

## The cult of Erkenwald at St Paul's Cathedral

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DOI:

[10.1007/978-3-030-77267-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77267-3_2)

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*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Yarrow, S 2021, The cult of Erkenwald at St Paul's Cathedral. in S Altman & J Buckner (eds), Old St Paul's and culture. Early Modern Literature in History, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 29-50. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77267-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77267-3_2)

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## *The Cult of St Erkenwald at St Paul's Cathedral*

### *Introduction*

The early history of St Paul's cathedral and chapter, from its foundation in c.604 to the Norman Conquest of England, is obscure. We have no archaeological or architectural remains for the foundation prior to the tenth century,<sup>1</sup> and little historical information about the community from the seventh and eighth centuries. The texts for fewer than three dozen charters produced by the community survive for the whole period, and most of them are late, composite fabrications, some only surviving in fragments and facsimiles made by antiquarians. A forged foundation charter takes its cue from Bede's record that, 'King Aethelbert built a church dedicated to the Holy Apostle Paul in the city of London, which he appointed as the episcopal see of Mellitus and his successors'.<sup>2</sup> A writ of Edward the Confessor granting judicial and financial privileges to the priests of St Paul's,<sup>3</sup> survived into the seventeenth century, but was lost during the Commonwealth period along with three medieval cartularies and a thirteenth-century roll. Their modern editor, Susan Kelly, has alternatively suggested - from the lack of early charters dealing with the chapter and high number of forgeries among them, relative to those surviving for the bishop - that the canons were either assiduous in destroying outdated versions of charters they periodically 'improved', or that archives and estates might even have been held separately from as early as 1000. In short, St Paul's surviving records provide only incomplete and intermittent evidence for its early institutional history and for historical moments in the making and remaking of its institutional memory.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter addresses one particular moment in the recovery and remaking of the institutional memory of St Paul's, the miracle stories accompanying the translation of St Erkenwald's remains in 1140. Erkenwald was bishop of London and the East Saxons (675-93), and a key figure in the consolidation of the diocese following a period of set back from 617 to 659, when the community had

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<sup>1</sup> *St Paul's : the cathedral church of London 604-2004*, eds. Derek Keene, Arthur Burns, Andrew Saint, (New Haven, CT, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. L. Sherley-Price and rev. ed., D. H. Farmer (London, 1990), pp.107-8. *Charters of St Paul's, London* ed. S. Kelly (Oxford, 2004), pp.2-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>4</sup> See P. Taylor, 'Foundation and Endowment: St Paul's and the English Kingdoms, 604-1087', in *St Paul's : the cathedral church of London 604-2004*, pp.5-16, for a detailed reconstruction of its endowment and benefactors.

fled a pagan backlash. The *Miraculi Sancti Erkenwaldi* (henceforth *MSE*), was written soon after the translation of St Erkenwald's body in 1140, and probably in 1141. Its fullest surviving manuscript, a slightly abridged mid-twelfth century copy of the lost archetype, provides the base for its modern English translation, and for this chapter.<sup>5</sup> It is a collection of nineteen narratives separated by rubrics and headed by a proem. Its author identifies himself as a nephew of Gilbert the Universal, the biblical commentator and bishop of London (1127-1134), and was most likely Arcoid, a cathedral canon. Arcoid claims not to have recorded all the miracles performed by St Erkenwald. Rather, he compiled 'a few from the many', most of them contemporary, a few surviving from earlier generations. He refers to some relatively briefly or in passing, others he omits, 'to avoid tedium', still others, we are told, were lost as past generations failed to preserve oral traditions in writing.

Arcoid repeatedly addresses the narratives to his most beloved brothers (*karissimi fratri*), the canons of St Paul's. But, as we shall see, he intended interest in the cult to extend beyond them to the clergy, religious, and the laity of the diocese, and to the citizens of London, whom, in one significant narrative dealing with the 1087 fire of London, he addresses as *karissimi cives*. The stories commonly treat the kinds of relationships and exchanges in which miracles implicated all these groups. Beyond his aim to preserve oral tradition in writing, Arcoid's narratives were self-consciously works of rhetoric, intended to foster a particular understanding of public reverence for the saint. In the *MSE*, we see an author weaving together three related themes: economy, memory, and religion. Together these provided a distinctive cosmological perspective on the livelihoods of Londoners in the 1140s.

The opening sentence of his proem reveals the importance Arcoid placed on language and the art of speaking well as a means to edify his audiences, and to influence their religious beliefs and practices.

'Eloquence is a powerful instrument in the business of the world, but it is also effective, in that of the sacred, for instructing and exhorting the faithful to acknowledge the true God and to ask him for strength of mind and body'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> E. Gordon Whatley, *The Saint of London The Life and Miracles of St Erkenwald* (Binghampton, NY, 1989), pp.9-12. The chief manuscript used for the *MSE* is CCCC, 161.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.101.

Arcoid's understanding of eloquence was mediated by a twelfth-century education in grammar and rhetoric based on a classical inheritance routed through, among others, Cicero, Quintilian, and Isidore. Indeed, the narratives can be seen as a series of practical elaborations of Isidore's prescription, 'The orator, then, is a good man skilled in speaking... His skill in speaking comes from studied eloquence, which is divisible into five parts: invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery and purpose'.<sup>7</sup> Arcoid's staking of eloquence in the service of sacred business is highly conventional. But his contrast of its use to this end with its use in the conduct of worldly matters, perhaps aimed a gentle chide at his primary audience, the clerks and canons of the cathedral and diocese, whose educations in the *trivium* typically helped them advance their careers in royal and aristocratic households, and in the ecclesiastical institutions of Anglo-Norman London.

At the time Arcoid was writing, for example, a London youth called Thomas, educated in its grammar schools and the son of a merchant, Gilbert Becket, was making his way among the bankers of the city, and was soon to find a clerical foothold in the Lambeth household of Archbishop Theobald.<sup>8</sup> In his *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury, Thomas Becket's sometime companion and biographer, and a scholar who made the journey from cathedral school to secular governance, reproached the 'Cornificians', a seemingly invented clique of charlatan scholars, for their scorn of such hard won knowledge.<sup>9</sup> His comment, 'For myself, I am at a loss to see how anything could be more generally useful: more helpful in acquiring wealth, more reliable for winning favour, more suited for gaining fame, than is eloquence,'<sup>10</sup> offers a brighter view of clerical careerism than that vouched for by Arcoid, but also hints at the inflationary demands that twelfth-century governance appear to have made upon standards of pedagogy.

Arcoid's narratives combine dramatic description, invented speech and apostrophe, prayer, homily, and biblical allusion, among which can be found nuggets of historical detail including the names, origins and occupation of pilgrims, fragments of information about the architectural setting of the shrine, scenes from the city, and the dates of specific events. An illustration of eloquence is his extended recounting of

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<sup>7</sup> *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*, eds. R. Copeland and I. Sluiter (Oxford, 2009), p.242.

<sup>8</sup> F. Barlow, *Thomas Becket* (London, 1986), pp.19-23.

<sup>9</sup> R. W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe Volume II, The Heroic Age* (Oxford, 2001), pp.167-171.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, eds. R. Copeland and I. Sluiter (Oxford, 2009), p.490.

the fire of 1087, and Erkenwald's miraculous defiance of the flames that ravaged the city and cathedral. In preparing his audience for this, the lengthiest and most inventive of his narratives, Arcoid appealed to their generosity and imaginative investment in a story 'virtually impossible to narrate', that 'must be judged more on faith than on appearances'.<sup>11</sup> The moral is short and simple: repent in wonder at God, who revealed himself through the sanctity of Erkenwald. The exposition is circuitous, elaborate and stirring: Arcoid's generous use of biblical citation, apostrophe, excursus and amplification give appropriate vent to his subject. He begins with a description of 'Happy London' a 'celestial Jerusalem', and a 'garden of delight' (*ortus voluptatis*),<sup>12</sup> at whose centre is the basilica of St Paul, 'teacher of the gentiles', crowned with celestial treasures, the mortal remains of heavenly protectors, chief among them St Erkenwald. This quickly gives way to a dramatic description of the fire advancing like an army, destroying homes, terrifying the women and driving the men to flight. The scene is taken, at times verbatim, from Joel 2.1-17, a call to repentance describing the visitation of an army of locusts on the sinful people. A hortatory apostrophe to Erkenwald and a harangue of the London citizens follow, in which Arcoid reminds the latter of their dependence on Erkenwald's power (*virtus*) for redemption of their sins. All this prepares the way for a scene of the whole city – townsfolk, bishops, priests and ministers – 'on the third day', witnessing to the miracle of Erkenwald's pristine tomb among the otherwise fire-ravished interior of the church.

Of course, Arcoid's primary audience was the canons. But these stories had an immediacy to wider audiences, including the laity, who would have heard them through lections read by canons on feast days, and from the clerks and parish priests in their charge around the city. It is just possible, for example, that there were elderly folk in 1141 who remembered the London fire of 1087, and if so, then Arcoid did not miss the opportunity to imply a parallel between them and the elders of Joel 1.2-5, in their duty to recount their experience to younger generations.<sup>13</sup>

In short, these narratives are examples of rhetorically woven 'texts', utterances and images collected from discrete historical and literary settings to serve new persuasive needs.<sup>14</sup> We encounter them as

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<sup>11</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.127.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.122.

<sup>13</sup> 'Hear this you elders... tell it to your children and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation'.

<sup>14</sup> M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.10-12. For such practices in other historical contexts, see K. Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2007), pp.22-24.

records of miraculous events, but when read out they were also themselves events that helped create 'textual communities'.<sup>15</sup> Such communities were exposed to three related themes through these texts: the rhetorical figuring of economy; the uses of memory, and; religion as belief and affect.

### *Economy*

As we have seen, Arcoid's arrangement of texts represents one kind of 'economizing', that which Cicero discussed as rhetorical *dispositio*. The word is a translation from the Greek *oikonomia*, used by Aristotle among others to denote 'administration of the household'.<sup>16</sup> But Arcoid's miracle narratives are steeped in a third, extended understanding of economy, one derived from the language of St Paul's epistles. Giorgio Agamben's recent study of the early church and its trinitarian theology has carefully elucidated St Paul's use of *oikonomia* to denote a practical, pastoral duty of 'divinely nominated administration' entrusted to the faithful.<sup>17</sup> Agamben cites 1 Cor. 4:1 as a decisive example of the meaning: 'Let a man so account of us as servants of Christ, and treasurers of the mysteries of God'.<sup>18</sup> Arcoid's miracles are didactic in the spirit of St Paul, the 'teacher of the gentiles'. They represent St Erkenwald's cult as the unfolding of a divine economy through a division of relational roles serving the moral ordering of the world.<sup>19</sup> In one narrative, for example, a wife who prays for her ill husband becomes an illustration of Paul's observation in 1 Cor. 7:14 that 'the unfaithful husband will be saved by the faithful wife'.<sup>20</sup> Miracles are tokens in that economy. Arcoid calls them 'heavenly sacraments' (*celestia sacramenta*), tokens of grace revealed in everyday life, examples of the workings of divine dispensation, and, as such, incitements to religious conversion: 'miracles preach... the grace of God... to the deaf ears of men'.<sup>21</sup> Arcoid was, then, both a Ciceronian *and* a Pauline economist of these miracles, considering himself entrusted by God to bring an order (*dispositio*) and a legibility to those experiences that groups and individuals came to recount to each other as signs of divine will. The rhetorical economy of his writing -

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<sup>15</sup> B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983), pp.90-92.

<sup>16</sup> G. Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory. For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans., L. Chiesa (Stanford, CA, 2011), pp.17-19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp.21-22, citing 1 Cor. 9:16-18.

<sup>18</sup> Vulgate: 'Sic nos existemet homo ut ministros Christi et dispensatores mysteriorum Dei', ibid., p.23.

<sup>19</sup> G. Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, pp.22-25.

<sup>20</sup> 1. Cor. 7:14

<sup>21</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.103.

like that of the speech of sermons, prayer and preaching for which his text provided a resource<sup>22</sup> - dispensed these tokens in the service of a Pauline economy of Christian faith.<sup>23</sup>

Part of that ministering to divine mystery enabled him to explain the higher good to which God - in the distribution of affliction, justice, and adversity, as well as prosperity and health among various agents - directed the faithful. Thus, at the time of the fire of 1087, God, 'the dispenser of all things',<sup>24</sup> had 'handed over his power in such a crisis to Satan'.<sup>25</sup> On another occasion, God earmarked to St Erkenwald the healing of Benedicta, a young Italian noblewoman and weather-beaten (*facies ardore combusta*) pilgrim *alumna* of St Peter and St Paul in Rome. Arcoid presents the cure as a reward for her devotion, but also as an illustration that, despite the fact that Rome was full of saints, God assigned the cure specifically to St Erkenwald so that 'London might the better honour and revere you [Erkenwald]'.<sup>26</sup> In another miracle, St Erkenwald protects, and then liberates from his chains, a fugitive prisoner. Arcoid invents the petitionary prayer of repentance the prisoner made before a feast day congregation, informing the canons that 'the wisdom of the Almighty God wondrously and ineffably dispenses prosperity and adversity to men by turns, by way of providing for their perpetual well-being'.<sup>27</sup> The parting prayer in which Arcoid leads the canons at the end of the miracle collection, exhorts them to 'turn to God with all our hearts... and pray to him that, by the intervention of the preeminent Bishop Erkenwald, he may so guide us amidst prosperity and adversity'.<sup>28</sup>

Arcoid's portrayals of Erkenwald's cult amplify the Pauline theme of *oikonomia*, or divinely nominated administration. To his 'dear citizens' St Erkenwald acts as a 'dutiful father and loving mother'. He alone, we are told, among those holy men associated with the cathedral, Mellitus, Cedd, and Sebbe, assisted London in its 'successes, and helped us in our daily perils'.<sup>29</sup> He is a 'blessed and pious shepherd who answers just petitions' (*beati piissimique pastores*), a great priest, (*sacerdos magnus*), friend of God (*dei amicum*), a distinguished teacher (*preclari doctoris*), and a bishop and protector (*presulem et patronum*).

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<sup>22</sup> We have a manuscript containing lections excerpted from the *MSE* that belonged to Chertsey Abbey, one of Erkenwald's foundations. *The Saint of London*, p.11.

<sup>23</sup> He is 'ministering to the mysteries', to echo the passage from St Paul, 1 Cor 4:1.

<sup>24</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.133.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.123.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125.

In visions, he appears in episcopal and archiepiscopal vestments, on another occasion as a winged angel. Parent, priest, teacher, shepherd, angel, protector: Erkenwald is a trustee of London's ecclesiastical *domus*, the divinely designated 'sole holder of Britain's capital' (*solus caput tenes Britannie*). Against this model of pastoral virtue, Arcoid appraises St Erkenwald's most recent successors. Bishop Maurice, 'of blessed memory' translated St Erkenwald to the crypt, and began the 'impossible task' of rebuilding the church after the fire of 1087. His successors, Bishops Richard de Belmeis and Gilbert the Universal, are praised for their management of episcopal burdens: Richard bought land at his own expense to build a wall around the cathedral precinct and Gilbert, even with a 'spirit of frugal moderation', still 'bestowed great gifts upon his church'.<sup>30</sup>

### *Memory*

In addition to economy, a second, interlinked theme in the *MSE* is memory: as a technique for the transmission of knowledge; as creative resource; and more theologically, as the partial realization of the transcendent. As noted, part of Arcoid's intention for the miracle collection was to capture commemorative resources from the decay to which oral tradition had left them exposed:

'the faithful folk, [*fidelis populus*] fondly committed to memory the things they heard and saw, neglecting, alas, to bind them with letters to prevent their escape. And so, death rushed in and swallowed up the very witnesses of his divine virtues, and erased in large part the traces of sanctity which had flourished in the godly bishop'.<sup>31</sup>

As a creative resource, memory lay at the roots of speech and writing. We have seen that Isidore regarded it as an important constituent of eloquence. Quintilian called memory a storehouse, a strongbox, or treasury of eloquence (*thesaurus eloquentiae*).<sup>32</sup> As Mary Carruthers explains, '*Recitare* is the verb used for this elementary school-room exercise, in which children train their memories first by rote, word for word'.<sup>33</sup> Arcoid's depiction of rote learning in the cathedral school of St Paul's nicely illustrates this. At the school, Master Elwin expounded to one of his pupils, 'in the usual grammar-school

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp.129-131.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp.102-3.

<sup>32</sup> M. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400-1500* (Manchester, 2011), p.20.

<sup>33</sup> M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), p.90.



fashion', a passage for the boy to recite in the morning. As an incentive to learn the reading (*lectionem*) the master promised to forego the 'severe flogging' he would surely administer if the boy were not able to recite it. The boy - as young boys often do - played with his friends rather than memorizing the passage and only later began to dread the consequences: 'after much fretting... he took himself off to the church in which the body of St Erkenwald rested, and there he prostrated himself at St Erkenwald's side'.<sup>34</sup> Erkenwald miraculously enabled the boy not only to recite the set passage but also, 'at length and completely from memory, (*memoriter diuque recitavit*) to recite what the teacher had been about to give him for the next assignment'.<sup>35</sup>

The scene would have evoked personal memories for Arcoid's audience of canons. Some of them may also have known the scene from the master's perspective and so given Arcoid an opportunity further to explore the theme of what lay at stake in the reproduction of the master-disciple relationship. From rudimentary skills of rote learning Master Elwin wished to deliver his charge to greater feats of memorizing. Elwin was 'a man noted for his morality and learning... truly desirous that after his death, when he was no longer able to do good works himself, he would not cease, in the person of the disciples he had educated, to go on teaching and training many others for the service of God'.<sup>36</sup> However admirable his motive, Arcoid notes that, after wrong-headedly dragging the boy kicking and screaming from St Erkenwald's tomb, Elwin 'took a vow of penance, divided up his effects, distributed them to the poor, and went immediately of his own free will into exile, nor did he ever appear in his own country again after that'.<sup>37</sup>

The story teaches the priority of a child's simple faith in St Erkenwald over the master's pedagogic ambitions, and the danger, through personal pride, of mistaking mnemonic technique as an end in itself over its higher use in seeking knowledge of God. As the proem states, St Erkenwald's virtues 'are more than can be comprehended in human memory'.<sup>38</sup> The idea sown here, that neither oral tradition or human comprehension themselves could encompass the subject, nicely fulfills the proem's function to prepare the audience's imagination for the miracle stories to follow.

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<sup>34</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.105.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.104-5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

Arcoid's story of the schoolboy might be seen as part of that trend toward the intimacy of inward reflection found in writers of his generation. It certainly recalls Augustine's prizing of a third understanding of memory, that is, according to Patrick Geary, as 'the highest intellectual faculty and the key to the relationship between God and man'.<sup>39</sup> Book Ten of Augustine's *Confessions* famously discusses memory in a repetitively elaborated response to the question – 'what is it that I love when I love my God?'. To paraphrase Augustine's answer: not external things, which only point to God their creator, nor accumulated personal memories, those vast internal fields and storehouses of our sense perceptions and innate knowledge, nor even the mind's habit of sifting and evaluating these memories; rather, it is the chastening realization that one's memories harbour intimations of a happiness fulfilled only in God, but which are the very bounds defining our alienation from God's constant loving presence within us.<sup>40</sup>

Arcoid's peroration reflects this thinking:

'if the boy, by resorting to wholesome counsel... was imbued with a knowledge which the master had not taught him, why do we not flock together to pray for the mercy of God... and strive for the knowledge of God with all the zeal for virtue we can muster?... Dearest brethren, let us all together earnestly pray to our God that he... absolve us of our sins and allow us to hold fast to the counsel of the saints and to attain to the blessed presence of the Lord'.<sup>41</sup>

The message is reprised in the penultimate miracle narrative where he again exhorts the canons '...let it not be wearisome for us to call often to memory the miracles of his saints, since we are created for his praise and glory'.<sup>42</sup> The story of St Erkenwald's devoted school boy nicely illustrates memory as a technique of storage and retrieval, memory as a creative resource, and as a space of embodiment and reflection one inhabits in contemplation of the Creator. Memory is the act of coming to know, and of willing oneself to be closer to, God: a test of love, a passage to joy through the regret occasioned by

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<sup>39</sup> P. J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), p.17.

<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans., S. Ruden (New York, NY, 2018), pp, 283-312.

<sup>41</sup> *The Saint of London*, pp.107-9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

partial literary reminiscence.<sup>43</sup> In short, memory is means to *religio*, piety, affect; the reaching out and forming of an attachment to something beyond oneself.

*Being Religious: Embodiment and Sacred Materiality*

Arcoid's purpose for his eloquence of speech and writing was, then, to teach how St Erkenwald made possible 'strength of mind and body'.<sup>44</sup> The sacred presence of the saint's relics encouraged the 'inhabiting' of religious pieties. In this way, the drama of the suffering body, body symbolism, and sensory and emotional affect were recurring images of his narrative.<sup>45</sup> For example, the French traveler William transformed from a young man 'happy, healthy, robust, rich and successful', into a 'vile cadaver'. Arcoid compared his plight to Job, tried by God, 'like gold which passes through the fire'.<sup>46</sup> William had wax casts of his blinded eyes placed on the railing above the shrine. In a vision to a fevered London girl, St Erkenwald explained how she was being 'scorched in the furnace of this trial'.<sup>47</sup> A pelterer called Vitalis accidentally plucked out his own eye with his scraping tool after refusing to see fault in working on the saint's day. There are references to the thundering sound of the bronze bells customarily used to summon the congregation on St Erkenwald's feast day.<sup>48</sup> The people come together, bells are rung, and clergy and people rejoice, the choir singing a *Te Deum*. A regular foreign traveler to London, Baldwin, while afflicted by a fever, heard the canons singing on St Erkenwald's feast day and was later cured at the saint's shrine.<sup>49</sup> The scent of incense and taste of dust from the wooden shrine cured a boy from the collegial church of St Martin.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> B. Stock, *The Integrated Self Augustine, the Bible and Ancient Thought* (Philadelphia, PA, 2017), pp.156-158.

<sup>44</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.101.

<sup>45</sup> On the subject see, E. J. Wells, (2013) 'An Archaeology of Sensory Experience: Pilgrimage in the Medieval Church, c.1170-c.1550', unpublished Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/7735/> ; and C. Hahn, 'Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early-Medieval Saints' Shrines', *Speculum* 72 (1997), 1079-1106.

<sup>46</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.139.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.

<sup>48</sup> For significance of bells see J. H. Arnold, and C. Goodson, 'Resounding community: the history and meaning of medieval church bells', *Viator* 43 (2012), 99-130.

<sup>49</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.157.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155.

Opportunity to be religious depicted in these terms softened the contrast between the laity and those ordained or under religious vows.<sup>51</sup> Arcoid found religion in lay piety: the distressed school boy's appeal to St Erkenwald; the Tuscan noblewoman's unostentatious prayer, 'a sign of true religion' (*ut religionis est*); a London woman's 'devout heart' (*mente devota*) that moved her to help pay for the silver shrine. These, and other emotional intimations of religion were works of piety (*operibus pietatis*) mingled and continuous with the more formal liturgical operation of the cult. On one memorable feast day of the saint,

'people of both sexes and of all ages and conditions throughout the whole town were moved to such a great pitch of exaltation that a foreigner who came and witnessed the religious zeal in clergy and people (*in clero et populo*) alike would have been reminded of the way of life of the heavenly Jerusalem...'.<sup>52</sup>

The cure of a blind woman parishioner brought out the citizens, the 'clergy and people (*clerus et populus*) chanting praises to the lord'.<sup>53</sup> The feast day of St Erkenwald involved processions, a soundscape of summoning and sacralizing bells, liturgy, prayers, litanies, chanting, singing, and collective up-swells of concentrated emotion. It was the moment when the celestial economy of the city, eclipsed the worldly preoccupations of its citizens, and secular exertions (*secularibus studiis*) were officially suspended.

### *Rhetoric and Reality*

All this begs a question. How much of this divine economy evoked by Arcoid existed outside the text? What was the gradient of indifference or mistrust his persuasive efforts were attempting to counter? The text was not solely canon-fodder - so to speak - but estimating its reception among the people of London and the diocese and their assimilation to the Pauline values shaping Arcoid's stories is hardly possible with any great accuracy. However, it need not be abandoned altogether. With no convincing metric or ethnographic vantage on them, historians can explore the possibilities and suggest clues to the 'throw' of these stories.<sup>54</sup> Since the task of eloquence was to move audiences toward new sensibilities

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<sup>51</sup> See, B. Bedingfield, 'The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2002), 223-56, on the mingling of social classes through shared religious sensibilities on feast days.

<sup>52</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.109.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150.

<sup>54</sup> P. Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 94-117.

and realizations by meeting them first on their own terms, we might assume a degree of verisimilitude in Arcoid's narratives. Though the manuscript tradition was slight and local, it is reasonable to imagine the text was meant to be performed aloud, sometimes to mixed audiences, if not quite as formally as liturgy, scripture or homily, then almost so. In fact, in their circulation through speech as well as text, one could say there was no 'outside' to these stories, each miracle a 'celestial sacrament' repeated in every retelling.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, this has to be balanced with consideration of the power relations these stories inscribed as they oscillated back and forth between lived religion and literary discourse. For example, feast days are prominently depicted in the *MSE*, no doubt because there were real up-swells in the cycle of cult activity on such occasions. But they were great opportunities for Arcoid to represent cult as a cosmic spectacle, a fictional matrix of relationalities distilled out of more fractured and indeterminate social interactions. Which is to say that Arcoid was offering a partial 'view from within' of St Erkenwald's cult as 'total social phenomenon', that aimed to foster an institutional self-image, and to imply wider claims on behalf of the cathedral's material privileges and wealth as a corollary of its existence as the resting place of St Erkenwald. Rather than hazard maximal or minimalist interpretations, or lend normative approval to his evaluation of St Erkenwald's cult, we might briefly note, first, some of the wider relationships evolving between the cathedral community of St Paul's and the laity at the time, and then, secondly, ask what slippages we can detect in the *MSE*, or what Ranajit Guha calls the 'elementary aspects of counter-consciousness'<sup>56</sup> that it was made to manage as part of its discursive work.

### *Beyond Arcoid's Cult of St Erkenwald*

Arcoid's depiction of the cult of St Erkenwald added literary texture to existing interactions, religious and mundane, between the laity and the cathedral community of St Paul's. Its scope, beyond the lives of a silversmith, a pelterer, a painter, schoolboys, a businessman, a cleric, and a farmer's daughter that it miraculously touched, we might reasonably infer, included: clerks serving in the episcopal household or

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<sup>55</sup> An instructive modern analogue is M. Gilson's comment in *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East* (London, 1982, rev. ed, 2000), p.75, 'miracles are made every day in cafés and conversation'.

<sup>56</sup> R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Duke, N.C. 1999), pp.1-17. And see T. Reuter, 'Nobles and Others' in *Nobles and Nobility* ed. A. J. Duggan (Woodbridge, 2000), p.96, for use of these and related insights in a medieval context, and his comment that: 'there is a public transcript to which a hegemonial group can - generally - command or compel assent, but this does not necessarily extend inside people's heads'.

in the dean's office; the families, servants and associates of the thirty major canons that comprised the religious community; tradesmen, merchants, craftsmen and artisans occasionally or permanently contracted to St Paul's; neighbouring residents, priests, vicars and parishioners of the city and diocese; and rural leaseholders, reeves, peasant farmers and tenants working on the cathedral's country manors.

In the case of the latter group, Ros Faith surveyed the broad significance St Paul's cathedral in the lives and livelihoods of peasant farmers and tenants through its command of estates, organization of labour, and its disposition of resource in terms of the production and supply, for example, of crops like barley, oats and wheat, used to make bread and beer.<sup>57</sup> Most of the cathedral manors were leased out to canons, and heirs could be expected to inherit both office and land. The canons were high status holders of multiple offices and estates. They could assign vicars at the cathedral or be residents themselves; many of them held important roles in ecclesiastical and royal administration. They sometimes managed their farms directly, more often remotely through a lay sub-tenant. Their increasing preference for rents, tithes and tolls in the form of cash payments stimulated the cultivation of surplus produce for London markets. The organization of plough teams, building of barns, and use of carts to harvest, store and transport crops into the city, was an important responsibility of lessees, and the results of their efforts made for the conspicuous traffic in produce on routes to and from the city and its estates. Faith notes the substantial presence of wooden and stone buildings (barns, home farms, courts and halls), on rural estates and in urban space. The estates were not extensive, but they were being made more productive through the settling of an increasing population on assized land.<sup>58</sup>

From this outline - a brief summary of Ros Faith's work - of the cathedral's situation in wider material terms of ecclesiastical lordship, Arcoid's image of St Erkenwald's cult as Pauline economy might be seen as what Mary Douglas calls a system for the 'naturalization of social classifications by analogy'.<sup>59</sup> The natural analogue implied here is that of a spiritual identity and complementarity transcending the division of labour between the work of the laity and that of the cathedral canons. The cathedral church was a storehouse of wealth. It was also a treasury in the sense that its relics were 'inexhaustible hoards, inestimable treasures of wisdom and knowledge'.<sup>60</sup> Arcoid celebrated the poor who contributed most to

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<sup>57</sup> R. Faith, 'Estates and Income 1066-1540' in *St Paul's: the cathedral church of London 604-2004*, p.149

<sup>58</sup> R. Faith, p.150.

<sup>59</sup> M. Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (London, 1984), p.48.

<sup>60</sup> Richard de Belmeis added an arm of St Osyth to this, with a translation that took place in 1123-1127, for which see F. Neiningen, ed., *English Episcopal Acta 15: London, 1076-1187* (Oxford, 1999), p.16.

the funding drive in support of St Erkenwald's new silver shrine. He noted that the feast day of St Erkenwald was a special day 'the day which angels no less than men revere', on which the laity 'by their own prayers... pay joyful service to the spirit' (*letie spiritualis*).<sup>61</sup> The spiritual offspring of their donations, prayer, and piety, were miracles of consolation, healing, protection and vindication. The sick were cured; obstinate, public scoffers punished. The cult was one of a battery of innovations in the association of spiritual dividends and divine providence with new forms of exchange, interaction and endowment-driven networking, much of it monetized and all of it helping to fine-tune systems of social classification at more diffuse levels than previously visible in the available sources.

Church reform, the management of resource and spiritual opportunity, were all part of this fine-tuning process. Bishop Maurice consolidated the principle of the prebendary system at St Paul's whereby canons received specific estates to which were tied obligations to participate in the liturgical cycle.<sup>62</sup> Bishop Richard Belmeis (1107-27) granted rents from tenants of the new St Paul's wharf to the service of the altar with bread and wine.<sup>63</sup> The deed lists tenants and provides evidence for the layout of the river shore for vessels bringing goods from the cathedral's coastal estates of Essex and from interregional markets. Sometime between 1123 and 1127, and with the approval of William of Corbeil, archbishop of Canterbury, Richard granted an indulgence of twenty days remittance of sin to those penitents attending the translation of the 'other' arm of St Osyth, a new addition to the cathedral's treasury of relics.<sup>64</sup> Subsequent bishops, particularly Gilbert Foliot (1128-1134), granted indulgences to support building and renovation work on particular churches, religious orders abroad, and maintenance of the city's infrastructure.<sup>65</sup> The educational responsibilities of the master of St Paul's school extended across the city. An episcopal deed of c.1111 – 1127 granted lodgings to Master Hugh and his successors and entrusted him with keys to the book cupboards near the altar.<sup>66</sup> At the same time as the cult was beginning to gain momentum, in the late 1130s, a writ addressed to the chapter and William the

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<sup>61</sup> *The Saint of London*, pp.108-9.

<sup>62</sup> *Charters of St Paul's, London* ed. S. Kelly (Oxford, 2004), pp.45-9, who notes that the first generation of prebendaries, listed in a charter of Bishop Maurice (1087-1107), included fifteen continental, thirteen English, and two indeterminately named canons; F. Neining, *EEA 15: London*, p.xlvi.

<sup>63</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.63, for an 1130s/early 40s charter involving a 'Galio' donating '40s and half a mark of silver to Erkenwald for the work on the reliquary'.

<sup>64</sup> N. Vincent, 'Some Pardoners' Tales: The Earliest English Indulgences' *TRHS*, 12 (2002), 23-58, at pp.38-9, as an early example of indulgences associated with relics.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>66</sup> F. Neining, *EEA 15: London*, p.17.

archdeacon, instructed them to excommunicate those who taught in the city without a license from a certain Master Henry of the cathedral.<sup>67</sup>

In short, across a range of areas of ecclesiastical lordship, including pastoral and educational provision, the earmarking of resources to liturgical operations, and the association of indulgences with relics and charitable institutions, we see a particular variety of institutional reform at work.<sup>68</sup> Having assumed a degree of verisimilitude in these narratives, there are nevertheless clues in the *MSE* to a level of indifference and perhaps hostility among its audiences to Arcoid's vision of the cult.

### *Learned Sceptics*

Among Arcoid's audience were learned sceptics for whom St Erkenwald's miracles were of marginal interest. Such is implied from Arcoid's employment of eloquence to persuade them otherwise. Scattered through his narratives are appeals, for example, to the effect that: 'We ought not negligently to hear the marvels of God... those who are driven mad by the miracles of saints rather than being inspired by them to grow in increase of faith... let it not be wearisome for us to call often to mind the miracles of his saints... Everyone who reads what I have written, even the most elite member of my audience, will be capable of wonder'.<sup>69</sup> The simple faith of the devout schoolboy, held up as a model for imitation, underlines the theme.

A learned distaste for miracles need not indicate their rejection on rational grounds. In fact, too great an interest in them risked an undignified association with those for whom, according to St Paul, 'miracles are for unbelievers'.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, those London canons attracted particular praise in Arcoid's narratives who were unafraid of the lowbrow stigma associated in some circles with saints' cults. On the day of the translation of St Erkenwald's relics to the chancel entrance in 1141, two miracles took place involving canons of the cathedral, the first a fever cured before all at the translation, the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>68</sup> For another example of diocesan reform see J. Norrie, 'Land And Cult: Society And Radical Religion in the Diocese of Milan c.990-1130' (unpublished Oxford DPhil. thesis, 2017).

<sup>69</sup> *The Saint of London*, pp.103,127,147,161.

<sup>70</sup> 1 Cor 14.22.



second remotely effected by Master Theodus, canon of St Martin's and colleague of Arcoid, who administered dust from the tomb of Erkenwald to his sick boy.<sup>71</sup>

### *Counter-consciousness*

A subtle aporia in the *MSE* is the disjuncture between voluntary and compulsory participation in St Erkenwald's cult, most visible in those cases in which members of the laity were punished by St Erkenwald for failing correctly to observe his feast day. Arcoid tells us that it was customary on feast days to 'order... people living in the diocese [to] refrain from secular pursuits'.<sup>72</sup> Among those who fell foul of this sanction was Vitalis, the pelterer who accidentally pierced one of his eyes with a sharp implement while at work on the holy day of St Erkenwald. Theodwin was also severely beaten beside the tomb of the saint when painting the vaulting of the crypt during the saint's feast day.<sup>73</sup>

The extended account of a man engaged in servile labour (*servili operi*) carefully rehearses this tension between ideal and reality in the cult of St Erkenwald. The events of the tale belonged to an undisclosed past, but it was clearly meant to deal with issues current at the time Arcoid was writing. Arcoid's retelling works in a series of dramatic stages: first, he evokes the laity in all their best clothes, gathered to show their devotions, on a 'day of cheery spiritual service' (*dies letie spiritualis*), as if recreating a heavenly Jerusalem on earth; next, is an extended explanation of the meaning of the feast day, addressed by a canon to a wretched man carrying bundled timber through the churchyard of St Paul's; then, and unusually, the low born man is granted by Arcoid a remarkably eloquent rejoinder to the canon, only after which does he receive divinely-sanctioned punishment at the hands of St Erkenwald, when he trips over a skull in the churchyard and bashes open his own head. News of his death gets out in the final section of the story, Arcoid noting the sympathetic complaints of many among the lay bystanders at the severity of his punishment. Clues to the polemical design of Arcoid's narrative lie in the speech he invents for the low wretch, which clearly reflected genuine attitudes to the cult in London of the 1140s. Among the impious remarks of the lowly wretch is an emphasis on the dignity of secular labour and the parasitism of the religious life of the canons: 'you clerics get to grow soft with idleness and to eat other folks' food'. The novelty of the cult, certainly as envisaged by the canons, seems

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<sup>71</sup> *The Saint of London*, p.155.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109.

<sup>73</sup> Though not on a feast day, Eustace the silversmith was also mortally stricken by the saint after climbing into the new shrine to act the blasphemous fool before his workmates, *ibid.*, p.143.

apparent in his remark that, 'you bring in some St Erkenwald or other to defend your idleness'. He objects to the solemn purpose ('endless dirges') the canons intend for the feast day, customarily a chance to indulge in dancing, shouting, and drunken feasting. The miserable man's offence was not against the saint alone but, perhaps worse, lay in the fact that 'He scorned the clergy dedicated to the service of the most-high God'.<sup>74</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Arcoid's invented speech makes concession to a prevailing secular critique of cult. Its anticlericalism and advocacy of labour as self-betterment, however, gives him a foil with which to stage an accommodation of the Pauline economy - revealed in the cult of St Erkenwald - to those beneficiaries of the 'discreet upward pressure'<sup>75</sup> working on sections of London society in Arcoid's lifetime. To those who lost out in this burgeoning urban environment, the coincidence of liturgy, charity, and prosperity that Arcoid's stories highlighted, must have seemed quite distasteful. To those glad of the opportunity to be seen out in their fanciest clothes, or those recipients and dispensers of the cathedral's charity, St Erkenwald became an emblem of civic identity.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp.112-115.

<sup>75</sup> P. Brown, 'Enjoying the saints in late antiquity', *Early Medieval Europe*, 9 (2000), 1-24, at p.14.