

## Foreword by the Former Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie

Dunstan was the Archbishop of Canterbury for 28 years, during a period when the foundations of the mediaeval English Church were being laid. It was his misfortune to be somewhat eclipsed, first by the Norman Conquest, then by the martyrdom of Thomas Becket. Though he was remembered as a saint throughout the middle ages, the historical significance of his life was all but lost sight of until Bishop Stubbs collected his 'memorials of St. Dunstan' for the Rolls Series, and published them with a masterly introduction in 1874. Since that time, there has been a wealth of study into the period between the death of Alfred the Great and the Norman Conquest. It is therefore appropriate that in preparation for the millennium of the death of Dunstan, in May 1988, a full-scale life of the Saint should now be available which sets him in the context of the Church and society of which he was part.

As we look back to life and events in our country a thousand years ago, we see many things emerging which were to exercise a profound influence. The unity of England was established, a reconciliation was effected between English and Danes, and more positive relations created with the Celtic peoples of Wales and Cornwall. Contacts with continental Europe, with what became France and Germany, and with Rome itself, tied England into the life of a wider world and Church; and the influences in art and learning and politics were reciprocal and fundamental. It is a time when the special relationship between Crown and Church was deepened and articulated in a way which persists until today; when the Church influenced law and justice in a Christian direction and spoke up for the poor and oppressed. Finally, the period is crowned by glorious and colourful works of art – illuminated manuscripts in particular – of music, and of architecture which attracted the admiration of Europe at the time.

For an English Christian to look into this period of our history is a deeply enriching experience. For we find men and women of great sanctity and learning who are also people of practical ability and sound common-sense. Theirs was a profoundly spiritual achievement, and at the heart of it lay a life of prayer and discipline which was the essence, of the renewed Benedictine monasticism for which this period is justly famous. They too had a past to look back to, especially to

the age of Bede, whose memory and example broods over the hopes and labours of this generation. For them, as for us, Christian history is very much the experience of a living past nurturing a living present.

I am deeply grateful to Douglas Dales for this comprehensively researched and elegantly written biography. I hope it does much to renew an interest in Dunstan and a period of English church history which has much more immediate lessons for our Christian life now than a thousand years' separation seems to suggest.

+ *Robert Cantuar*

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