

Chapter Five

Thomas de Cantilupe: The Model of Perfection

If Thomas Becket was the model from which all bishops in England, and their biographers, took their inspiration during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, then the canonization of Thomas de Cantilupe enshrined the final model of spiritual perfection for English bishops during the Middle Ages. The century and a half that had passed since Becket's death and canonization had given the saintly bishops of England a clear chance to define the 'Becket model' for themselves, whilst staying within the established three models of holiness already discussed. The ripples caused by Becket's martyrdom continued to reverberate around the English episcopate, but he also kept a firm grip on the imagination of the populace too:

To the church, Thomas [Becket] was a symbol of triumph and future glory, to bishops and clergy, a model of that renunciation which they all expected to make sooner or later, to the laity, the pattern of a courageous and beneficent prelate, crowned with bliss when the king's men cut him down.¹

Thomas de Cantilupe shared many qualities with his namesake, perhaps emulating Becket's examples; they had both held the office of Chancellor of the Realm, both quarrelled with barons and lords, both disagreed with the policies of a king named Henry, both had taken a self-imposed exile, and both wore hair shirts. This barely scratches the surface of similarities exhibited by both of the prelates, yet the vast differences between the two, such as their respective positions within the church, and because Becket's cult had captivated all of Europe whilst Cantilupe's remained almost exclusively local to the Marcher region of England and Wales, meant that:

¹ Duggan, 'The Cult of St Thomas Becket in the Thirteenth Century', p. 42.

The second Thomas did not inherit the mantle of the first – nor did he seek to assume it – but neither he nor any another conscientious English bishop could escape the long shadow of the heroic martyr; and his admirers made what they could of the coincidences between his life and Becket’s to find in St Thomas of Hereford some echoes at least of St Thomas of Canterbury.²

These echoes even affected Cantilupe’s early life; for example, Richard Strange reflects on the story of when Thomas spoke to his uncle, Walter, the bishop of Worcester, about his future wishes:

The sayd noble Prelate Walter Cantilupe being in familiar conuersation with William Lord Cantelupe father of S. Thomas, and the child being present, the Bishop askd him what course of life he would chuse, what pleasd him best? The child freely answered him, that he would be a Souldier: Well sayd, sweetheart, quoth the Bishop, thou shalt be a souldier to serue the highest of Kings, and figh vnder the colours of his glorious Martyr S. Thomas.³

And so ‘the child himselfe, as if he had learn’d a new lesson from heauen, thought no more of those glorious fancyes’,⁴ as he moulded himself to fly the flag of his namesake in defence of the Church. Richard Strange’s *Life and Gestes of S. Thomas Cantilupe* is a seventeenth-century life based on the information within *Acta Sanctorum*, or Acts of the Saints, which was compiled between 1643 and 1794. It transcribes and translates materials from surviving *processus informativus*, inquiries into saints and their lives, organising them according to feast days. Thus it offers some interesting opinions and stories from the *processus* that Cantilupe was subjected to, and although it is not contemporary to Cantilupe, it is the earliest *vita* that we have to hand, offering a useful, if subjective, viewpoint of his actions.

The Anglo-Norman chronicler Nicholas Trivet, writing in the early fourteenth century, described the beginnings of Cantilupe’s saintly qualities as: *Hic, nobilibus*

² *Ibid*, p. 21.

³ R. Strange, *The Life and Gestes of S. Thomas Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford, and some time before L. Chancellor of England Extracted out of the Authentique Records of his Canonization as to the Maine Part, Anonymus, Matt. Paris, Capgrave, Harpsfeld, and Others* (Gant: Robert Walker, 1674), pp. 44-45.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 45.

ortus natalibus, a puero Deo vixit devotus (This man born of noble parents, from a child was devout and lived with God).⁵ It could be argued that this was Cantilupe's conversion because, after his uncle had mentioned becoming part of the *militia Christi* rather than the *militia mundi*, Cantilupe was set upon the path to becoming a priest in the service of God and the Church.⁶ His uncle sent him to schools and eventually the young Cantilupe went to the universities in Paris, Orléans and Oxford, becoming a formidable scholar: *Studii autem exercitatione litterarum acquirens peritiam, primo in artibus liberalibus, deinde in jure rexit canonico; tandemque ad theologiam totam intentionem transtulit mentis suæ* (he acquired skill through the practice of study of letters, first in the liberal arts and then in canon law; at last he applied the whole attention of his mind to theology).⁷ His 'academic career spanned more than thirty years and encompassed six faculties in three universities',⁸ and he became Chancellor of Oxford University twice, earning him the favour of King Henry III (1261-3 and 1273-4).⁹

The interlude between Cantilupe's tenures as Chancellor of Oxford University corresponded to his involvement in the baronial rebellion, led by Simon de Montfort, between 1263 and 1265. Cantilupe followed the advice of his uncle Walter as he had

⁵ Nicholas Trivet, *Annales Sex Regum Angliæ, Qui a Comitibus Andegavensibus Originem Traxerunt* (A.D. M.C.XXXVI.-M.CCC.VII), ed. T. Hog (London: S. & J. Bentley, Wilson, and Fley, 1844), p. 305. (My Translation).

⁶ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 292.

⁷ Trivet, *Annales*, p. 305. (My Translation).

⁸ J. Catto, 'The Academic Career of Thomas de Cantilupe', *St Thomas Cantilupe: Bishop of Hereford*, 45-55 (p. 45).

⁹ 'Grant to Master Thomas de Cantilupo [...] shall be quit of livery of the king's marshals'. – *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1247-58*, p. 412, [online]. Available at: <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/patentrolls/h3v4/body/Henry3vol4page0412.pdf> (Accessed: 07/02/2014); grants of oak for fuel from the King's forests, *Calendar of Close Rolls 1254-6*, pp. 147, 197, 200, 1256-9, p. 450; cited in A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500: Vol. I, A to E* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 347-8.

done in childhood, and stood behind the Earl of Leicester. The barons used Becket as a paradigm; the *Song of Lewes* echoes, in its telling of Montfort and the baron's plight, the story of Becket's relations to the king.¹⁰ The bishops who followed the Montfortian regime were reformers, fighting for the *libertas ecclesiae* and the rights of the Church against the Crown, and Thomas de Cantilupe was said to be the 'most impressive figure among the baronial churchmen'.¹¹ Cantilupe made his presence felt in the Montfortian camp. He forged a name for himself independent of that of his uncle, who had become one of Montfort's most influential advisors due to their long friendship;¹² he was specifically chosen to represent the Provisions of Oxford, along with a small group of others, to King Louis IX in Armiens, and was probably one of the authors of the baronial *gravamina*.¹³ This document set forth the arguments that the barons and bishops had directed against the rule of King Henry III, and appealed to the customs that had been set down in the Magna Carta at Runnymede in June 1215; allowing for the liberties of the people, and especially the barons, of England. Whereas Stephen Langton had overreached in his capacity as archbishop when writing the Magna Carta, Cantilupe and the other Montfortian bishops were more subtle. Even so, the Provisions were eventually condemned by King Louis, and England was pushed into a civil war. After Montfort took victory at the Battle of Lewes in 1264, taking both King Henry and Prince Edward captive in the process, he began to rule from Hereford.

¹⁰ *Song of Lewes* [online]. Available at: http://historyofengland.typepad.com/documents_in_english_hist/2012/10/the-song-of-lewes-1264.html (Accessed: 07/02/2014).

¹¹ Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort*, p. 251.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 251.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 251; *Annales Monastici: Vol. IV*, ed. H. R. Luard, Rolls Series (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), p. 139; Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, pp. 347-8.

Cantilupe was appointed as Chancellor and Keeper of the Privy Seal as he was everything the baronial cause needed; ‘conscientious, immune to bribery, and responsive to the council’s directions’.¹⁴ He relinquished the title after two months, in May 1265, and by 4 August Simon de Montfort and the reformists were dismantled when an escaped Prince Edward defeated them in battle at Evesham.¹⁵ By February 1266, however, Cantilupe was back in favour with the King with the grant of ‘remission to Master Thomas de Cantulupo [...], sometime chancellor, of all the king’s rancour and indignation of mind conceived against him by occasion of the disturbance had in the realm, and admission of him to the king’s grace’.¹⁶ In this respect Cantilupe’s relations with the king were the complete opposite of Becket’s; whilst he did endure a temporary, voluntary exile, Cantilupe was soon welcomed back into the fold and eventually became a member of both Henry and Edward’s councils. Yet it was the support Cantilupe gave to the barons, and the spirit of the Magna Carta and the baronial *gravamina*, that would bode well for his cult, enticing the support of the laity since they could identify with him.

Cantilupe had proven himself a capable administrator under Montfort, and would carry this expertise into his episcopate, spending time visiting many locations in his diocese.¹⁷ Cantilupe was also pugnacious in his defence of the rights of his church, engaging in numerous disputes with barons with his ‘litigious and unyielding temper, in

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 314; ‘The King on the same day committed the said seal to Master Thomas de Cantilupo, who sealed with it forthwith’. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1258-66*, p. 410, Available at: <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/patentrolls/h3v5/body/Henry3vol5page0410.pdf> (Accessed: 07/02/2014).

¹⁵ Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort*, p. 342.

¹⁶ *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1258-66*, p. 549, Available at: <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/patentrolls/h3v5/body/Henry3vol5page0549.pdf> (Accessed: 07/02/2014).

¹⁷ Thomas de Cantilupe, *The Register of Thomas de Cantilupe: Bishop of Hereford (A.D. 1275-1282)*, trans. R. G. Griffiths (Hereford: Wilson and Phillips, 1906), pp. lxx-lxxviii.

which personal antipathies were carried far [and wide]’,¹⁸ and he ‘let pass few opportunities of defending the interests of his See against high handed aggressions of great nobles’.¹⁹ Richard de Swinfield, his successor to the see of Hereford, said of Cantilupe that *pro ecclesie sue juribus conservandis labores plurimos usque ad vite sue terminum cum omnia paciencia pertulisset* (until the end of his life, he endured many labours with all patience in order to preserve the rights of his Church).²⁰ Cantilupe’s disputes with barons such as the Corbet family and Gilbert de Clare lent themselves to the construction of his sanctity because ‘to the mediaeval mind, fearless assertion of the Church’s rights, and even of the personal rights of a bishop as a consecrated leader in the Church, would be seen, not as litigious and quarrelsome, but as courageous in the cause of God’s truth’.²¹ Where Becket had defended both his and the Church’s rights in a national context, especially from the king, Cantilupe had defended them locally. It seems likely that the behaviour of his saintly namesake was on Cantilupe’s mind, subconsciously or otherwise, during the conduct of these disputes. Cantilupe also did not shy from disputes with fellow bishops, and managed to extend the boundaries of his diocese to include Dore Abbey against the strong objection of Thomas Bek, bishop of St Davids. He was a capable administrator, a reformer and a defender of the rights of the Church.

Cantilupe also conformed to the ideal of the *bonus pastor*, and would often travel around his diocese, tending to his churches, his clergy and flock. The only major problem that Cantilupe had in preaching to his diocese was that his ‘vulgar tongue was

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. lx.

¹⁹ D. Usher, *Two Studies of Mediaeval Life* (Cambridge: J. S. Wilson, 1953), pp. 100-101.

²⁰ Richard Swinfield, *The Register of Richard de Swinfield: Bishop of Hereford (A.D. 1283-1317)*, trans. ed. W. W. Capes (Hereford: Wilson and Phillips, 1909), p. 234-5. (My Translation).

²¹ E. M. Jancey, *St. Thomas of Hereford* (Isle of Wight: J. Arthur Dixon, 1978), p. 9.

Norman-French rather than English' so to get around the problem, he would often be accompanied by his confessor, who 'was an excellent preacher in the English tongue'.²² This allowed him to follow the papal movement that wished for the prelates and bishops of Europe to become better pastors and preachers in their diocese. The Fourth Lateran Council had settled on several canons in 1215 regarding the pastoral care of the common people by their bishops. In following the ideas of the mendicant orders which were on the rise within Europe, spreading the word of God amongst the populace of the diocese became papal and episcopal prerogative. Emphasis was placed upon the practice of appointing preachers to help, and the notion that bishops should be learned men, knowledgeable in the practices of theology and canon law:

It often happens that bishops by themselves are not sufficient to minister the word of God to the people, especially in large and scattered diocese, whether this is because of their many occupations or bodily infirmities or because of incursions of the enemy or for other reasons – let us not say for lack of knowledge, which in bishops is to be altogether condemned and is not to be tolerated in the future. We therefore decree by this general constitution that bishops are to appoint suitable men to carry out with profit this duty of sacred preaching, men who are powerful in word and deed and who will visit with care the peoples entrusted to them in place of the bishops, since these by themselves are unable to do it, and will build them up by word and example. The bishops shall suitably furnish them with what is necessary, when they are in need of it, lest for want of necessities they are forced to abandon what they have begun.²³

Cantilupe made sure that his flock knew their bishop, and appointed capable learned men to administer the parishes of the diocese for him. Cantilupe also followed the example of other holy bishops in having beggars sit at his table and eat with him.²⁴ Whilst, as mentioned above, his hagiography was written much later, Richard Strange

²² D. M. Smith, 'Thomas Cantilupe's Register: The Administration of the Diocese of Hereford 1275-1282', *St Thomas Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford*, 83-103 (p. 90); c.f. Vatican City, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Cod. Lat. 4015, fo. 78r.

²³ Papal Encyclicals Online, *Fourth Lateran Council – 1215 A.D.* [online]. Canon 10, for full canon see Appendix. Available at: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum12-2.htm#> (Accessed: 28/2/2014).

²⁴ Strange, *Life and Gests*, pp. 138-9.

offers a plausible, if biased, glimpse into the life of Cantilupe. He paints the picture of the bishop as *bonus pastor* to the people, especially the poor: ‘the esteem he had of them was such that he commonly calld them his Breethren (a name of greatest loue)’.²⁵ Cantilupe would also send his household to see if any of his ‘brethren’ were waiting outside, and would invite them in:

This was the substantiall part of his loue to the poore, and he was not sparing of it: he had, to witt, learnd the great lesson of his Lord and Master „, *beatius est „, magis dare quam accipere*, it is a more blessed thing to giue than to take; and he was resolu’d to practise it in this behalfe.²⁶

Cantilupe also exhibited ascetic values within his life. Strange explains that Cantilupe followed a process of both internal and external mortification.²⁷ He apparently suppressed his emotions, so as not to appear overzealous, keeping them in perfect harmony with everything around him to such an extent that ‘one might say he eyther neuer had passions, which is impossible in such a liuelynes of nature, or else kept them in a perfect subjection to reason and vertue’.²⁸ In doing so he also used physical punishment, ‘rendring the flesh duelly subordinate to the Spiritt’.²⁹ His uncle had bequeathed him ‘that most personal of possessions, his hair shirt’,³⁰ and he duly followed his example. Cantilupe’s sanctity was manifest in three parts of his asceticism:

‘First by hayr cloath and other austerities to which he accustomed himselfe many yeares, and euen at his death, not contenting himselfe with the incident sufferances of so long a journey, he was found with a hayr shyrt next to his body and that of the rougher size’.³¹

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 138.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 139.

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 281-3.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 281.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 281.

³⁰ Carpenter, ‘St Thomas Cantilupe: His Political Career’, p. 63.

³¹ Strange, *Life and Gests*, p. 282.

He also reduced the number of hours that he could sleep, and duly decreased the amount his household slept too, in order to better spend time reading the scriptures and conducting other acts of piety.³² Finally, he employed a strict diet as all ascetics did, leaving the table before being fully satisfied so that ‘his dyett was so spare, that his familiars did wonder how it could giue a competent sustenance to maintaine life’.³³

Whilst Cantilupe still embodied the three models shown above, as all English bishops tried to do, he also marks a watershed in the Church’s view and saintly culture; a shift towards scholarship and learning – ‘from Edmund of [Canterbury] to Thomas Cantilupe, they had all held teaching positions at the highest level before being given charge of a diocese’.³⁴

However, whilst Cantilupe did embody the three main models of saintliness for bishops, and especially resistance to royal prerogatives, the ‘Becket Model’ was losing its influence and prestige within the papal curia with the canonization of those from the mendicant orders taking precedence.³⁵ What caused Cantilupe’s to evolve from mere local devotion and *fama sanctitatis* was the support it received from both bishops and the noble families of the Marches of England. Many bishops confirmed writs of forty days indulgence for anyone who travelled to Hereford Cathedral on pilgrimage to Cantilupe’s burial place and left an offering for the fabric of the cathedral in order to promote the cult,³⁶ with even more bishops issuing indulgences after Cantilupe’s

³² *Ibid*, p. 282.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 283.

³⁴ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 293, 398-9.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 295.

³⁶ Hereford Cathedral Archives 1420, 1421, 1422, 1423, 1424, 1425, 1426, 1427 – bishops of Worcester, Clonfert, Carlisle, London, Rochester, Salisbury, Ossory and archbishop of Dublin.

canonization.³⁷ As with all cults, the initiative was taken by the clergy of many dioceses to promote the cult,³⁸ but the laity also played an important part in its diffusion. When Cantilupe's successor to the see, Richard de Swinfield, was campaigning for Cantilupe's canonization he wrote numerous letters of postulation for Cantilupe and obtained many from other bishops, abbots, earls and nobles.³⁹ Even King Edward I wrote letters to the papacy as he was hoping 'to have as a sympathetic patron in heaven him [Cantilupe] whom we had in our household on earth'.⁴⁰ It is perhaps unsurprising that Edward's letter, issued in 1305, contains the same overtones found in the letters from the bishops as Swinfield had sent Hereford's Postulator,⁴¹ Henry de Schorne, to help in its writing.⁴² By gaining the cooperation of the lay authorities in the postulation of their local thaumaturge, the clergy helped to mould the cult. Whilst the clergy saw Cantilupe as one of them, a defender of their church and fighter for the *libertas ecclesiae*, exhibiting *contemptus mundi* in equal balance, 'the lay aristocracy, recognizing the prelate as one of them, contributed to the success of the cult by spreading his name',⁴³ and supporting the foundation of the cult. In doing so, Cantilupe bridged the gap between the Church and State, bishop and king, and became a saint for everyone; 'whether clergy or laity, it was always the ruling classes who suggested the name of the intercessor and assured the growth of the devotion. This did not prevent it from

³⁷ Hereford Cathedral Archives 1428, 1429, 1430, 1431, 1432, 1433 – bishops of Bath and Wells, Salisbury, Chichester, Exeter and the archbishop of York.

³⁸ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 221.

³⁹ In total: 'Edward I, the Archbishop of York, fifteen bishops, eleven counts, as well as numerous barons and nobles' – p. 127; letter from the Bishop of Bath-Wells is in Swinfield, *The Register of Richard de Swinfield*, pp. 369-70; Some other letters are in Vat. Cod. Lat. 4015, fos. 260v-263r.

⁴⁰ Bartlett, *The Hanged Man*, p. 120.

⁴¹ Richard Swinfield, *The Register of Richard de Swinfield*, pp. 440-1.

⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 420-1.

⁴³ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 223.

becoming popular once the masses had adopted the new intercessor, whose thaumaturgical powers seem to have been remarkable'.⁴⁴ Once his saintly powers had taken hold of people's minds his *fama sanctitatis* expanded and became a national cult, with enough miracles to rival his namesake at Canterbury.⁴⁵

Cantilupe's canonization marks a shift in the Church's view and culture from the learning of the monks to the actual scholarship of the universities in Europe of the period. As such, it is clear that England had developed specific needs and wishes for her bishops; they needed to exhibit certain qualities. They were to be independent from their kings, defending the church's rights in the age old battle between *regnum* and *sacerdotum*. They needed to support the Magna Carta, since the first clauses lent themselves to the liberation of the church from the oppressions of the crown,⁴⁶ and all the rest were essential if the bishops and their cults wished to cultivate the popularity of the aristocracy and take hold in the minds of the people. And finally the bishops needed to show some independence from the papacy, in order to tread the line between the popularity with the clergy and the laity. However, the papal canons set down in the Lateran Councils had to be taken into consideration too. Yet, by the late thirteenth century, the qualities that the papacy wished the episcopate to exhibit had shifted from the monastic qualities of chastity and moderation, which were still important, to preaching and pastoral care of the flock. In fulfilling the needs of the laity by being independent from the king and papacy, whilst also fulfilling the wishes of the Lateran Councils the bishops could cultivate the support of both the people and European

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 223.

⁴⁵ B. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215* (London: Scolar Press, 1982), p. 89; All of Cantilupe's miracles are recorded in Oxford, Exeter College Manuscript 158 which was compiled .

⁴⁶ 'The English church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished and its liberties unimpaired', Clause 1, Magna Carta, trans. W. Warren, *King John*, new edn. (Totton: Hobbs the Printers Ltd, 1997), p. 266.

clergy, and Cantilupe did this with skill. Also, by following the models of holiness that had been prevalent during the previous century and taking Thomas Becket as a role model, Cantilupe met the expectations of both the laity and clergy. Had he not conformed to all of these requirements defined by the different sections of medieval society, Cantilupe's cult would surely have failed; neither case alone would have been strong enough to warrant canonization, even with miracles being recorded.