Chapter Eight

Conclusion

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries England was at the forefront of a revival of episcopal sanctity, canonizing more bishops than any other country during the period. Bishop-saints thrived in England because the bishops met the stringent specifications for spiritual perfection that both the papacy and the populace of England had set out: balancing a double life, that of the bishop and the saint, both in the world and exhibiting *contemptus mundi*. Being involved in the world appealed to the laity whilst exhibiting *contemptus mundi* was always important for a bishop in the eyes of the clergy and papal curia.

What both the populace and papacy expected of bishops was rooted deep in scripture; exhibiting good morals, being temperate and kind, not given to sin or drink, serving as *bonus pastor* to the people, and taking care of their spiritual wellbeing.[1] These expectations stayed rooted within the ideals of the church, yet sanctity changed and evolved with different trends coming to the fore. Saints needed to adapt to whatever the focus was on. With the rise of the monk-ascetic models and saints during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, bishops had to change their entire attitude, since they lived in the world, yet had to also try and distance themselves at the same time. They continued to preach around the diocese, spreading the Word, and in exhibiting the attributes associated with monks and ascetics, such as praying fervently, fasting, and wearing hair shirts, they maintained a balance between monastic and episcopal sanctity. Thus the two models became intermeshed. Bishops moulded the models to allow

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[1] 1 Timothy 3: 1-6; Titus 1: 6-10.

themselves to be both in the world and separate from it, keeping both the interests of the populace and their own sanctity in equilibrium.

After his death in 1170 and canonization in 1173, Thomas Becket, and everything that he had embodied during his episcopate, created a brand new model of episcopal sanctity to follow. In being cut down on the altar steps in Canterbury by four of Henry II's knights Becket had shown an example of spiritual perfection – as a bishop he had exhibited *contemptus mundi* and everything which the papacy and clergy wished to have in a bishop, and for the populace he had been one of them, a man of the people and a hero of England's peasantry. Becket practised works of mercy, preached around his diocese, spent time in the cloisters of Canterbury, went on a self-imposed exile into the desert of the cloisters of Pontigny, and he had been an active *defensor civitatis* for the *libertas ecclesia*; he was the saint the people in England deserved, and needed. The lack of *in vita* miracles which had littered the *vitae* of saints throughout Europe during the past century, often associated with their asceticism, aided the bishops in becoming saints, as little holiness was expected to show in the lives of the secular bishops. As time moved on and the universities of Paris, Orleans and Oxford were established learned clerics were being placed into the bishoprics of Europe, and thus focus was on the secular rather than spiritual.[2] Yet during the period, four English secular bishops were placed in the Rolls of the Saints, showing how the ideal of spiritual perfection had changed by the late twelfth century. The secular model had often showed a heavy regard for those who had been scholars, such as Edmund of Abingdon who was praised for 'devoting his life to study and sending many young clerics to the schools'.[3] The success of Becket changed the specifications to be a saint in England and, supported by

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[2] Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 398-9.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 399.

the papacy, created an all new model of sanctity which the biographers of the bishops of England applied to them with gusto, and which evolved through the period, changing for each bishop in turn when they were canonized.

Until Becket, the bishops of England were just as holy, if not more so, yet it was not until Becket laid the foundation for the change in what the English people needed in a saint that the likes of Wulfstan were recognised. But one could argue that this same model had already been created by Wulfstan when he had died in 1095. Wulfstan was an example of spiritual perfection according to the three models of holiness, being a monk and following ascetic practices, preaching in the community, and being converted to the station of bishop, which he took to and administered well. The most telling case of his sanctity was his *in vita* miracles, yet even these did not gain the attention of the papacy. Perhaps, due to the rise in the new monastic orders just a few years later, many monks and ascetics were seen as better candidates for canonization. Instead, it was not until Becket died that the story of Wulfstan and Lanfranc, or Wulfstan and William, gripped the minds of the populace and the re-writing of his *vita* gained the attention it deserved. Perhaps it would be better if the model was called the 'Wulfstan Model', instead of 'Becket Model', as Wulfstan embodied it first. But we must not forget that, without Becket, Wulfstan and many of the bishops canonized within the period, probably would not have undergone a *processus informativus*.

As time marched on bishops became deeply involved within the working of the *curia regis* and other worldly affairs. It had been no uncommon thing for the bishops later in the period to come from noble families in England, instead of experiencing 'the humble servitudes of the *cura animarum* or shared the life of the priests they were later

called on to direct'.[4] This meant they had a taste of the world and its meddlesome affairs. In fact, 'the holy bishops, as they emerge from processes of canonization between 1198 and 1431, were all nobles. Most of them came from great aristocratic lineages, or were even connected to ruling dynasties'.[5] The reason why kings often fought so hard for the right to appoint bishops into their bishoprics was because they were all tenants-in-chief, administering a land given to them by the crown and managing retinues, acting as spiritual lords of the land rather than claiming to be temporal, though they were equal with the barons and magnates of the realm. Nothing is more apparent when viewing the shrine of Thomas de Cantilupe, still standing in the north transept of Hereford Cathedral. The shrine is adorned with the finely chiselled sculptures of fourteen fully armoured knights, which would probably have been painted with coats of arms related to the Cantilupe family, indicating his status as a temporal marcher lord.   On the other hand, perhaps we could consider this as a physical emulation of Cantilupe's offensive episcopal power against lords, becoming *viriliter* as any 'doughty defender of the rights of his church, the good bishop fiercely opposed any encroachment, whether by kings, princes or lay lords'.[6] As such saintly-bishops continued to be the *defensores civitatis* and *viriliter* once they had died, often intercessing in matters of temporal justice considered as unfair. For example, William of York intercessed in the matter of Ralph and Besing,[7] where Ralph was castrated and 'the just man was blinded by the unjust, the pious by the impious, the pure by the impure'.[8] When Ralph prayed at the shrine of William of York he 'received new privy

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[4] *Ibid*, p. 293.

[5] *Ibid*, p. 292.

[6] *Ibid*, p. 294.

[7] Norton, *St William of York*, pp. 169-170.

[8] *Ibid*, p. 170.

parts and fresh little eyes were placed in his head which, however, were different from his previous ones in size and colour'.[9] Thomas Cantilupe also intervened in matters of state when the Welsh brigand, William Cragh, was the subject of a rightful case of baronial justice and hanged.[10] Cantilupe revived the hanged man, undoing what the lord of Gower had commanded.

After Becket, bishops generally held good relations rather than a fractious rapport with the king, becoming deeply involved with the administration of the realm. A bridge between *regnum et sacerdotum* was finally being re-built, and it was Stephen Langton who ushered the building along. Becket's immediate input required royal resistance as Russell and Vauchez noted,[11] allowing Wulfstan to gain recognition. Yet by the time Hugh of Lincoln received a *processus informativus*, Langton had turned the Becket model into one of royal cooperation too. Bishops need not fight against their king and be martyred, but could work with them and still be considered holy. One could argue that the royal resistance could be manifested privately, especially in the supporting of Magna Carta; allowing for the support of both the church, in the first clause, and the laity in the others. Moreover, these bishops acted as spiritual guides of the kings in question and lead them to act and follow the clauses of the Magna Carta especially after 1217.[12] Many still did end up in voluntary exile eventually during their episcopate, such as Edmund of Abingdon and Thomas Cantilupe,[13] but none incurred

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[9] *Ibid*, p. 170.

[10] Bartlett, *The Hanged Man*; R. Bartlett, *The Hanged Man*; *The Saint and the Hanged Man*, DVD (London: Hardy & Sons Productions, 2008), first shown, BBC4 (16 April 2008), 21:00-22:00.

[11] Russell, 'The Canonization of the Opposition in Angevin England', p. 281; Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 169.

[12] Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III*, pp. 296-7.

[13] Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora IV*, 74, see p. 28, n. 2 above; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1258-66*, p. 549, Available at:
http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/patentrolls/h3v5/body/Henry3vol5page0549.pdf (Accessed: 07/02/2014).

the rancour and indignation that Becket did. They proved that they could be detached from the world and secular affairs, fighting for the *libertas ecclesie* of the church by supporting Magna Carta, but they could also be in the world, acting as friends, confidants and helpers of the king, and intercessing for the people on matters of baronial justice. Spiritual perfection could occur in the world if one followed the bishop-saints before them.

The will of the papacy was also considered, yet as with scripture, the demands of a bishop were often moderate. The Second Lateran Council in 1139 insisted that bishops exhibit more monastic and ascetic traits, remain chaste, and mortify their flesh due to the rise of the new monastic orders.[14] By 1215, the focus had changed again and the Fourth Lateran Council requested more scholarly bishops, knowledgeable in the arts of Theology, who would preach to the masses, or find adequate men to preach in their stead, and become a friend and example to the mendicant orders of friars which were becoming widespread throughout Europe.[15] The models of sanctity had changed throughout the period, focussing on different elements; administrator bishops first were prominent due to their standing with the people in the Germanic countries, being *viriliter* and *defensores civitatis*; monastic bishops then rose to the fore with the new orders, a rise expedited by papal support; and finally, with the rise of the mendicants focus was placed on the *bonus pastor*. Yet for England it had been the moment of Becket's death which had spurred on this revival of bishop-saints, rather than following the trends of the papacy and Lateran Councils.

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[14] Papal Encyclicals Online, *Second Lateran Council – 1139 A.D.* [online]. Canons 4 and 6, see Appendix.

[15] Papal Encyclicals Online, *Fourth Lateran Council – 1215 A.D.* [online]. Canons 10, 26 and 27, see Appendix.

The creation of bishop-saints in England soon outstripped demand, and England found itself with enough saints to rely on, in the papacy's eyes at least.[16] In fact, as early as '1230-40, it looks as if the popes sought to check the demand in order to not depreciate the supreme honour of canonization by granting it too frequently',[17] and thus less saints achieved canonization. There was also the increasing problem of bishops becoming more focussed on their temporalities rather than their spiritual work, and as such they moved further from the ideals laid out by the papacy and found themselves firmly in the courts of the kings and barons. Perhaps royal resistance was still a sought after quality by the papacy, but the episcopate reached for the Becket model that Langton had created, with royal cooperation as the focus. By the time of the Reformation the model was completely outdated, yet Becket still held a pervasive hold over the minds of the English clergy and Henry VIII re-drew his image – 'instead of the steadfast defender of the Church, Becket was 'really a rebel who fled to France and the bishop of Rome to procure the abrogation of wholesome laws' who 'shall no longer be named a saint''.[18] Becket represented the antithesis of everything the Reformation stood for, and thus he could no longer be seen as a model of spiritual perfection in the new religious world of Henry VIII.[19]

To claim that the decline in English bishop-saints occurred at the Reformation would be wrong though. The decline had concluded by the time of Cantilupe's canonization on 17 April 1320 in the church of Notre Dame des Doms in Avignon. One last saint was added to the rank of bishop-saints in 1457; Osmund of Salisbury who had

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[16] The English church continued request canonization of their bishops until 1385: see Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 169, n. 38.

[17] *Ibid*, p. 68.

[18] A. Duggan, *Thomas Becket* (London: Arnold, 2004), pp. 238.

[19] *Ibid*, p. 239.

died in 1099 and received a *processus informativus* in 1228.[20] For the papacy Thomas de Cantilupe offered the final model of spiritual perfection, though the English clergy argued that other bishops also deserved to be canonized until the end of the fourteenth century, with Richard FitzRalph, archbishop of Armagh, being the last postulant bishop in 1385.[21] The bishops after Cantilupe related more to lords than to holy bishops and so, Thomas Becket had revived the model, and given new life to saintly bishops in England, and Thomas de Cantilupe had embodied spiritual perfection of the values of thirteenth and fourteenth century populace and papacy. The model had been changed, shaped and evolved by every bishop canonized between 1170 and 1320. Royal opposition, royal cooperation, asceticism, administration, pastoral care; each rising and falling in prominence. The model was finally cemented in 1320 and it would not be used or changed again.

In conclusion, English episcopal sanctity had risen after the martyrdom of Becket because they were the saints that England needed and the English people believed they deserved; leaders of their communities and tangible spiritual intercessors on their behalf. Becket's death had indeed created a new model of spiritual sanctity for bishops, based upon royal resistance, and ushered in a revival and renewal as contemporaries like Matthew Paris described.[22] Wulfstan and his plight re-emerged and bishops like William of York, who did not exhibit sanctity until years after his death, became important. Canonization was a ladder, and many who tried to climb it failed and only received local recognition. Those who managed to climb to the top had done

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[20] Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 46, 168-9, n. 37.

[21] The requests for canonization that were made were – 'Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln (1254), Robert Winchelsea, archbishop of Canterbury (1318), William March, bishop of Wells (1325), John Dalderby, bishop of Lincoln (1327), and Richard FitzRalph, archbishop of Armagh (1385)', *Ibid*, p. 169, n. 38.

[22] Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora V*, 191.

so by following the pre-existing models of administrator, monk and preacher; but also royal resistance. They maintained strict independence from the world; from the king by fighting for the *libertas ecclesie*, but also often from Rome and the papacy. Ultimately the trend went into decline, as all saintly trends did in the Middle Ages, and more appealing candidates rose from the ranks of the mendicant orders to be considered saints. The final nail came during the fourteenth century as the episcopate had become too involved in the *curia regis*, too rich and lavish, and thus more lordly and less saintly – no longer spiritual exemplars to every rank of society, including the common people. The model could equally be called the 'Wulfstan Model' of episcopal sanctity; but without Becket and his cult, Wulfstan's cause would probably have gone unheard by the papacy. If Wulfstan had been martyred things may have been different. Without Becket and his martyrdom the episcopal model of sanctity would never have risen with such speed and importance in England, and perhaps other models would have continued to have been chosen over the *sanctus episcopus*.