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THE WORLD OF JOHN OF SALISBURY

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JOHN OF SALISBURY AND THOMAS BECKET

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JOHANNES Sarebiriensis, quondam clericus beati Thomae martiris, diuina dignatione et meritis beati Thomae martiris, Carnotensis ecclesiae minister humilis'.¹ This protocol from the last known letter to come from John of Salisbury's hand attests his continuing devotion to the memory of the blessed martyr of Canterbury and his pride in having once belonged to his household. John had made an important contribution to the beginning of the cult of Saint Thomas the Martyr. His well-known letter *Ex insperato*, addressed in early 1171 to John, bishop of Poitiers (and possibly to others), contains not only the first circumstantial account of the murder in the cathedral but also, most significantly, the earliest discussion of Becket's status as martyr, comparing his trials and sufferings with those of Christ.² Both in its original form as a letter,³ and in an expanded form as a pious *Vita et Passio Sancti Thomae Martyris*,⁴ the record was widely circulated in

¹ *Sicut plurimi*, 1177-79: [The] Letters [of John of Salisbury], 2, [The Later Letters (1163-80) (ed W. J. Millor and C. N. L. Brooke, OMT: Oxford 1979)] 325, p 802.

² Ep 305. For the comparison of Thomas with Christ, see pp 726-31.

³ This letter, sometimes divided into lections, occurs in martyrologies or lectionaries from Cîteaux (Dijon, Bibl municipale MSS 574 and 646), Hasnon (Douai, Bibl municipale MS 855), Marchiennes (Douai, Bibl municipale MS 838), Moissac (Paris, BN MS lat 2098), Saint-Martial de Limoges (Paris, BN MS lat 5347) and Saint-Rémi de Reims (Reims, Bibl municipale MS 302), in addition to a Clermont-Ferrand lectionary (Bibl municipale MS 148), the provenance of which is uncertain.

⁴ Setting aside the strictly liturgical commemorations of Saint Thomas, the evidence of surviving continental MSS, the medieval provenance of which can be securely established, suggests that John's *Vita et Passio* was widely disseminated. Work on the expansion of Becket's cult is still in progress and more copies of John's *Life* may yet come to light. So far, however, versions of his *Vita et Passio* have been found in MSS from Belval (Charleville, Bibl municipale MS 254, vol. 3); Bologna, Bibl dell'Università MS 1604 (*olim* aula III, app MSS 1031); Clairvaux (Montpellier, École de médecine MS 2 and Troyes, Bibl municipale MS 1183); Jumièges (Rouen, Bibl municipale MS U 24, catalogue no 1402); Lyre (Évreux, Bibl municipale MS 7); Monte Cassino, cod casin 466 KK; Novara, Bibl capitolare MS CIV (*olim* 65, catalogue no 80); Sainte-Geneviève (Paris, MS CC.I. in 4° 19, catalogue no 1370); Saint-Ghislain (London, BL Additional MS 10050); Saint-Hubert in the Ardennes (Namur, Bibl du Musée archéologique MS 15, prologue only; Saint-Nicholas in Arnstein (London, BL Harleian MS 2802); Saint-Séverin (Bibl Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, MS E.I. in 4° 21, catalogue no 1648); Saint-Victor (Paris, Bibl de l' Arsenal MS 938); San Felice di Narco (Spoleto, Bibl della cattedrale, Lectionary of San

continental Europe and created an enduring image of the martyr *pro defensione libertatis ecclesiae*. John's second letter-collection was largely concerned with the period of the controversy, spanning the years 1163-75, and he had some hand in initiating the highly valuable collection of Becket's correspondence which was brought to impressive completion by Alan, monk and prior of Canterbury, later abbot of Tewkesbury, in the mid-1170s.⁵

John was therefore closely associated with the promotion of Becket's cult, with the dissemination of accounts of the martyrdom, and the creation of an epistolary memorial to the recent martyr. There can be little doubt of his total commitment to Becket at the last; but certain features of their relationship have raised questions about his attitude to the archbishop while he yet lived, and to his cause. The fact that John did not retain his leading position in the Canterbury *curia* on Becket's promotion (the Canterbury chancellorship went to the little-known Master Arnulf, Becket's clerk when he was royal chancellor,⁶ while William FitzStephen and Herbert of Bosham enjoyed the archbishop's closest confidence), his separation from the *familia* in exile, and the tenor of many of his early letters suggest a certain detachment from Becket, if not actual alienation. This has been explained either in terms of John's moderation (in contrast with Becket's 'extremism') or of his disapproval of Becket's character and behaviour. On this evidence, John is made to appear cautious and conciliatory in regard to the king, criticising Becket's 'excesses' and advising humility and restraint. Beryl Smalley has satisfactorily refuted the theory of his moderation in the

Felice di Narco); Santa Giustina, Padua (Oxford, Bodl. Lyell MS 77: prologue and modified *vita*).

⁵ The precise contribution made by John to Alan's collection remains uncertain. Guy, canon of Merton, claimed that he helped John assemble a collection of letters relating to the cause of Saint Thomas, and his *florilegium* of extracts from that work (Oxford, St. John's College, MS 126) reflects the order of Alan's collection rather than that of John's second collection of letters, although it predominantly contains letters written by John himself. The most satisfactory interpretation of this evidence is that John made a special selection of Becket materials which Alan incorporated into his own more ambitious work. For the latest discussions of the relationship between these letter-collections, see *Letters* 2, pp lviii-lxiii and Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket: A Textual History of his Letters* (Oxford 1980) pp 94-8.

⁶ [The] *Letters [of John of Salisbury]*, 1, [The *Early Letters (1153-1161)* (ed W. J. Millor and H. E. Butler, revised by C. N. L. Brooke, NMT, OMT London 1955)] p 44 n 1. The recipient of *Letters* 1, ep 27, he is the 'suus Ernulfus' of the Becket correspondence, *MHTB*, 5, epp 84 and 163; 6, ep 233. The ascription of these letters to bishop Arnulf of Lisieux is erroneous: see *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux*, ed F. Barlow, *CamSoc*, 3 series, 61 (1939) p lxxxvii.

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context of the Becket controversy.⁷ John's belief in the primacy of the spiritual and commitment to the immunity of the clergy were as total as Becket's, and he never withdrew from the position adopted in his *Policraticus*.⁸

His personal attitude to Becket, however, is less easy to define in simple terms. Miss Smalley has called it ambivalent;⁹ others have considered it circumspect; while a hostile critic might question its general integrity. Self-conscious expressions of difference of opinion and criticism alternate with professions of loyalty and duty; counsels of restraint in certain circumstances are followed by pleas for stronger action in others. It would not be difficult to use selected evidence from John's own letters to show him primarily concerned with his own interests, or conscientiously disturbed by Becket's conduct of the dispute with the king, or as one of Becket's most forthright supporters. Nor is the modern commentator helped by John's command of rhetorical device, or his use of private jokes and allusions whose meaning can no longer be recovered. We run the risk, sometimes, of mistaking light-hearted jokes between friends for studied sarcasm, or of misconstruing the intentions of a particular letter, read in isolation. Nevertheless, most of the apparent contradictions are resolved if proper attention is paid to the immediate context within which a given letter was written. Letters to members of the king's circle, for example, or to friends with access to the royal court, were composed in the knowledge that they might be brought to the king's ear, and adjusted accordingly. Even private letters could be stolen or betrayed, and a prudent man did not sell too many hostages to fortune. What the early letters of the exile reveal most strikingly is the dilemma of a man of principle trying to save his career and his conscience in a period of acute crisis, attempting to find not so much a middle way between opposing parties, as a means of reconciling his ecclesiastical convictions and loyalties with the recovery of royal grace. His outward demeanour in regard to Becket was moulded by the changing circumstances of the exile, and evolved according to his evaluation of the possibilities of an honourable reconciliation with the king.

He had not been a willing exile. The reason for his proscription is obscure, though FitzStephen was possibly right in ascribing it to Henry II's desire to deprive Becket of John's support as the crisis deepened

⁷ [Beryl] Smalley, [*The Becket Conflict and the Schools* (Oxford 1973)] p 103.

⁸ *Policraticus* viii.18 [(ed C. C. I. Webb: Oxford 1909)] 2, p 364.

⁹ Smalley p 88.

through the winter of 1163–4. It is also likely that the opinions expressed in the *Policraticus*, with its defence of clerical immunity and attack on royal ecclesiastical policies, had already made him *persona non grata* to the king. Still earlier he had survived a period of royal disfavour (1156–7) by enlisting the aid of influential patrons and friends,¹⁰ and doubtless he hoped to secure Henry's pardon by the same means in 1164–6. Therefore in the first phase of his exile, he was concerned to recover the goodwill of the king and to return to England, and to this end he was obliged to avoid too close an association between himself and the archbishop and his fortunes. And in pursuit of this goal of a separate accommodation with Henry II, he besought the good offices of influential friends and acquaintances,¹¹ acknowledging his loyalty to the archbishop and his cause while underlining his personal independence. He was treading a difficult path between his desire to regain the king's grace and his duty to his archbishop. 'I do not deny', he wrote to the bishop-elect of Bayeux in 1164–5, 'having kept faith with the archbishop of Canterbury and his church; but I am prepared to show that neither the honour due to the king nor his interests have in any way suffered from me',¹² sentiments which he repeated on more than one occasion.¹³ He was careful not to jeopardise his own chances by too close a public association with Thomas. This purpose explains his taking refuge with Peter of La Celle, abbot of Saint-Rémi in Rheims, which enabled him to preserve a studied objectivity, also his withdrawal from Becket's *familia*, announced in letters to Master Humphrey Bos¹⁴ and to bishop Bartholomew of Exeter,¹⁵ his refusal to

¹⁰ *Letters* 1 pp 257–8.

¹¹ For letters to Henry de Beaumont, bishop-elect of Bayeux, Master Humphrey Bos, chancellor of Bayeux, Richard of Ilchester, archdeacon of Poitiers, Bartholomew, bishop of Exeter, and Robert, prior of Merton, see *Letters* 2, 138–9 and 149–51. His letters to the justiciar, Richard de Lucy, and to the bishops of London, Hereford, Worcester and Chichester have not survived, but see *Letters* 2 pp 48–53.

¹² *Letters* 2 p 20, 'non diffiteor quin ecclesiae et archiepiscopo Cantuariensi debitam fidem seruauerim, sed quod ex conscientia contra honorem regi debitum aut utilitatem me in nullo uersatum esse'.

¹³ *Letters* 2 pp 20–2 (to Master Humphrey Bos), 'Ecclesiae et archiepiscopo Cantuariensi debitam seruauim fidem et ei, ubi iustitia et modestia uidebantur adesse, et in Anglia et in partibus cismarinis fideliter astiti'; p 48 (to Bartholomew, bishop of Exeter), 'Seruauim quidem fidem debitam domino meo archiepiscopo, sed ex conscientia mea saluo honore regis'. See also ep 167, to Master Raymond, chancellor of Poitiers, and ep 183, to Engelbert, prior of Val-Saint-Pierre.

¹⁴ *Letters* 2 p 22, 'sciatisque pro certo quia michi propositum est ut non sim de cetero curialis; et hoc ipsum bene nouit dominus Cantuariensis, a cuius me subtraxi consortio, sed nec fidem subtraho nec caritatem' (italics mine).

¹⁵ *Letters* 2 p 48, 'Nollem quidem expromittere quod Cantuariensi de cetero non seruirem, et tamen michi Deus testis est quod ex proposito non ero de cetero curialis'.

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act as Becket's envoy in early 1164,¹⁶ and his expressions of divergence and criticism likewise addressed to Master Humphrey and bishop Bartholomew.¹⁷ For the same period, his letters to Becket are discouraging and pessimistic. In his view, neither the king of France nor the pope could be relied upon for help, since Henry II's tentacles of power and influence were everywhere.¹⁸ His advice in *Cum dominum papam*, written in January 1165, was almost a counsel of despair (as Miss Smalley has recognised),¹⁹ for he judged at that time that the recovery of royal favour, by whatever honourable means possible, was the only solution for the archbishop and for himself. This was the context of his much-quoted advice to Becket to abandon the study of canon law in favour of prayer and meditation on the psalms and on the moral writings of Saint Gregory, often used to demonstrate John's distrust of canon law and disapproval of Becket's position.²⁰ But that is not the meaning of the letter. It was the advice of an anxious man hoping for a diplomatic way out of an impasse. As Becket had wavered at Clarendon in 1164, so John flinched in 1165 before the prospect of an unequal struggle. The opposition seemed too strong, the support too unreliable, to induce a prudent man to continue a dispute whose outcome was so uncertain. It was not that he doubted the justice of the cause, rather that he feared the consequences of defeat. For his own sake, therefore, as for Becket's, he urged humility and prayer.

His interview with the king at Angers in May 1166, however, convinced him that such a policy was ill-conceived.²¹ Henry II's demands for acceptance of the Constitutions of Clarendon and abjuration of the exiled archbishop showed the true nature of the issues at stake, and John found that he could not accept them with any semblance of honour.²² From that point he became an increasingly outspoken de-

¹⁶ *Letters* 2 p 12.

¹⁷ *Letters* 2 p 22 (to Master Humphrey), 'Sicubi uero aut exorbitare a iustitia aut modum excedere uidebatur, restiti ei in faciem'; p 48 (to bishop Bartholomew), 'saepius et asperius quam aliquis mortalium corripuerim dominum archiepiscopum de his, in quibus ab initio dominum regem et suos zelo quodam inconsultius uisus est ad amaritudinem prouocasse'.

¹⁸ *Letters* 2 pp 8-15.

¹⁹ *Letters* 2, 144; see Smalley p 103.

²⁰ [W. L.] Warren, [*Henry II* (London 1973)] pp 512-13.

²¹ The fullest account of the Angers interviews is given by William FitzStephen, *MHTB* 3, pp 98-101. See also *Letters* 2, pp 98-9, and n 46 below.

²² *Letters* 2 p 86 (to his brother Richard), 'Potueram namque recipere quae michi, ut opinor, per iniuriam auferuntur, si aeterna uellem usquequaque postponere et libertatem spiritus pernicioso et certe periculosissimo artare iuramento . . . ego, prout exigebatur, sine dispendio salutis et famae petitam non possem praestare cautionem'.

fender and counsellor of the archbishop and a fierce critic of the latter's enemies (though his immediate reaction to the Vézelay sentences contained something of his earlier ambivalence, as long as efforts were being made through John of Poitiers and Richard of Ilchester for his pardon).²³ His public commitment to Becket deepened as the possibility of his own restoration faded. His change of outward demeanour was signalled in July 1166, and several letters to Becket record a decisive hardening of his attitudes. In *Etsi certum sit* he urged Becket to summon his suffragans on any pretext,²⁴ presumably to demonstrate his authority and to extricate the bishops from an increasingly difficult situation; his letter *Litteras quas* commented acidly on the English bishops' appeal against Becket, denounced its presumed author, Gilbert Foliot, here called Achitophel, the prefigurer of Judas, and praised the wisdom and propriety of Becket's reply to it;²⁵ and *Recepi nuper* attacked the bishops in language stronger than any found in Becket's own letters of the time.²⁶ Simultaneously he began to share in strategic discussions with Nicholas of Mont-Saint-Jacques²⁷ and John of Poitiers (whose own reconciliation with king Henry had just been secured on favourable terms),²⁸ to write on behalf of the exiles,²⁹ and to compose long letters defending Becket's cause and actions, some addressed, significantly, to Bartholomew of Exeter and to Baldwin, archdeacon of Totnes,³⁰ who could circulate them among the English episcopate, and

²³ *Letters* 2 pp 184-5.

²⁴ *Letters* 2, 173.

²⁵ *Letters* 2, 175, esp p 160, 'Vos autem, ut michi uisum est, litteris et malitiae eorum prudentissime et elegantissime respondistis'.

²⁶ *Letters* 2, 176, esp pp 170-5.

²⁷ *Letters* 2 pp 190-1.

²⁸ *Letters* 2 pp 188-9.

²⁹ *Letters* 2, 213 (to the pope), on behalf of the Canterbury exiles who are suffering 'pro tuenda libertate ecclesiae' (p 348); 2, 219 (also to the pope).

³⁰ See esp *Letters* 2, 174 (*Multa quidem*, July 1166) and 187 (*Expectatione longa*, late 1166) addressed respectively to Bartholomew and Baldwin. *Multa quidem* (evidently written with the bishops' appeal before him, since he quotes verbatim from its text) condemns the appeal of 24th June 1166, *MHTB* 5 (ep 205), which he regards as a piece of royalist propaganda fabricated by Gilbert Foliot of London, contemptuously described as 'your scribe' (*notarius uester*) and 'ruler of the synagogue' (*archisinagogus*), whom he accused of having sought the primacy. In *Expectatione longa*, written to the archdeacon of Totnes somewhat later, he deploys a fully-developed justification of Becket, rebutting the charges made against him in the bishops' appeal and extended in Gilbert Foliot's *Multiplicem nobis* (*The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot* [ed Adrian Morey and C. N. L. Brooke: Cambridge 1967] ep 170) and blaming the bishops' own unreliability and lukewarmness for Becket's momentary weakness at Clarendon.

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others to Peter, formerly the king's scribe,³¹ who could pass them on to the royal administration.

By that time he was fully identified with the cause of the Canterbury exiles, though some tensions may have persisted. John's occasional jibes at members of Becket's resident household may suggest a lingering coolness,³² which would be hardly surprising. He had ostentatiously left the *familia* on his arrival in France, in an effort to protect himself from involvement in the fortunes of the archbishop, whose cause at that moment he thought to be all but lost. It was not to be expected that a man of the character of Herbert of Bosham would have entertained warm sentiments towards the prodigal, and John's pointed request for Becket to bring only 'a few prudent and wise' clerks to a projected interview with the empress Matilda—'if you have any such'—seems directed towards the flamboyant Master Herbert.³³ It is possible, of course, that remarks such as these were no more than banter among friends, testifying to an amicable rivalry between John and his colleagues. Even so, the fact that he did not sever his links with the royal court may well have told against him; his attempted protection of influential contacts like bishop Jocelin of Salisbury and Richard of Ilchester may have done likewise. He was concerned to keep open the channels of communication between himself and the king's entourage. Hence, while he condemned the usurpation of the deanery of Salisbury by the king's agent, John of Oxford,³⁴ and bitterly denounced his

³¹ See esp *Letters* 2, 225 (*Raritas intermeantium*, c October 1167), where he attributes Becket's concession at Clarendon to the pressure of the bishops, though he does not seek to excuse it—'Pollicitationem Clarendonae, ad quam de consilio episcoporum impulsus est, purgare non possum'—and defends his flight from Northampton as a defence of the sinking English Church, not abandonment of it—'Confugit ergo ad Romanum pontificem . . . ut eius praesidio ualidius opitaretur ecclesiae naufraganti. . . . Hoc autem non fuit ecclesiam exponere, sed liberationi eius operam dare' (p 392).

³² In a letter to Becket in summer 1166 (*Letters* 2, 179), John seems to be impugning the moderation and discretion of the household, or certain members of it (see n 33 below); more than a year later, in condemning the breach of diplomatic etiquette in Becket's proposed letters to cardinal William of Pavia, he submitted his own conciliatory letter to the cardinal (*Letters* 2, 229) for Becket's approval, because 'nolo ut sensus insulsus et ariditas linguae meae in uestrae clientelae risum et opinionis meae dispendium publicetur' (p 400).

³³ *Letters* 2 p 190, 'sed paucos, prouidos et discretos, si quos tamen habetis tales'. See FitzStephen's lively description of Herbert of Bosham's interview with Henry II at Angers (*MHTB* 3 pp 99–101), and the well-judged comparison of Herbert and John of Salisbury in Smalley, pp 87–8; also p 59: 'Master Herbert was a colourful character who loved a scrap. He was also a gifted writer, an original thinker, an artist and the best Hebraist of the century'.

³⁴ *Letters* 2 pp 170–1, 354–5, and 372–5.

embassy to Rome in 1167, he tried to soften Becket's judgement in regard to Jocelin of Salisbury and Richard of Ilchester,³⁵ in the interests of diplomacy. He fully appreciated the delicate position of friends in the king's circle, like Master Ralph Niger, who might be required, in order to exercise any moderating influence, to ignore the excommunication of royal clerks,³⁶ and he was acutely conscious of the almost impossible situation created for the bishops and clergy of England, caught between the *publica potestas* of the king and the obligations of their ecclesiastical duty.³⁷ Nevertheless, to the extent that they failed to resist Henry's demands and participated in frustratory appeals against their exiled archbishop, John considered them to be culpable, and he urged that their allegiance be put to the test (though he privately told Bartholomew of Exeter that he need not obey Becket's summons, if obedience were too risky, because 'we have not set such snares for you');³⁸ and in the end he was insistent that Becket should use the papal interdicts which he had been empowered to impose if peace were not swiftly made.³⁹

Like Thomas in 1162-3, John also had to make a choice between

³⁵ See his letters to Jocelin's brother, Richard de Bohun, bishop of Coutances (*Letters* 2, 216), to Jocelin's son, Reginald Lombardus (FitzJocelin), archdeacon of Salisbury (2, 217), and to Jocelin himself (2, 218). In *Romanos amicus* (2, 278), he recognised his obligations to Jocelin and asked Becket to spare him, 'nostis me domini Saresberiensis esse a multo tempore debitorem, et Deus novit quantum infortunio eius compatiar; ideoque . . . omni deuotione supplico ut ipsius, quantum salua honestate ecclesiae et uestra poteritis, misereamini, nec a me unquam aliud consilium audietis' (2, p 600). Writing to Master Ralph Niger in summer 1166 (2, 181, p 202), he promised to do his best for Richard, 'Temptabo utique, ut consulitis, archiepiscopum flectere pro archidiacono Pictauiensi, si tamen intellexeritis quod ad pacem ecclesiae possit proficere labor meus; alioquin probrosum esset et turpe patrem circumuenire et dominum', though later (2, 182, p 206) he somewhat ambiguously commended his refusal to consort with the archdeacon.

³⁶ In *Fides et deuotio* (2, 182, cited in n 35 above), John discussed the problem of association with excommunicates in the context of Ralph's refusal to have dealings with Richard of Ilchester. He distinguished four forms of contact: salutation with a kiss, sharing a common table, praying together, and greetings, and argued that a distinction should be made between the perfect and the imperfect observance of the canon law, between the ideal and the necessity imposed on imperfect men by the pressure of 'public power'. This is one of John's most ambivalent letters. It implies that Ralph should overlook Richard's excommunication in order to use the opportunity afforded by his friendship in the service of the Church. Becket forbade precisely this kind of equivocation to bishop Roger of Worcester in 1169, *MHTB* 6, p 577.

³⁷ See esp his discussion of the dilemma of Bartholomew of Exeter in early 1168, *Letters* 2, pp 462-9.

³⁸ *Letters* 2 p 152, 'Non enim uobis laqueum procurauimus'. John had urged Becket to summon the bishops, despite their appeal to the pope, 2 pp 134-5.

³⁹ *Letters* 2 pp 708-9.

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principle and career, between loyalty to the Church and duty to the king, between the enjoyment of his rightful position in English ecclesiastical administration and an exile which, no matter how congenial the 'paradise' of Saint-Rémi proved to be,⁴⁰ was unwillingly endured. And, in all the cross-currents of conflicting friendships, associations and loyalties, John clung to two overriding principles: faithfulness to Becket, whom he refused to forswear; and steadfast opposition to the Clarendon constitutions which he regarded as inimical to the rightful freedom of the English church. Like many a twelfth-century ecclesiastic, John had tried to maintain the golden equilibrium between ecclesiastical and secular lordship and power; but when circumstances compelled him to choose, like Becket, he chose the Church. It is not possible to read the letters written in May to August 1166 without being aware of the anguish of mind and conscience that the king's enmity and the crisis in the Church had imposed on him, and the painfulness of the final choice.⁴¹ He would have done anything, short of binding himself by oath to observe the Constitutions of Clarendon and of abandoning the archbishop,⁴² to secure the king's peace and a safe return to Exeter, where Bartholomew was ready to receive him. But the king's terms were too severe. John had too fine a sense of clerical honour and his personal reputation to purchase peace by publicly denying his fundamental loyalties.⁴³ So had it been with Thomas. Beryl Smalley is right to speak of Becket having to cross the boundary, having to make a choice, rightly judging that what was possible for Hubert Walter a generation later (when institutional evolution and Henry's accommodation with the pope had reduced somewhat the vulnerability of the Church to a powerful king) was not possible for Thomas in 1162.⁴⁴ He could be either a courtier or a cleric; he could not

⁴⁰ *Letters* 2 pp 724-5.

⁴¹ See esp *Si affectum* (to his brother Richard, *Letters* 2, 164, cited in n 22 above), *Puer meus* (to Master Raymond of Poitiers, 2, 167, cited in n 43 below), and *Litterae tuae* (to Master Ralph of Lisieux, 2, 202, cited in n 51 below).

⁴² *MHTB* 3 p 99, 'dicens, se nutritum ab adolescentia de bonis Cantuariensis ecclesiae, et juratum esse in domini papae et archiepiscopi sui obedientiam; neque posse Cantuariensi ecclesiae vel domino suo archiepiscopo deesse, neque posse quarumlibet consuetudinum observantiam suscipere contra dominum papam et ecclesiam Cantuariensem'. See also nn 46 and 51 below.

⁴³ *Letters* 2 p 96 (to Master Raymond of Poitiers), 'Si de praeteritis agatur, non nego me Cantuariensi archiepiscopo sicut domino et patri meo debitum et deuotum prestitisse obsequium, et utinam efficacius prestitissem; nec unquam, Deo propitio, ad hoc pro quacumque utilitate uel dampno deducar ut dominum meum, quicumque sit, abiurando uel abnegando maculem uitam meam, immo et memoriam nominis et gentis meae coram Deo et hominibus'; see also n 51 below.

⁴⁴ Smalley pp 118-20.

be both in that situation. So, when the king made him archbishop, he resigned the chancellorship. His political career had not made the *conversio morum* either difficult or absurd, though the change surprised many who had known the *parvenu* and the courtier.

The circumstances of the controversy forced many, early or late, to make this choice—to cross over, in Miss Smalley's appropriate phrase. The king's adamant persecution of anyone connected with Becket in his personal or public capacity, his insistence on the Constitutions of Clarendon, and his requirement of public oaths subversive of ecclesiastical authority, whether that of the archbishop or of the pope,⁴⁵ drove the bishops gradually to the point of decision. Henry regarded fealty to himself as an exclusive obligation,⁴⁶ and compelled his household,⁴⁷ the bishops,⁴⁸ and Becket's *familia* to choose between himself and the archbishop, making acceptance of the Constitutions a touchstone of loyalty to the crown. In no instance is this dilemma so clearly shown as in the career of John of Salisbury, and his reaction to it is particularly illuminating in the context of Becket's intransigence.

It is frequently argued, and the point has been firmly restated by Professor Warren, that Becket's pride and pettiness prolonged the dispute and made reasonable and intelligent negotiation impossible. Henry would have been satisfied, according to this interpretation, with

⁴⁵ In October 1169, Henry II attempted to protect himself from the consequences of an interdict by compelling the adult population of England to swear that they would not obey any sentences imposed by the archbishop or by the pope, and issued severe decrees against any who should fail to observe his mandate, *MHTB* 1 pp 53-5 and 3, pp 102-3. Although some of the bishops seem to have allowed the oath to be administered in their lands, they all refused to take the oath themselves: see M. D. Knowles, Anne J. Duggan, C. N. L. Brooke, 'Henry II's Supplement to the Constitutions of Clarendon', *EHR* (1972) pp 757-71, esp pp 760-1.

⁴⁶ See FitzStephen's record of the arguments put to John himself at Angers, *MHTB* 3 p 99, 'Dictum est ei pro rege, quod in terra regis natus et nutritus . . . et . . . oportere eum sicut regni regis indigenam regi esse fidelem contra archiepiscopum et omnes homines: propositaque est ei forma sacramenti, si jurare vellet, quod regi fidelis foret de vita et membris suis, et honore suo terreno conservando contra omnes homines, et nominatim, quod consuetudines suas scriptas et regales suas dignitates legitime conservaret, quidquid faceret dominus papa vel archiepiscopus vel episcopus suus'. Similarly exclusive loyalty is implied in Henry's statement to the nobles and courtiers assembled at Chinon on 1 June 1166—'dixit quod omnes proditores erant qui eum adhibita opera et diligentia ab unius hominis infestatione nolebant expedire' (*Letters* 2 p 108). As recorded here by John of Salisbury, this is a telling anticipation of the words which allegedly precipitated Becket's murder.

⁴⁷ Walter de Insula, keeper of the king's seal, was required to swear that he would receive no messages from the Canterbury exiles (*Letters* 2 p 78), 'Audio magistrum Galterium iuramento artari, ut neque litteras neque nuntios recipiat exultantium.'

⁴⁸ FitzStephen records an illuminating exchange between Henry II and bishop Roger of Worcester in 1170, see *MHTB* 3 pp 104-5.

John of Salisbury and Thomas Becket

the mere 'submission of the clergy' and recognition of his royal rights and privileges.⁴⁹ The pattern of John of Salisbury's experience, however, proves otherwise. No amount of diplomacy and humility sufficed to mollify the king: even John's withdrawal from Becket's household was to no avail. What Henry demanded was not a simple expression of submission and loyalty (which John would surely have given), but a root and branch abjuration of principles which he cherished—and that from a man against whom no specific offence could be alleged. This was indeed the same that Henry demanded from Becket. The significance of the king's insistence on sworn agreements has not perhaps generally received the attention it deserves, partly because the gravity of the solemnly-sworn oath has not been sufficiently discussed in the context of the dispute. For Becket and for John this was a most important consideration. The refusal of the Becket party to bind itself to such agreements, without some saving phrases, has been seen as petty insistence on inessentials (and such insistence did indeed momentarily alienate Louis VII and John of Poitiers).⁵⁰ John's attitude to the binding power of oaths throws valuable light on the sensitive conscience of the time in their regard.⁵¹ The whole contemporary feudal structure was held together by oath; religious life was sanctioned by permanent vows; and any sworn undertaking was regarded as an irrevocable promise to God, the breaking of which put a man's soul in peril. The breaking of an oath, which was regarded as perjury, injured a man's legal standing as well as his public honour and personal salvation. An unconditional oath

⁴⁹ Warren, p 402.

⁵⁰ At Montmirail in January 1169, *MHTB* 3 pp 424–5 and 428–9; see also FitzStephen's account of the attitude of Henry of Houghton, one of Becket's clerks, on the same occasion, pp 96–7.

⁵¹ *Letters* 2 p 96 (to Master Raymond of Poitiers), 'Si uero de iuramentis actum fuerit, nouit dominus meus episcopus quam subtili reuerentia in talibus teneat. Nunquid ergo iurare possem in ea praescriptione uerborum aut potius salutis proscriptioe quae ab aliis (ut audio) exigitur et praestatur, ubi nec Dei nec legis nec ordinis saluandi licet fieri mentionem? Sed et de consuetudinibus reprobis et legibus ignotis aut repugnantibus legi Dei seruandis quis sacramentum praestat, nisi alienus a fide et omnium sacramentorum contemptor?' (see also n 43 above); p 296 (to Master Ralph of Lisieux), 'Sed forte dices quia pridem proposita mutabitur formula iuramenti nec cogetur aliquis in reprobarum consuetudinum uerba iurare, contentus erit exactor iuramenti si fidelitatis seruandae sibi succinctim absolute uerba praestentur, ita quidem ut non adiciatur fidem ecclesiae et praelatorum obedientiam saluam fore; nam, ut aiunt, istis nec uult nec uoluit praeiudicare quod nec exigitur iuramentum. Verum si praeiudicare non debet, quare necessariae ad salutem obseruationis non licet fieri mentionem? Si praeiudicat, qua conscientia praestabitur a fidei?'; p 386 (to John of Poitiers), 'Nam si de iuramentis agitur quae dominus rex a nobis exigere consuevit, rogo Deum meum ut ante michi mortem misericorditer largiatur quam conscientiam et famam iuramentis talibus maculare'.

bound absolutely, and even the commonplace fealty could be interpreted very widely indeed, if it were not restricted. John could not swear to the king's requirements at Angers in 1166, nor could he allow negotiations on his behalf to continue without establishing the clear principle that he could not bind himself to any undertaking which did not explicitly protect his clerical status.⁵² And so it would be with Becket through the arduous negotiations from Gisors-Trie in 1167⁵³ to Montmirail in 1169.⁵⁴ Both John and Thomas were of one mind in the importance which they attached to clauses like *salvo ordine meo* and *salvo honore Dei* in any agreements they might make with the king. For John as for Becket, such phrases were not mere face-saving *formulae*, but an essential safeguard for the rights of the Church.

Throughout the long and difficult years of exile John of Salisbury had 'kept faith', not only with the archbishop of Canterbury and his church, but also with friends as diverse as Jocelin of Salisbury and John of Poitiers, preserving all the while a high concept of clerical honour. The ambiguities of his early letters reflect the cross-currents of contemporary public life and the dilemma which conflicting loyalties placed him in. It may be thought that he tried to face too many ways at once, especially amid the uncertainties and dangers of the years 1163-6. But that would be a harsh judgement in the light of his consistency on profounder matters of principle. His pursuit of an individual accommodation with Henry II, in the fashion of Philip of Calne, William FitzStephen, and others, should not be interpreted as hostility to Becket or disagreement with his cause. It was his unswerving loyalty to the archbishop and opposition to the Constitutions of Clarendon which cost him the peace he so earnestly desired. No matter how strong his wish for the king's pardon, he was not prepared to sell his soul to purchase it.

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⁵² See n 51 above.

⁵³ In his first conference with the king, held 'inter Gisorcium et Triam' on 18 November 1167, Becket insisted on the insertion of the saving clause '*saluo honore Dei et libertate ecclesiae et honestate personae suae et possessionibus ecclesiarum*', *Letters* 2 pp 408-9.

⁵⁴ These same reservations were repeated at Montmirail on 6 January 1169, *Letters* 2 pp 640-1.