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Title of extract: **The Controversial Archbishop**

Name of Author: **Duggan, A.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Thomas Becket. Duggan, A.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Arnold**

Pages scanned: **33 - 60**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Thomas Becket AHHI7013**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning:

EL Harris

Date authorised: 13.08.12

Moodle/Powerpoint

11

The image constructed and deconstructed, 1171–1900

More was written about Becket by his contemporaries and near contemporaries than about any other medieval character. Why so much? And what are we to make of it? The answer to the first question is surely to be found in the extraordinary circumstances of Becket's career and death, and in his good fortune to be surrounded by a gifted household at a time when historical writing in England had reached an apogee not reached again in the middle ages. For the circumstances, his former career as King Henry's chancellor and his mode of office – the splendid court, the demonstrative embassies, the chivalric participation in military campaigns, all of which are stumbling blocks to seeing him as a potential saint – made him an international figure before his royally organized election as archbishop of Canterbury. Relatively humble as his origins were, particularly in the context of a nobility-dominated society, he was personally known to Pope Alexander III and the Curia, as well as to King Louis of France and a scattering of influential ecclesiastics across Europe. His exile accentuated his renown – especially as it paralleled Alexander's exile from Italy – and made him an even more international figure. The controversy with Henry II had never been an issue merely of domestic politics in any case; and its conduct, by letter, ambassador and papal legate was pursued in the most public way possible. All this heightened the drama of his murder in Canterbury Cathedral. His murder, therefore, when it came, was not just another regrettable murder of a bishop unknown outside his own region,¹ it was the brutal slaying of a well-known – and, to many,

heroic – figure in a place not only sacred but extremely public, and in the presence of numerous unimpeachable witnesses.

Medieval men and women were not very different from their modern counterparts in their appetite for the gory details of a violent death. Most of those who were alive when it happened can remember exactly what they were doing when they heard the news of president John F. Kennedy's assassination, and their initial disbelief that such an event could have happened. The same, though to a lesser extent, is true of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Television newscasts beamed the dreadful images around the world in the blinking of an eye, and 'the world' was for a moment united in its shock. It was much the same in the case of Thomas Becket's murder. Twelfth-century Europe lacked modern electronic media, but it shared a common religious culture and remarkably effective networks of communication linking the various regions. Not only the Latin Church itself, with its international religious orders and a lively traffic between the papal Curia and the most distant regions, but commercial networks embracing Scandinavia, Germany and the Baltic, France, Spain, Italy and the Mediterranean bound the Latin West together. Although geographically on the periphery of Europe, England had been part of its political, religious and commercial history since its inclusion in the Roman Empire in the first century AD. At the time of Becket's death, moreover, England's king was the Angevin Henry II, whose territories stretched 'from the northern ocean to the Pyrenees', and included the whole of the western seaboard of France. Once the news got out of England, by whatever route, it spread rapidly.

Moreover, there was also a spectrum of participants and observers able to write what they knew, a monastic community, Christ Church Canterbury, ready (after some very short initial hesitation) to embrace the cause of the murdered archbishop, and, after his canonization in February 1173, a Latin Church eager to receive the liturgical materials necessary for the celebration of his feast throughout Europe. Their readiness to embrace the new saint is a factor in the establishment of his reputation.

The murder was not a piece of ordinary violence. It was not an everyday occurrence for an archbishop of Canterbury to be cut down in his own cathedral, and the surprise and shock the event created were genuine enough. While the king sought to reduce the diplomatic fallout, Becket's household, associates and admirers made the best of the opportunity to exploit his death and call for vengeance and vindication. The circumstances of his murder provided enough

material to build a picture of martyrdom: in the north transept of Canterbury Cathedral, on the fifth day of Christmas (29 December), as the monks were beginning the service of vespers in the cathedral. His associates, in any case, were already convinced of the rightness of his cause, the falsity of the king and the disloyalty of the opposing bishops – convictions reinforced by the place and manner of his death. Men and women of the time were familiar with the passions of the early martyrs, whose stories could be reduced to a recurrent pattern of devotion to God, pressure to abandon faith, resolute resistance to the point of death and glorification. For the early Christian martyrs, the enemy was the Roman State. In the case of Becket, it was an expansionist secular power, manipulated by ambition and the Devil. Underlying both images was belief in God's providence, which ensured that the man (or woman) of faith would prevail, even through death. After all, Christ's own sacrifice provided the primary image of martyrdom. It did not take much manipulation of Becket's story to see the confrontation with Henry II and the murder in the cathedral as the working out of a divine plan.²

The image constructed

Among the first written formulations of the iconic image was the letter drafted by the Old Testament scholar, Herbert of Bosham, for Archbishop William of Sens.³ It condemned the machinations of 'that most infamous man, not so much king of the English as enemy of the angels',⁴ whose actions imitated those of Ahab and Herod, both kings, murderers respectively of Naboth, the Holy Innocents and John the Baptist; it named the four murderers, denounced the actions of the archbishop of York and the bishops of London and Salisbury, 'not bishops, but apostates, who murdered their brother Joseph.' Thomas is Christ's unique champion, God's anointed, resisting the demands of the knights for absolution of the bishops and, through God's dispensation, 'freely offering himself as a peace offering to God.' A short letter from Louis VII amplified the message. 'Evil has risen up in God's sanctuary, driven its sword into Christ's ward, and shamefully snuffed out the lantern of the church of Canterbury.' Thomas is 'the martyr of Canterbury', whose 'blood cries out ... for vengeance, not for itself but for the whole Church', at whose tomb 'God's grace is revealed through miracles.' Count Theobald of Blois emphasized Henry II's bad faith and insisted that Henry had given Thomas full power to punish the bishops who had participated in the young king's coronation. Thomas is a fearless

man of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, an innocent lamb, slaughtered by 'creatures of the court', who put themselves forward as agents of the English king, whose blood cries to Rome for vengeance.⁵

These are the outraged reactions of associates and protectors: two call him martyr and all emphasize the sacrilegious aspects of the murder, and stress, variously, the complicity of the three bishops, the king's broken faith and the illegality of the coronation of the younger Henry (14 June 1170) as immediate circumstances. These were the images carried to the papal court by two of Becket's clerks; from a third, John of Salisbury, came a more extended circular letter, addressed to recipients in France, which lays out the fully developed theme. Thomas is 'the glorious martyr', a paragon of clerical virtue: primate of Britain, legate of the apostolic see, an incorruptible judge who accepted no bribes and made no exception of persons, a defender of ecclesiastical liberty, a hammer of the wicked, and a comforter of the poor and grief stricken. Already the circumstantial reality is passing into the universal image of the man 'who struggled unto death to defend God's law and overthrow the abuses of ancient tyrants'; and John, who was with the archbishop almost until the moment the assailants struck, emphasizes the martyr's willing acceptance of his fate:

Gladly do I accept death, as long as the Church receives peace and freedom through the shedding of my blood.
... I commend myself and the Church's cause to God and St Mary, to the holy patrons of this church, and to St Denis.

He uses all the resources of his rhetorical repertoire to spell out the full horror of the sacrilege: in the metropolitan church, in the sacred Christmas season, the butchers not only 'profaned the church with the blood and murder of a priest [and] cut off the crown of his head, which had been dedicated to God with the unction of sacred chrism', but 'scraped out the brain of the already dead man with their murderous swords and scattered it with blood and bones all over the paved floor.' Throughout the whole event, the martyr stood unbroken in spirit, uttering neither word nor sigh, and making no effort at defence. Fearing further sacrilege, the 'holy men' took his body to the crypt and placed it in a marble coffin before the altar of St John the Baptist and St Augustine, Apostle of the English, where

to the glory of Almighty God occurred many great miracles so that the crowds of people who flooded in should see in others and experience themselves the power

and mercy of Him who is marvellous and glorious in his saints. ...

Both in the place of his passion and before the high altar, where he spent the night before burial, and at the place of burial, the paralyzed are cured, the blind see, the deaf hear, the mute speak, the crippled walk, the fevered are relieved, the possessed are freed from the devil, and the sick are cured from diverse illnesses.

The letter ends with the question of whether it is right to honour Thomas as a martyr without consulting the pope – who would already have been consulted if the English ports had not been shut. For himself, John declares, 'it is better to stand by the will of God and revere as a martyr the man whom He has already honoured as a martyr.'

What John of Salisbury set out, probably after Easter 1171, was a description of Becket's martyrdom, which conformed in essentials to the pattern familiar from early Christian martyrologies, and the image was confirmed by a list of miracle types familiar to those who read the gospels: the lame walked, the dumb spoke, the blind were given sight. This letter was followed up with a short *Life* and *Passion*, written perhaps in 1171–72, which sets a slightly more detailed account in the context of salvation history. 'The Ancient Enemy is continually assaulting Holy Church', begins John, but

God's son, who redeemed it with his own blood, defended and promoted her to true freedom by the blood of his members – the glorious chorus of Apostles and the purple-clad army of the martyrs ... by whose blood the living stones were bound together to build Christ's body...

Pre-ordained by God's providence, Thomas put off the old life of chancellor as soon as he was consecrated, adopted a hair shirt and monastic habit, preached, gave what time he could to prayer and reading, said mass with great devotion, avoided all bribes, fed the poor and venerated the religious. 'Seeing that so great a man would greatly benefit God's Church, the Ancient Enemy ... chose many powerful creators of discord through whom he scattered the seeds of hatred in the hearts of the king and court.' Thomas thus becomes the victim of a devilish conspiracy; then, misled by bishops fearful for themselves, he eventually conceded at Clarendon and gave a verbal assent to the king's request, for which he did penance until absolved by

the pope. At Northampton, he submitted first to an unjust sentence, but then appealed to the pope when charges relating to the Chancery were laid against him, against all law and right. At Pontigny, he prayed for the king and kingdom until the king caused him to be expelled by the Cistercian abbots, although he received a vision of his future glory before he left the monastery, after which he was received by 'the most Christian king of France'. Through the action of the venerable Archbishop William of Sens, Henry was threatened with anathema and the kingdom with interdict; meanwhile Roger of York presumed to crown the king's son in another's province, contrary to the right and dignity of the church of Canterbury. Compelled by canonical severity, the king agreed to restore the peace of the English church, and Thomas returned to be received like an angel of God. But when Thomas published the sentences of the pope, suspending Archbishop Roger of York and the bishops who had supported him, and re-imposing excommunication on London and Salisbury, the king was enraged. The *Life* concludes much as the letter.

What John produced was not the biography of an archbishop but the unabashed hagiography of a saint. And the same image, extended and interwoven with various accounts of Becket's life, was amplified by a stream of biographers. For Edward Grim, for example, who had stood by him in the cathedral and who wrote in 1172–73, Thomas was a providentially chosen instrument of divine power: 'The eminent martyr St Thomas comes forth into the world, a new knight of Christ, miracle of holiness, pattern of justice, incentive to patience, model of virtue, and invincible defender of truth'. Listeners and readers are invited 'to study his life, contemplate his character, admire the man.' Thomas was chosen before the making of the world; his parents Gilbert and Matilda were like the biblical Zachariah and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist. Becket, therefore, is 'St Thomas ... the holy man ... the holy archbishop ... the saint', and finally 'the holy martyr'. The adjective or noun *Sanctus* (holy/saint), occurs more frequently in Grim's *Vita* than in any other contemporary *Life* (about 73 times), supplemented by other phrases, such as 'the noble martyr', 'the man of God' and 'The Lord's champion'.

Ultimately, though, it was the murder that made the martyr; and from the murder the enduring image emerged of resistance to force, courageous endurance in the face of violence, and steadfast faith, all validated by the cures attributed to his intercession after death. As Alexander said in the bull sent to the English clergy and people in March 1173,

England is perfumed by the fragrance and virtue of the manifestations (*signa*) which Almighty God is working through the merits of the holy and venerable Thomas, formerly archbishop of Canterbury; and the whole Christian religion everywhere rejoices that He who is marvellous and glorious in the saints has made famous after his death his saint whose laudable life shone with the great renown of merits and was finally crowned by the martyrdom of a glorious struggle. (*MTB*, vii, no. 785)

Having been convinced by Cardinals Albert and Theodwin of the veracity of the many miracles being performed through Becket's merits, the pope had no hesitation in solemnly canonizing the saint, and ordering the annual celebration of the 'birthday' of the glorious martyr, who 'in life suffered exile for Christ and by the steadfastness of his courage endured in death the martyrdom of his passion.' Alexander's letter repeated verbatim the phrase, 'marvellous and glorious in [his] saints', used by John of Salisbury both in his circular letter and in his *Passion*, suggesting that copies of one or both had been transmitted to the Curia by early 1173.

If Alexander's canonization, announced in a stream of letters to the episcopate of the Latin Church, consolidated the picture of Thomas, martyred for defence of the Church, the liturgy constructed for his first feast day (29 December 1173) transformed the image into an object of cult. Composed by the monk Benedict (later abbot of Peterborough), who had been given the task of recording the miracles worked at the tomb, it was an amazing feat of compression and powerful image-making. Taking John of Salisbury's *Life* as its basis, Benedict constructed a liturgical office in which the sequence of chants echoed the readings to powerful effect. The following is a translation of Lections IV–VI, as copied into a manuscript in the imperial monastery of Stavelot in the last quarter of the twelfth century. Lections I–III are a summary of Becket's resistance to the unjust royal decrees, but are wholly unspecific as to their content; Lection IV takes up the story in 1166.

IV. Learning of his steadfast constancy, the king, having sent threatening letters to the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order by certain abbots, procured his removal from Pontigny. For St Thomas, fearing that the holy men might suffer loss on his account, freely withdrew. But before he left the monastery, he was comforted by a divine revelation: it was revealed to him from on high that

he would return to his church with honour and pass to God by the palm of martyrdom. When he had been removed from Pontigny, Louis, the king of France, received him with the greatest honour, and treated him kindly until peace was restored. Often indeed, though fruitlessly, was he pressed not to accord any humane treatment to the traitor to the king of England. The mad fury and to pious ears the horrid cruelty went further. For although the Catholic Church prays for heretics and schismatics and the faithless Jews, it was forbidden for anyone to help him with the support of prayers.

V. On the fifth day of the Lord's Nativity there came to Canterbury four men of the court, men certainly distinguished by birth, but notorious for their misdeeds. Having entered, they attacked the bishop with insulting words; they assailed him with violent abuse, and finally directed serious threats against him. The man of God responded moderately to each point, as reason required, adding that many outrages had been inflicted on himself and on God's Church since the re-establishment of peace. There being no one to correct errors, he neither wished nor could he do anything other than exercise the duty of pastoral care in the future. The foolish hearted men were therefore thrown into confusion, and they immediately went out speaking the utmost wickedness. When they had left, the pontiff went into the Church to render the evening praise to Christ. The devil's henchmen, in mail, followed by a crowd of armed men, pursued him from behind with drawn swords. Entry to the church having been closed off by the monks, God's priest, soon to be Christ's sacrificial victim, unlocked the door to his enemies as he reached it, saying, 'The church must not be locked up like a fortress.' As the knights and others burst in after him, with furious voices some shouted, 'Where is the traitor?', others, 'Where is the archbishop?'; Christ's fearless confessor went forward to meet them. To those threatening him with death, he said, 'I shall willingly accept death in defence of God's Church, but in the name of God I command you not to injure any of my followers', imitating Christ who said during his passion, 'If you seek me, allow the others to depart.'

What brought Ludwig and Ida to Canterbury in the first place cannot be established, but news of Becket's murder and the miraculous events recorded at his tomb would have travelled fast along the well-established trade routes between London and the Rhineland. The couple may, in fact, have come to pray for children, like the later Arnold 'of Grevingge' (= Groningge), a merchant from Cologne, and his wife, Oda (c. 1180). Their story was not recorded at Canterbury; but one of their grandsons, Arnold Fitz Thedmar, who became alderman of the German counter in London in 1251 and alderman of Billingsgate in 1274, told the story of his grandparents' pilgrimage and the subsequent establishment of his own parents in London. After their Canterbury pilgrimage, Arnold and Oda were blessed with two children. Their son, appropriately called Thomas, died on the fourth crusade in 1203–4; their daughter, Juliana, married Thedmar of Bremen, who established his business in London, where the family prospered, and where their son Arnold proudly recorded his own miraculous origins.¹²

Men and women thronged to Becket's tomb in the hope of spiritual refreshment and physical or psychological healing. Their demand for tangible tokens of their pilgrimage created a veritable industry for the manufacture of *ampulae*, badges, and small figurines, made usually of tin, which the pilgrim could pin to his hat, suspend round his neck, or attach to his staff or knapsack. Especially prized in the early days (late twelfth and thirteenth centuries) were small metal flasks resembling scent bottles (*ampulae*), some bearing the legend, 'Thomas is the best healer of the virtuous sick'. Fashioned in various shapes and sizes, they contained Canterbury water, a descendant of the blood relics scraped up from the floor on the night of Becket's murder.¹³ These seem to have been superseded, from the early fourteenth century, by a host of pilgrim badges, whose diversity suggests a flourishing trade. At least ten different images were produced: the mitred head (denoting 'St Thomas's crown', the portion of Becket's skull hacked off during the murder and preserved in a separate reliquary); the shrine itself, the martyrdom, William Brito's sword (whose point had broken off with the force of the blow); gloves (depicting Becket's episcopal gloves, kept as a relic at Canterbury); Canterbury bells and stars, known as 'Thomas's bells/stars'; Thomas in a boat or on horseback (depicting his return to Canterbury – there was a special feast-day commemorating his *Regressio* (Return) on 2 December); and the letter T (for Thomas). The rich retrievals from excavations in the city of London alone suggest that many thousands of these devotional souvenirs

were sold every year.¹⁴ They functioned as personal mementoes, sacred objects, and even as passports. Pilgrims were a recognized category of privileged persons, allowed free and secure passage in the regions through which they passed, and the wearing of a badge was a sign of their *bona fides*.

Virtually all the surviving badges or *ampulae* are mass-produced objects, late in date and of little intrinsic value, but they represent the popular end of a market that embraced the highest in medieval society. The earliest *ampula*, in fact, was the pendant made for Queen Margaret of Sicily and presented to her, in all probability, on the occasion of the marriage of her son, King William II, to Henry II's daughter, Joanna, in 1177. Fashioned in gold, the tiny reliquary is inscribed with a list of the relics enclosed within: fragments of blood, bone and clothing;¹⁵ three hundred years later (c. 1480), King Louis XI of France informed the Canterbury monks that he would appreciate the present of a badge, which he would wear on his hat!¹⁶

Margaret and Louis XI were unable to visit the shrine in their own persons, but many notables did. Within seven years of Becket's death (1177), Count Philip of Flanders had made the first of three visits to the tomb;¹⁷ within ten years (1179), King Louis VII of France made a spectacular pilgrimage to pray for the life of his only son and heir, Philip II,¹⁸ and among his gifts to the shrine and the monastic community were a magnificent ruby, the *régle* of France, and an annual shipment of French wine.¹⁹ With the single exception of 1188, when there was an interdict on the cathedral, Henry II made a detour to pay his respects to the martyr every time he returned to England from the continent after 1174; and Richard I went to pray at the shrine in 1190, before departing for the Holy Land and the third crusade; while another crusader, Hubert Walter, bishop of Salisbury, later archbishop of Canterbury (1191–1205), justiciar and chancellor, led 500 soldiers under the banner of St Thomas before the walls of Acre in 1191.²⁰ Through all that time, Becket's body remained in the crypt, where it had first been placed, although a splendid new chapel was constructed to receive it between 1174 and 1186.²¹ Various political and ecclesiastical problems prevented the solemn translation of the relics until 1220, however; but then, the archbishop of Sens and an unnamed Hungarian archbishop joined Archbishop Stephen Langton, the young Henry III and magnates of Church and State to celebrate the translation of Becket's remains to the Trinity chapel of Canterbury Cathedral, following which a second Becket feast was added to the Church's calendar.²²

Becket's cult was not simply a Canterbury phenomenon. By the time of his translation, St Thomas the Martyr was not only England's leading saint, but he had also become the most popular after St Olaf in Norway and Iceland, and he was venerated with varying degrees of solemnity throughout the Latin Church. Monasteries, priories and collegiate churches were founded in his honour in England, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Scotland and the Norman kingdom of Sicily; churches and altars were dedicated to him;²³ liturgical music was composed in his honour;²⁴ and a reliquary enshrining some of his brains and blood was placed in the chapel at the heart of the templar fortress of Tomar, in Portugal (c. 1176).²⁵ His name appeared more than that of any other English saint in calendars and liturgical books;²⁶ his relics were enshrined in Limoges caskets;²⁷ his image was emblazoned in stained glass,²⁸ carved in statues and capitals, illustrated in friezes, manuscripts, mosaics and wall paintings;²⁹ confraternities were formed under his patronage; and hospitals were founded in his name.³⁰

But for Peter the Chanter, who taught generations of clerical students at Paris, including Stephen Langton and Pope Innocent III, as well as for Absalon of Saint-Victor,³¹ he was principally a moral and ethical exemplar, the image of a good pastor. He did not build up wealth for himself when he was chancellor or archbishop; he did not aggrandize his family or his *familia*; he did not allow his staff to charge for their legal and scribal services. This aspect of his brief career as archbishop appealed especially to the reformist theologians at Paris in the two or three decades following his death. There, together with Lukács of Esztergom, he became an exemplar of clerical probity in the teaching of Peter the Chanter, Robert of Courson and Stephen Langton, one of his successors as archbishop of Canterbury.³² Langton's own dispute with King John of England was seen by him and by Pope Innocent III as a continuation of that of St Thomas.³³ The twin images, of martyr, symbolizing the Church in struggle, and good pastor, symbolizing the ideals of that Church, echoed down the ages in the sermons preached annually on his feast day.³⁴

The image deconstructed and rebuilt

If, during the middle ages, the image of Becket was sanitized and simplified to become the miracle-working saint and the pattern of exemplary priesthood, the Henrician Reformation in England, with its formal rejection first of papal authority, then of independent

priesthood, then of monasticism, then of the cult of saints, progressively stripped away many of the elements that had comprised the construction of the exemplary Becket. His appeal to Pope Alexander III became treason, his defence of clerical immunity was unlawful protection of criminals, his monastic affiliations confirmed his attachment to foreign and hostile powers, and his status as martyr and saint were at the same time spurious and manifestations of his un-Englishness.

The attack was mounted by the royal administration itself, as part of its policy of isolating the English Church from the power structures of Catholic Europe. Henry VIII's strategy had been masterly: first proclaim his own headship of the English Church, then compel the bishops to acknowledge it (1531–32), thus cutting off their only defence against a crown that could now through Parliament not only stigmatize but criminalize contacts and actions that had been lawful for more than 900 years. The wholesale destruction of monasticism (1535–39), although dressed up as 'reform', constituted a significant stage in the transfer of power and resources to the crown, as well as the elimination of a potential source of opposition; while the destruction of saints' shrines was the removal of one of the foci of popular religious belief and practice. Eamon Duffy has shown how the whole religious landscape, both intellectual and physical, was changed in a couple of generations.³⁵ No English shrine was more potent in its political and ecclesiological symbolism than that of Thomas Becket. Three years before its destruction, Thomas More's last letter, written on the eve of his own execution for treason, expressed the power of Becket's name. Addressing his daughter, Margaret Roper, he said,

I cumber you much, good Margaret, much, but I would be sorry if it [his own execution] should be any longer than tomorrow (6 July, 1535), for it is St Thomas' Even and the Utas [octave] of St Peter, and therefore tomorrow long I to go to God – it were a day very meet and convenient for me.³⁶

Two decrees in particular established the new environment in 1533–34. The first, the Act of Supremacy (24 Henry VIII, c. 1), proclaimed Henry to be 'the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England, called *Anglicana Ecclesia*'; the second, the Act in Restraint of Appeals, (c. 12), proclaimed the imperial character and overall supremacy of the English crown:

Wheras divers sundry and authentick Histories and Chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that

this realm of England is an Empire ... governed by one supreme Head and King, having Dignity and Royal Estate of the Imperial Crown of the same: Unto whom a Body politick ... divided in terms and by names of Spirituality and Temporality, been bounden and owen to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience: He being also institute and furnished, by the goodness and sufferance of Almighty God, with plenary whole and entire Power, Pre-eminence, Authority, Prerogative, and Jurisdiction, to render and yield Justice and final determination to all manner of folk, residants or subjects within this his Realm, in all Causes, Matters, Debates and Contentions ... without restraint or provocation to any foreign Princes or Potentates of the World....

Simultaneously, oaths denying papal authority were imposed throughout the country, refusal of which was accounted high treason, punishable by death. The practical dualism of the middle ages was swept away. Thenceforth was the English Church absorbed into the political ordering of the state, the king its supreme head, and all papal authority permanently abolished from England. Appeals would go to an ecclesiastical commission appointed by the crown; papal taxes would be paid to the crown; all clerical officers would be obliged to take the Oath of Supremacy, affirming their acceptance of the new order. There could be no place for St Thomas of Canterbury in this new world; and a royal proclamation, issued from Westminster in November 1538,³⁷ re-drew Becket's image in brutal and uncompromising fashion. Instead of the steadfast defender of the Church, Becket was 'really a rebel who fled to France and to the bishop of Rome to procure the abrogation of wholesome laws' who 'shall no longer be named a saint.' It was not enough, however, merely to un-canonize him, as it were; the decree went on to declare that 'his pictures throughout the realm are to be plucked down and his festivals shall no longer be kept, and the services in his name shall be razed out of all books.'

At this early stage in what became the Reformation, there had been no change in the liturgy or theology of the English Church. The language of both remained Latin; the calendars still glowed with the 'red-letter days' of numerous medieval saints; mass was still said or sung in accordance with the ancient rubrics. Becket became the first casualty of what was essentially a political campaign. Here was an archbishop of Canterbury who had withstood an English king,

appealed to foreign powers (France and the papacy) and had his cause canonized. It was necessary, therefore, not to attack the cult of saints as such – that would come later – but to destroy the reputation of this particular one, so that he could not be held up as a model for the English bishops, clergy and people.

Henry's decree attacked Becket's reputation at three crucial points: the cause, the character and the canonization of both. Now proclaimed not only an un-saint but also a pseudo-saint by royal decree, Becket's name was deleted from the prayer books, his feasts removed from the calendars and his shrine broken up for the benefit of the crown. What had once been one of the particular glories of the tomb, the ruby given by Louis VII in 1179, was made into a thumb ring for Henry VIII. A more complete reversal of image could scarcely be imagined. England's most widely celebrated saint was consigned to the rubbish bin, together with all that he had come to represent in popular religion, ecclesiology and law. However much the reformed *ecclesia Anglicana* preserved of its medieval heritage, it did not include the cult of St Thomas of Canterbury, and every mark of his liturgical existence was scrupulously removed, in a manner reminiscent of the way in which men who usurped the office of Pharaoh in Ancient Egypt, systematically deleted the cartouches of their dead predecessors from public monuments, in order to confirm their own legitimacy. Inconvenient history was literally expunged from the record.

This political rewriting of historical tradition set the pattern for much of the subsequent writing on Becket in Protestant circles. No longer the hero of an English Church in union with Rome, Becket became a particularly expressive example of all that had been rejected in the Henrician and post-Henrician Reformation. Even more: in the feverish atmosphere of the time, Becket symbolized treasonable subservience to the papacy, 'the Babilonical bawdy Romysche church and religion ... vile painted lecherous whore, Rose of Rome' (these are the colourful words of Bishop Stephen Gardiner of Winchester (1531-51, 1553-55) in his *De vera obediencia* (Latin, 1536; English translation, 1553). John Foxe's (1517-87) *Acts and Monuments* (Latin, 1554; English translation, 1563), generally known as the 'Book of Martyrs', continued the theme: 'This Becket ... did not (as some affirm) dye a Martyr, but a stubborn man against his King; who had preferred him from an Archdeacon, to Lord Chancellor of England, and after to be Archbishop of Canterbury.' 'If the cause make a martyr (as is said), I see not why we should esteem Thomas Becket to die a Martyr, more than any other whom

the Princes Sword doth here temporally punish for their temporal deserts. To die for the Church I grant is a glorious matter', but since the Church 'is a Spiritual and not a Temporal Church', to 'contend with Princes for ... temporal Possessions, Liberties, Exemptions, Privileges, Dignities, Patrimonies, and Superiorities ... is no matter (to my mind) material to make a Martyr, but rather a Rebellion against them to whom we owe subjection.'³⁸

Whatever personal merits he had were vitiated by his allegiance to Rome ('So superstitious he was to the Obedience of the Pope, that he forgot his Obedience to his natural and most beneficial King') and by a suspicion of hypocrisy. It was Foxe who first constructed the image of Becket the character actor, which surfaces from time to time in modern historiography (Lord Lyttelton, Lady Stenton, Zachary Brooke, Frank Barlow) and was given dramatic form in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. Recommended by Theobald 'to bridle the young King, that he should not be fierce against the Clergy ... he left playing the Arch-deacon, and began to play the Chancellor ... He played also the good Souldier under the King in *Gascoigne*'.³⁹ Moreover, his claims to sanctity rested upon forgery and falsehood. Foxe expressed the opinion that was to predominate in Protestant circles for a long time: 'If thrue, [the miracles are] not wrought by God, but by the contrary Spirit; or else feigned and forged of idle Monks, and religious bellies, for the exaltation of their Churches, and profit of their pouches.' To record them would be to write 'a Legend of lies'. The one example which particularly attracted his fierce denunciation was the cure of Ailward of Weston:⁴⁰

This one Miracle (gentle Reader) so shameless and impudent, I thought here to express, that by this one though mightst judge of all the residue of his Miracles ... and the filthy wickedness of all these lying Monks and Cloisterers, which count it a light sport to deceive the simple souls of Christs Church with trifling lies and dreaming fables.⁴¹

Equally, the liturgical cult of 'Saint' Thomas was an affront to true religion. Particularly offensive to pious Protestant ears was the invocation of the fourth antiphon from the Sarum office of Lauds, which Foxe presented in its Latin and English forms as an example of the genre:

Tu per Thome sanguinem, quem pro te impendit
Fac nos Christe scandere, quo Thomas ascendit.

That is:

For the blood of Thomas,
Which he for thee did shed,
Grant us, O Christ, to climb,
Where Thomas did ascend.

And his conclusion was uncompromising. Such a prayer was nothing less than 'blasphemous, and derogateth from the praise of him to whom only all praise and honour is due.'⁴²

For English Catholics, in contrast, St Thomas the Martyr became an icon of their claims to represent the authentic continuation of the ancient English Church and its thousand years of history as part of the Latin Church in communion with the successors of St Gregory the Great (who had sent the Roman mission of St Augustine). The English College (Collegio Inglese) in Rome, founded in 1579 as a seminary for the training of English Catholic priests, on the site of an earlier hospice for English pilgrims to Rome, made St Thomas one of its chief patrons, its chapel dedicated to him, and its chief altarpiece, a crucifixion by Durante Alberti, depicted St Thomas as the chief supporter on the right side of the crucified Christ. Before this picture prayed many of the English recusant priests, before their departure for an uncertain fate in England, through the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The college, the chapel and the picture are still there. It was alleged by anti-Catholic propagandists that every Spanish ship sailing to the Indies from Seville, Sanlúcar, and Cadiz carried a collecting-box bearing the image of St Thomas with the inscription, *Sancte Thoma Cantuariensis, ora pro nobis* ('St Thomas of Canterbury, pray for us'), to gather financial support for St Gregory's College in Seville, another of the seminaries for English Catholic priests, founded in 1592.⁴³ Here was yet another transformation: Becket the patron of English Catholics, the protector of underground priests, the icon of 'old Catholicism'.

The defence of Becket's reputation thus became a matter of confessional identity. Typical of this approach was *Tres Thomae* ('The Three Thomases'), first published at Douai, a seminary and centre of English Catholic scholarship,⁴⁴ in 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada (and again in Cologne in 1612), in which Thomas Stapleton linked Becket with Thomas the Apostle and Thomas More, and set out to rebut the charges made by the 'English heretics', by presenting 'the true cause of the martyr Thomas, archbishop of Canterbury'. To the claims that Becket was a traitor defending worldly claims,

rightly executed for his crimes, Stapleton opposed the counter-image of a courageous defender of ecclesiastical law. But his emphasis was also coloured by the contemporary religious situation. His Thomas died for the judicial authority of the Church and the Holy See. The same image was invoked by Pope Pius VI at the height of the French Revolution, which transformed France from a Catholic to a secular state. His letter of admonition to the French bishops, issued on 10 March 1791, condemned both the approbation given by 30 of their number (a very small minority) to the new Civil Constitution of the Clergy (August 1790) and the oath imposed on the French clergy. In it, he compared the actions of the French national assembly with those of Henry II, and cited Bossuet's comparison of Thomas Becket and Thomas Cranmer, the one defending the Church, the other betraying it, while Talleyrand, then bishop of Autun, was depicted as playing Cranmer's role.⁴⁵

If Catholics could see St Thomas as a Catholic icon, to Anglicans he was a *Roman* Catholic idol, a representative of the papal and clerical power that they rejoiced in having defeated in the days of the eighth Henry, and which many seemed to fear might be reinstated if any concessions were made to the remnant of fully practising Catholics (called recusants, because they refused to take the Oaths of Supremacy) still surviving. Belief that the Catholics/papists, in league with the Jesuit Order and the papacy, were plotting the overthrow of Protestant England was widespread, and popular paranoia was fed by anti-Catholic tracts, mostly anonymous, which continued to appear throughout the seventeenth century. Typical of this firebrand writing was a little booklet printed in London in 1679 with the title, *The Ungrateful Behaviour of the Papists, Priests, and Jesuits, Towards the Imperial and Indulgent Crown of England Towards them, From the Days of Queen Mary unto this present Age*; its second segment, *The Real Merits of the Papists*, contains an extraordinarily creative rewriting of English history, which purports to demonstrate the involvement of 'papists' in every rebellion and plot against the English crown from Henry II onwards.

Even John Locke's rational and urbane plea for mutual toleration between different religious groups, first composed in Latin in 1685–86, excluded Catholics from those deserving such consideration, not because of their beliefs,⁴⁶ but because of their alleged political aspirations:

Those ... who upon pretence of religion do challenge any manner of authority over such as are not associated with

them in their ecclesiastical communion, I say these have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate. ... That Church can have no right to be tolerated which is constituted upon such a bottom that all those who enter into it do thereby *ipso facto* deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince.⁴⁷

The 'other prince', of course, was the pope; and Thomas Becket had made much of his allegiance to that 'foreign' authority.

Yet the position of the established Church was by then no longer as self-evidently justified as it had appeared. The disconcerting experiences of the civil war, in which Puritanism played no small part, the execution of the lawful 'supreme head' and king (Charles I) in 1649, the successive governments of a Puritan Parliamentary Commonwealth, a suspected crypto-Catholic (Charles II, 1660–85), and finally of a professed Catholic (James II, 1685–88), whose forcible substitution by the Protestant William of Orange and Mary Stuart (1688) caused considerable unease among believers in legitimacy – all these events, and the backward and forward swing of the pendulum between the 'Laudian' and 'anti-Laudian'⁴⁸ wings of the Church, proved unsettling for the leaders of Anglican opinion. The debate about the nature of the Church of England, its claims to apostolicity and catholicity, and its compatibility with the royal supremacy, were issues not only between Anglicans and their opponents, but also increasingly within Anglicanism itself.

One line of argument, advanced by William Wake, later archbishop of Canterbury (1716–37), in the non-juring crisis,⁴⁹ vehemently defended the royal supremacy.⁵⁰ This was countered by Francis Atterbury (1662–1732), later bishop of Rochester (1713–32), who used medieval records to prove the independence of the English Church within the realm, even to the extent of citing a pope (Innocent III) and a papal council (Fourth Lateran, 1215) among his authorities.⁵¹ His contemporary, White Kennett (1660–1728), responded with a spirited defence of the Reformation settlement and an interpretation of Atterbury's sources, which confirmed the royal supremacy.⁵² Against such a background, Becket's opposition to Henry II and appeal to papal authority remained anathema.

A full-blown re-statement of the Protestant view of a medieval Church sunk 'in the most corrupt and dark ages of Popery, when the pure light of the gospel was almost extinguished, and the ministers of it were become a mere faction, combined together under a foreign head, against the civil power' was presented in Lord George Lyttelton's

monumental *History of the Life of King Henry the Second*.⁵³ Lyttelton saw the twelfth century through the prism of the eighteenth, so that Henry II's council became 'the High Court of Parliament'.⁵⁴ From this standpoint, virtually every aspect of Becket's position was repugnant, from his defence of the canon law in Gratian's *Decretum* (which 'continued ... to raise and support in them [the clergy] a spirit of independence pernicious to society, and principles incompatible with the obedience they owed the laws of their country'), to his appeal to the pope at Northampton, which drew the comment,

to deny the authority of the highest court in the kingdom, and, in a cause purely civil, to appeal from these to an ecclesiastical and foreign tribunal, when such an appeal, even in spiritual causes, had been so lately forbidden by one of the statutes enacted at Clarendon, was the highest act of contumacy that can be conceived: it was not only an infringement of that particular law, but a rebellion against all the laws of the land and the whole legislature.

Alexander III's disapprobation of ten of the Constitutions of Clarendon was roundly condemned:

That the Pope and his consistory should then sit in judgment upon the laws and statutes of England was a most insolent violation of the independence, the freedom, and the dignity of the crown; and the abetting of such an act was without question highly criminal in a subject of that kingdom.⁵⁵

Lyttelton's highly critical treatment of Thomas as archbishop was underpinned by his discovery of Gilbert Foliot's *Multiplicem*, in a manuscript in the Cotton Library (Claudius B. ii), which he printed in an appendix and exploited to considerable effect in his denunciation of the character and stand of Thomas Becket.⁵⁶

From first to last, Becket is a wily, dangerous opponent of the laws and institutions of England, lawfully indicted on civil charges (financial), lawfully condemned and unlawfully calling in the insolent judgment of a foreign power (the papacy) against his lawful sovereign. Having created the gratifying image of an orderly parliamentary state on the model of post-1688 England, with its High Court of Parliament, its legislature and its established laws and statutes, confronted by a corrupt and un-Christian medieval Church and a

predatory papacy, the Becket controversy took on the appearance of a dangerous conspiracy against a generally good and constitutional monarch. In the background was the spectre of a potentially hostile Catholic Europe:

Even the rudest form of our government has always been animated by the spirit of freedom. May that spirit continue to inspire and support it in the more perfect state to which it has gradually been brought by the wisdom of many ages, and more particularly by the revolution of the year 1688, when the bounds of the royal prerogative were better marked out, and the privileges of the people more clearly defined and established. ...

Where the papist religion remains established, the principles of Becket will also remain.⁵⁷

This was too much for English Catholics, still labouring under anti-Catholic legislation. Joseph Berington in 1790 responded with a reversal of Lyttelton's interpretation, which made Henry the aggressor and Thomas the protector of the Church against the ecclesiastical policies of the Normans. *Multiplicem* he branded a forgery.⁵⁸ Fifteen years later, Father John Lingard (1771–1851) laid the foundations of a reassessment of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval worlds in two monumental works. His *Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church* aimed to demonstrate the extent to which the ancestral races of the 'English' had received and practised the 'Romish' practices, which the Reformation and three centuries of Anglican writing had condemned. Even a cursory perusal of the headings in the 'Contents' pages of the third edition must have sent shock waves down the spines of many of his English contemporaries: 'Papal Supremacy', 'The Pope head of the church', 'Celibacy of the clergy', 'Sacrifice of the Mass', 'The Latin language', 'Penance', 'Sacrament of Extreme Unction', 'Prayer for the dead', 'Intercession of the saints', 'Relics of foreign saints, Relics of native saints', 'Belief in miracles' and 'Anglo-Saxon pilgrimages'.⁵⁹ Here was being redrawn the spiritual map within which the restoration of Thomas Becket as saint and martyr could be made. The recently unspeakable characteristics of his world were described with sensitivity and respect, and assigned to the golden age of the pre-Conquest world, long before the time of 'Hildebrand and his school'. Not surprisingly, Lingard's second great work of historical scholarship, the many-volumed and much republished *History of England*, which first appeared in the

years 1819–30, provided an extremely positive interpretation of Thomas Becket. For Lingard, Henry II is the villain: 'pride and passion, caution and duplicity formed the distinguishable traits of his character'; and the controversy is the product not of the impertinent rebellion of an arrogant archbishop but a consequence of the development of Christianity since the days of Constantine. Far from canon law being an instrument of clerical oppression,

The proceedings of the former [ecclesiastical courts] were guided by fixed and inviolable principles, the result of the wisdom of the ages ... The clerical judges were men of talent and education: the uniformity and equity of their decisions were preferred to the caprice and violence which seemed to sway the royal and baronial judiciaries.

Lingard then produced a critique of the Constitutions of Clarendon, which denied their claim to ancient authority on the grounds that none of the obnoxious clauses was older than the Conquest. The hostile witness of Foliot's *Multiplicem* is dismissed; and Becket's erratic behaviour at Clarendon is explained as

the hesitation of a mind oscillating between the decision of his own judgment and opinions and the apprehensions of others. His conviction seems to have remained unchanged; he yielded, to avoid the charge of having by his obstinacy drawn destruction on the heads of his fellow-bishops.⁶⁰

It was Lingard's mastery of the sources, both of the Old English and the medieval English Church, that enabled him to set Becket in his medieval context and thus re-evaluate the man and his cause.

Two different emphases in Lingard's exposition found fuller expression in works of the next generation. Augustin Thierry amplified the Saxon vs Norman implications of Lingard's work, and made Thomas into a Saxon hero who resisted the tyranny of Norman rule,⁶¹ and Richard Hurrell Froude (1803–36) reverted to the image of the clerical hero, defending the Church from lay aggression.⁶² At the same time, Robert Southey's *The Book of the Church* (London, 1824) set an equally positive interpretation of Becket into the context of general church history, in a work that was to pass through six further editions in the nineteenth century, in addition to being summarized for the use of Sunday schools. On a different level, in Baltimore, William Eusebius Andrews attacked the icon of Elizabethan

Protestantism, in order 'to refute and expose the greatest mass of falsehood and calumny ever issued against the social and religious principles of our Catholic fellow-men'.⁶³

Outside the world of historical debate, but not wholly unaffected by it, the entire ecclesiastical landscape was transformed by two movements: the campaign for Catholic Emancipation (c. 1778–1829) and the Oxford Movement (c. 1833–45). The first grew out of the necessity of finding a solution to the problem of governing Ireland, where the majority of the native population had remained resolutely Catholic, and whose resistance to English government included demands for religious freedom. Political independence was not conceded, but the religious question was largely resolved in 1829 with the lifting of many (but not all) of the legal restrictions placed on the practice of Catholicism, not only in Ireland, but throughout the British Isles. The second, led by John Henry Newman (1801–90), Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800–82) and John Keble (1792–1866), and associated with Samuel Wilberforce (1805–73), bishop successively of Oxford and Winchester, and others, sought to prove the 'catholicity' of the Church of England through revived study of the early Church. Each movement brought profit and loss to the popular reputation of English Catholics. The Emancipation Bill was rejected by the House of Lords in 1825 and occasioned fierce debate. John Cross prefaced his denunciation of the bill with a summary of Christian history, which saw the papacy as an unscriptural usurpation, whose 'supremacy' disrupted the tranquillity of 'this kingdom ... arising from a *double allegiance*'. 'Through the succeeding reign of *Henry the Second*, the contract between the ecclesiastical and the civil power was contested, and the peace of the kingdom again distracted, by the disloyalty of the primate *Becket*, and by his turbulent resistance of the Regal, and entire subjection to the *Papal* authority'. For Cross, the Reformation and the Revolution of 1688 'are the title-deeds, by which the king holds his crown. With that title, they have transmitted to us a Constitution the admiration of the civilized world, and an Empire comprising a rich inheritance'. The Bill amounted to 'national suicide', which would undermine the Constitution based on the Reformation, the Revolution and the Acts of Union, and preserved by the Coronation Oath and the Oath of Supremacy.⁶⁴

Emancipation itself, though granted grudgingly and incompletely for the settlement of the Irish question,⁶⁵ combined with the government subsidy (1845) to Maynooth, the Catholic Seminary in Ireland, displeased Anglicans and Methodists, who feared a resurgence of popery; and Pope Pius IX's restoration of a Catholic hierarchy to

England in 1850 (with 12 dioceses and a cardinal archbishop of Westminster at its head!) only added fuel to that particular fire. If the Maynooth subsidy was 'Protestantism betrayed', Pope Pius's action was 'papal aggression'; and the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1867 sent shock waves through the Anglican establishment in England. What had been established by an Act of Parliament (the Anglican Church) could just as easily be *disestablished* by the same institution; and the political and religious configuration of that assembly had ceased to be reassuringly high church and Tory. Equally, as members and supporters of the Oxford Movement sought to give the Thirty-Nine Articles a 'Catholic' interpretation, and reclaim for Anglicanism some of the authority of the medieval English Church – and with it some of the 'popish' practices abandoned at the Reformation (cult of saints, the mass, auricular confession, the sign of the cross, celibacy, monastic institutions for men and women) – in the 1840s and 1850s, the royal supremacy became an obstacle. Edward Bouverie Pusey even wrote a study on the royal supremacy (1850) that argued, on the basis of a historical survey reaching back to Christian Roman times, that the crown's authority in matters ecclesiastical (including both theological and disciplinary matters) was 'limited by the laws of the Church, of which kings are members', that appeals against bishops lay to 'other Bishops, or the Primate, or a General Council', not to a 'Civil Court', and that 'the principle that Ecclesiastical offences could only be tried by Ecclesiastical Courts, was formally admitted into the Theodosian Code.'

Here was a very distinguished high Anglican, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, proclaiming as essential elements of the freedom of the early Christian Church principles for which Thomas Becket was said to have died, with this difference: that the papacy does not feature in his list of authorities to whom appeal may be had. His King Henry VIII, who 'knew of no law of God or man but his own passions',

meant doubtless to remove any constraint from his own will, and circumvented the Clergy to accomplish it. We have to consider principles to which the Church has expressed her assent, not the acts of a lawless king (whose memory is held in abhorrence in the whole world), even if in the guise of law.⁶⁶

Pusey remained an influential Anglican, but he proclaimed many of the beliefs and practices associated with the medieval Church: monasticism, private penance, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and so on.

If Catholics could be gratified at this growing recognition of some of their practices and beliefs, more evangelical Anglicans could feel that the Protestant credentials of their religion were being undermined by a creeping Romanism and they were alarmed at the leakage of converts to Catholicism. Some of the leading lights of the Oxford Movement converted (Frederick Oakley (1844), Frederick William Faber, rector of Elton (Northants) (1845), John Henry Newman (1845), William George Ward (1845), Henry Edward Manning (1851)); so did Augustus Welby Pugin (*c.* 1835), one of the principal architects of the Gothic revival in architecture, noblemen (John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, marquess of Bute (1868), George Frederick Robinson, marquess of Ripon (1874)), and three of the four sons of the renowned humanitarian William Wilberforce, no less. Moreover, from the 1850s, Catholic religious institutions (monasteries and convents) were being founded and gained legal recognition as voluntary associations in 1871. Catholicism was thus legitimized and many of its hitherto condemned manifestations were again publicly displayed throughout England (though not without strong popular opposition): the cult of saints, the Latin mass, a celibate clergy, monasticism and the spiritual authority of the pope. And even after the collapse of the Oxford Movement (through the defection of its leading lights to the Roman Church and the confusion of its survivors), aspects of its programme of restoring ancient theology and ancient liturgy flourished among high churchmen who fostered liturgical regeneration (the Ritual Movement) on the basis of the rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer*. As supporters of the revival found, the *Book of Common Prayer*, which had been magnificently translated by Cranmer from the medieval Sarum liturgies, contained many of the desired solemnities and practices that offered high church Anglicans some of the consolations of formal religion that attracted many to Rome. Even the revival of the Gothic style in architecture, which was applied not only to churches but also to major secular buildings (the law courts, the Houses of Parliament, and St Pancras Station in London, for example) assisted in the reassessment and re-evaluation of all things medieval.

The results of this renewed interest – even passion – were not always either accurate or reassuring, but they broke down the alienation between medieval and 'modern' that had been occasioned by the fact and the rhetoric of the Reformation. Sir Walter Scott's highly coloured novels and Alfred Lord Tennyson's (1809–92) *Idylls of the King* (1859) and *The Lady of Shalott* (1851) were hugely popular. At the same time, the tireless industry of the Reverend John A. Giles

(1808–84) produced a stream of medieval Latin works and translations, covering pre-Conquest history (Gildas, Nennius, Bede, St Boniface, Aldhelm, Alfred, etc.) and the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Malmesbury, the Peterborough Chronicle, Richard of Devizes, Roger of Wendover, Matthew Paris). Undistinguished as his editions proved to be, they helped to transform the historical landscape, by making available a host of works hitherto available only in manuscript or in rare early editions. Among this enormous output, 15 volumes, published between 1844 and 1848, were devoted to Thomas Becket and four of his contemporaries – Arnulf of Lisieux, Gilbert Foliot, Herbert of Bosham and John of Salisbury – and 12 of these were included in the *Patres Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (Fathers of the English Church) series, published in Oxford. Becket's Lives, Letters and Miracles were thus made available in a respectable English imprint by an Anglican cleric, and associated with the venerable heritage of the English Church. In addition, Giles made an English compendium from the Latin letters of the Becket controversy, which he published in two volumes with the title *The Life and Letters of Archbishop Thomas of Canterbury*. Although later judged a 'useless work' by Freeman,⁶⁷ his was perhaps the most sympathetic study on Becket to appear since the Reformation. Giles shared the growing Romantic view of the middle ages. The images that emerge from his *Life and Letters* are of a brutal Henry confronting a courageous if not quite saintly Becket. Whatever he is, though, Becket is a clerical hero and a hero of the *English Church*.

Canon John C. Robertson's learned but critical biography of Becket, challenged both the Saxonizing view of Thierry (1835) and the clerical hero depicted by R.H. Froude (1838–39), but he looked at the Becket dispute with a value system based on the contemporary constitution of the English Church, whose bishops were appointed by the crown, paid homage to the queen, and sat in the House of Lords. In his view, Becket should not have given up the chancellorship or opposed Clarendon; the king's demands were warranted by the advice of learned canonists and jurists; Becket's case had no real foundation; 'the immediate cause for which he fell was but a quarrel as to the privileges of Canterbury and York'; and it was 'his defiant behaviour and intolerable language' that 'excited [the murderers] to uncontrollable fury.' 'The great fortune of Becket's reputation was the manner of his end.' 'Was it for a Christian prelate, not only to oppose the king in a reasonable claim, but to render his opposite move offensive by continual displays of that pride for which his enemies loudly reproach him?'⁶⁸

But the heroic and justified image drew influential partisans. In the context of Catholic revival, Becket became once more a defender of ecclesiastical law against the illicit *customs* introduced by the Norman kings. The first edition of the Jesuit John Morris's *Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket* appeared in the same year as Robertson's critical *Life*.⁶⁹ This was written more like a hagiography than a critical history: Becket is 'St Thomas' and 'Our Saint' throughout. Cardinal Manning – a former leader of the Oxford Movement – in an 'Inaugural Address to the Academia of the Catholic Religion' at the opening of the 1868–69 session, discussed at length the Constitutions of Clarendon, citing Becket's letters (from the edition by Giles), and argued that St Thomas died for the lawful freedom of the Church, specifically the right of appeal, access to Rome, free elections and independent tribunals. He concluded, 'It is therefore beyond a doubt that the conflict of S. Thomas was precisely in behalf of the true and legitimate union of Church and State', in which Becket, in his view, had a 'prophetic instinct' about the consequences of Henry II's proposals, if they were not resisted,⁷⁰ and was deservedly honoured as a 'Martyr for the liberties of England'.⁷¹ Meanwhile, Edward A. Freeman, a distinguished (if controversial) historian of Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest, criticized Robertson's interpretation, principally on the grounds that it was anachronistic, since it viewed the Becket controversy through the eyes of the nineteenth century; and he argued that contemporary dealings with Rome should not be taken into account in evaluating Becket's career. This was an important statement in the immediate context in which Freeman was writing, for 'no popery' and 'papal aggression' were given a new lease of life in the fierce debates surrounding the proclamation of papal infallibility in the First Vatican Council (1870). Freeman, it should be noted, was a defender of the greater antiquity and civilization of the Anglo-Saxons, for whom the Norman Conquest and all that followed was an unmitigated disaster. His Becket, therefore, like Thierry's, wears a distinctly English mantle in confronting Henry II, who is described as 'a mere foreigner, a Frenchman living in France, devoting his energies to French objects, and holding England almost as a province of Anjou'.⁷²

So, the contempt and disdain with which the medieval Church was generally viewed in England was being moderated by foreign travel (especially in Italy and Rome), by historical research, by restoration movements within Anglicanism itself, by Romanticism, by the Gothic Revival, by the spin-off from the Oxford Movement,

and by the Catholic revival. The congeries of national attitudes that had cast Becket in the guise of traitor, ecclesiastical zealot, power-hungry adversary of constitutional legitimacy, opponent of the High Court of Parliament, supporter of popery and canon law, was much muted by the end of the nineteenth century, although it did not disappear entirely.