

LANFRANC

Lanfranc, the first Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, was born at Pavia in northern Italy c.1005, the son of Hambald, a magistrate responsible for administering the laws of the city. He studied civil law at Bologna, and at first seemed destined to follow his father's profession, but instead became a teacher of law, grammar and logic in Pavia.

In about 1040, he travelled to France in search of further knowledge, and studied theology as a pupil of Berengar of Tours. He then taught at Avranches in Normandy, with considerable success, being noted particularly for his lectures on the art of argument and debate, but after experiencing a religious conversion, he renounced literary education and worldly fame, and left Avranches, arriving eventually at Bec, then the poorest and most primitive monastery in the area. He entered the community there, and in 1042 took holy vows. With the sympathetic help of Abbot Herluin, he became an excellent monk, and within three years was made prior.

Herluin recognised Lanfranc's ability as a teacher, and had encouraged him to begin a school at Bec, where the monks could receive instruction in the scriptures. The barons and wealthy landowners, aware of his previous reputation as a teacher at Avranches, began to send their sons to study under him at Bec, and Lanfranc found it necessary to open an external school. Under his direction, this became one of the most famous and influential schools in Europe, renowned for the standard of its scholarship, and it attracted excellent students, including the future Pope Alexander II, and Anselm, Lanfranc's successor at Canterbury.

In 1050, Lanfranc attended the Council of Rome, called by Pope Leo IX, as principal defender of the orthodox view of the Eucharist, against the heretical doctrine propounded by his former teacher, Berengar. He affirmed the traditional teaching that the substances of bread and wine were changed into the essence of the Lord's human body. His views were later set forth in his treatise, "De Corpore et Sanguine Domini" ("Concerning the Body and Blood of the Lord"), written c.1063, which became a medieval classic.

During the 1050s, Lanfranc became a close adviser to William, Duke of Normandy, and a relationship of mutual respect developed between the two men. In 1063, William appointed Lanfranc as the first Abbot of St. Etienne, the new monastery which William had founded at Caen.

When William became King of England after the Norman Conquest of 1066, he nominated Lanfranc as Archbishop of Canterbury. Lanfranc had secured a papal blessing from his former student Pope Alexander II for William's invasion, which Lanfranc had represented not merely as a secular conquest, but as a crusade whose aim was to reform the English Church. Once Stigand, the Saxon incumbent of Canterbury was deposed, Lanfranc was called to England by the King. He was reluctant to leave St. Etienne to take up his new appointment, because he regarded himself primarily as a scholar and a teacher, not an administrator, but William, with the Pope's support, insisted that Lanfranc must obey, and he yielded gracefully to their authority, and so was consecrated as Archbishop of Canterbury on 29th August 1070.

In England, Lanfranc was William's trusted counsellor, his chief agent in church affairs, and one of the King's leading supporters. He embarked on a policy of reform and reorganisation of the English church. English abbots, and all but one of the bishops were replaced by Normans, and a number of bishoprics were transferred from small towns in inaccessible country districts to important

cities, such as Chester, Salisbury and Chichester. By the Accord of Winchester in 1072, Lanfranc secured the supremacy of the see of Canterbury over York. He took steps to establish separate ecclesiastical courts to deal with clerical offenders, and determine matrimonial and family disputes, and he compiled his own text book of canon law. Ecclesiastical finances were also reformed. Lanfranc instigated a great church building programme, and in particular, supervised the rebuilding of Canterbury Cathedral, and its monastery, Christ Church, which had been largely destroyed by fire in 1067. The monastic community was provided with a new chapter house, cloisters and dormitory, parts of which still survive. The new cathedral was dedicated in 1077, although little now remains of Lanfranc's cathedral.

Lanfranc was determined to enforce stricter discipline within the monasteries, and he began with his own, Christ Church. He deplored what he regarded as the opulent lifestyle of the monks there, which contrasted sharply with the austerity of Bec, and so he endeavoured to set a pattern for other communities to follow, by establishing a model community, through bringing in recruits from Bec and Caen, and introducing a stricter Rule, with more stringent standards of obedience. Other reforms were instituted at the Council of Winchester in 1076, where steps were taken to enforce the principle of clerical celibacy, and outlaw the practice of clerical marriage, which had become widespread.

In 1075, Lanfranc acted in effect as first minister for William, who was absent in Normandy, and succeeded in suppressing a rebellion against the King, by the Earls of Norfolk and Hereford.

Lanfranc was largely responsible for the excellent relations which existed between Church and State in England after the Norman Conquest. He regarded co-operation with William as the Church's best policy, and realised that to implement policies of ecclesiastical reform, he must work through the King. Although a firm supporter of papal sovereignty, he helped William to maintain as much independence as possible for the English church. Thus he did not oppose the King's claim to appoint and invest bishops, to approve or disapprove decrees of church councils and the publication of papal letters, or that papal legates were to be received in England only with the King's express approval. Lanfranc's position between King and Pope was never easy, and required him to exercise much tact and diplomacy.

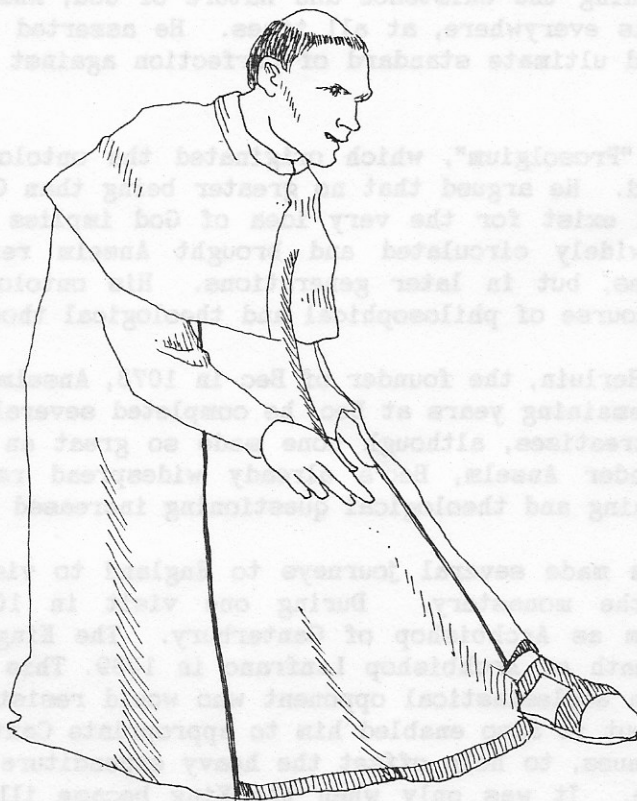
In 1077, Archbishop Lanfranc returned on a visit to Bec, where his religious training had begun. He was greeted warmly by Abbot Herluin, then sat with the monks in the cloister, speaking to all in turn, as an equal, just as though he was still of their number, and at table he shared the common dish and cup. He left behind great gifts for the community. In October of the same year, he made a second visit to Bec, to dedicate the new church. The congregation of bishops and nobles attending the ceremony was so great that some of the older monks were unable to enter the church, and were left outside. Lanfranc consecrated the principal altar amid great rejoicing. He left early next day to avoid the emotional scenes he anticipated on his departure for he was much revered at Bec.

In 1087, William I died, and Lanfranc crowned William's son, William Rufus as King of England. At the beginning of the reign, Lanfranc was the power behind the throne, but friction soon developed between the two men, particularly over William's attacks on the wealth of the church, and co-operation proved impossible.

Lanfranc died on 24th May 1089. His remains are buried near the altar of St. Martin, in the north transept of Canterbury Cathedral, although the exact spot is not marked.

As a theologian and a teacher, Lanfranc was highly regarded by his contemporaries, although his standing as such was later eclipsed by his pupil, Anselm. However, he showed at Bec what a poor and obscure community could achieve if it had a well-known teacher. As an Archbishop, his rule was significant, and as an ecclesiastical statesman, his ability and wisdom were respected. Yet despite his high rank, at heart he was essentially committed to the life of a monk, and remained a man of deep piety and charity.

Sources: E. Power; "Lanfranc of Bec"
B.E.Carpenter; "Cantuar"
A.A.Porée; "L'histoire de l'abbaye du Bec"
F. Barlow; "English Church 1066 - 1154"



a benedictine monk