

3 'Longing to be prayed for': death and commemoration in an English parish in the later Middle Ages

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To fathom the connections between death and commemoration, as one acted upon the other fashioning the priorities of later medieval English Christians, it is worth developing one very obvious point as a platform for discussion.¹ Christianity, resembling other faiths, commemorates an individual whose life and teaching avowedly showed the way to deeper truth; perhaps more idiosyncratically, it has been particularly concerned to remember and, in the mass, symbolically re-enact Christ's death as an avenue to understanding and realising His teachings about life and redemption. Christians have always been concerned to contemplate and commemorate Christ's death because in so doing they address pressing questions about themselves: they believe that, just as Christ overcame death, so too they may obtain salvation by fulfilling the instructions He vouchsafed. The Church, the institution with the task of perpetuating and spreading His teachings, has mediated His message as it strives to ensure that death should have dominion over as few as possible. In short, death and commemoration are issues at the very core of Christianity. Different emphases have been applied to each, and these have changed

¹ This essay explores a theme that I have considered before (most obviously, perhaps, in 'The Benefactions of Mortality: the Lay Response in the Late Medieval Parish', in D. M. Smith (ed.), *Studies in Clergy and Ministry in Medieval England* (Borthwick Studies in History, 1, 1991)), but I hope that the present offering takes the material in a new and worthwhile direction. My debt to the first chapters of Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven and London, 1992) is plain. Less apparent is the fact that I only realised how the theme that the editors were pressing me to write on, death and commemoration before the Reformation, might dovetail with the liturgy when I was teaching courses on Late Medieval Christianity and Culture at University College London in the autumn and spring terms of 1997–8; I doubt whether my long-suffering students knew the favour they did me, but I offer all of them my thanks.

radically with time and circumstance. The result has been a variety of traditions. In later medieval England, before the sweeping changes of the sixteenth century, preparations for death and the importance assigned to personal commemoration assumed a noteworthy prominence, not only as far as the teaching of the institutional Church was concerned, but also in the very striking responses of the faithful. The form and implications of these responses are the principal concern of this chapter but, by way of background, attention will be paid both to contemporary teaching on death and commemoration, and, more immediately, to the customs and conduct of local church life to appreciate quite how instruction sat with context.

As it strove to involve a population for the most part unlettered and which lived by husbandry, the institutional Church in the Middle Ages evolved a distinctive and complex liturgy.² The events of Christ's life and the mysteries of the faith were represented and re-enacted through services and ceremonies: as time passed through seasons and years, the Church observed a well-defined and endlessly repeated cycle of rites, and at each the celebration of the mass was invariably of central significance. The two most prominent sequences of feasts in the Church calendar were particularly associated with the life and the Passion of Christ: Advent, Christmas, the Epiphany and Candlemas were concerned essentially with the incarnation, with the mystery that God became Man; but of deeper significance, Easter asserted Christ's triumph over sin and death, and its date in turn determined the feasts of Ascension and Pentecost, of seasons like Lent, and celebrations like Corpus Christi. In addition to the feasts concerned particularly with the Saviour were many others celebrating those close to Him, like His mother, the Blessed Virgin, Her mother, St Anne, St John the Baptist and, of course, the Apostles. To these feasts were added those of eminent saints and martyrs, like Sts Stephen, Catherine and Margaret; and there were others of more general significance like those of St Michael and All Angels and the feasts of All Saints and All Souls, and this is before we come to the myriad feasts observed for saints often of more local or personal significance.³ Many of the most

² Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, chap. 1 and bibliography provides a particularly useful starting point on the subject of the liturgy. See also R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: the Ritual Year, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994), chaps. 1–3, and D. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells. National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), chaps. 1 and 2.

³ Despite attempts by the elite of the Church to alter attitudes to sanctity, it is clear that the cult of saints enjoyed sustained and intense popularity in the later Middle Ages: see A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, tr. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 1997).

important feasts occurred, whether by accident or design, at significant times of the year.⁴ Easter, celebrating the triumph of life over death, is in spring at the beginning of the agricultural year; Christmas and the feast of St John the Baptist immediately follow the solstices; Lammas, Michaelmas and All Saints occur at significant stages of the harvest; and so on. The truths and teachings embodied in the feasts inevitably became deeply embedded into the consciousness of believers, and the figures celebrated and commemorated were invoked in petition at critical times of the year and in particular predicaments, or thanked more generally as helpmeets. Religion, and the unfolding of the Christian message, became part of life's pattern, symbolically and in reality, repeated year after year after year. Late medieval Christians in countryside and towns – themselves centres acutely dependent on rural food production, whose populations originated for the most part from nearby counties – lived and worked in a tissue of time, memory and meaning, articulated primarily by the seasons but powerfully reinforced and elaborated by the Church.

For the great majority, the teaching and ministry of Christianity emanated from parish churches. As a building, replete with fixtures, fittings and decorations, a parish church reinforced many of the truths expressed in the faith and its liturgy. Ceremonial was enacted in spaces provided in and defined by the building – with, for instance, masses being celebrated at the holiest places, the high or side altars, and processions exploiting internal aisles and exterior features for suitable routes on certain feast days. Observances were, as a matter of course, sited in appropriate places with, for instance, vigils at the Easter sepulchre, fraternity masses in a chapel dedicated to the patron saint, and drinkings and May celebrations in the churchyard. Decoration reinforced the message. Any parishioner sitting or standing in the nave and looking towards the high altar in the chancel could be left in no doubt as to the core of the faith and the fate of his or her soul when time should end, as it would. The rood, surmounting the screen separating nave from chancel, comprised a carved figure of Christ crucified, flanked by the Virgin Mary and St John, an echo in visual form of the truth celebrated in the mass – celebrated with most circumstance at the high altar in the chancel beyond. This representation of the Passion had broader ramifications of reinforced meaning for it would, in all probability, have been set

⁴ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, chaps. 1 and 2 is particularly good on the 'rhythms' of the year, and succinctly describes how the Church had accommodated itself within earlier festivals of significance.

in a fuller visual context intended to remind the onlooker of the Judgement when the individual's response to Christ's sacrifice would be decided: roods were frequently set within a Doom painted on the surrounding chancel arch, with St Michael weighing souls under God's gaze, whilst the saved on one side ascended to the celestial city and the damned on the other were tossed or dragged into Hell's mouth. Reminding every onlooker of the essentials of the faith, this arrangement of visual stimuli acted also as a mainspring to prompt actions, be they good works, almsdeeds or service for others and in the interests of the parish. No one could be in any doubt of what was at stake and of the importance of one's actions in the here and now for the eventual outcome in the hereafter.

Thus an *aide-mémoire* became a prick of conscience, an effect further reinforced by decorations and fittings visible in the rest of the building. On side walls, in the aisles, on panels at the base of the screen and elsewhere, and in the windows were respectively murals, paintings or stained glass depicting scenes from the life of Christ, of the Virgin or of a saint, or stories from the Bible, or portraits of saints with symbols. Surfaces reinforced by image what was celebrated and commemorated in the lessons and liturgy, a feature further mirrored by carved images of Christ and the Virgin and the saints in the shrines, screen and aisles of the church. In short, the setting in which the liturgy was enacted mirrored and counterpointed the rites themselves, providing a continuous presence, and prompting prolonged veneration and contemplation of predecessors and truths perforce celebrated at set times.

The effects were cumulative: chiming in with time and experience, a regular round of observances established the tenets of the faith; moreover, the physical setting in which this was enacted became a visual mnemonic, further reinforcing dogma. But it is, in addition, to be remembered that sounds, that is of the words comprising the rites and of the music, chants and even polyphony to which services and observances were set, further compounded the mnemonic effect – and sound can carry where sightlines fail.⁵ Words and phrases used at special times set indelibly in the mind; similarly chants, tunes and song might reinforce the grasp of the pious and the not so pious. If in our culture the medium may be deemed to be the message,⁶ then it is worth pondering how, in a very much less

⁵ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, chap. 2 explores the power of images and words, and also the effects of the Church's programme of catechesis.

⁶ Most notably, of course, Marshall McLuhan, in the title of the first chapter in his book, *Understanding Media* (London, 1964).

cluttered environment, the potency of the ceremonial, visual and aural media together comprising the experience of parish Christianity would have penetrated and shaped the consciousness and experience of late medieval Christians; and this was, of course, but a pale reflection of what was on offer in cathedrals, abbeys, hospitals and collegiate churches. The experience was nothing if not memorable; it was, of course, meant to be so.

The principles of the faith, the round of ceremonial, and the decorative, verbal and aural environments were of a piece, facilitating worship and commemorating and celebrating the saints, 'the very special dead'. Religion made past things present by constant and vivid re-enactment: life was articulated, truths taught, intercessors invoked, the past celebrated and some semblance of control over the future proffered in the process. But as the past exercised a strong influence shaping the religious experience of Christians in the century and more preceding the Reformation, so too did it elicit a distinctive and co-ordinate response as men and women, with the teachings of Christ and the Church in mind, sought to procure their salvation. It is a striking – although, on reflection, hardly surprising – aspect of late medieval pious practice that contemporaries, prompted particularly by the imperatives of the Sacrament of Penance, interwove their response within the existing liturgy, within the structures and practices deemed appropriate by and for precursors in the Church Triumphant. Members of the Church Militant and the Church Suffering, that is on earth and in Purgatory, contrived to be remembered, and even celebrated, in parallel with the liturgy and the church year by succeeding generations, usually in their own parish, but sometimes in other arenas, such as colleges, or in civic life, or by companies and confraternities. To restrict the discussion for the time being to the parish, this had implications of profound importance both for individuals and for communal religion as most experienced it in the century or more before the Reformation. It is to a closer examination of this response, considering what prompted it and what forms it took, that I now turn.

I work from the premise that, at a fairly basic level, the motive which explains why men and women were profoundly affected by and continued to respond to the teachings of the Church in the late medieval period was the hope of salvation (and, one might add, fear of the alternative). It is, therefore, important to consider quite what the Church demanded as it sought to fulfil its duties to mankind as the mediator of Christ's teachings. In addition to the essentials of belief and attendance, the Church required that individuals should receive and

participate in the sacraments: the rites of passage – baptism, confirmation, matrimony, extreme unction – on the one hand, and the central rites of Christian worship – Mass and Penance – on the other. If, as suggested earlier, the celebration of mass invariably formed the focal point of corporate Christian worship, the operation of penance was of utmost importance for individuals, addressing as it did the barrier of sin excluding Man from God's providence. In contradistinction to emphases introduced as a result of sixteenth-century change, penance before the Reformation demanded a more public and ostentatious response. The most important aspect of penance, dealing with the guilt consequent on sin, was confession, and every Christian of either sex had an obligation to confess at least once annually.⁷ Properly shriven and penitent, the Christian might rest assured that he or she could not be damned. But among the most auspicious of the doctrinal developments emanating from the Schools, particularly Paris in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, was a feasible means of dealing with the penalties inexorably attached to sins. Although strictly subordinate, paying the penalty to purge the stain of sin was necessary to complete the process and gain admission to Heaven. The point was that, as a result of changes in emphasis implicit in the new dispensation, while one might certainly make a start by good works in this life, the process could be completed (and might, indeed, be wholly satisfied) in Purgatory. Provision to expedite the progress of the soul through Purgatory rendered the spiritual imperatives of the late Middle Ages distinctive, and, as indicated above, contemporaries' responses dovetailed neatly with the characteristics of liturgical practice. Purgatory emphasised the need for good works, both for their intrinsic merit and because those who benefited were obliged to intercede for benefactors; it extolled intercession, from saints certainly, but very definitely from those still living and the dead in Purgatory. And whereas the honest poor might rest assured that, because of intrinsic virtue, their main duty was to pray for benefactors, written, preached and visual admonition left the wealthy in no doubt that they were sorely in need of intercession, and that it was their duty and in

⁷ T. N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977) is invaluable on the application of the sacrament of penance and of developing obligations; attention is also drawn to the useful discussion in early chapters of W. D. Myers, 'Poor, Sinning Folk', *Confession and Conscience in Counter-Reformation Germany* (Ithaca, 1996). For discussion of the doctrine of Purgatory and its implications, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, chap. 10, and my 'A Fond Thing Vainly Invented': an Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Later Medieval England', in S. J. Wright (ed.), *Parish, Church and People. Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350–1750* (London, 1988), pp. 56–84.

their interest to stimulate it.⁸ One of the most striking attributes of the late medieval Church was, indeed, the success it had in prompting generosity: the wealthier classes gave fulsomely both for their own spiritual benefit and the practical benefit of others. Above all else, the wealthy – be they the aristocracy, gentry or, to be discussed here, the bourgeoisie – sought commemoration. Stimulating others to intercede for them, the wealthy spent a very great deal and made themselves hardly less of a presence in death than they had been in life.⁹ The contrivances to which they resorted coloured many aspects of parish life and repay close examination.

In the following, examples will be drawn from one urban parish, All Saints' in Bristol, for two reasons. First, it is important to emphasise that the practices which contemporaries fostered and funded had a cumulative effect which may best be appreciated by dwelling on provisions in a single locality. The second reason for concentrating on All Saints', Bristol, is that it has an unusually detailed archive: other late medieval parishes may have more extensive accounts or more wills but few, if any, have so broad a range of surviving material – indeed, most English parishes have no surviving muniments for the later medieval period. All Saints' has a reasonable number of surviving wills, some twenty or thirty in all.¹⁰ More unusually, the parish has an extensive run of pre-Reformation churchwardens' accounts and two reasonably detailed inventories of equipment. Quite extraordinarily it has, in a volume known as the Church Book, a list of parish ordinances and the names of parish benefactors – 'Good Doers by whom livelode, tenements and other goods have been given to the church of All Saints'. It itemises who had given what for their own and the parish's benefit, as well as a list of pairs of churchwardens mentioning what each had achieved for their own and the common benefit during their term of

⁸ B. L. Manning, *The People's Faith in the Time of Wyclif* (2nd edn, Hassocks, 1975), chap. 10 is still useful; for a more recent overview, M. Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1987), and, as a local study, P. H. Cullum and P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Charitable Provision in Late Medieval York: "to the Praise of God and the Use of the Poor"', *Northern History* 23 (1993), pp. 24–39.

⁹ I explore this theme more fully in 'The Benefactions of Mortality'; for broader treatment of the theme, see S. Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy* (Baltimore, 1992).

¹⁰ Given that the mid-sixteenth-century Chantry Certificate reveals that All Saints' had a population of just less than 200 houseling members, the number of wills surviving for the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries only serves to remind us that, excellent as the All Saints' archive is, a very great deal has been lost.

office.¹¹ The parish has the muniments and accounts generated by the perpetual chantry founded by the Halleways in the parish church in the 1450s, and – almost unbelievably – a very considerable cache of property deeds and of miscellanea pertaining to the life of the parish in the century or more before the Reformation. Much has been lost, inevitably depressing our impressions; but we are, relatively, very well informed as to the priorities and behaviour of the men and women in this particular parish. This is ample reason to survey their activities to discover how the dead and those about to die contrived to be commemorated and thus benefit from intercession. It also proves possible to gain some impression of how the dead perpetuated their identities, weaving benefactions and requirements into the fabric of parish practice, juxtaposing their own presence with those who still lived within a small community. Such contrivance was, of course, placed within a regime already efficiently operating to commemorate precursors, saints and significant events. The formal liturgy combined with penitential imperatives to spawn a fuller roster of both saints and sinners, as the wealthier members of the parish in particular sought to engage surviving and succeeding parishioners in a structured response of collective memory and intercession. Their personal benefit thus went hand in hand with the profit of the parish and relief of the generality as bequests provided for services, building and equipment from which all gained. Beneficiaries in life were thus bound to remember benefactors in death, and the All Saints' archive reveals both strategies and results with clarity.

There are, however, two further preliminaries – one specifically pertaining to All Saints', the other of more general application – which deserve consideration. First, as commented earlier, the decoration of the church left the faithful in no doubt as to their fate, and it is of interest to note that parishioners often took it upon themselves to remind those who came after just what was in store. That All Saints' had a rood, for instance, is clear from Alice Chestre's commission and provision of an ornately carved new rood loft, replete with many carved images 'of which three are principal – a Trinity in the middle, a Christopher in the north, and a Michael in the south side'.¹² John Haddon, vintner of All Saints', had moreover 'let make the story of the doom in the cross aisle'; that is, a parishioner paid, if not for a painting of the Day of Judgement, then

¹¹ The All Saints' Church Book has been published in full, see *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints', Bristol. Part 1: The All Saints' Church Book*, ed. Clive Burgess (Bristol Record Society Publications, 46, 1995) (hereafter cited as *ASCB*).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

some representation on this theme proving his own mindfulness and reminding others of the last things.¹³ Further, William Wytteney 'let ordain and let make at his own cost a memorial that every man should remember his own death, that is to say the Dance of Pauls, the which cost £18. God have mercy on his soul.'¹⁴ What this was is best explained by reference to John Stow's *Survey of London*: 'There was also one great cloister on the north side of this church [St Paul's Cathedral] invironing a plot of ground, of old time called the Pardon Churchyard . . . About this cloister was artificially and richly painted the Dance of *Machabray*, or dance of death, commonly called the Dance of Pauls.'¹⁵ Wytteney's donation cannot be accurately dated but it was probably made in the mid-fifteenth century, and was a *danse macabre*, a painting of the Dance of Death. The All Saints' churchwardens' accounts reveal that this was put up and taken down again twice annually, at St James's tide in late July and at All Saints' at the beginning of November.¹⁶ It must have been painted either on boards, or on canvas to form a banner. It was expensive and, presumably, large or long; it would have commanded attention, reminding the living of every degree 'to remember their own death'. Parishioners were themselves prepared to admonish others, commissioning depictions which heightened an awareness of death, judgement, Purgatory and, as a result, the requisite responses which all were obliged to make and on which all depended.

Second, as a result of synodal legislation in the thirteenth century, the laity had been assigned the duty of maintaining the fabric of their parish churches, save that of the chancel for which the incumbent was liable; from a slightly later date, congregations had been made responsible for

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵ J. Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (2 vols., Oxford, 1908), I, p. 327. John or Jenkyn Carpenter, town clerk of London, is said to have paid for the painting in the north cloister of St Paul's 'with great expenses'; Stow also tells us (I, p. 109) that it was 'painted upon a board . . . a monument of death, leading all estates with speeches of death, and answer of every estate'. The verses were translated from French into English by Lydgate.

¹⁶ The feast of St James was a time of heightened significance in Bristol, the main English port for pilgrims travelling to the shrine at Compostella; moreover, given that the feast was in high summer, the details of the painting may have been at their most clearly visible at this time. At an altogether darker time of the year, All Saints' Day was the parish's patronal feast and was immediately followed by All Souls', a feast of particular relevance for considerations of mortality. It is perhaps worth noting that both seasons were in the so-called 'secular half' of the year, confirming once again that much of spiritual and liturgical significance might occur between Corpus Christi and Advent. The identification of a 'ritualistic' and a 'secular' half of the liturgical year is made by C. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the Citizen', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Early Modern Town* (London, 1976), pp. 106-28.

maintaining the vessels and vestments necessary for the seemly conduct of rites and worship.¹⁷ So, at roughly the same time as the penitential system was rejigged, practical obligations were imposed on the laity to provide for buildings and equipment, that is for the basic wherewithal for parish worship. In practice the two often combined: to fulfil or start to satisfy their penitential obligations, parishioners might repair or embellish church fabric, or donate vessels and vestments, and, parish pride apart, this was done because donors wished to be remembered and prayed for by contemporaries and successors. The more that any individual gave, the less the parish as a whole would have to contribute, so donors were justified to expect some return of gratitude. But benefactors also contrived to ensure that, were they forgotten, then their benefactions should be forfeit. So they had to be remembered officially by the parish, and provision made to ensure that they were formally prayed for. The management of endowments, fabric and equipment, and the preservation of benefactors' memories, all became vital duties. The office of churchwarden evolved whereby prominent individuals undertook to discharge these responsibilities on behalf of the wider parish community.¹⁸ Parish management was a good work, profiting the soul and deserving commemoration – a theme to be examined in more detail below.

When investigating the response elicited by the prevailing penitential regime in a community like All Saints', a start may be made by examining the formal provision on which parishioners might rely. Early in the fifteenth century, in 1405, Robert Crosman, in addition to making various benefactions to All Saints', promised the vicar 3s 4d if he should put Crosman's name, his wife's name, and the names of their respective parents on the *tabula memoria*, and rehearse them every Sunday.¹⁹ At the end of the century such practice was still current. In 1492, Thomas Baker gave the vicar, John Thomas, 20s so that 'every Sunday he shall specially exhort parishioners to pray for my soul'.²⁰ In the same year, Clement Wiltshire, Mayor of Bristol who died while in office, bequeathed John Thomas a robe of scarlet 'to pray for my soul and my first wife's soul, and

¹⁷ *Councils and Synods*, ed. F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney (2 vols., Oxford, 1964), I, pp. 128, 367; II, pp. 1002ff., 1122–3, 1385–8; see also C. Drew, *Early Parochial Organisation in England: the Origin and Office of the Churchwarden* (York, 1954), pp. 8–9 and notes.

¹⁸ For the origins of the office of churchwarden, see Drew, *Early Parochial Organisation*, *passim*; and a more recent study, B. Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: the Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400–1560* (Aldershot, 1996), chap. 2.

¹⁹ The Great Orphan Book (in Bristol Record Office), fols. 96v–7.

²⁰ Great Orphan Book, fols. 245v–7; also Prerogative Court of Canterbury Registers (hereafter PCC), 23 Dogget fols. 181–2v.

for the souls of parents, brothers, sisters, kin and friends on every Sunday among the other dead of the parish of All Saints' according to the usage there'.²¹ Clearly a bede-roll, a list of benefactors, which the celebrant read out at high mass, was long established in All Saints', and if not explicitly commissioned all that frequently, might evidently comprise part of the spiritual armoury of the very rich no less than those of more moderate means.²²

There was also an annual commemoration of benefactors in All Saints', known as the General Mind, which took the form of a corporate anniversary paid for from parish funds.²³ The celebration which, apart from anything else, was an important social event in the parish calendar, was held on the Thursday and Friday after Ash Wednesday – different parishes had different days, but in All Saints', notably, it coincided with a high-water mark of the penitential season.²⁴ Moreover, in All Saints' the General Mind was preceded by a more than usually detailed recitation of Good Doers and their good deeds on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, a recital presumably based on the benefaction lists in the All Saints' Church Book.²⁵ A statement concerning the practice on this particular Sunday heads this material and offers a particularly revealing appraisal as to the effects of benefaction and memory in death as the two combined to operate in a fifteenth-century parish. It bears quotation at length.²⁶ The preamble reads thus: 'The names of good doers and wellwillers by whom livelode, tenements and other goods have been given unto the church of All Saints' in Bristol, unto the honour and worship of Almighty God and [the] increasing of divine service, to be showed and declared unto the parishioners on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and at high Mass and yearly to be continued.' Practice is then expounded:

²¹ Great Orphan Book, fols. 244v–5v.

²² See also Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 327–37; the bede-roll, ironically, was so common a means of commemorating the dead that many testators may not have explicitly commissioned inclusion of their name, relying instead on their executors' discretion.

²³ Payments for the General Mind comprise a prominent part, year after year, of the All Saints' churchwardens' accounts. The costs of the Mind gradually increased even despite a parish ordinance that, should its expense exceed 13s 4d, the senior warden should have to pay the difference from his own pocket, *ASCB*, p. 3.

²⁴ In St John's, Bristol, the General Mind was on the Tuesday and Wednesday of Whitsun week; in St Nicholas's, the vigil and feast of St Martin; in St Stephen's, the eighth and ninth days after Easter.

²⁵ The benefaction lists are to be found in *ASCB*, pp. 4–30; effectively there are three or four versions of the same list, each succeeding list compressing old material and adding new items.

²⁶ The following quotations together comprise the statement concerning practice on the Sunday before the General Mind; it is to be found in *ASCB*, p. 4.

Where it has been of a laudable custom of long continuance used, that on this day the names of good doers and wellwillers by whom livelode – tenements, buildings, jewels, books, chalices, vestments and with divers other ornaments and goods, as follows – has been given unto the church unto the honour and worship of almighty God and increasing of divine service, to be rehearsed and shown yearly unto you by name, both man and woman, and what benefits they did for themselves and for their friends and for others by their lifetimes, and what they left for them to be done after their days.

The purpose is plain: 'That they shall not be forgotten but had in remembrance and be prayed for of all the parish and all of them that be to come, and also [that they should be] for an example to you that be now living that you may likewise do for yourself and for your friends while they be in this world.' And this was done so that the living remembered their benefactors: 'That after the transitory life you may be had in the number of good doers rehearsed by name and in the special prayers of Christian people in time coming'; and with, finally, a more transcendent purpose, 'that by the infinite mercy of almighty God, by the intercession of Our Blessed Lady and of all the blessed saints of heaven, in whose honour and worship this church is dedicated, you may come to the everlasting bliss and joy that our blessed Lord has redeemed you unto'. Explanation and exhortation are thus woven together to extol the benefits accruing from commemoration and intercession: it was to expedite salvation, and individuals and the community had their respective parts to play.

It is clear, on the one hand, that the authorities in All Saints', be they clerical, lay, or both together, promoted 'good doing' as an activity of the utmost importance, and on the other, that parishioners responded, either because of a sense of sin, or of need, or simply for fear of missing out. Richard Ake, for instance, gave an antiphoner worth £10 for the use of subsequent vicars 'in order to be prayed for among the benefactors of the parish'.²⁷ Thomas Abyndon, innkeeper, at his decease in the late fifteenth century gave the church 40s so that he should be remembered 'as a good doer'.²⁸ John Jenkyns, alias Steynour, another innkeeper, and his wife, Agnes, 'longing to be prayed for', gave a standing nut, that is a cup.²⁹ His instructions are unusual: Jenkyns prevailed upon the current vicar, John

²⁷ ASCB, pp. 13, 27. The date when Ake made the donation is uncertain, but it may very well have been before the beginning of the fifteenth century; it is instructive that his gift was being commemorated over a century later.

²⁸ ASCB, pp. 21–2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 30.

Thomas, 'that he should so order in this book, the register of good doers, that this nut should never be alienated or sold, but should remain in the treasure coffer, to the behoof [advantage] and pleasure of the parishioners in the day of the General Mind of good doers'. The cup, significantly, was to be reserved for use on the day of the General Mind to prompt specific, efficacious prayer.

Possibly the most illuminating single example of generous benefaction to guarantee commemoration in death, and one which I have mentioned in passing above and described more fully elsewhere, concerns the activity of a widow, Alice Chestre, who died in 1485, who sought both her own benefit and that of her spouse, Henry, who had predeceased her in 1470.³⁰ Neither of their wills suggests conspicuous wealth or noteworthy piety; the benefaction list, however, reveals just how generous Alice was, presumably with her dead husband's estate, in the years succeeding his death but preceding her own. One can only guess how many others, now all too easily dismissed because their wills are unremarkable, were in fact similarly generous. The All Saints' Church Book records her benefactions at length; here I mention only those entries accompanied by description of motive. It is recorded that Alice, 'to the worship of almighty God and his church and to have both their souls [i.e. her own soul and Henry's] prayed for specially among all good doers, has at her own cost had carved a new front to the altar in the south aisle of the church, called the rood altar, with five principal images, St Anne, St Mary Magdalen, St Giles, St Erasmus and St Anthony'.³¹ In addition to stimulating parishioners' special prayers, it would also appear to have been Alice's intention to invoke the intercession of powerful mediators.³² In addition she commissioned a hearse cloth:

Also the said Alice, considering that there was no hearse cloth in the church of any reputation in value, saving only a hearse cloth that Thomas Halleway ordained for his own anniversary, for the love and honour she had unto almighty God and to all Christian souls, and for the ease and succour of all this parish unto whom she owed her good will and love in her day as it

³⁰ I refer to the Chestres in more detail in my 'By Quick and by Dead': Wills and Pious Provision in Late Medieval Bristol', *English Historical Review* 102 (1987), pp. 841ff. Henry Chestre's will is PCC, 1 Wattys fol. 4v; Alice Chestre's is PCC, 14 Logge, fols. 103v-4.

³¹ ASCB, p. 16.

³² The choice of Sts Anne and Mary Magdalene needs no comment; the others, Sts Giles, Erasmus and Anthony, were all included in the collective cult (particularly popular in the Rhineland) known as the Fourteen Holy Helpers, see D. H. Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1978).

appears in this church as it is afore expressed and rehearsed, she has given an hearse cloth of black worsted with letters of gold of H & C and A & C and a scripture in gold *Orate pro animabus Henricus Chestre et Alicie uxoris eius*.³³

The exhortation is blatant, her motive plain. But she is said to have done this, in part at least, 'for the ease and succour of all this parish unto who she owed her good will and love in her day'. Cynicism is easy, but she probably was devoted to the parish; her provision, while to her and her late husband's specific benefit, was no doubt also prompted by genuine good will. The motives and emotions which found expression in such generosity were complex, and one might easily reinforce and temper the other.

The All Saints' Church Book refers to Alice's death as follows: 'On the day of O Sapientia, that is to say the 16th day of December in the year of Our Lord God 1485,³⁴ the soul of this blessed woman departed out of this world, on the which soul almighty God of His infinite grace take mercy, and reward her for her good deeds.'³⁵ It adds: 'We that are now and that are to come are bound to pray for her.' The response, if obligatory, may also have been heartfelt: Alice had done a very great deal for the parish. Any who were similarly wealthy might consider Alice's activities and the fulsome reaction she elicited from surviving parishioners, and conclude that 'altruism' might, in fact, be money well spent. The benefaction lists served *pour encourager les autres*.

Having touched, briefly, on the response orchestrated through the parish, it is worth considering individual initiatives. These, too, might well be expressed through institutional arrangements, the most common being chantries and anniversaries. The chantry was an arrangement providing for the daily celebration of masses, either in perpetuity, in which case a property endowment invariably provided the necessary income, or for a number of years, in which case the service was usually 'found' by a legatee of the individual who was to benefit from the celebration. Chantries, which undoubtedly commemorated the dead, were good works, and their founders 'good doers'. Apart from anything else, each funded a priest who, after he had celebrated mass for the founder, was to help out in the parish, with a specific obligation to assist in and bolster the celebration of the liturgy, at no cost at all to the parish. So in All Saints', for instance, John and Katherine Leynell 'ordained at

³³ ASCB, p. 17.

³⁴ It is worth making the point, to illustrate the way in which liturgical observance had permeated the common conception of time, that it was common form to date by reference to church feasts and saints' days.

³⁵ ASCB, p. 17.

their own proper cost to find a priest to sing in this church for ten years to the worship of almighty God and the augmenting of divine service, every year 9 marks, £59 6s 8d [*sic*].³⁶ The parish, significantly, costed the service from which it benefited but which was, in point of fact, found from the Laynells' estate: the sum was treated as a gift.

The anniversary, as suggested earlier, was a re-enactment of the funeral liturgy, with exequies on the eve and a requiem on the morrow, complete with bell-ringing and the distribution of doles to the poor, intended to stimulate intercession.³⁷ Integral to these proceedings was the presence of the parish hearse, draped with a pall and set at either end with lighted tapers, as if the body of the deceased was once again present. Anniversaries were, as the name implies, usually performed annually, although deceased parishioners might have two or three celebrated on prescribed dates during the year. It should be noted, though, that by the later fifteenth century perpetual anniversaries were almost always part of a benefaction: the annual service was, quite simply, the visible aspect of generous property devise. In All Saints', where sufficient documentation survives to reveal what precisely was going on, parishioners such as the Chestres, the Bakers and the Fylours devised property to produce a steady income, and a proportion of this sufficed for the anniversary. Agnes Fylour, for instance, made provision for an anniversary for her husband and herself at the cost of 10s annually.³⁸ This was found from the revenues from a tenement in the High Street which she devised to All Saints', the rents from which yielded an overall annual income of £3 6s 8d. The parish was obliged to maintain the property but it is nevertheless plain that it, or, more strictly, succeeding generations of Agnes's parishioners, were the real beneficiaries. Obligated to remember Agnes and her husband, the parish provided a fitting commemoration by celebrating the anniversary with full ceremony.³⁹ Although, by the later fifteenth century, property devise to the parish commonly had some such reciprocal obligation attached, earlier arrangements were not quite so ambitious. In 1261, for instance, Alice Hailes devised the Green Lattice to the

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ For more detailed discussion of the anniversary, see my 'A Service for the Dead. The Form and Function of the Anniversary in Late Medieval Bristol', *The Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 105 (1987), pp. 183–211.

³⁸ Agnes Fylour's will is in *The Great Orphan Book*, fols. 186–6v; her anniversary is also mentioned in *ASCB*, pp. 7, 25, where it is said to have cost 12s per annum, but the extra 2s was a payment to the churchwardens.

³⁹ The All Saints' churchwardens' accounts reveal that the anniversary was indeed faithfully kept, coming under the direct responsibility of the parish apparently in 1485–6.

church. This was an inn on the High Street which, by the fifteenth century, yielded some £5 annually, invariably the churchwardens' single most important source of rental income.⁴⁰ It would be misleading to claim that she was lionised by the parish in the fifteenth century and, although she had specified that a light be kept and a mass of the Blessed Virgin be celebrated for her, it is impossible to tell from surviving accounts whether these were observed. Nevertheless she made the devise 'for my soul and the soul of William Hailes, my man, and for the souls of all our ancestors and successors, in order that our souls shall specially be held in memory of the church' and, in fairness to the parish, the benefaction lists in the All Saints' Church Book assign her gift priority, commemorating her generosity and commending her soul.⁴¹ Called a 'special benefactrix', her memory was very much alive in the parish well over 200 years after her death.

In addition to institutional services and endowments, it is important to note that individuals made further benefactions. They frequently bequeathed sums of money, as mentioned earlier with the example, for instance, of Thomas Abyndon. Others gave vestments, vessels and books, shown not only by Alice Chestre but also by another wealthy widow from All Saints' in the late fifteenth century. Not only did Maud Baker give a sumptuous suit of white damask vestments embroidered with flowers of gold and shells of silver enamelled with the Grocers' arms, said in all to be worth £27, she also gave a suit of blue damask vestments 'with five wounds in the cross', and a vestment of cloth of gold. In addition she gave a chalice 'well gilded', worth £6 13s, cruets of silver, a 'goodly censer' of silver, and two latten candlesticks to stand on St Thomas's altar. She also gave a mass book 'in prent work'.⁴² Many also added to the fittings in the church but, confining ourselves for the time being to the bequests made by Alice Chestre and Maud Baker, it is worth pointing out that in addition to commissioning an elaborate rood loft, Alice commissioned a new front to the rood altar, paid for a tabernacle to go over the image of Jesus and, as well as gilding Our Lady's altar, she also set up a tabernacle around this altar. Maud Baker contributed towards gilding the rood loft; she provided hangings for the high altar 'of satin of Bruges with flowers and a crucifix of gold there set out on the same', with two frontals of black velvet with crowned 'M's and 'Jhc's; she gave a 'Table of the Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ to move and excite people unto

⁴⁰ As perusal of the churchwardens' accounts easily verifies.

⁴¹ *ASCB*, pp. 5, 25.

⁴² Maud Baker's benefactions are listed in *ASCB*, pp. 20–1, Chestre's on pp. 15–16.

devotion'; she paid for painting two stories on two pillars in the lower part of the church 'one story over the font of the baptising of Our Lord Jesus Christ' and on the other pillar 'a figure otherwise an image of St Christopher'. These widows were wealthy and notably generous, but many another parishioner made donations, or equipped or strove to embellish the church in order that their deeds should outlast them and to guarantee commemoration, as a glance at the All Saints' Church Book confirms. It is worth reiterating, too, that without the benefaction list in the Church Book – whose existence proves that each achieved his or her ambition – we would all too often know nothing of their actions; their wills, if they survive, are frequently silent on the matter.⁴³ So, to an unquantifiable but appreciable degree, All Saints' derived its fittings, decoration and equipment from its parishioners either near or at their death and to perpetuate their memories. It becomes easier to imagine how All Saints', as with virtually any late medieval parish church, did indeed come to resemble a highly ornate and articulated *aide-mémoire* celebrating the Passion of Christ and the redemption of mankind, and facilitated the elaborate celebration of the liturgy and portrayed stories of Christ, the Holy Family and many of the saints. Much of the wherewithal for this was provided by the commemorative benefaction of parishioners, in just the same way as many of the clergy were funded and a good proportion of the parish income was provided, effectively, as a result of benefaction. The dead 'increased Divine Service'; the living were to manage and maintain and, of course, to pray and intercede.

Before reaching any conclusions, one or two points deserve fuller exploration. It is, for instance, important to stress that the clergy were deeply involved in the practices described, not just as teachers and facilitators, but also as practitioners. Indeed, the All Saints' Church Book has sections devoted solely to clerical benefactors, and it is plain that during the mid- and later-fifteenth century, the period for which the Book is at its most informative, every incumbent gave, some very generously, as did many another priest associated in one way or another with the parish.⁴⁴ Maurice Hardwick, incumbent from 1455 until 1471, may be singled out as the most lavish. The following represents only some of his benefactions: he gave silver to be made into clasps for the parish's best suit of vestments; he helped the parish purchase an organ; he helped to repair the church roof; he commissioned a wooden statue of

⁴³ The implication clearly being that testators had either made provision in life or left it to their executors' discretion.

⁴⁴ ASCB, pp. 7–12, 25–7.

St Ursula 'to excite people to devotion'; he gave altar cloths, one decorated with a crucifix, one with the Coronation of Our Lady, and another pair said to be of St Ursula; he gave a pair of red vestments; he gilded the image of All Hallows' in gold and gilded the crucifix with the sun; he also 'let set out the tabernacle at the high altar at principal feasts unto the more laud and worship of almighty God'.⁴⁵ He seems to have had a particular concern to enrich the parish liturgy. The same intention may be detected in provisions he made in April 1471, at or near to the time of his death. He gave a cloth of red velvet embroidered with flowers of gold, each of which had the text *Hymnus omnibus sanctis* in the foot, and with two letters of gold, M and H, his initials, embroidered prominently on the cloth; he specified that the cloth should hang behind the head of the image of All Hallows' at every principal feast. He gave a frontal of cloth of gold to hang over All Hallows' head at every principal feast; he gave four stained cloths of red and yellow with wreaths and the arms of the Passion in the middle, with the scripture *Dulcis est illo amor meus*, the which cloths were to be hung around the choir at principal feasts; he also gave the vellum necessary to add three quires to the antiphonal used by the vicar, and paid for the necessary chapters, collects and benisons for the year to be added, 'where there was never chapter, collect or benisons before'. In addition to embellishing the parish's liturgy, he also sought commemoration as an integral part of this liturgy: to this end, in a device indistinguishable from Alice Chestre's, he had his initials embroidered on an eye-catching cloth on show at principal feasts.

Clergy and lay are hardly to be distinguished in such matters; but in others, clergy, acting in a manner difficult for the laity to emulate, induced others to generosity and were celebrated for their actions. Hardwick, for instance, 'procured, moved and stirred Agnes Fylour to give the said house in which she dwelt in the High Street on the south side of the Green Lattice', providing the parish with an income and Agnes and her late husband with an anniversary. When Agnes's son, who lived in London, incidentally, attempted to thwart his mother's wishes, Hardwick and the churchwardens resisted him. Finally, it was Maurice Hardwick who, in addition to providing a chest in which to keep the parish muniments, 'where before they lay abroad likely to be embezzled and mischiefed', instigated the procedures to safeguard, preserve and formalise parish memory, initiating the benefaction list itself. 'He laboured to compile and make this book for to be a memorial and a remembrance for ever for the curates and the churchwardens that shall be for the time, that

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11.

every man to put yearly his account for one evidence of the livelode, and for to put in the names of the good doers and the names of the wardens of the church and what good they did in their days that they must yearly be prayed for.' Hardwick was far from being the only clergyman to enrich the liturgy,⁴⁶ but it is to be noted that, more unusually, Hardwick strove to preserve and improve what might be termed the practical and spiritual memory of the parish; apart from anything else, he benefited by weaving memorials to himself into the parish liturgy, but, by moving to provide and compile the Church Book, helped others to do likewise and achieve their aims more effectively.

Hardwick's stated reasons for compiling the All Saints' Church Book force us to consider quite what the churchwardens were doing and why they were persuaded to do it. The Book was 'to be a memorial and remembrance for ever for curates and churchwardens' so that the actions and achievements of each might be recorded 'that they must yearly be prayed for'. Churchwardens, it may be recalled, were the laymen who managed the congregation's responsibilities, maintaining the fabric of the parish church and the equipment for seemly worship. They generally served in pairs for a year or two at a time and, we are told in the surviving All Saints' Ordinances, were 'chosen by the most voice of the parish'.⁴⁷ In practice churchwardens played a vital role managing many aspects of parish life, sustaining and even increasing its effectiveness as a sacramental and intercessory battery for the benefit of all parishioners. Their role was essential, not least in that it was a prerequisite, if the wealthy were to be induced to generosity, that those who were preparing for death should feel confident that whatever they bequeathed or devised would be kept safely and used as intended. While much was done in consultation with the incumbent, the role of the churchwardens was both onerous and of critical importance. Considering what was involved, it is only right that the faithful discharge of the task should have been considered a good work and, as such, worthy of commemoration, so much so that much of the All Saints' Church Book is in fact a celebration of churchwardens' achievements. Not only does the volume contain a list of summaries describing what each pair who served in the early and mid-fifteenth century had achieved, providing a 'memorial and remembrance' thereby, but the accounts contained in the Book (which were a very much tidied version of whatever might originally have been submitted for audit) were

⁴⁶ William Warens, one of the Halleways' chantry priests, was perhaps the most notable, giving books of pricksong and a breviary to the parish, *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3. Quite what proportion of the parish was permitted a 'voice' is debatable.

probably intended to be a detailed testimony reminding posterity of quite how much each pair of wardens had done.⁴⁸ This was to stimulate commemoration, certainly; it was, in all probability, also intended to urge others to volunteer for the task to ensure that they, too, would be remembered as benefactors whose contribution was no less important than those able to give vessels, vestments and fittings.⁴⁹ It must be emphasised, then, that the urge for commemoration and desire for intercession served not only to enrich the parish but also to procure faithful management, safeguarding benefaction and ensuring, presumably with the help of the clergy, who were themselves deeply involved in the indissoluble nexus of altruism and self-interest, that the liturgy was fully and properly celebrated. Once in operation, the system was clearly self-generating and self-serving: the prerequisites which might prompt generosity were themselves furthered by the promise of effective commemoration. The durability over long periods of the practices outlined, with celebrations being maintained, endowments kept and bequests preserved, surely suggests that the system *was* both effectively regulated and efficiently discharged. Late medieval parishioners, to judge from unswerving practice, might confidently depend upon their wardens for competence and on the clergy and parish as a whole for effective and seemly commemoration.

As we approach some conclusions it is, first, to be borne in mind that, even for a parish like All Saints', Bristol, where the survival rate of material has been unusually good, a great deal has been lost, and our impressions of late medieval practice are inevitably impoverished. Even if the glass is dark, we may still conclude that in the face of death and as preparation for the eschatological processes as taught and conceived before the Reformation, parishioners behaved in a way which, if remarkable, was nevertheless congruent with and determined by other practices prominent in parish life. Existing in, and having doubtless been shaped by, a potent and highly structured devotional environment, which pervaded both the sacred and the secular, which commemorated death as a means of procuring life, and which celebrated the lives and deaths of many larger-than-life precursors, men and women were persuaded to act in ways which emulated the liturgy and improved it. They may have been the 'less special dead', but they still contrived to be remembered. They

⁴⁸ An argument developed at more length in the introduction to *ASCB*, pp. xxxviii–xli.

⁴⁹ Regardless of the wealth of an individual, generosity in terms of immovable or movable property may have been difficult were there heirs who had claim to the estate; labour as churchwarden was, to that extent, a more flexible but equally vital 'currency' which deserved commemoration no less than the donation of goods.

provided extra revenues and equipment. They paid for ever more elaborate fittings in the church, glorifying the mysteries of faith and celebrating 'the very special dead' in ever more fulsome ways. They supported supernumerary clergy who further added to the liturgy, acting when necessary as teachers and extra ministers in the parish, providing more sumptuous celebration by serving as extra celebrants, deacons and subdeacons, and also facilitating sophisticated musical and choral performance when appropriate. The laity wove themselves into the liturgy. Their images, too, might appear in the church, in glass, in brasses, and as effigies and etchings on tombs. Their names, or initials, were emblazoned in hangings, embroidered on cloths, embossed or engraved on vessels, paving slabs or stones, or carved in wood. As the saints had special days and celebrations, so too might the parish dead. In addition to their funerals, they had anniversaries, and had their names inscribed in books or on 'tables' and ensured that these were regularly read out. Corporately, in addition to All Souls' Day, they had the General Mind. Cumulatively, it may (or may not) have been a faint imitation but, reflecting the parish liturgy, the dead contrived to perpetuate their presence and demanded and elicited a response as they further glorified God and His saints. In sum, the giving that this involved, and the services and ceremonies that were implicit, changed parish regimes very profoundly, and particularly stimulated the efforts of the living, be they clergy, churchwardens or simply the parishioners obliged to pray.⁵⁰ But it is to be emphasised that benefactors who sought commemoration were not somehow swimming against the stream and acting in an eccentric fashion; their activity added to the stream as they sought immersion in it. In regimes which were in any case repositories of sacred memory, it made perfect sense that individuals should seek to capitalise on this by dovetailing themselves into the repertory. Telescoping time and obfuscating the division between life and death, those who deserved memory as exempla and those who sought commemoration as suppliants made an indelible mark both on contemporaries' attitudes to life and death, and on parish regimes as centres of instruction and of intercession which might offer a semblance of influence over events and eventualities. In sweeping away the saints, the Reformers had also to sweep away the more humble dead, subverting – whether successfully or not – the human urge to be remembered: parish

⁵⁰ An argument developed at more length in my 'Shaping the Parish: St Mary at Hill, London, in the Fifteenth Century, in J. Blair and B. Golding (eds.), *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 246–86.

regimes were emasculated as a result. Death lost its positive role: it was no longer a key to be turned, or a drama to be played and replayed in the midst of a growing array of props and paraphernalia.