The Anglo- Norman Church

There were two major events in the middle of the C11th, which changed the nature of the church in Britain so completely that by the C12th it was unrecognisable as the church left by Edward the Confessor when he died in January 1066. There was one passing clue as to what might happen and that was the magnificent abbey Edward built in Westminster which was in the Romanesque style found in Europe rather than the Anglo-Saxon style churches found in Britain. The invasion and conquest of Britain by Duke William of Normandy between 1066 and 1072 took place whilst there was a Papal-led reform of the church in Europe and by William's death in 1086 the English had lost their Anglo-Saxon nobility, their land their church and their language. Each are interwoven strands of one thing that we may term as the *Normanising* of Britain and this article will examine in particular how the church was changed.

The conquest of Britain by William in 1066 was not a case of one battle at Hastings, it took him several years to bring the country under his rule including plunder, and theft to discourage rebellions. One of the worst atrocities was what came to be called the "harrying of the North" in the winter of 1069, where a scorched earth policy was employed leaving thousands killed and mutilated or left to die from the ensuing famine. So much property was destroyed that in the Domesday book (1086) place after place in Yorkshire were listed as "and it is waste" and Northumberland was omitted altogether. Motte and Bailey castles also littered the country designed to help keep order on William's new and rebellious subjects. These were gradually rebuilt as stone fortifications serving as not only homes for the Norman overlords, but as courts of law and prisons.

At the same time on the continent, the church was undergoing a process of reform initiated by the man who would in 1073, become Pope Gregory VIIth. The so-called Gregorian Reforms dated from 1050-80 and dealt mostly with the moral integrity and independence of the clergy from lay influence. Since the days of the Holy Roman Empire Institutions and church property were mainly controlled by the secular authorities whilst clergy were subject to the customary law under the authority of the King, Prince or Overlord. Four particular abuses were the most protested against: A) The investiture of clerics or the handing over of a religious function to a cleric by a layman; B) lay control over church property: some bishoprics and abbeys not only belonged to the patrimony of the sovereigns, but they had also usurped important ecclesiastical revenues; C) Simony, or trading in religious functions and D) The marriage of priests: the moral decadence of the clergy was seen as the logical consequence of the entanglement of the spiritual and the temporal.

William framed his invasion of England as a Papal crusade against the laxness of the English church and so was expected to make good on his promise to bring the church in England more into line with the reformist agenda without undermining his own authority. Having invaded under a Papal blessing, it was necessary that restitution needed to be made by William and his soldiers for the loss of life on the battlefield as to take a life was a grave sin. The Penitential Ordinance, first drawn up in 1067 as a guide for Norman soldiers only, approved a scale of penances ranging from a year's penance for every man killed in battle and three years for every man killed whilst plundering. Archers who couldn't know how many they had killed were permitted to do penance for three Lents and anyone unable to recall the precise body count could, at the discretion of their bishop, do penance one day a week for the rest of their life. Any killings taking place after

William's coronation on Christmas Day 1066 were considered to be regular crimes deliberately committed and subject to stricter penalties unless those killed were bearing arms against William. The Ordinance was reissued in 1070 to cover the years of violence as William fought to establish his rule over England. This meant that many men faced a lifetime of penance and restitution but endowing an abbey or church was considered as an alternative form of redemption. William himself endowed two abbeys in Selby and Hastings. Many others were similarly inspired and there began a wave of church building across the country. By 1070 William felt secure enough to do two things: pay off the mercenaries who fought in his army and ask Pope Alexander II to send a papal legation to inquire into the church in England.

Paying off an army required money. High taxation imposed by William together with his scorched earth policy in the North and Midlands had weakened the economy so much that he was forced to look elsewhere for funds. William found his alternative income stream from the monasteries. Living through the dangerous post-Hastings period, many men had entrusted their wealth to their local monastery, believing they would be least likely to be disturbed. William authorised the searching of monasteries for this hidden wealth and when found, it was seized and placed into his treasury. Not only hidden wealth was seized but church treasures were also taken and used to pay the mercenaries.

The request for a Papal legation in 1070 came when the standing of the English church was at a low ebb. Orderic Vitalis, a medieval chronicler whose account of this period is one of the main sources of information writes of the legates travelling around the country as much as they found necessary to bring about much needed reform. The first major problem they faced was Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury since 1052, and whose position was suspect in a number of ways. His predecessor Robert of Jumieges had been forced into exile, but was not deposed by the Pope, Leo IX, so the appointment of Stigand by King Edward was uncanonical. Stigand did not receive the Pallium until 1058 when it was granted by Pope Benedict X who was himself irregularly appointed and in 1059, was declared an antipope with all his actions nullified and deposed from the papacy. Stigand was also guilty of pluralism or the holding of two benefices simultaneously as when he was appointed to Canterbury, he refused to give up his office as Bishop of Winchester, which was as lucrative as Canterbury. Although Stigand was excommunicated and unable to carry out his function as bishop and priest, Edward refused to remove him, and William too kept him in post as a figurehead possibly to lend credence to his claim that the church in England was in dire need of reform. At the Council of Winchester in 1170 Stigand was formally deposed by the legates, accused of misusing church property. He was imprisoned and his wealth confiscated by William, useful cash for a monarch trying to pay off his army. Three other bishops were removed also by the legates, ostensibly for being married in the case of two of them, but more likely for the fact that William could not be certain of their loyalty. Bishops were not the only churchmen to be purged, several Abbots were also removed from office, and some were imprisoned on suspicion of being opposed to William's rule. Although the king could easily remove laymen from office, it was less easy with churchmen. Most of those against William either removed themselves through going into exile or dying in battle. Some more unfortunate were subject to summary justice or removed by the legates.

All were replaced by Normans known to William and resulted in the higher echelons of the church being transformed just as the secular aristocracy was swiftly transformed by the battle of Hastings and the subsequent rebellions. His new Archbishop of Canterbury

Lanfranc was a longtime friend of William and one of his spiritual advisors as well as being one of the leading scholars in Europe. Lanfranc was reluctant to take the role and eventually at William's behest Pope Alexander II commanded Lanfranc to obey even though he felt unequal to the task for fear he would be required to help run the country in William's absence -a fear that, as his letters reveal, came true.

1070 was the year for change in the English church, but more was to come as most of the bishoprics and abbeys had placed upon them the novel burdens of military service. In the Anglo-Saxon church, they had been exempted from this, but William declared in writing how many knights each was to provide him and his successors in time of war or hostility. William had many new castles to garrison, so his army was, in reality a dispersed army of occupation. It was too expensive to rely on mercenaries, so everyone, both churchmen and overlords were expected to contribute men. The Church was a major landowner in this period, and by a system of subfeudation – the granting out of lands given by the king to subtenants was a useful way for monasteries and abbeys to supply knights when William needed fighting men. However, it was a medieval practice that ordained men did fight. William's brother, Odo bishop of Bayeux is a case in point. Pictured on the Bayeux Tapestry prodding his men onwards, the caption reads "0do confortat pueri". Translated this says *Odo comforts the boys* and this should be read in a similar sense to the Holy Spirit being called the comforter driving people onward rather than the connotations the word *comfort* has in modern language.

In 1072 Lanfranc and William set up ecclesiastical courts whereby clergy were withdrawn from the ordinary hundreds courts. Being dealt with separately meant the moral decadence of the clergy which was caused by the Anglo-Saxon intertwining of temporal and spiritual roles could be addressed under the new canon laws which were being introduced as part of the Gregorian reforms. In order to better regulate the clergy, the new role of Archdeacon was also introduced. In addition, Lanfranc initiated annual reforming Councils as he felt administrative reform was a necessary first step to correcting people's religious beliefs. For example, at the Westminster Council in 1075 the practices of soothsaying and divination were declared illegal on the grounds that they were the work of the devil and punishable by excommunication.

Clerical marriage was also stopped although priests who were already married were allowed to keep their partner, and it was a change that was very slow in being enforced. The Domesday book published in 1086 suggests that the village priests were usually found to be members of the peasant community, and the church was owned by the local Overlord. If the land was divided, then church money would also be divided. In many ways the village priest shared the lifestyle of the ordinary villager. He was likely to be married with some land gifted to farm and have inherited his position from his father. By the end of the Norman period in 1154, married priests were rare, and it is probable that change came about due to the general improvement in education rather than by imposing church law. If society became more literate it was easier to recruit clergy from a larger pool of suitable men.

Administratively the church in England was divided into two provinces, Canterbury (Cantuar) and York (Ebor) and in 1070 Lanfranc refused to consecrate the new Archbishop of York, Thomas of Bayeux unless he swore an oath to obey him and any future Archbishops of Canterbury. This was part of Lanfranc's claim that Canterbury was the primary bishopric, and its holder the head of the English church. Thomas argued that York had never made such an oath and William had to persuade Thomas to submit. When

the two archbishops went to Rome in 1071 to receive their pallia it was brought up with the Pope and were told it was a matter for the English church to sort. A second council was held in Winchester in 1072, and the subsequent Accord declared the primacy of Canterbury over York.

Diocesan realignment happened in 1075 at the Council of London. It was decided that bishops should be based in the major towns which led to some significant changes. The bishop of Dorchester was moved to Lincoln; the bishop of Lichfield became the bishop of Chester, and the bishop of Thetford moved to Norwich. Coincidentally all the bishoprics were now in towns firmly under Norman control. Not only the church's administrative structures were altered, but there was also an architectural revolution led again by Lanfranc whose cathedral in Canterbury had been gutted by fire in 1067. Lanfranc commissioned a new building in the latest Romanesque style. Six more Cathedrals were commissioned in the 1070's including the towns to where bishops had moved their Cathedras. The cathedrals were all built in the Romanesque style and expensively dressed in stone shipped in from Caen. All were highly decorated but finished in a remarkably short period of time. However, Durham Cathedral, which was begun later in 1093 was Norman in both scale and proportion but decorated in a pre- conquest style with its pillars carved with linear patterns characteristic of old English art, giving rise to a building that was an Anglo- Norman fusion.

The cult of saints was also questioned, and local saints were removed from the *Ordo* and their relics hidden away. The reformers wanted to direct popular devotion away from local and often dubious cults and to focus on Christ himself. Under the Reformers the definition of a saint had to come from the Pope not by local acclaim. However, as with architecture there was a softening in the approach as Norman rule became accepted by the populace. Lanfranc, who had led the cull in England became an enthusiastic devotee of St Dunstan the local saint in Canterbury. When Winchester Cathedral was completed in 1093, the bones of St Swithin were reinstated with much pomp and ceremony, another example of an Anglo-Norman fusion.

Much of the misunderstanding between the conquerors and conquered lay in the use of language. One of Lanfranc's arguments for rejecting the Archbishopric of Canterbury was that he knew no English, and many of his fellow Norman appointees were similarly disadvantaged. Up to 1070 all documents were written in English, but this ceased suddenly, and all royal documents started to be written in Latin, a language familiar to literate Normans and educated Englishmen. For the English, this felt like another attack on their culture, whereas for the Normans it was another move in the *Normanising* of the country.

Up to 1075, William had been reforming the church under the guise of his invasion being a Papal crusade but when Pope Gregory VIIth issued his *Dictatus Papae a* compilation of twenty-seven statements about papal authority there were a number of provisions William was not prepared to countenance. Gregory wanted the Pope to be recognised as the sole head of the Universal Church, able to depose kings and emperors if they did not obey his decrees and allow their subjects to renounce their fealty to such rulers. No medieval ruler could accept such a rule, and it led to conflict between the Papacy and European rulers. Other provisions that William and other European rulers ignored were statements about the appointment of bishops and archbishops being made by the papacy alone. The rite of lay investiture became the symbol of what needed to be changed. Investiture was performed by members of the ruling nobility despite

theoretically being a task of the church. Many bishops and abbots were themselves part of the ruling nobility due to the practice of primogeniture whereby a title and wealth passed to the eldest surviving son and surplus male sons often sought careers in the upper levels of the church hierarchy. This was particularly true where the family may have established a church or abbey on their estate. Since a substantial amount of wealth and land was usually associated with the office of a bishop or abbot, the sale of church offices—a practice known as "simony"—was an important source of income for leaders among the nobility, who themselves owned the land and by charity allowed the building of churches. Rulers had also been heavily relying on bishops for their secular administration, as they were not hereditary or quasi-hereditary nobility with family interests. Although it was a controversy that was raging in Europe since 1059, it only erupted in Britain in 1102 when Henry I was on the throne. (See below)

William died in 1087 and was succeeded by his second son William known as Rufus. The elder son Robert inherited the duchy of Normandy. William Rufus was a more flamboyant and extravagant ruler than his father and treated the church as a rich body to pay for his lifestyle. He was slow to appoint bishops and abbots, for while a *sede vacante* was in place the revenues came to the king. Anselm, Abbot of Bec was favoured by the cathedral chapter to be Lanfranc's successor, but it wasn't until 1093 that William Rufus afraid he was dying, appointed him. The two men did not agree on many things and in 1095 William called the Rockingham Council to deal with matters in dispute which centred on the grounds of who had first call on a bishop's loyalty -Pope or King? In 1097 Anselm took himself into exile, which meant the wealth of Canterbury was once again in William's hands.

In 1100, the year he died William enjoyed the revenues from three bishoprics and twelve abbeys. His successor was his younger brother who became Henry I. Henry too had problems with the church. He recalled Anselm out of exile, but while Anselm had been abroad, he had absorbed the ideas which have been termed "High Gregorian" namely, acknowledgement of the supreme authority of the Pope over all earthly rulers, the independence of the clergy from secular control and the repudiation of lay investiture. The reformers not only wanted to reform the moral and spiritual life of clergy, but believed in order to do it, it was necessary to free the church from secular control. On his return to England, Anselm refused to do homage to Henry or consecrate those Prelates Henry had invested. It placed the king in a difficult position for the bishops and abbots were major landowners and key figures in both central and local administration and Henry needed their expertise and to be sure of their loyalty. Unlike his brother, Henry was reluctant to force a quarrel, and the matter drifted until 1107, when the Concordat of London was drawn up and agreed by all parties. Henry renounced lay investiture, but bishops continued to pay homage to the king for their position as vassals of the crown. In practice it was clear that although cathedral chapters were instructed to make a free election, they normally chose the candidate that the king had indicated a preference for. This meant that Henry had, in effect given up the form of lay investiture but preserved the reality of control. For example, when Anselm died in 1109 Canterbury was five years in *sede vacante*. However, the king had lost something far more significant than the power of appointing bishops. During the conversations around the controversy the Reformers insisted the king was a layman and as such was inferior to all priests, for they were concerned with the soul and the king only with the body. The church would no longer

accept the ancient idea that anointed kings were sacred deputies of God. As Honorius of Augustodunensis explained:

Perhaps there are babblers who…contend that the king is not to be numbered with the laity since he is anointed with priestly oil. But there is a plain reason which mocks this folly: the king is either a layman or a clerk. Is he a clerk? Then he must be a doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, or priest. But he is none of these. Therefore, he is not a clerk. So he is a layman pure and simple, unless perhaps you think he is a monk. But if he were a monk, how can he have a wife and bear a sword? No, he is neither monk or clerk; just a layman, nothing more (Summa Gloria de Apostolic et Augusto P.L. 172, 1261-2)

In giving up investiture Henry was acknowledging the secular nature of his office which was a pivotal moment in the history of kingship. It took European rulers another fifteen years to reach agreement with Rome by means of the Concordat of Worms which was signed in 1122 and based very closely on the Concordat of London. But they too realised that they had lost something valuable. Unlike the foreign rulers, Henry used the Investiture Controversy to strengthen the secular power of the king, but it would continue to simmer under the surface. The controversy would resurface in the Thomas Becket affair under Henry II of England, the Great Charter of 1217, the Statutes of Mortmain, and finally come to a head under Henry VIII of England.

The Anglo- Norman church that Plantagenet England inherited would remain frozen in time in its diocesan and parochial organisation. The C12th was very much the age of the Cloister in the flowering of many new Orders, which gave within its framework almost every type of religious life – rural, urban, contemplative, mendicant, ascetic and active. But the Norman ecclesiastical building programme would ensure that English people would never forget the fact their country was invaded, and that invasion changed the country beyond recognition in many different ways usurping their language, their nobility, their land and their church.

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Sources and Further Reading

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