic Towns Atlas, Volume II* (Oxford, 1975).
58. Cluse, "Fabula," 316; fol. 23r.
59. "Erat enim mulier ceca fidelis in lege sua, dicit dominus deus"; Cluse, "Fabula," 315; fol. 22v. "Non credam in hominem mortalem Ihesum" *ibid.*, 325; fol. 26v.
60. John McCulloh, "Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth," *Speculum* 72:3 (July, 1997).
61. Langmuir, "Knight's Tale," 240-1, collects the references.
62. A point noted also by Langmuir, "Knight's Tale," 241.
63. Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims* (London, 1997).
64. R. W. Southern, "The English Origins of the Miracles of the Virgin," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958): 176-216; Jordan, *French Monarchy*.
65. Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1993), is an excellent introduction to the burgeoning literature on women and the reading of books.
66. Langmuir, "Knight's Tale," *passim*.
67. Robert C. Stacey, "John of Lexinton," *The New Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
68. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 209-98.