Preface to the Second Edition

It seemed appropriate to publish a second edition of *Dunstan: Saint and Statesman* in order to review the research that has further deepened and enriched our understanding of the tenth century in England since the book was first published twenty-five years ago to mark Dunstan's millennium in 1988. There is therefore an updated bibliography in this edition that is marked by many more critical editions of the primary texts of this period than were available earlier. This welcome development should enable further research into this fascinating and important period of English history.

The publication of my *Light to the Isles: Mission & Theology in Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Britain* in 1997, to mark the 1400th anniversary of the death of St Columba and the arrival of St Augustine at Canterbury, and most recently my two volumes on Alcuin, *Alcuin: His Life and Legacy*, and *Alcuin: Theology and Thought* enable Christian history, theology and mission in England between the sixth century and the Norman Conquest in 1066 to be seen as a whole. The study of Alcuin has also shed fresh light on some of the resources in Latin and Anglo-Saxon that inspired and enabled the reforms over which Dunstan presided. All three studies demonstrate how intimate was the connection between England and the continent during this period, to the enrichment of churches on both sides of the Channel.

The striking thing about the tenth-century Reformation in England was its coherence and sheer determination over several generations. What were its resources? What gave such a sense of united purpose to churchmen and their royal and aristocratic supporters, on both sides of the English Channel, in the reform and development of the Church within a society that was just emerging from the Viking onslaught and undergoing profound economic developments as a result? Why was the revitalising of monasticism considered to be of such central importance, resting as it did upon a foundation of economic wealth and relative social and legal stability? If developments in England in the tenth century can hardly be considered without reference to those on the continent at that time, the whole process on both sides of the Channel has to be seen in the light of the Carolingian inheritance, which mediated the vision and resources for this crucial period of history in Europe: for it was during this time that the foundations of mediaeval England were laid.

The initiatives of Alfred the Great have therefore to be seen alongside those of

Charles the Bald earlier in the ninth century for example; and the programme of his successors as kings of Wessex and Mercia, and later of all England, marched in step with the actions of the Ottonian kings in Germany, with whom there were close dynastic and ecclesiastical relationships. The eventual accommodation of the Viking populations within the existing social and political structure in England reflected a very changed situation to that of the ninth century, as it did in Normandy as well. Yet even at the very end of that troubled century, Alfred the Great could be portrayed by his biographer, Asser, in terms redolent of Charlemagne himself, as he was portrayed by Einhard. What is perceived now to have been a century of new beginnings was in fact often in conscious continuity with what had gone before and been crystallised by the Carolingian rulers and churchmen, among whom Alcuin played a key role.

Dunstan was therefore a beneficiary and an epitome of a process of renewal and reform by which the life of the Church moulded the surrounding society and gave it a moral framework. At all points, the initiative and patronage of the king and his family was indispensable. In the coronation order, for example, the sovereign was portrayed as the shepherd and servant of God's people, accountable to God and to divine law springing from the Bible for his rule and authority. This was certainly the vision of Alcuin, and of his disciples who followed him during the reign of Louis the Pious. The cult of Christian monarchy became pronounced and highly visible during the tenth century in England and among the Ottonians, as is reflected in the art of the period and the interpretation of Christology in terms of kingship – Christ the overlord or 'King of Kings.' For example, it is during this period that the Magi were portrayed for the first time as kings offering homage to Christ their true King.

The cult and claims of Christian monarchy were reflected also in the strategic dynastic overseas marriage alliances contracted by Alfred's successors, Edward the Elder and Athelstan. Earthly *imperium* was desirable in the interests of wealth, order and evangelism, but only if it mirrored the higher *imperium* of Christ, which later centuries would describe as Christendom. But this vision was not always shared by rulers and churchmen and Dunstan's own career, for example, rose and fell according to his relationship with successive kings of Wessex. Papal authority in Rome in the tenth century was then at its weakest, and churchmen had no effective support from that quarter: indeed it is remarkable that the institution survived at all. Dunstan himself challenged the corruption of the papacy over the issue of marriage and divorce just as Wulfstan of York did later over simony and bribery at the Curia in Rome.

Integral to this cult of monarchy and to its effective dominance over the recent Viking invaders was the appropriation of the Christian past: of the Anglo-Saxon past primarily, encapsulated in the writings of Bede, but also embodied in the memory of the *imperium* of Offa of Mercia in the eighth century which the rulers of Wessex ruthlessly manipulated; but also the more remote and noble past of late Christian Antiquity, the age of the Church Fathers, mediated through the teaching and memory of Gregory the Great, the 'apostle of the English'. To secure such a rich and potent inheritance meant the collation of ancestral Anglo-Saxon traditions, poems, laws and so forth; but also the copying of Latin manuscripts, those tenuous and vulnerable threads by which such a precious inheritance hung. Dunstan, like Alcuin before him, sensed the fragility of Christian learning, the acute sense of loss

and vulnerability that was expressed in the laments of King Alfred the Great. Such manuscripts as remain that were associated with him at Glastonbury or Canterbury reflect his own commitment and reputation as a scholar as well as his interests as an artist.

The task of the monasteries was therefore to serve as centres of education, equipped with competent scriptoria for the copying of manuscripts. This association of monasticism with education was a deliberate Carolingian innovation, pioneered by Alcuin and Benedict of Aniane early in the ninth century. Closely associated with this was the desire for uniformity of monastic life in accordance with the *Rule of St Benedict*. Monasteries served as spiritual fortresses, whose credibility, integrity and regular intercessions were portrayed as vital to the well-being of a Christian kingdom, contributing to its cohesion as well as the moral legitimacy of its rulers and their families. Kings were persuaded therefore that it was in their interests and that of their dynasties to foster regular monastic life under direct royal protection, and wealthy local land-owners often followed suit. Nunneries also provided a useful haven for royal and aristocratic women, whose patronage and wealth was no less important, not least in commissioning prestigious works of art, which expressed the prevailing ideology and theology in rich visual forms. Thus, for example, the *Regularis Concordia*, drawn up by Dunstan and Ethelwold at Winchester, was consciously modelled on the earlier work of Benedict of Aniane in its political as well as its religious character, drawing upon best practice as encountered by them in reformed monasteries on the continent, but reinforcing a sense of the English Christian tradition as well.

Another legacy of the Carolingian era was an active commitment to Christian mission. This had its roots in how Bede portrayed the coming of Christianity to England, and also in the cherished memory of English saints like Willibrord and Boniface in the first part of the eighth century, both of whom were closely associated with the rise of the Carolingian dynasty. Alcuin himself came from a Northumbrian family with close ties to the missionary initiative from England to Germany in the eighth century.It is notable that in the tenth century the English Church felt called to send missionaries back to the very areas from which their Viking adversaries had sprung – Norway and Sweden. Monasteries thus became centres of resource for mission at home, for example in the Danelaw, and abroad; and in the tenth century bishops of Viking origin like Oskytel and Oda wielded considerable influence in the English church alongside Dunstan and his friends.

The eventual incorporation of England within the Scandinavian *imperium* of Cnut was therefore not such a strange development, and his acceptance of the model of Christian monarchy and its associated culture that he found and prized in England helped to secure the work of the reformers in both church and state. Wulfstan of Worcester, who became archbishop of York early in the eleventh century, was a conscious successor to Dunstan and also to Alcuin before him, collating many of Alcuin's letters as a practical resource for his own episcopacy. One of the most remarkable developments pioneered by Dunstan and Ethelwold in England at this time was the emergence of the monk-bishop, whose spiritual integrity and relative independence from family ties would enable him to be a leader of education and mission, as well as a prophetic figure in relation to kings and their legislation.

Monasticism, education and mission all depended in practical terms upon the support and generosity of the landed aristocracy, led by royal example. Part of this partnership found expression in the strong bilingual culture in which the writings of Alcuin, for example, were translated into English and Latin and became an important element in homilies and moral exhortation. Monks like Aelfric in Winchester adapted the writings of Bede and Alcuin to their own audiences, using both Latin and Anglo-Saxon, and stimulating rich visual portrayals of the stories of the Bible in manuscripts, carvings and other works of art. The tenth century was a period of energetic rebuilding of churches and cathedrals, as well as the creating of monasteries and of parish churches in growing towns like London and Winchester.

It was within the circles of Dunstan and Wulfstan that selections of the letters of Alcuin in particular were carefully copied in England and treasured for their wisdom and practical application of Christian theology and moral teaching. In many ways it seems therefore that Alcuin was remembered and valued by his compatriots, serving as a virtual *eminence grise* to the whole reform movement. Some of his prayers found inclusion within the *Regularis Concordia*, for example. Recent research has begun to reveal the scale of his influence upon those who initiated such major changes in the life of the English Church early in the tenth century, as well as upon the thinking of the principal reformers of Dunstan's generation and those who succeeded him.

The art of the tenth century in England reflects a deep contemplative spirituality with a powerful focus upon the meaning of the Cross and the cult of the saints, notably that of the Virgin Mary. Some of the exemplars for this art were drawn from the continent and from the earlier Carolingian period, notably the Utrecht Psalter, which played a seminal role in English church art in the first part of the eleventh century. Important to this whole process was the veneration of English saints, especially royal and monastic ones. In this initiative, royal women often played a key role, as may be glimpsed in the life of Dunstan himself.

All this tangible development of ecclesiastical life reflected the increasing wealth of England during this period in terms of its agricultural organisation, trade and overseas connections. For example the bullion available to the kings of Wessex from the western parts of their domains was as vital to them as was the silver of the Hartz mountains to their Ottonian cousins in this expansion of influence, culture and wealth. Monasticism and the culture that it nurtured was thus to some extent the consecration of surplus wealth; and the reputation of Anglo-Saxon craftsmen was very high as a result of this patronage, as may be seen in the works of art that still remain from this period. The debt to Carolingian art is often evident in them; but so too is the distinctive metamorphosis of it as a reflection of the spiritual vitality of the English Church at this time, even in something as basic as handwriting.

The quest for sanctity is a common thread running throughout this story. The emergence of saints like Dunstan was seen to be highly significant, as it had been in the time of Bede and as Alcuin had celebrated in his famous poem about the Church of York. The close collaboration of friends such as Ethelwold and Oswald with Dunstan should not be underestimated, either for its practical importance, or for its spiritual significance. Dunstan like Alcuin before him was very much a team player, and neither should be seen or judged as isolated figures, however gifted and influential they might have been. The expectations of Alcuin in this matter of Christian friendship

found a sympathetic ear in Wulfstan, who treasured his letters in particular, as did most probably Dunstan and his circle at Canterbury a generation before him. For throughout this whole period, theirs was a small world of acquaintance, vulnerable however to the transience of life itself, the difficulties of travel, the threat from pagan adversaries, and the vagaries of kings.

The documentary evidence for the tenth century, though significant, is hardly rich or extensive: much has been lost. Reliance on hagiography is therefore inevitable, taking into account the inevitable biases and agenda of those who compiled them. The earliest *Lives* of Dunstan are good examples of the strengths and limitations of this material. Whatever Dunstan himself wrote has now been sadly lost, apart from a few fragments. His impression is therefore more like that of a fossil laid within a stratum of rock, rather than a living subject who can be approached through his writing like Alcuin or Bede before him. The study of his career and its significance is therefore more like examining an archaeological site, perhaps a ship burial, where the principal artefact has left no more than an impression, but within and around which there lie many artefacts that have to be carefully pieced together to establish a coherent context. For what remains from the tenth century in terms of charters, chronicles, letters, wills, along with actual archaeological and artistic artefacts, was preserved then and subsequently mostly for a reason, though sometimes by accident as well.

Dunstan's memory in particular was treasured by his contemporaries and immediate successors, even if it was damaged and superseded to some extent by the impact of the Norman Conquest and certainly eclipsed by the Reformation. This book rests upon the assumption: *si monumentum requieris, circumspice* – if you want to discern his monument, look around carefully at the various fragments that remain and carefully interpret them within the framework of his Christian belief and inheritance and the immediate memory of his life and sanctity.

Dunstan was in many ways closer to Alcuin than to Bede inasmuch as both were active churchmen, adumbrating and implementing policy with clear underlying principles and able to bend the ears of kings. Both were essentially applied theologians, although this has to be inferred in the case of Dunstan because of the paucity of direct material written by him. But the wealth of material remaining from the pen of Alcuin is quite exceptional by any standards in the early Middle Ages, and it arises from the unique circumstances in which he was operating at the end of his life at Tours, under the personal patronage of Charlemagne and with the support of sympathetic friends. Wulfstan of York is the person in which the influence of both Alcuin and Dunstan converge, and his situation was in many ways closer to that of Alcuin in his battles to secure moral consistency amidst the vicissitudes of royal policy.

What clearly emerges during the whole period from the advent of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons in and after 597 and the Norman Conquest in 1066 is the continuity of missionary theology that enabled the rich flowering of Anglo-Latin Christian culture and the marriage, as it were, of church and state thus developing a Christian polity. The fact that the Viking onslaught did not disrupt this process except for a while is remarkable. No less striking *sub specie aeternitatis* is the vigour of their prayers. They enable us to witness the development of a simple but profound

theology, couched in eloquent Latin that is rich in its resonances with Anglo-Saxon vernacular expression, notably poetry. In this field, Bede, Alcuin and Dunstan were each masters of prayer and poetry. This stream of spiritual expression, and the art that articulated it, was not seriously interrupted by the Norman Conquest; and it constitutes one of the most important tap-roots of English language and Christian culture in the Middle Ages and beyond.

Just as Bede stands behind Alcuin, so both Fathers of the Church stand behind the forging of the medieval English Church under the leadership of Dunstan and others in the tenth century in a shape that has lasted ever since, through the Reformation to the present day. The essential character of the *Ecclesia Anglicana* was thus determined in the Anglo-Saxon period, and that is why understanding accurately the legacy of Bede, Alcuin and Dunstan is of such importance today.

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