

## About Matthew Parker and the Parker Library

**M**atthew Parker (1504–75) was a powerful figure of the English Reformation who was largely responsible for the Church of England as a national institution. Parker's talents were sought after by both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. He served as a chaplain to Anne Boleyn and proved himself a capable administrator, becoming Master of Corpus Christi College (1544–53), Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, and Archbishop of Canterbury (1559–75). A benefactor to the University of Cambridge, Parker's greatest tangible legacy is his library of manuscripts and early printed books entrusted to Corpus Christi College in 1574. He was an avid book collector, salvaging medieval manuscripts dispersed at the dissolution of the monasteries. He was particularly keen on preserving materials relating to Anglo-



*Detail of The treatise De pauperie Salvatoris by archbishop of Armagh, Richard FitzRalph (d. 1360)*

Saxon England, motivated by his search for evidence of an ancient English-speaking church independent of Rome. To ensure the safekeeping of his collection, Parker included a clause with his donation to Corpus Christi College. It

required an annual inspection of the completeness of the collection. Should there be more than twelve items missing, the entire collection would revert to Gonville and Caius College. In the case of a similar event in the new location, the collection would be moved to Trinity Hall and then back to Corpus Christi College. There was no need ever to invoke this clause. The extraordinary collection of documents that resulted from Parker's efforts has been continuously housed at Corpus Christi College since 1574.

It includes items that span more than a thousand years, from the St. Augustine Gospels (sixth century) to sixteenth century records of the English reformation. The Parker Library's holdings of Old English texts accounts for nearly a quarter of all extant manuscripts in Anglo-Saxon, including the earliest copy of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (c. 890), the Old English Bede and King Alfred's translation of Gregory the Great's Pastoral Care. Other subjects represented are music, medieval travelogues and maps, bestiaries, royal ceremonies, historical chronicles and Bibles. The Parker Library's magnificent collection of English illuminated manuscripts provides invaluable resources to scholars in a variety of disciplines—including art, music, science, literature, politics and religion.



*Matthew Parker (1504–75) at the age of 70. He is holding a beautifully bound Latin Bible opened to show the text of Micah 6:8: 'I will show you, o man, what is good; and what the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?' MS 582*

