

## Chapter Seven

### Wulfstan of Worcester: Revived by the Model

With the explosion of the Becket cult from Canterbury in 1170, many other bishop-saints began to perform miracles again in order to aid the flow of pilgrims to Canterbury, and take advantage of the economic value of a new saint. Saints such as St Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne (d. 687), began performing miracles once more with renewed strength after a hiatus. Cuthbert had been ‘considered perhaps the most popular saint in England prior to the death of Thomas Becket in 1170’,<sup>1</sup> rivalling his cult rather than being eclipsed by it,<sup>2</sup> can be seen to have been working actively with Becket who sometimes even sent pilgrims to Cuthbert’s shrine for miracles.<sup>3</sup> Other cults emerged and re-emerged, allowing postulants who had been considered holy to prove themselves saints, such as that of William FitzHerbert, archbishop of York (d. 1154) who had performed a few miracles and was considered holy because his body had the odour of sanctity, according to his biographers writing in the 1160s;<sup>4</sup> however, it was not until 1177 that he began to perform miracles properly.<sup>5</sup> Wulfstan II, Bishop of Worcester, also soon began performing miracles alongside the other bishop-saints. Whereas William of York had emerged at the right time to take part in this miraculous

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<sup>1</sup> D. Marner, *St Cuthbert: His Life and Cult in Medieval Durham* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> D. Rollason and R. B. Dobson, *Cuthbert [St Cuthbert] (c.635-687), bishop of Lindisfarne*, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [Online]. Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/6976> (Accessed: 12/3/2014).

<sup>3</sup> D. Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000), pp. 53-4.

<sup>4</sup> C. Norton, *St William of York* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd for York Medieval Press, 2006), pp. 149-50.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.

revival, Wulfstan had been considered holy since his death in 1095, with a *vita* having been written about him by at least 1125, if not before.<sup>6</sup> Yet, although he had embodied all three models of sanctity discussed above, and even performed *in vita* miracles, it was not until Becket's cult exploded into Europe that Wulfstan was canonized, showing royal resistance, but also a case for royal appointment.

Wulfstan had appeared as a dedicated bishop and had exhibited the three models of holiness throughout his life. He was an ascetic, a monk from a Benedictine house in Worcester, and managed to elevate his position by becoming prior,<sup>7</sup> even engaging in a wrestling match with the devil where 'God in his mercy came to Wulfstan's assistance and drove away the raging demon'.<sup>8</sup> His personal asceticism also led to the recording of some *in vita* miracles,<sup>9</sup> a quality which proved his saintliness beyond doubt and was only matched by one other bishop-saint during this period – Hugh of Lincoln.<sup>10</sup> Wulfstan also embodied the idea of the *bonus pastor*, preaching to his flock in Worcestershire and often confirming and blessing the many laypeople who gathered to see him.<sup>11</sup> He 'noticed the people were drifting away from good behaviours because they were short of sermons; and so on every Sunday and feast days he would pour out the salutary advice for them in church', 'and people flocked to him from the town and

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<sup>6</sup> The first life was written by Coleman, which William of Malmesbury translated into his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* which was written by mid-1125: see, William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, p. xv; also, William of Malmesbury, *The Deeds of the Bishops of England*, pp. 187-196; F. Tinti, *Sustaining Belief: The Church of Worcester from c. 870 to c. 1100* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), pp. 61-2.

<sup>7</sup> William of Malmesbury, *The Deeds of the Bishops of England*, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 188.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 191-2.

<sup>10</sup> See above, p. 22 and n. 25.

<sup>11</sup> See above, p. 20; William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 53, 87.

country alike'.<sup>12</sup> Finally, he was a capable administrator of the sizeable income of his temporal see, and even managed to extend the lands held by the bishopric in 1087 during the Domesday Inquest.<sup>13</sup> He had also undergone a forced conversion where 'the holy man made his appearance at court, and was told to take up the offer of the see. He objected, and cried out – while all the rest shouted back their disagreement – that he was not up to so great an honour'.<sup>14</sup> Wulfstan had, therefore, exhibited all the qualities needed of a saintly bishop during his life and death, even performing miracles almost as soon as he had died.<sup>15</sup> By the standards of the mid-twelfth century Wulfstan must have certainly been considered a saint, if only within Worcestershire. Yet, it seems that these qualities, which seemed to almost guarantee the longevity and canonization of medieval cults, were not enough to bring him into the scope of the papal curia and receive a *processus informativus*.

With the expansion of Becket's cult though, and the renewal of saint-bishops and postulants performing miracles, Wulfstan's cult came back into medieval fashion and the scope of the populace. With the renewal of interest in holy-bishops Senatus, a monk of Worcester (d. 1207), began to re-write and abbreviate the *vitae* of the two holy bishops of Worcester; St Oswald, and Wulfstan.<sup>16</sup> In bringing Wulfstan's *vita* back to the fore of English saints' lives, a different light was shed on his life. Certainly he was a holy bishop, a perfect embodiment of the three models of holiness attributed to many bishops, yet the beginnings of the Becket model gripped the English episcopate and

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<sup>12</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Baxter, *Domesday* [DVD], See above, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> William of Malmesbury, *The Deeds of the Bishops of England*, pp. 195-6; William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 149-155.

<sup>16</sup> P. Damien-Grint, *Worcester, Senatus of [called Senatus Bravonius]*, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [Online]. Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25083> (Accessed: 12/3/2014).

Wulfstan became the first prelate to exhibit it after Becket's death. One such defiance of royal and episcopal authority is written in *The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor* by Aelred of Rievaulx,<sup>17</sup> from around 1161 to 1163, where Wulfstan refused to give up his staff of office to Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury:

Lanfranc ordered the venerable man to give up his staff and his ring. But the man of God, without changing his expression or his disposition, stood up. Holding the pastoral staff in his hand, he said, 'Truly, my lord Archbishop, truly I know that I am neither worthy of this dignity nor fit for this burden nor sufficient for this toil. I knew this when the clergy chose me, when the bishops constrained me, when my lord King Edward summoned me to this office. He himself alone, by the authority of the apostolic see, placed this on my shoulders, and he commanded that I be invested with the episcopal rank through this staff. And now you demand the pastoral staff that you did not deliver to me, you deprive me of an office you did not confer. Indeed I am not unaware of my incapacity. Yielding to your judgement and that of the holy synod, I will indeed give up my staff, but not to you; rather to him by whose authority I received it.'<sup>18</sup>

Whilst this story was to show the sanctity of Edward the Confessor as part of Aelred's *Vita S. Eduardi, regis et confessoris*, instead of Wulfstan, later editions of this story were sculpted and moulded to make William the Conqueror the centrepiece of episcopal subjugation, rather than Lanfranc. Perhaps with the rewriting of his *vita* by Senatus and the cult returning to the fore of English episcopal sanctity, the Becket model took effect and moulded the disagreement with Lanfranc.

It is not so hard to believe that Lanfranc could be considered as a form of King William within the episcopate, attempting to subjugate not only the populace through temporal conquest, but the episcopate too through ecclesiastical placement. Lanfranc becoming the embodiment of William therefore allows for early *vitae* to be considered as showing Wulfstan to be a paragon of royal resistance, rather than a contumacious cleric. Yet at the same time, Wulfstan had recognised where his power had come from,

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<sup>17</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor*, in *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, trans. J. P. Freeland (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2005), pp. 125-243.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 221; William of Malmesbury accounts for a different confrontation where Lanfranc had declared Wulfstan illiterate: William of Malmesbury, *The Deeds of the Bishops of England*, p. 192; *The Lives of the Saints, Vol. I*, ed. S. Baring-Gould (London: John C. Nimmo, 1897), pp. 294-5.

the king, and thus would not relinquish his staff to anyone else. By at least the mid-thirteenth century the story of Wulfstan and Lanfranc had changed or been edited. King John used the image of Wulfstan in 1211 as an example of a royal appointment to a see, reciting the story of royal resistance to William the Conqueror, yet subjugation to King Edward:

*Unde videre potestis per sacras scripturas quod beatus et gloriosus rex Sanctus Edwardus contulit in tempore suo Sancto Wlstanus episcopatum Wignoriae. Dum Willelmus Bastardus conqwestor Angliae voluit ei auferre episcopatum, qui nescivit Gallicum, respondens Sanctus Wlstanus Willelmo Bastardo ait, 'Mihi non contulisti baculum, nec tibi reddam;' sed iuit ad tumulum Sancti Edwardi et dixit in lingua sua: 'Edwarde, dedisti mihi baculum nec possum tenere pro rege, et ideo illum tibi committo: et si potestis defendere, defende;' et fixit baculum in tumulo de lapide exciso, et baculus ita miraculose adhaesit tumbae beati Edwardi, quod non erat aliquis ibi qui eum posset evellere, nisi Sanctus Wlstanus.*

So you can see through the scriptures that the blessed and glorious King, saint Edward, in his time bestowed on St Wulfstan the bishopric of Worcester. When William the Bastard, conqueror of England, wanted to take the bishopric away from him because he did not know French holy Wulfstan said in reply to William the Bastard, 'you did not bestow the staff on me, nor will I give it back to you'. But he went to the tomb of King Edward and said in his own tongue, 'Edward, you gave me the staff and I am not able to hold it for the king, and thus I commit it to you. If you are able to defend it, defend it.' And he fixed the staff in the tom which was carved in stone, and the staff miraculously stuck to the tomb of blessed Edward, so that no one – not even Wulfstan – could pluck it out.<sup>19</sup>

Yet the bishops could also use this imagery, since the story also shows royal resistance.

Such is the case in the *Song on the Bishops*, where Wulfstan is presented as a model for the bishop of Worcester, Mauger, against King John, declaring:

*Tu, Wolstani subambule,  
Es in conflictu tertius,  
Robustus insta sedule  
Triumpho veri conscius.  
Hæres Wolstani diceris,  
Si vere sit, tu videris:  
Prius resigna baculum,  
Et ephod et annulum,  
Quam Baal velis subjici.*

Thou, who walkest in the place of Wolstan, art the third in the conflict: robust as thou art, press on sedulously, certain of a true triumph. Thou art called the heir of Wolstan;

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<sup>19</sup> *Annales Monastici I*, p. 211. (My Translation).

if thou be truly so, thou art seen: sooner resign the staff, and the ephod, and the ring, than be willing to bow to Baal [the king].<sup>20</sup>

Wulfstan was thus both a paragon of royal resistance and a paradigm to follow, having created this model of holiness based on royal resistance almost a century before Becket's martyrdom. But that is exactly what Wulfstan lacked; had he been martyred he might have achieved canonization immediately, instead of waiting until 1203.

Having long been the object of a saintly cult, attention was finally fully drawn to Wulfstan in 1198, when the bishop of Worcester, John de Coutances, translated his relics.<sup>21</sup> However, soon after this John died since he had performed the service in secret in the middle of night instead of in 'the fullness of daylight, and all solemnity, and above all the authority of the holy Roman church'.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, by 1201, Wulfstan was at his height of his powers; issuing miraculous cures and proving his deserved his sanctity to all observers.<sup>23</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter, visited the see and soon began supporting the request for papal canonization. He gained the support of many of England's bishops, and perhaps even the king,<sup>24</sup> and within three months a *processus informativus* was underway, led by Archbishop Hubert and Bishop Eustace of Ely.<sup>25</sup> On 21 April 1203 Wulfstan was formally canonized as a saint and finally, rightfully enshrined. Before his death in 1216, John asked to be buried between the shrines of St Wulfstan and St Oswald,<sup>26</sup> perhaps as a final say on the matter of royal episcopal appointment.

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<sup>20</sup> *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> Cheney, *Innocent III and England*, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 56-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

Overall, Wulfstan could be considered the spiritual predecessor of the Becket model of sanctity, even if he did not receive the same fame as Becket. During his life and death Wulfstan had exhibited every quality needed of a holy bishop of the period, conversion, administrative expertise, asceticism, and preaching in the diocese. He had even performed *in vita* miracles, like Hugh of Lincoln, perhaps due to his monastic background. By local standards in 1095 he was already a saint, yet by national and international standards he was not. Once the image of Becket on his knees on the altar steps of Canterbury had gripped the minds of the English populace and episcopate, Wulfstan finally warranted his canonization. The story of Lanfranc and Wulfstan, or William and Wulfstan, was found again in his *vita*, not just emphasising the holiness of Edward the Confessor, but also Wulfstan's own sanctity. In refusing the person of William the Conqueror in the form of Lanfranc, he had resisted royal prerogative. On the other hand he could still be used, as King John showed, as an example of royal cooperation. He knew exactly from where and whom his power as bishop had been designated. Wulfstan was the progenitor of the model which Becket followed, and ultimately became the name-bearer of.