

Preface

This book owes a great deal to my pupils and colleagues at Marlborough College, as well as to my wife, Geraldine, for their steady interest, encouragement and patience during a ten-year project. Particular thanks must be given to Colin Fraser, Julian Lloyd, Niall Hamilton and Philip Dukes, who each read parts of the text; also to our children, Christopher, Gwendoline and Basil. Thanks must go to the Master of the College for his steady encouragement, and to the Council of Marlborough College for granting me sabbatical leave in the summer term of 2009, when much of the extensive and detailed research for this book was accomplished in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, whose staff have given unstinting and courteous assistance at every stage. I am most grateful also to my publisher, Adrian Brink, for his encouragement, advice and help in preparing this book for publication.

I am most grateful also to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, for his constant friendship, interest and encouragement, and also to my friends Father John Blacker, Sister Benedicta Ward, Professor Peregrine Horden, The Rt Revd John Kirkham, The Rt Revd John Bickersteth, Dr Charles Miller, Sir Andrew Moylan, Gareth Playfair and Dr Derek Craig. I have appreciated very much the interest, prayers and friendship of Father Innocenzo Gargano at San Gregorio in Rome, and of my monastic friends at Vatopedi and Simonospetra monasteries on the Holy Mountain of Athos. Finally, thanks must go also to Reuben, who has proved to be a faithful scholar's cat, always at hand, and ever alert in his loyalty and attention!

Tribute must also be paid to the many scholars from the Continent and the English-speaking world whose work underpins this enterprise, and from whom I have learnt so much with great enjoyment and interest. Pre-eminent among these must be M-H. Jullien, & F. Perelman, the editors of the *Clavis Scriptorum Latinorum Medii Aevi – Auctores Galliae 735-987: tomus II – ALCUINUS* (Brepols/Turnhout, 1999), without whose meticulous work it would have been impossible to compose this book outside the university in the midst of my multifarious duties as Chaplain of Marlborough College. Equally indispensable has been the masterly and comprehensive annual bibliography, *Medioevo Latino*, published in Florence by SISMELE – Edizione del Galluzzo, which is one of the many valuable and wise legacies of the late Claudio Leonardi.

Any work on Alcuin owes much to the pioneering labours of the late Donald Bullough, whose tenth anniversary of death falls in 2012. His posthumous volume, *Alcuin – achievement & reputation* (Brill-Leiden & Boston, 2004) is now the indispensable starting point for any study of Alcuin up to 796. Moreover in 2004, there were two notable symposia in France and Switzerland to mark the 1200th anniversary of Alcuin's death, whose papers are published in Depreux, P. & Judic, B., (eds.) *Alcuin de York a Tours: écriture, pouvoir et réseaux dans l'Europe du haut moyen âge* (Rennes, 2005), & Tremp, E., & Schmuki, K., (eds.) *Alkuin von York und die geistige Grundlegung Europas* (St Gallen, 2010). In England there was a fine exhibition at York in 2001, commemorated in Garrison, M., et al., *Alcuin & Charlemagne – the Golden Age of York* (York, 2001). This book is intended to complement these and to give a complete overview of the wealth of scholarship that relates to Alcuin. It is intended for the general reader as well as for those studying, teaching or researching this period of early medieval history and theology in schools and universities.

As I composed this work in the Bodley I was often mindful of the debt that I owe personally to the late Dr Henry Chadwick who, as Dean of Christ Church, showed me every kindness when I was a student, and who introduced me to the study of patristics and ecclesiastical history. My earlier studies of St Dunstan and the tenth century reformation in England, and of the period of Christian mission in and around the British Isles in the period leading up to the death of St Boniface, provided the framework and motivation for this study of Alcuin and they complement it.

At a time when there is widespread concern across Europe about secular amnesia and ignorance of its Christian foundations, and continued ambivalence in England towards entanglement with continental affairs, it is worth recording the words of Jacob Burckhardt that were quoted in the conclusion to the seminal work on this period by Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the eighth century*: 'A truly rich nation becomes rich by accepting much from others and developing it.' This certainly happened on both sides of the Channel in the early middle ages. Levison fled from Germany to Durham in 1939 to find refuge from political tyranny and intended his great book to be a bridge across troubled waters. This book is written in the same hope, challenging a secular miasma of perception, while bridging the gap that can sometimes appear between continental and English-speaking scholarship, and between the several academic specialisms that have to be considered together, if the full picture of the achievement of Alcuin and his collaborators is to be appreciated and understood: for no society or church can flourish unless it is true to its own foundations, and understands them accurately.

Alcuin and those who worked with him applied Christian theology, deeply rooted in the Bible and the teachings of the Fathers, to the pressing

needs of their society as they perceived them to be; and the foundations that they laid survived the Viking onslaughts to become the basis for subsequent Christian medieval civilisation in Europe. Alcuin was truly a hidden saint of the Church, of the same stature and significance as his predecessor Bede. To work closely with his writings for so long and on so many varied topics, and especially with his letters, prayers and poetry, is to come close to a remarkable Christian thinker and educator, who was also a person of deep spirituality, insight, determination and love.

Douglas Dales
Feast of St Dunstan & Memorial of Alcuin:
19th May, 2012 – at Marlborough College.

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