

Four Studies in Conventional Piety¹

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There were religious standards for almost every field of late medieval activity. It follows that it is not only historians of religion who want to understand the Christianity that medieval people professed. Religion is an essential ingredient in our economic, social and political interpretations. We know what the Church taught and we also know what it tried to impart to the laity. They were expected merely to 'know the Creed, Paternoster and Ave Maria, and be able to identify the sacraments, the seven deadly sins, the works of charity, the acts of mercy, and the seven virtues'. Understanding was optional. 'The impression is of knowledge which was little more than recitation; acceptance, acquiescence, and belief rather than understanding'. A few individuals might achieve much more, particularly those literate layfolk with 'an almost insatiable hunger for spiritual guidance'. Apart from formal teaching, there were many different routes for the acquisition and comprehension of religious knowledge by lay-people: paintings on walls and glass, sermons, drama, literature, and the spiritual guidance of the parish priest. They could interact. Their interplay, as Dr Swanson recently observed, 'is a notable feature of the period; their combination could only contribute towards the creation of a pervasive but perhaps unconscious spiritual ethos'.² Dr Swanson shows the Church succeeded in imparting not only basic religious knowledge, but also conformity to its standards for the conduct of everyday life.

This interpretation requires almost as much faith of the modern historian as it attributes to those whom it describes. It assumes that the laity achieved the minimum level of attainments outlined above, whereas almshouse statutes assumed that many would not know even the *Paternoster* and would need to be taught even that. It assumes that the laity understood the meaning at least of the *words* of the creed, *Paternoster*, and *Ave Maria* that they learnt, even though these were in Latin which few layfolk and surely no almspeople could translate. It assumes that the clergy put their manuals to practical use and that they regularly explained the plays, paintings, sermons and songs that supposedly interacted. Without such exposition, how could people have recognized who the glass or mural portrayed and imbibed the intended moral? It assumes that all these things hap-

pened everywhere, whereas much of this material – drama, for example – was specific to time and place. What happened in Dr Swanson's York and was conventional there may not have applied anywhere else. It is clear that there is an enormous gap between the Church's teachings and our knowledge of the actual attainments of the laity, for which we lack the evidence to speak confidently. We cannot know what most people knew of Christianity, still less what they understood or applied. 'The question of piety – how religious were the English people, and in what ways? – is massive, all embracing, but unavoidable'.³ But it is not unanswerable.

Our problems are threefold. First of all, the bulk of the population were illiterate and relatively poor and have left us no record of their piety. Secondly, our records are cursory and partial. We are better informed on piety at death than in life, but wills are preoccupied with purgatory, which constituted only a fragment of religious experience. We know *of* many acts, such as pilgrimages, but not much *about* them, and cannot yet appreciate the full significance of particular types of foundation to different individuals. And thirdly, almost everything known of almost everyone is highly conventional. Too often historians find themselves writing of 'conventional piety' or of 'more than conventional piety'. Inescapable as they are, such phrases serve rather to disguise our ignorance than to develop our understanding. They merely indicate that the piety studied took forms characteristic of the age, with or without unusually frequent expression, and that we historians recognize these forms and cannot delve deeper. Such generalisations do tell us something of what certain individuals did, may enable us to presume that all conformed to the standards prevalent in the group, and may indeed permit us to leave religion out of the equation because it influenced everyone equally. That, however, is a dangerous presumption that remains to be proved, not least because it denies individuality to those concerned and makes no allowance for individual responses or for particular circumstances. That religious foundations and testamentary provisions have defied statistical analysis and generalisation warns us that the responses did differ. And it is those with most education and thus most likely to have individual viewpoints whom some types of historian most wish to understand. Historians still need to know what these conventional standards are and thus need to understand the nature of the conventions. The basic questions are inescapable: what did their faith mean to medieval people and how much was it understood?

Historians wanting to understand the conventionally pious can adopt several alternative, overlapping, and complementary approaches. Since all Christians belonged to congregations or communities, a

study of group practice – their everyday rituals and conventions – casts light on every member of the group. But such an approach presumes that communal religion mattered more than individual piety, which remains to be demonstrated. A similar sameness and blandness inevitably emerges from most studies of wills. It is the exceptional who stand out and are more easily comprehended, but they are obviously unrepresentative and thus provide no basis for generalisation. If people acted in the same way as everyone else, how can we distinguish their individuality? It is understandable that such are dismissed as ‘insular, inert and shallow’,⁴ apathetic conformists whose faith was a matter of form. Did they blindly accept the direction of the Church and obey its dictates to the letter? Could their conventionality disguise a reasoned understanding and a genuine fervour that was normal and was expressed in conventional language? Could religion shape everyday political, social, or economic behaviour or was it mere conformity and a walkover for Reformation Protestantism?⁵ There are so many questions that cannot currently be answered by studying the conventional piety of a particular place or group.

Yet comparison of such studies can be most revealing. Already it is obvious that only certain religious beliefs were universal. Religious practices were not uniform. Fifteenth-century wills make it clear that the conventional piety of three adjacent northern cities, differed from that of Bristol, and the aristocratic piety of Yorkshire was not identical to that of Kent.⁶ This was because their conventions differed. Dr Fleming has used contemporary literature to show the significance of the cursory comments in the wills of the Kentish aristocracy. Dr Burgess has identified the conventions that governed not only death-bed bequests in wills but also religious activity in life in Bristol. Similarly the studies of Dr Whiting and Dr Mayhew cast much light on the character of Catholicism in early Tudor Sussex and the South-West.⁷ It is undoubtedly a big step forward to know that conventional piety was piety that conformed to convention. It is valuable to know what were the conventions to which particular groups at specific places (and perhaps at particular times) conformed in overtly religious ways. More studies of more places will inevitably expand our knowledge. But such material tells us little of the *depth* of the knowledge and understanding of Christian theology that such conventional piety implies or its ramifications for other aspects of life.

Some studies do achieve more depth. Thus the piety of Cecily Duchess of York is illuminated by her household ordinance and library, Henry Duke of Lancaster by his *Livre des Seyntz Medecins*, others by their religious foundations or devotional tracts.⁸ But all

these depend on unique sources and moreover document unique individuals, who were recognized as unusual at the time and were certainly not conventional. They thus provide no basis for generalisation. But some people who were conventionally pious are particularly well-documented and thus can illuminate others. These are those who expressed their conventional piety through new religious foundations as well as wills and drew on their understanding of the liturgy. The cycle of services prescribed by the Church is recorded in the surviving missals, breviaries, and other service books. These may be taken as normal, the standard tenplates against which to measure exceptions. New religious cults began as departures from these tenplates and were usually added to them later as they gained official acceptance. Whenever aristocrats expressed their preferences in their foundation deeds and wills, they were responding to the teaching and practices of the church. They were also providing modern historians with data for comparison with the service books and supplying criteria for judging what was traditional and what was novel. Such material can be analysed for what it reveals about the donor. This method has already been applied to such data in the case of Margaret Lady Hungerford.⁹ Since such sources are relatively common, the same technique can be applied to many other individuals. Here it is applied to four earlier generations of the Hungerford family to illuminate their piety and, indirectly, their aristocratic contemporaries.

The Hungerfords have been identified as one of the four most outstanding families of religious founders in the later middle ages. That judgement is based on the twenty chantries, obits, and almshouses that form the raw material for this study. It is thus a purely *quantitative* assessment. In other ways, the Hungerfords were not exceptional. Their religion was conventional. None of them initiated any new form of religious expression, none rebelled against orthodoxy, and none departed from conventional patterns of behaviour. They held services in private chapels, gave alms, went on pilgrimages, and thought of purgatory in ways normal to their class. Their enthusiasms were unremarkable for their respective periods. They thus rate as conventionally pious. So too with their foundations, which were conventional for their times. Far from being exceptionally well-documented, our information in every case is derived from the physical remains, foundation deeds, wills, and odd references in accounts that survive for other foundations everywhere. This data is uneven, illuminating some chantries not at all and none of the founders in the round. What makes the Hungerfords worthy of study is thus decidedly not what is remarkable about them but what is

conventional: not the quality of the data, but its quantity; not particular individuals but successive generations, which illuminate one-another through interaction; and not their pious innovations but their religious commonplaces. By studying a family like the Hungerfords it is possible to add substance to convention and to demonstrate a reasoned understanding too easily concealed by conventional forms. This is not to belittle other approaches, to minimise those studies of communal religion for which Hungerford evidence is lacking, or to set up an unreal conflict between individuality and communal religion. This study draws on data that survives for many families, demonstrates its utility, and indicates its wider relevance. Above all, it demonstrates the vitality of conventional piety.

II

The Hungerford family arose from obscurity into the ranks of the Wiltshire gentry in the early-14th-century and from thence into the peerage in 1426. Their lands and foundations were concentrated on the Wiltshire/Somerset border between the cathedrals of Salisbury and Bath. This study focuses on four successive generations in the male line: Sir Robert (d. 1352); his nephew Sir Thomas (d. 1398); his son Walter, 1st Lord Hungerford (d. 1449); and the latter's son Robert, 2nd Lord (d. 1459). A fifth Hungerford, Margaret (d. 1478), completed their work. Her piety and political activities, Heytesbury Hospital and their other foundations have been studied elsewhere.¹⁰ It is the earlier Hungerfords that are considered here.

The first significant member of the family was Sir Robert de Hungerford (d. 1352), who lies buried in the parish church of St Lawrence at Hungerford in Berkshire and who may have resided at nearby Kintbury. We know nothing of Robert's education, even whether he was literate. He knew French but probably not Latin. He enjoyed a successful secular career: in politics, in local government, and in ecclesiastical estate administration. But the key to his prosperity was probably his marriage to an heiress Geva de Stock (d. 1337). They had no surviving issue to inherit their possessions. Hence perhaps in part their generosity to the church even before her death. Robert continued to endow new foundations thereafter. Whilst the loss of his will has deprived us of a basic source for his personal religion, its principal value was as a record of his attitudes towards purgatory and pious giving, which are known from other sources.

Religious observances seem normally to have shaped the daily routine of aristocratic households.¹¹ Almost certainly Robert

employed a household chaplain to conduct services in his private oratory on his manor of Rushall. Since that oratory was not licensed for celebrations of the mass, he went for that purpose to the parish church until 1332. Its reconstruction then provided the necessary pretext for the issue of a licence to him to hear mass in private at home.¹² Probably Robert also visited the monasteries that he patronised and participated in their services, but there is no direct evidence for this.

Such licences were commonplace among contemporary aristocrats, but none of these founded as many chantries as Robert. These were in Hungerford parish church (1325–6), in Salisbury cathedral (1334), and in 1336 in the Trinitarian friary at Easton and in Calne parish church; a fifth, in the Augustinian priory of Ivychurch in 1321, was stillborn. Two obits were established in the Cistercian abbey of Stanley (1331) and at Ivychurch. The recipient institutions were local: all were in the diocese of Salisbury, only Hungerford in Berkshire, the others in Wiltshire. They varied considerably in character. The three monastic establishments represented the very different Cistercian, Augustinian, and Trinitarian ideals. A cathedral, two parish churches, and a hospital benefited among secular establishments. Robert evidently saw good in all these religious establishments and had no clear personal preferences between *them*. In the early 14th century new chantries were still commonly located in monasteries and there were many other founders who patronised a range of religious activities rather than specialising in one.¹³ He was also representative in his preference for new free-standing chantries for his specific benefit rather than the additional endowment of existing institutions. Whilst his desire for masses for the good of his soul was constant for the last thirty years of his life, it was expressed not in the single sustained chain of activity that produced the greater foundations that were probably beyond his means, but in a whole series of pious impulses. Evidently these represent changing priorities and indeed changes of mind, such as his decision *not* to proceed with his Ivychurch chantry. Why these occurred, we cannot now know, though clearly Robert's origins were an essential ingredient at Hungerford.

We do not know enough about the institutions that he patronised and his foundation deeds are too laconic to reveal precisely what it was that he valued about them. Some clues are provided by the dedications. Significantly two foundations are dedicated to the Trinity, two to St Mary, and two to royal martyrs, St Edward and St Edmund. As we shall see below, we know what he thought about the Trinity, but precisely what appealed to him about the two kings and

martyrs is less obvious. At Calne mass was to be celebrated daily except on Sundays and feastdays, perhaps because it was always intended that the celebrant would be the warden of St John's hospital, who said mass there on those days.¹⁴ None of the deeds tells us much about the organisation, daily routine, or liturgical duties of the cantarists: foundation in existing institutions may have rendered such details unnecessary. Conventionally enough, Robert seems to have been content with the mass of the day and a daily office of the dead,¹⁵ and, at Easton alone, the distribution of alms to the poor after his obit.¹⁶

Such is the pitiful sum of the documentary evidence for the founder of the exceptional number of six chantries and obits. But considerably more can be gleaned from the physical remains recorded in the church of St Lawrence, Hungerford before its Victorian reconstruction.¹⁷ It must have been Robert who chose the site. What could be more natural than that he should found his first chantry, before he knew there were to be others, in his parish church of Hungerford, whence he came and whose name he bore? Situated in the south aisle and dedicated to the Holy Trinity, it was presumably already complete by 1331, when the first chaplain John de Sewell was apparently already at work.¹⁸ Robert's wife Geva does not share his memorials, so it seems that she was buried elsewhere. This suggests that Robert's cross-legged effigy was erected after her death, most probably before his own. Such dating certainly fits his memorial tablet of a stone quatrefoil on the wall. The central inscription is written in French, the language of the aristocracy. It was therefore aristocratic visitors above all that the tablet invited to say a Lords Prayer and a Hail Mary *for Robert's good estate while living* and for his soul after death and to whom it offered as incentive 550 days of indulgence from no fewer than fourteen bishops.¹⁹ It thus dates from his lifetime and was commissioned by Robert himself rather than his executors. Written in French, which Robert could understand and vet, it contains offers of indulgences, which he must surely have solicited from the bishops in person. Obviously therefore Robert knew what was written and approved. The inscription thus represents his religious preferences. He was prepared to pay for it. And that makes almost certain that he also approved the far more interesting and revealing Latin inscriptions that encircle the quatrefoil.

Since Robert built his chantry chapel, evidently it was he who chose to dedicate it to the Holy Trinity. Supporting evidence that he venerated the Trinity emerges from the chantry he established in the Trinitarian friary at Easton. Certainly it is Trinitarian theo-

logy that appears in the Latin sentences on the tablet. The inner circle reads:

Credo,	I believe,
per dei patris potenciam	through the power of God the Father
per filii sapientiam	through the wisdom of the son
per sancti spiritus clementiam	through the mercy of the holy spirit
vitam possidere beatam	to possess blessed life.

The outer circle reads:

Credo,	I believe,
quod de terra surrecturus sum	that I shall have arisen from the earth
quod in carne mea videbo	that in my flesh I shall see God my
Dominum Salvatorem meum	Saviour
quod Dominus pater, filius et	that the Lord the Father, Son, and
	Holy
spiritus sanctus sunt	Spirit are one Lord
quod idem Dominus	that the same Lord will judge everyone
quemquam	
secundum opera sua judicabit	according to his works.

Actually the sentences do not come from the creed, though they read as though they do. Only a couple of phrases can be found in the service books. The sentences echo the liturgy, rather than cite it precisely. Presumably they represent the wishes of Robert himself, who must have heard such phrases many times and indicated what he wanted to the clerk who composed them. The first two sentences in the outer circle are taken, appropriately enough, from a response in the matins of the dead, which reads in full: 'I believe, that my redeemer lives and in the newest day *I shall have arisen from earth. And in my flesh I will see God my Saviour*'.²⁰ It thus expresses Robert's belief that he will rise again to everlasting life through Christ's redemption. The third sentence proclaims his faith in the one-ness of the three persons of the Trinity. Hence his hope in the fourth person, God the Father. These works undoubtedly included the masses he offered up to the Trinity in their chapel of the Trinity, the alms and masses he offered elsewhere, but works by themselves were insufficient without the intercession of Christ the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit with the Almighty Father, as the inner circle makes clear.

Such analysis is all the more revealing when account is taken of the novelty of the cult of the Trinity in the early 14th-century. Trinity Sunday itself was only designated by Pope John XXII in 1334,²¹ after Robert dedicated his chapel and presumably also after he had set up

the quatrefoil tablet quoted above. Robert was thus ahead of official church, one of those whose veneration of the Trinity caused the devotion to become official. Too much should not be made of this of course, for all such cults emerged and developed before securing official approval and inclusion in the service books. Evidently Robert had encountered the new cult, appreciated it, and chose to adopt it in preference to more established ones. It follows that he knew what was involved and understood the (relatively simple) doctrine contained in the tablet itself when selecting the dedication and inscriptions for his chantry.

Behind the formal instruments of Robert's foundations there thus lies a much more extensive and deeper understanding of Christianity. Yet Robert's individuality went hand-in-hand with uncritical acceptance of the teaching of the liturgy and of the Church's control over the pains of purgatory. Although understanding the role of salvation and redemption, Robert nevertheless wanted the mechanical repetition of masses, the invocation of prayers from casual visitors to his mausoleum, and the accumulation of indulgences remitting the penalties for unperformed penance. No fewer than fourteen bishops were solicited for indulgences totalling 550 days: 40 days each was all they were able to authorise. Robert could as well be the model for the mechanical superstitions attacked by the satirists as for the informed lay piety that he undoubtedly represents.

III

Since no rich heiress drew Robert's brother William from the shadows, the next member of the family who can be studied is William's son Sir Thomas Hungerford (d. 1398). He inherited only a little of Robert's lands, but he built up the core of the family inheritance in the same area. It would have been convenient for him to have shared the same foundations. Thomas, too, was conventional in his regular domestic religious life and in his enthusiasm for the mass. He employed private chaplains and had at least three private oratories at Kintbury (Berks.), Heytesbury and Knoyll by 1353, when he was licensed to have divine service celebrated in them all.²² By 1376, when he possessed other residences and doubtless oratories too, he secured a papal indult for a portable altar, which allowed him to have mass celebrated privately wherever he was.²³ It seems likely, therefore, that his day always commenced with mass. In 1412 the chapel of his widow Joan was presided over by John Pratt, absentee rector of Winterbourne Homington, and contained a breviary, a

missal, a gradual and a martyrology.²⁴ Another papal privilege of 1376 granted plenary remission for Thomas and Joan at the hour of their death,²⁵ but this was not taken as a substitute for other expressions of piety. Thomas was more demonstrably charitable than his uncle, providing alms both in his Lesnes chantry and in his will and in 1386–7 was supporting ten paupers continuously in an unendowed almshouse at Farleigh Hungerford (Soms.).²⁶

The principal evidence for Thomas' religion comes from his funeral chapel at Farleigh, where he founded no chantry, from his chantries at Lesnes Abbey in Kent (1377) and at Longleat Priory, still incomplete at his death, and his obit in Edington Priory (1365). He was besides a confrater of Llanthony Priory (Gloucs.) and patron, in right of his second wife, of Maiden Bradley Priory.²⁷ He consistently preferred regulars to seculars and Austin canons to other types of monk. He thus differed from his uncle Robert in the balance of his benefactions as well as the destination institutions and also from his second wife. Admittedly he was introduced to Lesnes Abbey by his parents and to Edington Priory by William of Edington, Bishop of Winchester (d. 1366), whose steward and executor he was,²⁸ but the *combination* of favoured institutions is his alone. Why Austin canons? What was it that appealed to him about them? It is not at all clear how far such an old order conformed to its original ideals or what it stood for by the 14th century. Certainly Thomas cannot have found their practice indistinguishable from those of the Benedictines, as Chaucer did,²⁹ and indeed he preferred it. But why? Did he share the criticisms of the possessioners? Did he still find in Austin canons the original combination of pastoral zeal lacking from other monks and the regulated private life absent from the secular clergy? Part of the answer, as we have seen, may be personal connections; part proximity – but why did he prefer Longleat to Maiden Bradley or Monkton Farleigh? – and part, certainly, to distinctive features of the respective houses. For we can be sure that none of these were ordinary Augustinian houses. Lesnes, formerly an Arrouasian house, was distinguished by its elaborate services, Edington as the second house of Bonhommes in England, and Longleat by its unusual dedication to St Radegund. Unfortunately we do not know, at present, what was new about Bonhommes and scarcely anything about Longleat. That they are unusual, however, suggests that they offered advantages not generally available.

Little is known of Thomas's first wife Eleanor, whose children also predeceased him. His second wife Joan Hussey (d. 1412) of Teffont Evias expressed distinct preferences after his death. Like him, she attached great weight to the efficacy of masses, providing for the

celebration of 3,000 masses and for a new chantry at Farleigh Hungerford in her will.³⁰ Most of our information relates to the chantry that they founded at Lesnes Abbey in Woolwich, Kent.

The chantry at Lesnes actually refounded one established by Thomas's parents and substituted Thomas and Eleanor as the main benefactors to be commemorated. It was they who prescribed precisely the liturgical duties of the canon-cantors.³¹ Normally services conformed to local custom, such as the use of Sarum or York, or to particular monastic uses. Departures from these were exceptional and might even require a licence, like that needed by the future Richard III for Sarum observances in his college at Middleham in the province of York.³² How much more this was surely so at Lesnes, where a surviving missal demonstrates the elaboration of services that set the Arrouasians apart from other houses of canons regular. The Arrouasian use was the template from which Thomas was expected to select the services for his chantry. He duly took some of his requirements off the Arrouasian shelf. Whilst he found no place for St Thomas of Canterbury, patron of the abbey, there was nothing unusual in his daily masses of requiem and the Virgin, or in an annual obit including matins and vespers of the dead and a requiem mass on the first ferial day after midsummer. Thomas likewise specified that all observances would conform to the custom of the order, subject to the commemoration of the founders at every mass and subject also to the inclusion among the six collects of two Sarum collects – *Inclina, Domine* in the votive mass of requiem and *Adjuva nos deus salutaris* in that of the Virgin. It was not that these covered different ground from those offered by the use of Lesnes. There were actually precise equivalents in the use of Lesnes, which presented the identical message in rather different words. In the case of *Inclina, Domine*, the differences were not in the collect itself but in the associated secret and postcommunion.³³ The variations are thus very small and aesthetic rather than substantial, which makes it all the more significant that Thomas required them to be changed. Not only is this evidence of a remarkably minute knowledge and understanding of the Sarum use, but, much more surprisingly, of Arrouasian observances as well. Thomas could discriminate and had the self-confidence to impose his preferences.

When Thomas erected the existing inner ward at Farleigh Hungerford Castle, licensed in 1383, he demolished the parish church of St Leonard and rebuilt it as a simple rectangular box a few yards further south. Later he added a chapel to the north,³⁴ obviously purpose-built as his burial place, which it later became. The chapel was dedicated to St Anne and it was there in 1412 that his widow Joan

ordered the foundation of St Anne's chantry. She also left money to support a candle before the image of St Anne in her home church at Teffont.³⁵ Veneration of St Anne, the mother of the Virgin, was only authorised by Pope Urban VI in 1381 and officially approved in England in 1383, when King Richard II married Anne of Bohemia.³⁶ Since the Farleigh chapel has been dated on architectural grounds to the 1380s³⁷ and received Sir Thomas's body in 1398, it seems that he and Joan were forerunners of the new cult and were aware of the latest liturgical developments. Less certainly, they may also have patronised only female saints – St Anne, St Mary, and St Radegund.

IV

Thomas and Joan left as their heir their only surviving son Walter (d. 1449), who became first Lord Hungerford from 1426.³⁸ Much more is known of Walter's remarkable intellectual attainments. Rather than the simplified primer of the laity, Walter used the Latin missal of the professional clergy and read the bible, theological and devotional tracts. Far from following in the footsteps of his parents, he rejected many of their wishes and set out his own reasoned alternatives. Thus his father left him to complete his chantry at Longleat: Walter, it is clear, had little enthusiasm for a chantry there, dragged his heels for fifty years, and ended performing the letter but not the spirit of his father's wishes. He founded no chantries in monasteries. His mother instructed him to found a chantry at Farleigh Hungerford in honour of St Anne: Walter did indeed found it, but rejected the dedication in favour of his own love for the Annunciation.

As we have seen, Sir Thomas Hungerford inserted parts of the use of Sarum into his chantry's services at Lesnes. The chantry deeds sealed by Walter went much further. They reviewed the whole cycle of weekly masses both at Farleigh and Salisbury, inserted the Annunciation mass *Rorate coeli desuper*, and retained the remainder. Walter saw the Virgin as closest to the Trinity, a relationship encapsulated in the Annunciation, and invoked her support as intercessor with the Son and the Father.

At Farleigh Hungerford he instructed his chaplain to begin each day with a short service geared to his patron's salvation: the *Paternoster* and *Ave Maria* in honour of Christ and the Virgin, the psalm *De Profundis*, another *Paternoster* and *Ave*, and psalm 86, were followed by a special prayer to God for the good of Walter's soul. He not only requested but had had composed special prayers that he ordered at the introit of the mass and on other occasions and

the special collect that he had inserted in the masses demanded in his will. Similarly the decorations of his chantry in Salisbury Cathedral, with its angels bearing biblical texts in Latin culled from the liturgy, were designed to convey a coherent message of repentance, redemption, and God's glory. Walter knew what he was about. He knew what he wanted to say and where to find the appropriate material in his service books. He was confident in his capacity to adapt it to his individual needs and did so through the orthodox medium of the everyday liturgy. Although separated by quarter of a century, will, deeds and texts bear the stamp of a single distinctive mind. We lack knowledge only of his daily religious routine.

Walter could not have known in advance how long and successful his career was to be or that the resources dissipated on small projects could ultimately have financed a major foundation. Besides the careful accumulation of endowments and compilation of statutes, we can detect a personal progression as he moved from a chantry-founder into a patron of learning. The relatively simple plans of 1411-15 for a chantry at Farleigh parish church and a collegiate chapel in his household at Heytesbury became two chantries in what became the castle chapel and the triple foundation of chantry, hospital and school. A series of pious impulses played their part: a vow, a sense of guilty conscience, and the death of his wife. So did the influence of others. Presumably it was Henry V who instilled his own enthusiasm for the Annunciation,³⁹ his experiences in government that prompted his obit in St Stephen's Chapel at Westminster, his colleagues in government and fellow founders the Duke of Suffolk and Lord Cromwell who inspired his own triple foundation, and King Henry VI in particular who prompted all three to include a school. Only five contemporaries indulged in this highly unusual expression of piety. If Walter was unusual in this respect and perhaps also in his reasoned liturgical preferences, his fear of purgatory, his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and his belief in the efficacy of masses, prayers and good works were as conventional as many humbler and indeed illiterate testators of wills.

V

Horizons narrowed sharply to the Wiltshire/Somerset border once more with Walter's heir, who lacked his father's public career in government and at court. Yet Robert II (d. 1459) was just as well-educated and allowed religion as large a place in his household. He kept for his personal use at least two missals and two breviaries,

both Latin service books, had several almsdishes, the largest shaped like a hand, owned a silver gilt statue of the virgin, and wore a gold ring engraved with the four evangelists. These and much chapel equipment were left to his son, another collection of chapel paraphernalia went to his widow, and there were, besides, other chalices, vestments, and books available for his bequests. The high value and sheer quantity of these possessions⁴⁰ indicate the prominence given to ostentatious religious observances in his household and the priority within these of the mass and almsgiving. He was licensed to choose a confessor to give him plenary remission at the hour of death.⁴¹ Perhaps because he inherited only in middle life, Robert's sole foundation was the chantry of St Mary at Chippenham, which he shared with his father and for which no foundation deed or statutes survive. Like his father, he planned a pilgrimage to Jerusalem,⁴² but it is not known whether he went.

When Robert drew up his will, he knew that he was dying, but knew also that he would not die at once. He was of sound mind and had time enough to settle his affairs.⁴³ He saw his last will as a chance to settle accounts with God and considered it vital therefore that his pious wishes be implemented in full. His son's ransom had put him heavily in debt, which was a particular blemish on his soul, and he gave priority to repayment in his testament, the separate will that he made of his lands. His trustees were enjoined to fulfil his will, in particular by paying his debts, 'as they woll answer to God'; so was his wife; so too his son, who was effectually disinherited and was urged not to impede them but to behave 'as ye woll to be doon for your self such tyme as God lustith to calle you owte of this present life'. His injunctions were duly obeyed.

Robert considered himself bound by 'goddess lawe' to fulfil the will of his father Walter, 'whos sowle all we be bounde to pray for'. In the case of two splendid beds whose sale his father had ordered, he had 'doon in werkes of charite for the said lord more thenne they be of valour, wherefore of conscience I take them as my owne'. In short, Robert wanted to minimise his sufferings in purgatory, expected to answer to God for his sins, and acknowledged posthumous obligations to his father. These are common enough attitudes. Robert acted in accordance with convention, wrestled with his conscience and accounted publicly for his actions, and subordinated his own aspirations to the repayment of his debts,⁴⁴ as can be confirmed from other sources.

The testament is in English, the will in Latin, and the latter was written first. Both, however, were shaped by the overwhelming financial crisis provoked by his eldest son's ransom and the drastic

retrenchment of the testator's last months, when repayment of his creditors became his over-riding priority. Hence the low value of his many bequests, which, at less than £150 in cash, were a mere fraction of his father's legacies and in sharp contrast to Robert's own hitherto opulent lifestyle. The provisions for continuing and laying-off his household were borrowed from his father. Similar too is his conventional response to purgatory; the funeral in Salisbury cathedral in the *accustomed* form; the thousand priests saying his exequies with the commendations, seven penitential psalms, and the *accustomed* litanies; and the bequests to specific religious houses and churches specifically to pray for his soul. Together these encapsulate in the most conventional way all the expressions of unworthiness, of penitence, and of Christ's redeeming power present in his father's will and reiterated, as we shall see, in the preamble to his own. Again like his father, he made legacies to Salisbury cathedral, his father's chantry there, the two friaries in Salisbury, Heytesbury church and hospital, Farleigh church, rector and castle cantarists, Teffont church, his mother's causeway at Standerwick, his priory at Maiden Bradley, and to Amesbury, Edington, Witham and Hinton priories. More individual to him are the additions and omissions. Missing from his father's list are the London and Oxford foundations, the priories of Bruton, Lacock and Longleat, the friaries outside Salisbury, most of his parish churches, and even the chantry he helped to found. Bedlam hospital in London and Bradford-on-Tone hospital (Soms.) are new but neither received much. He spread his net widely, but, long though his will is, there is little that is individual about his preferences. Even whilst economising, he retained the number and range of recipients, scaling down the amount given to each.

The printed calendar omits the preamble to Robert's will. In sophisticated Latin and replete with liturgical echoes, the preamble is exceptionally long and detailed and was certainly composed by a clerk. As we have seen, the testament was written last, the will proper before that, though both were completed in their final forms shortly before Robert's death. The preamble may also have been composed then, but could be days, months, or years earlier, when Robert was in full possession of his faculties, or may even have been borrowed from elsewhere. However that may be, it was surely Robert himself who decided on a long and elaborate preamble and he too who – as a Latin *reader* – approved its contents. Such grateful phrases about his sound mind, end of hope in this world, the grace given him for meditation, his creation from earth, and his passage from the vale of tears to the newness of life may not have been his and may have been lifted from elsewhere, though they are conventional enough, but they were

presumably approved by him. Surely it was Robert himself who chose to invoke the Holy and Undivided Trinity rather than some other saint in the opening sentence, who made his will to the honour and glory of God my *plasmator* (creator) and the Lord Jesus Christ his redeemer, who left his soul to God omnipotent his creator, redeemer, and saviour, and who trusted in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose chantry he had founded at Chippenham and in whose cathedral he chose to lie? Here, too, he wished to purge his soul of sin, this time in more highblown language interlarded with superlatives. The clear statement here that the will was for the safety of his soul and '*for the redemption of all my sins*' is consistent with what was said later in English.

Even so, such sentiments are conventional enough. If the choice of patrons differs from the distinctive cults of his father and widow respectively for the Annunciation and Jesus, to concentrate on the Trinity was commonplace by this date. There is one hint, however, that reasoned discrimination rather than conformity lies behind his conventional preferences: his request to be buried before the altar of St Osmund in Salisbury Cathedral Lady Chapel. St Osmund, Bishop and Confessor, was a local saint, the first bishop of Salisbury, and had only been formally canonised in 1456.⁴⁵ Robert's will contains the first reference to an altar dedicated to him and has been taken as evidence that one had only just been erected.⁴⁶ Robert seems to have played no part in the canonisation process but his request indicates that he was right up-to-date in his enthusiasm for the new cult, preferring to be buried there rather than in any of the family's other chantries, even his own at Chippenham and his father's at Salisbury, where there remained sufficient room for his son. Robert too was independently individual and followed his own spiritual preferences rather than those of his ancestors.

VI

This study has demonstrated what a sophisticated liturgical and theological understanding can lurk beneath the most conventional piety. It has done so from commonplace sources that survive for many late medieval people. The exercise can therefore be repeated for many other aristocratic families, perhaps – but not certainly – with the same result. Piety, after all, did not exist in a vacuum. It was shaped not only by the official teaching of the Church and by its individual clergy, but by the conventions of particular classes, regions, and families. If the Hungerfords are at all typical, they

represent the aristocracy of central southern England. They took account of existing opportunities for benefaction, discriminating between them, supplementing or rejecting them, and devising foundations that conformed to their preferences and aspirations. Major influences, growing from generation to generation, were the examples of their ancestors, which, however, were almost invariably rejected. There were many other influences too. Different expectations and preferences were introduced every generation by wives, who were certainly capable of asserting them against their husbands', as Joan and Margaret did.⁴⁷ Each encountered and adopted new cults developed elsewhere and transmitted we know not how. Each was influenced by personal experience and personal contacts with particular religious orders, with lords and colleagues, with the court, other localities and the continent. The backcloth of region, class and family was always present and identifiable even as it constantly changed. It follows that its influence and effects will differ from individual to individual and from family to family.

The constitutional forms that the Hungerford foundations took conform roughly to national trends culled from licences to alienate in mortmain and the benefactions of the aristocracy as a whole.⁴⁸ Robert I illustrates the broad-minded patronage of the early 14th-century, his nephew a more restricted discrimination, and Walter's triple foundation can be precisely pigeon-holed. So, too, with their liturgical preferences, each of which conforms to the most advanced practice of its time and was superseded in the next generation. Whilst such tastes can be stigmatised as 'mere boring, meaningless, fashion', the pursuit or shaping of fashion itself required an awareness of both old and new, a comprehension of what the new involves and a preference for it over the old, and in the special field of religious patronage a willingness to incur substantial costs in supplanting or supplementing chantries that were still perfectly viable. Because each liturgical provision was advanced for its time, we need not *necessarily* suppose that the cursory deeds of Robert I indicate less comprehension, independence or individuality than the luxuriant provisions of Walter. They may do, but they need not and probably do not. That the form of documents changed may mean that individuality developed. Most probably it betokens an increased capacity for self-expression⁴⁹ or a greater willingness by the Church to accept less *unconventional* requests. The Hungerfords consistently operated within the framework of what was orthodox and authorised. They did not devise new cults but proved highly receptive to them. Instead of table d'hôte, they went à la carte, but always selected from what was on offer and expressed themselves through the official liturgy. They

picked and mixed from the set services, cycles, and new cults as in a *hors d'oeuvre*, blending according to taste. They indicate the range of choice open to late medieval patrons. They received expert ecclesiastical assistance that delivered what they ordered subject to their approval. The laity were no longer obliged to take what was offered, but could satisfy their personal inclinations and, on this evidence, frequently did so.

The Hungerfords demonstrate not only the levels of sophistication possible among the aristocracy, but the independence of particular individuals. Far from passively accepting the enthusiasms of their predecessors, they developed their own and they asserted them with great self-confidence over those of their parents. Changes to existing foundations and wholly new ones reflect not just the more ambitious material objectives of individual founders, but also their spiritual and intellectual development. Conventional piety in these cases did not entail conservatism, but left them receptive to new ideas. It was the enthusiasm of such benefactors that prompted the Church to develop and authorise new saints' days. The Hungerfords' preference for new cults over old implies that they were aware and critical of the liturgy of the whole of the Church's year. As new cults proliferated, older ones were neglected, and the liturgical cycle was cluttered to the point where sheer complexity demanded reform.⁵⁰ However, that may be, medieval Catholicism was still offering ample scope for spiritual fulfilment for even the most educated laity. But not merely to them. Similar studies may prove other families to be equally aware of liturgical developments. Perhaps there were equivalent possibilities latent in the equally commonplace religion of their socially inferior (and perhaps less educated) contemporaries. Evidence for one facet of an individual's religion, such as the Trinity, can illuminate the whole. There are many parallels to Robert I's *quatrefoil*.

Each Hungerford conformed to the standards of his age and they have much in common as a group. Yet they did *not* all possess the same intellectual attainments. If Walter and Robert II understood Latin, as it seems they did, the others probably could not. And yet all selected Latin prayers. Robert I is not unusual in his French injunction to pray and the Latin prayers that he prescribed.⁵¹ It seems that it was possible for those illiterate in Latin to appreciate, select, and even enjoy Latin prayers. Perhaps it was not just the words, but the ceremony and music that accompanied them – their visual and aural contexts – that we need to consider. Since the liturgy was universal, its appeal need not have been confined to the aristocracy. It was certainly shared by women as well as men and may

indeed have stretched down the social hierarchy, though this remains to be tested and it will require different sources for those with too little income to make foundations or wills that survive. But the Hungerfords clearly understood what the texts themselves contained. Their knowledge and understanding and its development over time is a great tribute to the success of the Church in imparting its message.

That the Hungerfords understood Christian teaching does not mean that they always conformed in everyday life. Admittedly on occasion each can be shown to have acted from religious motives that overrode more obvious material considerations.⁵² Yet they were acutely conscious of sin and guilt. The genuine religious fervour that inspired their foundations went with the maximisation of their personal profit, the exploitation of existing institutions, the transfer of expense as far as possible to others, and the overriding of the wishes of earlier founders if financially advantageous. The mixture of idealism and materialism is not unusual and is illustrated, for example, by Eton College.⁵³ To demonstrate the reality of conventional piety, whilst important, is not enough. To trace its influence on everyday conduct is the even greater challenge for the future.⁵⁴

Notes

¹ King Alfred's College, Winchester awarded me study leave in Lent term 1984, when an earlier version of this paper was delivered to the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York. I am grateful for advice on an earlier draft from Professor R.B. Dobson. Unless otherwise stated, all places are in Wiltshire.

² R.N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), 252–308, esp. 276–9.

³ Swanson, 253.

⁴ P. Heath, 'Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: The Case of the Hull Wills', *C[hurch], P[olitics and] P[atronage in the Later Middle Ages]*, ed. R.B. Dobson (Gloucester, 1984), 229.

⁵ Defects in late medieval religion have been suggested as contributing to the Reformation, see C. Richmond, 'Religion and the Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman', *CPP*, 193–207; M.C. Carpenter, 'The Religion of the Gentry of Fifteenth-Century England', *England in the Fifteenth-Century*, ed. D. Williams (Woodbridge, 1987), 53–74; and see n.6.

⁶ Heath, loc. cit. 208–34; J.I. Kermode, 'The Merchants of Three Northern English Towns', *Profession, Vocation and Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. C.H. Clough (Liverpool, 1982), 1–48; C. Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Late Medieval England*, ed. M.A. Hicks (Gloucester, 1990), 14–33; M.G.A. Vale, *Piety, Charity and Literacy among the Yorkshire Gentry 1370–1480* (Borthwick Paper 1, 1976); P. Fleming, 'Charity, Faith and the Gentry of Kent 1422–1529', *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History*, ed. A.J. Pollard (Gloucester, 1984), 36–58, esp. footnotes.

⁷ Fleming, *passim*; Burgess, 14–33; R. Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1989); R. Whiting, “‘For the health of my soul’: Prayers for the Dead in the Tudor South-West”; G.J. Mayhew, ‘The Progress of the Reformation in East Sussex; The Evidence from Wills’, *Southern History* v (1983), 38–94.

⁸ See papers listed in M.A. Hicks, ‘The Piety of Margaret Lady Hungerford (d. 1478)’, *Richard III and his Rivals: Magnates and their Motives during the Wars of the Roses* (London, 1991), 99n.

⁹ *Ibid.* ch. 5.

¹⁰ Hicks, *Rivals*, chs. 4–6; ‘Walter Lord Hungerford (d. 1449) and his Chantry in Salisbury Cathedral’, *Hatcher Review* ii.xxviii (1989), 391–9. Unless otherwise stated, these are the source for the rest of this article.

¹¹ K.A. Mertes, *The English Noble Household 1250–1600* (Oxford, 1988), ch. 5, as interpreted by M.A. Hicks, ‘The English Minoresses and their Benefactors 1281–1367’, *Monastic Studies: The Continuity of the Tradition*, ed. J. Loades (Bangor, 1990), 165.

¹² T. Phillippis, *Institutiones Clericorum in Comitatu Wiltoniae* (Middle Hill, 1825), quoting Wiltshire RO Register of Bishop Wyvill.

¹³ K.L. Wood-Legh, *Studies in Church Life under Edward III* (Cambridge, 1934), appx.; Hicks, ‘Minoresses’, 166.

¹⁴ Somerset RO DD/SAS H348 [Hungerford Cartulary] f. 259.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* ff. 259–261, 262.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* ff. 260v–261.

¹⁷ W. Dugdale, *Baronage of England* (2 vols. 1675–6), ii. 203; E. Ashmole, *Antiquities of Berkshire* (London, 1719), ii. 247–8; R. Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain* (London, 1796), i.ii. 107–8; W. Money, *Historical Sketch of the Town of Hungerford* (Newbury, 1894), 18–19.

¹⁸ *C[alendar off] P[atent] R[olls] 1330–4*, 178; *Abstracts of Wiltshire Inquisitions post mortem*, ed. E. Stokes (Index Library xlviii, 1908), 22.

¹⁹ Money, 18–19.

²⁰ *Breviarium ad usum insignis Ecclesiae Sarum*, ed. F. Proctor and C. Wordsworth (3 vols. Cambridge, 1882–86), ii. 274.

²¹ P. Sheingorn, ‘The Bosom of the Abraham Trinity: A Late Medieval All Saints Image’, *England in the 15th Century*, ed. Williams, 286.

²² Phillippis, *Institutiones*.

²³ *C[alendar off] P[apal] L[etters] 1362–1404*, 220.

²⁴ Lambeth P[alace] L[ibrary] Register of Archbishop Arundel ii. f. 152–v.

²⁵ *Calendar of Papal Petitions 1342–1419*, 531.

²⁶ Hicks, *Richard III and his Rivals*, 123.

²⁷ *VCH Wilts.* iii. 300; SRO DD/SAS H348 ff. 257v–8v.

²⁸ *Register of William Edington, Bishop of Winchester 1346–66*, ed. F. Hockey (2 vols., Hampshire Record Series vii & viii, 1986–7), i. viii; ii. 634.

²⁹ G. Chaucer, *Complete Works*, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd edn. London, 1959), 19.

³⁰ Lambeth PL Reg. Arundel ii. f. 152. For what follows see, Somerset RO DD/SAS H348 f. 261v.

³¹ Somerset RO DD/SAS H348 f. 262.

³² *Documents relating to the Foundation and Antiquities of the Collegiate Church of Middleham in the County of York*, ed. W. Atthill (Camden Society xxxviii, 1847), 81.

³³ Somerset RO DD/SAS H348 f. 262; *Missale de Lesnes*, ed. P. Jebb (Henry Bradshaw Society xcv, 1964), 150–1; *Missale ad usum insignis et praeclarae ecclesiae Sarum*, ed. F.H. Dickinson (2 vols. Burntisland, 1861–83), ii. 874*–876*.

³⁴ T.J. Milles and A.D. Saunders, ‘The Chantry Priests’ House at Farleigh Hungerford Castle’, *Medieval Archaeology* xix (1975), 165–7.

³⁵ Lambeth PL Reg. Arundel ii. f. 152v.

³⁶ *Obituary Kalendar of Queen's College, Oxford*, ed. J.R. Magrath (Oxford Historical Society lvi, 1911), xiii.

³⁷ See above.

³⁸ This section is based on M.A. Hicks, 'Walter Lord Hungerford (d. 1449) and his Chantry in Salisbury Cathedral', *Hatcher Review* ii.xxviii (1989), 391-9.

³⁹ P. and F. Strong, 'The Last Will and Codicils of Henry V', *English Historical Review* xcvi (1981), 90; G.L. Harriss, *Cardinal Beaufort* (Oxford, 1988), 378. Beaufort was also a devotee, Harriss, 378, 381 & n.

⁴⁰ *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, ed. F.W. Weaver (Somerset Record Society xvi, 1901), 186-93. This is the source for the rest of this section.

⁴¹ *CPL 1447-54*, 70, 384.

⁴² *48th Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office*, 233.

⁴³ Public Record Office PROB 11/4 (PCC 17 Stokton).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *The Canonisation of St Osmund*, ed. A.R. Malden (Wiltshire Record Series ii, 1901), xxxi.

⁴⁶ C. Wordsworth, *Ceremonies and Processions of the Cathedral Church of Salisbury* (Cambridge, 1901), 228.

⁴⁷ For Joan, see Lambeth PL Reg. Arundel ii. f. 152-v; for Eleanor, see PRO PROB 11/4 (PCC 3 Stokton); for Margaret, see Hicks, *Richard III and his Rivals*, ch. 5.

⁴⁸ Wood-Legh, *Studies*, appx.; J.T. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise: Gift Giving and the Aristocracy 1307-1485* (London, 1972).

⁴⁹ Similarly the increase in autobiographies, diaries etc during the Renaissance has been seen somewhat dubiously as evidence of growing individualism, J. Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, ed. S.G.C. Middlemore and I. Gordon (London, 1960), part 2; L. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (abr.edn. London, 1979), 155. Instead they may indicate an increased capacity for self-expression.

⁵⁰ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, ed. E.C.S. Gibson (London, 1910), 5.

⁵¹ E.g. *Titchfield: A Place in History*, ed. R. Wade and D.G. Watts (Southampton, 1988), 13.

⁵² E.g. Hicks, *Richard III and his Rivals*, 96, 192-3.

⁵³ B.P. Wolffe, *Henry VI* (1981), 145; R. Lovatt, 'A Collector of Apocryphal Anecdotes: John Blacman Revisited', *Property and Politics*, ed. Pollard, 187-9.

⁵⁴ For a beginning, see Hicks, *Richard III and his Rivals*, ch. 9.