

THE WINCHESTER PSALTER, Francis Wormald. *Harvey Miller & Metcalf*, London 1973. 134 illustrations, 4 in colour. £14.

Francis Wormald, the foremost scholar of manuscript illumination in late Anglo-Saxon and early Norman England, had just completed this work before his death in January, 1972. It was to have been the prelude to a full history of the 'Winchester School' of Romanesque manuscript illumination. The present work is the first full study of one of the most important products of that school, British Museum MS Nero C IV.

The manuscript was written and illuminated about 1140—1160, probably for Henry of Blois. Henry—the 'old wizard of Winchester', as Bernard of Clairvaux termed him—was brother of King Stephen and Bishop of Winchester 1129—1171. It was during his bishopric that the finest works of the Winchester scriptorium were produced, such as the great four volume Winchester Bible, still kept in the Cathedral library. John of Salisbury tells in his *Historia Pontificalis* how Henry, on a visit to Rome in 1151, purchased a number of *veteres statuas*—the astonished bystanders termed them 'idols'—in order to bring them back to England—a precocious example of the rich Englishman making a 'grand tour' for the benefit of his personal collection.

The Winchester Psalter was possibly commissioned by Henry for his personal use. There are two texts of the Psalter, written in parallel columns: the Gallican version of the Latin, and a French translation. This is followed not only by the usual set of Canticles, and by a litany of the Saints (which is reproduced in full) but also by fourteen collects and thirty-seven 'private' prayers (*preces privatae*, the sources of which are fully described). The book could therefore have served a double purpose: as a psalter in the recitation of the Office, and as a private prayer-book. The French psalter can only have been intended for private use. The litany reflects Henry's personal connections with the great Burgundian monastery of Cluny, and the prayers exemplify the increased devotion to the Blessed Virgin during his lifetime: nine are addressed to her.

Professor Wormald's study is centred on the thirty-eight full-page miniatures and on the calendar (which has miniatures of the labours of the months, and the signs of the Zodiac), all of which come at the beginning of the MS, as a prelude to the Psalter text. He reproduces all the miniatures in black and white, in the order in which they appear in the MS. In addition, four of the miniatures are reproduced a second time, as full-page colour plates: the publishers have been generous indeed in their

illustration of the book. The frontispiece of the study is particularly magnificent: a stern angel locks the door of Hell upon a melee of damned souls tormented by grotesque devils. The marriage-feast of Cana miniature is also reproduced in colour, as are the two beautiful 'Byzantine' illustrations—the Death of the Virgin (fol. 29) and the Virgin enthroned (fol. 30). This 'diptych' is in a quite different style from the other miniatures. It testifies once more to the contemporary increase in devotion to the Virgin, and in the series of miniatures forms a link between the ascension—pentecost scenes (fols. 27, 28) and the Last Judgement scenes (fols. 31—39) which end the series. The compiler of the MS made a significant devotional point, by placing the happy death and glorification of Mary before the scenes showing the Judgement of the rest of mankind. By the side of Mary's death-bed (on fol. 29) the miniaturist has drawn an open tomb, where Byzantine analogues of the painting have a stool or a bench. Professor Wormald is right in arguing that this means that the two Marian miniatures are 'English editions of Byzantine models', but surely is wrong in suggesting that the English artist misunderstood the Byzantine original. It is much more likely that he intended to associate Mary's death with the deaths and final resurrection of the rest of mankind, depicted in the following pages. The 'Byzantine diptych' could well have been copied from a Byzantine MS collected by Henry on his travels. I checked the four colour plates with the MS; the colour of the original is reproduced with remarkable fidelity.

It is particularly fitting that Professor Wormald, who was the first to refute the belief that there was a complete break at the Conquest between Anglo-Saxon and subsequent English illumination (see *Archaeologia* 91 (1945)), should edit a cycle of biblical scenes which confirm his insight so strikingly. In England, Norman illumination was saturated by Anglo-Saxon influences and motifs. Like the English homilies of Aelfric and Wulfstan, these were still being recopied and modernised, but not abandoned, over a century after the Conquest. Apart from the 'Byzantine diptych' already mentioned, the miniatures are in what Professor Wormald calls 'the English style'. In style and subject, these tinted drawings are descendants of late Anglo-Saxon works. The 'angel locking the gate of Hell' miniature (fol. 33) may have been directly based on part of a much less elaborate miniature at the beginning of the *liber Vitae* of Hyde Abbey, Winchester. That MS dates from the beginnings of the

Benedictine reform under King Edgar (about 970 A.D.), and contains a list of the deceased members of the community. That the MS should have contributed to Henry's psalter in the twelfth century, is striking confirmation of how the great monasteries, even under Norman rule, continued to develop Anglo-Saxon traditions.

In style, these miniatures preserve the lively interest in lineal patterns at the expense of volume and weight, characteristic of 'insular art' both Irish and Anglo-Saxon. The Tree of Jesse miniature (fol. 9)—this is the page of the MS placed open in the permanent display at the British Museum (Grenville Library)—is more of a decorative design incorporating human figures than a representative picture. Anglo-Saxon subjects as well as style are recalled in Henry's psalter: the scenes from the life of David (fols. 6 and 7) are derived from a pre-conquest MS (BM. Cotton MS. Tiberius CVI).

If we accept that this psalter was intended for private reading, it may be placed in the context of another pre-Conquest tradition—that of providing illustrations for MSS in the vernacular, in order to help the reader to

meditate on the text. The fashionable vernacular used in this MS is French, but the Noah's ark miniature (fol. 6) and the battle scenes of fol. 9 are reminiscent of the illustrations to Bodley MS Junius II in Oxford, one of the four major codices of Old English poetry. The scenes from the Book of Genesis on fols. 2—5 are comparable with the more extended cycle of miniatures which illustrates Aelfric's translation of the Heptateuch (BM. MS. Cotton Claudius B.IV). A cycle of Biblical illustrations would not, for a medieval reader, be merely a decorative prelude to the psalter, but a continual reminder that in the psalter the prophet David had summed up all of Salvation History, including both the coming of the Messiah and his return to judge the nations.

The only lack in Professor Wormald's book is that in its meticulous examination of artistic style, the purpose of the book might be forgotten by the reader. Only one page of the psalter text is reproduced (the *Beatus* page, fol. 46). But the present work is a fitting monument to a great scholar, and a worthy addition to a great series.

EAMONN O CARRAGHAN

THE PERSISTENCE OF RELIGION, by Andrew Greeley. *S.C.M. Press*, London 1973. 280 pp. £2.80

The basic religious needs and functions, says Andrew Greeley, have not changed very notably since the Ice Age. What he calls the conventional wisdom—that man has come of age, no longer needs religion and so on—is wrong, and he has written this book to demonstrate it in a sociological sort of way.

One way of propounding the conventional wisdom is to point to the decline in church affiliations. Against this Greeley presents some figures which give one pause for thought but can't do much more. Maybe at some point 85—90% of people in England say they believe in God, and 51% of Americans can name the first book of the bible (the same proportion apparently that knows the number of senators from their state and can spell cauliflower) but by their nature these and similar figures don't go deep enough to tell you anything interesting. They only give the tip of the iceberg, they don't tell one what the iceberg is. The continuing use of baptism and of religious ceremonies at marriages and funerals by a large number of people, to quote another of Greeley's examples, is susceptible of all sorts of explanation ranging from deep religious conviction to convenience or not wanting to offend older relatives.

Looking specifically at Christianity, even though church membership has remained high in America (this is an American book) it is

certainly on the decline in other Western countries (like England) and it is by no means clear what kind of commitment is represented by the American figures. Of course as Greeley points out, there is no reason to suppose that actual commitment to religion was any greater in the past that it is today, but in so far as the figures show anything at all, the conventional wisdom is right in pointing to a decline over the past few years in Christianity as at present organised.

But Greeley's primary concern is not with a statistical demonstration of the strength or otherwise of institutional Christianity. Or with Christianity at all. His concern is to demonstrate the continuing *need* for religion.

What he means by religion is (taking up the tradition of Weber) a system of ultimate meaning which provides an interpretative scheme for living. With this he incorporates (in the tradition of Durkheim) the community-making function of religion. He relies a good deal on other sociologists of religion here and brings these traditions together by seeing the interpretative scheme as integrating the community. People seek community with those who share their interpretations.

The interpretative scheme is conveyed in symbols of one kind or another but most commonly in mythology. For myths, which are not empirically verifiable, grape with the prob-