

SLIDE 1

**We suffer persecution: but are not forsaken.**

**We are cast down: but we perish not.**

**Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.**

**For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake: that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh.**

**(2 Corinthians 4:9-11)**

[Corinthians being one of the letters written by the Apostle Paul to new Christians]

Key concept: we suffer, but we suffer in imitation of Christ, and take comfort in the fact that Christ through the incarnation became flesh in order to make the ultimate physical sacrifice and save our souls from eternal damnation.

SLIDE 2

**Lucas Cranach the elder, The trinity (1515)**

One way of representing the incarnation is to represent the trinity; in this early 16<sup>th</sup> century painting, God resembles the human father of a human son—or to be more precise, a human ruler offering up his son (on the cross) to be sacrificed. The dove represents the holy spirit, the only non-anthropomorphic aspect of the trinity.

SLIDE 3

**Sculptural image of the maestà**

**German, 14<sup>th</sup> century**

Another way of representing the incarnation is to focus on the role of Jesus's human mother, Mary, who is the most important saint in the Christian canon, and seen as the primary intercessor between man and God now that Jesus is no longer on the earth. Mary intercedes with Jesus on our behalf—who then intercedes with his father.

This image, which appears on our syllabus, is a good example of what James Bernauer calls, an object of “art-faith”. It is neither simply an aesthetic object or simply a devotional object. In part because it moves, and is sculptural, it calls attention to the devotional uses to which it was put.

SLIDE 4

**Giotto, The Crucifixion, from the frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua (1304-6)**

But by far the most powerful and prevalent image of Christ in the medieval period was the image of the crucifixion, the final phase of what is known as the passion (from the Latin word for suffering). The mystery of Christianity (and of all religion—but Christianity's

mystery is manifested most clearly in the incarnation) is the question of how we can build a bridge between the human and the divine. Christ was that bridge during his lifetime; after his death and resurrection, Christians participate in the ritual of the mass in order to celebrate that sacrifice and, in a sense, participate in it. Visual representations of the crucifixion, when used as devotional tools, perform a similar function, allowing the viewer to imaginatively re-enact Christ's death.

The goal of the mass, in which believers consume the body and the blood of Christ in the wafer and the communion wine, is to:

- memorialize the passion
- cleanse the believer's sins
- inflame the believer with love of god
- endow the believer with the virtue of enduring suffering

This ritual stems, in part, from Christ's commandment to his disciples at the last supper: he told them that when he was no longer with them, they should break bread together and drink wine in remembrance of him. But the mass is more than merely a commemoration; it is a re-enactment.

#### SLIDE 5

#### **Woodcut image of the elevation of the host during the mass**

The key gesture at the heart of the mass is known as transubstantiation. This is the miracle through which the wafer and the wine become the body and the blood of Christ through the power of the ritual. The priest holds the host or wafer over his head so that the entire congregation can witness the miracle.

One way of thinking about this miracle is to compare it to the theater. Western theater as we know it emerged, in part, from plays that depicted the life of Christ, including his death and resurrection. How did these differ from the mass? The answer is that the play is a *representation* of the crucifixion, while the mass is a *presentation* of the crucifixion—as Duffy suggests on p. 91, the crucifixion is happening all over again each time the mass is celebrated. Christ is literally present in the communion wafer and wine.

See also: Clegg p. 20 and 52.

The priest was an actor in the sense that he performed a pre-determined set of gestures, wearing a costume that helped complete his "role" as the celebrant of the mass. But he was not "pretending" to enact the crucifixion; his actions, combined with the faith of the assembled believers, actually effected a miracle whereby Christ was sacrificed all over again. (Those of you who know something about Greek drama will recognize that in this sense the mass is much closer to the Dionysian rituals out of which classical tragedies emerged. The mass has also been linked to seasonal harvest rituals practiced by pre-Christian peoples.)

Thus the mass was both a reenactment of the crucifixion and of the last supper; the congregants were both themselves and the disciples, the priest was both himself and a stand-

in for Christ, since he had the power to complete the miracle by speaking the words “hoc est corpus meum” and elevating the host.

SLIDE 7

### **Implements of the mass**

Jesus was visually present during the mass in other ways, on the cover of the mass book, in the figure of the cross on the back of the priest’s vestment, and in the small metal altar crosses that frequently adorned the altar where the mass was celebrated. As we will discuss in more depth later on, the symbol of the cross was often as important as the realistic depiction of Christ’s crucified body.

SLIDE 8

### **Floor plan of Winchester cathedral**

Even the architecture of the church itself (albeit inspired by much earlier models) took on the form of a cross.

[brief discussion of the place of the mass within the church]

SLIDE 9

### **Contemporary image of the communion wafer**

Transubstantiation is not easy to wrap your mind around, and there have been skeptics all along. Some even believe that the origin of the phrase “hocus pocus” comes from the garbling of the Latin phrase uttered by the priest: “Hoc est corpus meum” (this is my body). As Eamon Duffy reminds us (see p. 101), medieval believers were not unaware of the leap of faith that the transubstantiation required.

SLIDE 10

### **Ysenbrandt, Mass of St. Gregory (c. 1530)**

The story of the Mass of St. Gregory (described on p. 108 of Duffy) was a particular version of the miracle of the mass that attempted to make the meaning of transubstantiation more palpable. A proliferation of images of the Gregory mass were painted between the 1460s and 1530s.

The original story concerned the satisfaction of a woman’s doubts about the real presence in the Mass when a host turned into a bleeding finger in front of the officiating priest, St. Gregory the Great. In versions from the 14<sup>th</sup> c. onwards, Christ himself began appearing on the altar in front of Gregory, and eventually, as the Man of Sorrows surrounded by the instruments of the passion. Christ’s suffering body was usually depicted appearing during the consecration or the elevation and sometimes shown dripping blood directly into a conveniently placed chalice.

There was problem, however, with literalizing the miracle. In the words of one critic, Christine Gottler: “By making visible the essential nature of the Eucharist, which is, however, nonvisible to the corporeal eye, the imagery of Saint Gregory’s miraculous mass

also exposes the fictitious character of visual evidence. The otherwise inexplicable miraculous appearance of Christ is brought into being by the artist.”

Pick this apart from a moment. What is Gottler saying about the proper, or improper, relationship between religious miracles and visual art?

SLIDE 11

**Master of St. Giles, Mass of St. Giles (1480-90)**

Consider another famous miracle, this one about solving the problem of doubt and its connection to sin.

Charles Martel, founder of the Carolingian empire in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, could not bring himself to confess a sin. He asked Saint Giles to pray for him. While Giles was celebrating mass, an angel placed on the altar a paper on which was written the king’s sin and his pardon, dependent on his repentance. The incident is said to have taken place in Orléans in 719.

In this image, the miracle has been set before the high altar of the Abbey of Saint-Denis near Paris. Many of the objects shown can be proved to have existed in the church. This is the only surviving representation of the church as it was in about 1500.

SLIDE 12

**Rogier van der Weyden, The Sacrament of the Eucharist from the altarpiece of the Seven Sacraments (1453-55)**

In the medieval church, importantly, there were more sacraments than just the communion—and, as Duffy reminds us, the communion was something ordinary parishioners did not always have access to. The other sacraments included: baptism, confession, confirmation, marriage, holy orders, anointing of the sick. Each of them worked in one sense or another to mark out ritual time from secular time and to connect the laity with the divine. But none was more symbolically important, or more central to the visual tradition, than the crucifixion.

Note the way in which van der Weyden places the crucifixion (along with the other sacraments) within the space of the medieval cathedral. The painting, like many other altarpieces, puts the crucifixion at the center of the viewer’s attention during the mass, since it would have been directly behind the priest.

- Discussion of Herbert poem
- Overview of Reformation (see handout)

