

## The Sacred Palace, Public Penance, and the Carolingian Polity<sup>1</sup>

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The concept of the “sacred palace” provides us with a key to understanding how Carolingian kings and emperors understood their role as rulers and legislators in relation to religion and the church. They did not consider church and state to be fundamentally separate or mutually antagonistic domains. Moreover, without understanding royal religious power in this era, we cannot properly interpret the role of public and royal penance during the reign of emperor Louis, Charlemagne’s son and successor.

The expression *sacrum palatium* as denoting the Carolingian palace first emerged in the context of the synod of Frankfurt (794), where Charlemagne, king and future emperor, presided over a gathering of bishops convened to deal with the supposed heresy of Adoptionism. Afterward, bishop Paulinus of Aquileia vividly evoked these discussions in the presence of the ruler, “when all were seated in the hall of the sacred palace [*aula sacri palatii*], with priests, deacons, and the entire clergy standing around us in a circle,” presided over by Charlemagne.<sup>2</sup> The expression *sacrum palatium* had gained some currency by the end of Charlemagne’s reign in 814. In 813, Hildebold of Cologne was referred to as the “archbishop of the sacred palace” (*archiepiscopus sacri palatii*), and his successor Hilduin, the abbot of Saint-Denis and the most powerful man at the court of emperor Louis, carried the title “arch-chaplain of the sacred palace” (*archicapellanus sacri palatii*).<sup>3</sup> When in 813 a synod

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<sup>2</sup> Paulinus of Aquileia, *Libellus sacrosyllabus episcoporum Italiae*, MGH Conc. 2.1 (1906), 131. On this gathering, see Rainer Berndt (ed.), *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur*, 2 vols. (Mainz: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1997). On the controversy over Adoptionism, see John C. Cavadini, *The Last Christology of the West: Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul, 785–820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Zotz, “*Palatium et curtis*. Aspects de la terminologie palatiale au Moyen Âge,” in A. Renoux (ed.), *Palais royaux et princiers au Moyen Âge* (Le Mans: Centre d’édition et de publication de l’Université du Maine, 1996), 7–15, at 9.

in Tours could not decide on which book of penance should be used, the bishops decided to wait for further instruction when they would be “gathered with all the bishops in the sacred palace.”<sup>4</sup> In the same year, Charlemagne’s biographer archbishop Leidrad of Lyon provided his “constant and sacred emperor” with a proud account of the success of reform in his own archdiocese, thanking him for sending books as well as an expert in singing. As a consequence of Leidrad’s efforts and of the emperor’s support, the chant of Lyon’s divine office was now performed according to “the usage of the sacred palace” (*ritus sacri palatii*).<sup>5</sup>

The emergence of a Carolingian *sacrum palatium* has been interpreted as the result of Byzantine influence,<sup>6</sup> yet there was more to Charlemagne’s sacred palace than a mere borrowing of late-Roman and Byzantine terminology in order to lend imperial glamour to a Frankish court hierarchy increasingly conscious of governing an empire. Even if Roman and Byzantine models played a part in shaping Western notions of the sacredness of the palace, these notions still functioned in a different cultural context: one that invested them with new and specific meaning. When Leidrad referred to the “usage of the sacred palace” (*ritus sacri palatii*), he had Aachen in mind, not Constantinople. Charlemagne’s palace at Aachen was called “sacred” because it had become the place where royal religious authority was embedded, enhanced, and articulated. For Leidrad, as well as for his colleagues gathered in Tours, the *sacrum palatium* was a source of authoritative liturgy and doctrine: a religious center to which bishops looked for guidance, and where they would find what in their eyes counted as genuine orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup>

As explanations in terms of “Byzantine influence” suggest, the Carolingian notion of the sacred palace transgresses a still-pervasive Western paradigm that has defined the spheres of religion and politics as fundamentally separate and opposed to each

<sup>4</sup> Council of Tours (813), c. 22, MGH Conc. 2.1, 289: “Ideo necessarium videbatur nobis, cum omnes episcopi ad sacrum palatium congregati fuerint, ab eis edoceri, cuius antiquorum liber poenitentialem potissimus sit sequendus.”

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Coville, *Recherches sur l'histoire de Lyon du V<sup>e</sup> siècle au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle (450–800)* (Paris: Picard, 1928), 283–87. E. Dümmmler (ed.), MGH Epist. 4 (*Epist. Kar. Aevi* 2), 542–45. On Leidrad’s biography and the date of the letter, see Coville, *Recherches*, 294–96, who proposes a date between 809 and 812. In 816, Leidrad retired to the monastery of Saint-Médard in Soissons. See also Otto G. Oexle, *Forschungen zu monastischen und geistlichen Gemeinschaften im westfränkischen Bereich*, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 31 (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1978), 134–35.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Fleckenstein, *Die Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige, vol 1: Grundlegung. Die karolingische Hofkapelle* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1959), 49. See also Otto Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell. Vom oströmischen Staats- und Reichsgedanken* (Darmstadt: Gentner, 1956.) For a broader approach that also takes the Merovingian period into account, see Josiane Barbier, “Le sacré dans le palais Franc,” in M. Kaplan (ed.), *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident. Études comparées, Byzantina Sorbonensia* 18 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001), 27–41. On the court and entourage of Louis the Pious, see Philippe Depreux, *Prosopographie de l'entourage de Louis le Pieux (781–840)* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1997), esp. 9–64.

<sup>7</sup> On the authority of the Carolingian court regarding liturgy, see Yitzhak Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald (877)* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 2001).

other. This long tradition of construing clerical and secular domains in terms of an antagonistic dualism between Church and State, with one inevitably posing a threat to the autonomy of the other, has turned the religious authority of Byzantine emperors into an anomaly called “caesaropapism.”<sup>8</sup> This same intellectual heritage has deeply influenced the historiography of politics and religion in the early-medieval West, and particularly that of the first two Carolingian emperors, Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. Charlemagne is credited with wielding a too-extensive religious authority, and, therefore, with having been caesaropapist and even aspiring to a “royal theocracy,” for this was a powerful ruler who kept his bishops well in check.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, the reign of his son Louis supposedly saw a transgression in the other direction, in which clerics massively and illegitimately invaded the domain of secular power. Instead of keeping itself to its proper priestly and pastoral functions, on this view, “the church” increasingly turned its religious authority into a political leadership based on the superiority of episcopal authority (*auctoritas*) over royal power (*potestas*). This so-called *Augustinisme politique* supposedly dominated the reign of Charles’s successor, Louis the Pious.<sup>10</sup> In recent scholarship, Louis’s reign has been the subject of increasingly positive reassessment,<sup>11</sup> yet the view that bishops undermined Louis’s effectiveness as a ruler and ultimately the Carolingian empire has been remarkably tenacious. Emperor Louis’s public penance in 833, recently characterized as the first Stalinist trial in history, still counts in historiography as clear evidence of a bid for an “episcopal theocracy,” which set the scene for the disintegration of the Carolingian empire after Louis’s death.<sup>12</sup>

The nature of the Carolingian state has been the subject of much reflection and debate,<sup>13</sup> but the same does not hold true for “the church,” which still tends to be

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre. Étude sur le “césaro-papisme byzantin”* (Paris, Gallimard, 1996), 290–322. For discussion of this groundbreaking study, see Evelyn Patlagean, “Byzance et la question du roi-prêtre,” *Annales HSS* 55.4 (2000): 871–78; and Alain Boureau, “Des politiques tirées de l’Écriture. Byzance et l’Occident,” *ibid.*, 879–87.

<sup>9</sup> Boureau, “Des politiques tirées de l’Écriture,” 883.

<sup>10</sup> The two classic statements of this view are Henri-Xavier Arquillière, *L’Augustinisme politique* (Paris: Vrin, 1934); and Étienne Delaruelle, “En relisant le *De institutione regia* de Jonas d’Orléans,” in *Mélanges d’histoire du Moyen Âge, dédiés à la mémoire de Louis Halphen* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), 185–93. The intellectual background and context of the concept of *Augustinisme politique* is outlined in Boureau, “Des politiques tirées de l’Écriture.”

<sup>11</sup> See the collected articles in Peter Godman and Roger Collins (eds.), *Charlemagne’s Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), and the excellent survey of Philippe Depreux, “Louis le Pieux reconsidéré? À propos des travaux récents consacrés à l’héritier de Charlemagne et son règne,” *Francia* 21.1 (1994): 181–212.

<sup>12</sup> Élisabeth Magnou-Nortier, “La tentative de subversion de l’État sous Louis le Pieux et l’oeuvre des falsificateurs,” *Le Moyen Âge* 105 (1999): 331–65 and 615–41, at 640. See also Monika Suchan, “Kirchenpolitik des Königs oder Königspolitik der Kirche? Zum Verhältnis Ludwigs des Frommen und des Episkopates während der Herrschaftskrisen um 830,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 111.1 (2000): 1–27, who takes a similar view.

<sup>13</sup> Johannes Fried, “Der karolingische Herrschaftsverband im 9. Jahrhundert zwischen Kirche und Königshaus,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 235 (1982): 1–43. For a critical response, see Hans-Werner

perceived as an entity that supersedes time and change. The term *ecclesia*, which looms large in Carolingian royal legislation, evokes two basic connotations today: it is either a clearly defined and separate clerical hierarchy pursuing its own interests, or a “real church” considered to be universal: a society of the elect not bound up with earthly polities. Deviations from these modern conceptions of “the church,” such as when kings cooperated with bishops and ruled with their help – a widespread early-medieval pattern – or when the term *ecclesia* was used to denote a polity, tend to be either ignored or treated as anomalous. In spite of a growing body of scholarship that argues differently,<sup>14</sup> historians still suppose that “royal theocracy” characterized the reign of Charles, whereas “episcopal theocracy” came to prevail under his son Louis.<sup>15</sup>

In what follows, I intend to show that this supposed contrast between the two regimes is anachronistic and misleading. Both in Charlemagne’s and in Louis’s reign, the palace embodied *royal religious authority*, above all because the ruler was perceived as the leader of an empire that was also an *ecclesia*. Together with his bishops, the ruler was responsible for the salvation of the Christian people (*populus christianus*) over which he ruled, and he was accountable to God for its sins. This aspect of royal and episcopal leadership was further articulated after 814. Whereas Charlemagne had repeatedly instigated collective and public acts of atonement without taking a prominent part in them himself, Louis played a leading role in collective efforts to placate an offended deity, evincing a truly imperial humility that was reminiscent of the emperor Theodosius I (also known as Theodosius the Great), who did penance in 390 at Ambrose’s behest. This developing “penitential state” was the background to Louis’s public penance in 833, for it created the context within which political conflict could be conceptualized in terms of sin and penance.

Goetz, “*Regnum*: zum politischen Denken der Karolingerzeit,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanische Abteilung* 104 (1987): 110–89. See also Janet L. Nelson, “Kingship and Empire,” in J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 211–51.

<sup>14</sup> Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and Carolingian Reforms, 789–895* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977). Nikolaus Staubach, “*Cultus divinus* und karolingischen Reform,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984): 546–81; Nikolaus Staubach, *Rex christianus. Hofkultur und Herrschaftspropaganda im Reich Karls des Kahlen, II: Die Grundlegung der religion royale, Pictura et poesis* 2 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1993). Karl-Ferdinand Werner, “*Hludovicus Augustus*. Gouverneur l’empire Chrétien – Idées et réalités,” in Godman and Collins, *Charlemagne’s Heir*, 3–124. Matthew Innes, “Charlemagne’s Will: Inheritance, Ideology and the Imperial Succession,” *English Historical Review* 112 (1997): 833–55. Mayke de Jong, “The Empire as *ecclesia*: Hrabanus Maurus and Biblical *Historia* for Rulers,” in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 191–226.

<sup>15</sup> This is a standard opinion in textbooks. Cf. Geneviève Bühner-Thierry, *L’Europe carolingienne (714–888)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2001), 74–78.

## PALACE AND CLOISTER

Leidrad and his colleagues in Tours did not have just any of Charlemagne's many palaces in mind, but rather the royal residence that came to be called the "senior palace," namely, Aachen.<sup>16</sup> From the winter of 774/75, this new palace became Charlemagne's preferred winter residence. From the winter of 801–02 onward, he resided there more or less permanently, with breaks only for summer campaigns and autumn hunting. Contemporaries were deeply impressed by its magnificent buildings, particularly its *opus mirabile*, the church dedicated to the Virgin, adorned with pillars brought from Rome and Ravenna. Once Charlemagne's residence had become permanent, Aachen grew into a busy hub with a thriving settlement (*vicus*), a market, and a mint. Aachen's sacred character was drawn from many different sources. Its church, dedicated to the Virgin, was likened to Solomon's temple – and understandably so, for, like Aachen, this biblical model of a cultic center had encompassed an interconnected temple and royal residence. But there were other sources of inspiration as well: notably Byzantium, late-antique imperial Rome, and, above all, the Rome of pristine and authentic Christianity, represented by the Acts of the Apostles and the martyrs. No single model from an authoritative past dominated the physical structure of the palace at Aachen and the meanings attached to it by contemporaries and subsequent generations.<sup>17</sup> Instead, drawing eclectically upon the symbolic resources of an authoritative past, the palace in Aachen resembled Carolingian culture in general.

The undiminished importance of this palace as a seat of royal authority after Charlemagne's death is revealed by the way in which Louis's succession was portrayed in contemporary sources. His taking over the empire from his father in 814 meant, first of all, that Louis took possession of Aachen.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, when the empress Judith was accused of adultery in 830 and sent to the monastery of Sainte-Croix in Poitiers to atone for her sins, her subsequent rehabilitation was depicted as readmission to Aachen. The empress was ceremonially welcomed to her rightful seat of power, with her son and other great men riding out from the palace to meet her, in the manner of a Roman *adventus*.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The literature on Aachen is vast. See especially J. L. Nelson, "Aachen as a Place of Power," in M. de Jong and F. Theuvs (eds.), *Topographies of Power in Early Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 217–42; J. L. Nelson, "La cour impériale de Charlemagne," in R. Le Jan (ed.), *La royauté et les élites dans l'Europe carolingienne (du début du IXe aux environs de 920)* (Lille: Université Charles-de-Gaulle/Lille, 1998), 181–82, repr. in J. L. Nelson, *Rulers and Ruling Families in Early Medieval Europe: Alfred, Charles the Bald, and Others* (Aldershot: Brookfield, 1999), ch. XIV; Ludwig Falkenstein, "Charlemagne et Aix-la-Chapelle," *Byzantion* 61 (1991): 231–89; Barbier, "Le sacré dans le palais Franc."

<sup>17</sup> Nelson, "Aachen as a place of power," rightly emphasizes this point. For a brief but illuminating discussion of the eclectic symbolism of the Aachen palace and chapel complex, see Mary Garrison, "The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an identity from Pippin to Charlemagne," in Hen and Innes, *The Uses of the Past*, 154–56.

<sup>18</sup> Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici*, cc. 21–23, ed. E. Tremp, *Thegan, Die Taten Ludwigs des Frommen; Astronomus, Das Leben Kaiser Ludwigs*, MGH SRG 64 (1995), 348–52.

<sup>19</sup> *Annales Mettenses priores*, s.a. 830, ed. B. von Simson, MGH SRG 10 (1905), 97–98.

Despite this palace's undoubted prominence, Carolingian royal rule remained multifocal. Aachen became the central node in a network and hierarchy of palaces that created interconnecting royal landscapes. Even the most peripheral palaces that kings hardly ever visited became infused with royal presence, for those living in them had vivid memories of having visited the great palaces, such as Aachen. As Stuart Airlie put it, there was an enduring "palace of memory" invested with a royal authority that depended not merely on the accidental presence of the king and his court but more on the memories and experiences of those who had visited the most prominent royal seats and had basked in the reflected glory of the ruler's proximity. Such central palaces embodied a shared ideal of the palace that could be transmitted to more peripheral royal spaces.<sup>20</sup> As a result of changing political constellations, the geographical location of central palaces shifted over time, but royal authority, nevertheless, came to be associated with specific locations, rather than being dependent upon the mere presence of the king in whatever palace he happened to be residing. Even palaces that he hardly ever visited became infused with royal authority.

The network of palaces of which Aachen was the central node consisted not only of *palatia* in the strict sense of the word but also of royal monasteries. In the course of the seventh century, Merovingian kings and queens had favored select religious communities with privileges of immunity, which created a direct link between the ruler and sacred spaces. Their Carolingian successors depended upon direct access to monastic resources to a much greater extent. Such resources consisted not only of a vast landed wealth of which kings might dispose to reward their faithful men, but also of the prayer that was necessary for the stability of the realm (*stabilitas regni*) and for the victory of the armies: in short, the "right worship" that would ensure God's favor. Carolingian royal protection (*tuitio*) turned these monasteries into a distinct but integral part of royal space.<sup>21</sup> As with palaces, the hierarchy within this network of royal monasteries was determined by royal favor and presence. The most prominent among them were entrusted to abbots and abbesses who were closely connected to

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Airlie, "The Palace of Memory: The Carolingian Court as a Political Centre," in S. Rees Jones, R. Marks, and A. J. Minnis (eds.), *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe* (Rochester: York Medieval Press, 2000), 1–20. See also Thomas Zotz, "Le palais et les élites dans le royaume de Germanie," in Le Jan, *La royauté et les élites dans l'Europe carolingienne*, 233–47.

<sup>21</sup> See Mayke de Jong, "Carolingian Monasticism: The Power of Prayer," in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History II, c. 700–c. 900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 622–53, which includes extensive references to the older literature. For an innovative perspective on the concept of Carolingian royal protection (*tuitio*) as distinct from that of Merovingian immunity, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). On monasteries as mediators of royal power in the Carolingian empire, see Anne-Marie Helvétius, "L'abbatiai laïque comme relais du pouvoir royal au frontières du royaume: le cas du Nord de la Neustrie au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle," in R. Le Jan (ed.), *La royauté et les élites dans l'Europe carolingienne (du début du IX<sup>e</sup> siècle aux environs de 929)* (Lille: Centre d'Histoire de l'Europe de Nord-Ouest, 1998), 285–300; and Matthew Innes, "Kings, Monks and Patrons: Political Identities and the Abbey of Lorsch," *ibid.*, 310–24.

the royal household. Such communities were, in effect, parallel palaces that served to a large extent as dependencies of the court.<sup>22</sup> They were “sacred places” (*loci sancti*), the status of which contributed to the notion of the sacred character of the palace. This was true of male as well as of female communities. Charlemagne entrusted a precious relic collection to his sister Gisela, abbess of the royal nunnery of Chelles.<sup>23</sup> The abbess of Remiremont, thanking Louis the Pious for his generosity, assured the emperor that over the past year her community had sung a thousand Psalms and celebrated eight hundred masses for his well-being and for that of his queen and their children.<sup>24</sup>

Royal monasteries served other distinctive purposes: They were temporary residences for the royal household, which regularly visited the most privileged of these sacred spaces; they were sources of human talent recruited by the palace in the shape of young monks and clerics sent to the court by their abbots for further training and future royal service; and they were places where prominent royal opponents, be they lay aristocrats or high-ranking clerics, might lie low, doing penance for their political sins until the tide had turned and they enjoyed royal favor once more.<sup>25</sup> As Fulda’s monks knew well in 816 when they had to elect a new abbot, good connections with the palace were of crucial importance. Thus, some argued in favor of electing an aristocratic abbot. “You know why? Because he will enjoy generosity in the palace.”<sup>26</sup> A balance had to be struck. Much of Carolingian monastic reform was designed to curtail excessive proximity to the world of the court, but too much distance would mean a loss of the royal patronage (*generositas in palatio*), which was essential to the survival of the community. Moreover, it was the ruler who was the final court of appeal in situations of conflict and who served as the ultimate guarantee of the monastery’s *regularitas* (i.e., adherence to the precepts of the *Rule of Benedict*). Thus, disgruntled monks from Fulda appealed first to Charlemagne (812) and then to Louis (816/17), calling for a restoration of the community’s *regularitas*.<sup>27</sup> Reflecting on these turbulent times two decades later, Brun Candidus recorded that Louis the Pious himself outlined the basic principles

<sup>22</sup> Airlie, “The palace of memory,” 18, makes this point in passing, but it deserves more emphasis in the present context than the author had occasion to give to it.

<sup>23</sup> Janet L. Nelson, “Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment?” in J. L. Nelson (ed.), *The Frankish World, 750–900* (London and Rio Grande: Hambleton Press, 1996), 223–24, at 236. On the relics of Chelles, see J.-P. Laporte, *Le trésor des saints de Chelles* (Chelles: Société archéologique et historique de Chelles, 1988), 115–50.

<sup>24</sup> MGH *Formulae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi* (=MGH *Leges*, Sectio 5), ed. K. Zeumer (1882–86), 525–26.

<sup>25</sup> *Annales S. Bertiniani*, s.a. 834, ed. R. Rau, *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte II* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 22.

<sup>26</sup> Bruno Candidus, *Vita Aegil*, c. 5, ed. Gereon Bercht-Jördens, *Vita Aegil abbatis Fuldensis a Candido ad Modestuum edita prosa et versibus. Ein opus geminatum des IX. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Knecht, 1994), 6.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Steffen Patzold, “Konflikte im Kloster Fulda zur Zeit der Karolinger,” *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter* 76 (2000): 69–162, with extensive references to older literature.

of monastic discipline in a long sermon. In Fulda's attempt to overcome a troubled past, the emperor was the ultimate source of religious authority.<sup>28</sup>

Palaces, with their constant flow and ebb of people, were different from monasteries, which anxiously guarded the boundaries of the cloister (*claustrum*): the inner enclosure into which only full members of the community and a few privileged guests had access.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, monastic life was part of the self-definition of many "men of the palace" (*palatini*), who belonged to the inner circle of the royal household, for some members of this charmed circle were men with prior monastic experience, sent to the court by their abbots for further training and in view of future royal service.<sup>30</sup> Einhard is an interesting case in point. His celebrated *Life of Charlemagne* (*Vita Karoli*) has often been characterized as "secular," and even as "anti-clerical."<sup>31</sup> The notion that Einhard was a "secular" author is influenced by his use of classical models – notably Suetonius and Cicero – but it also follows from the erroneous premise that he wrote his *Vita Karoli* as an implicit critique of the overly "monastic" emperor Louis the Pious. In fact, Einhard's career is not unlike that of many courtiers whose lives constantly crossed the boundary between cloister and palace. Raised in Fulda before he came to Aachen in 794 as an adolescent or young adult, Einhard was first Charlemagne's tutor (*nutritus*) and then Louis's faithful courtier. When Einhard's wife Imma died in 836, he retired to the religious community of Seeligenstadt, which he had founded with her on land given by emperor Louis.<sup>32</sup> There is no contradiction between Einhard's impressive classical scholarship, on the one hand, and his imperial virtues with a monastic resonance, on the other. The Charlemagne of the *Vita Karoli* is not only a victorious warrior but also the embodiment of a royal religious authority that is characterized by humility. This holds true not only for the ruler's appropriate reluctance to be crowned emperor,<sup>33</sup> but also for his punctilious attendance at services in Aachen's palace chapel, where

<sup>28</sup> Bruno Candidus, *Vita Aegil*, cc. 9–10, pp. 9–11.

<sup>29</sup> For a further discussion of the concept of the *claustrum*, see M. de Jong, "Carolingian Monasticism," at 636–40; and M. de Jong, "Internal Cloisters: The Case of Ekkehard's Casus Sancti Galli," in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 1 (Vienna: Verlag der österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 209–22.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Innes, "A Place of Discipline: Carolingian Courts and Aristocratic Youths," in C. Cubitt (ed.), *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages. The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 59–76.

<sup>31</sup> Matthias M. Tischler, *Einhard's "Vita Karoli": Studien zur Entstehung, Überlieferung und Rezeption*, MGH Schriften 48 (Hannover: Hahnsche, 2001), 157, with reference to Helmut Beumann, *Ideengeschichtliche Studien zu Einhard und anderen Geschichtsschreibern des früheren Mittelalters* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 49–52.

<sup>32</sup> On Einhard's biography, see Paul E. Dutton (ed. and trans.), *Charlemagne's Courtier: The Complete Einhard* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998); and Julia M. H. Smith, "Einhard: The Sinner and the Saints," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55–77.

<sup>33</sup> Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 28, ed. Reinhold Rau, *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte I, Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters 5* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), 198–200.



Charles the Great carefully corrected the way the Psalms were sung, although he took care never to sing or read publicly and loudly himself. The emperor personally supervised the liturgy in its most precise details, making sure that nothing impure might contaminate these sacred precincts.<sup>34</sup> The juxtaposition of Charles's construction of the chapel with his concern with the purity and correctness of its services in Einhard's account is reminiscent of the history of Solomon, another great ruler whose completion of the temple was followed by God's warnings about ritual correctness and obedience.<sup>35</sup> The Hebrew king and his people should keep God's "commandments and ceremonies," lest Israel would be "cut off out of the land I have given them, and this house, which I have hallowed" would be cast out of God's sight.<sup>36</sup> Einhard portrayed a typically royal kind of regularity, based on both monastic and classical templates.<sup>37</sup> This regularity included moderation in food, albeit only to an extent suitable to an emperor. The daily reading (*lectio*) at the royal table included not only selections from Augustine's *City of God* but also the "histories and the deeds of the ancients" (*historiae et antiquorum res gestae*). Like monks, this emperor regularly interrupted his sleep, even four or five times a night, although he did so not to pray but to dispense justice. Einhard wrote about Charlemagne's *vita interior et domestica*. The expression is difficult to translate, but it amounts to "the king's ordered life in the palace."<sup>38</sup>

### CHURCHMEN AND THE CHURCH

In Notker's *Gesta Karoli*, written in the mid-880s in the royal monastery of Saint-Gall, vainglorious or downright silly bishops were the author's favorite target of ridicule. Unlike kings, abbots, and monks, bishops did not really belong to the sacred space represented by monasteries and palaces.<sup>39</sup> Reading Notker, one is reminded of Alcuin, who wrote thus to the archbishop of Canterbury in 801 with regard to his imminent visit to the palace:

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., cc. 24–25, pp. 194–216.

<sup>35</sup> M. Garrison, "The Franks as the New Israel?" 156.

<sup>36</sup> III Kgs 9:6–7: "custodientes mandata mea et caeremonias quas proposui vobis."

<sup>37</sup> On the classical models, see Martin Kempshall, "Some Ciceronian Models for Einhard's Life of Charlemagne," *Viator* 26 (1995): 11–37. For a recent and cautious attempt at dating this work, see Karl-Heinrich Krüger, "Neue Beobachtungen zur Datierung von Einhard's Karls vita," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 32 (1998): 124–45. For a study of the text, see David Ganz, "Einhard's Charlemagne: The Characterization of Greatness," in J. Storey (ed.), *Charlemagne: Empire and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 38–51. On the convergence of classical and monastic traditions in Carolingian biographies of rulers, see Matthew Innes, "He never even allowed his white teeth to be bared in laughter: The Politics of Humour in the Carolingian Renaissance," in G. Halsall (ed.), *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 131–57.

<sup>38</sup> Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 18, p. 188.

<sup>39</sup> On Notker's *Gesta Karoli*, see Matthew Innes, "Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society," *Past & Present* 158 (1998): 3–36.

If you come to my lord the King, warn your companions and particularly the clergy to conduct themselves respectfully in all religious observances, in dress and in church order, so that you always set a good example wherever you go. Do not let them wear gold ornaments or silk clothes in the king's sight; they should go humbly dressed as befits servants of God.<sup>40</sup>

As well as being the target of Notker's jokes, medieval bishops are often the black sheep of historians today, who believe that by defining kingship as a divinely bestowed "ministry" (*ministerium*), for which the ruler would be held accountable to God in the Final Judgment, bishops in the late 820s and 830s relegated the ruler to the status of an ordinary sinner. Kingship became a conditional office, on this view, divinely conferred on good kings but withheld from bad ones. By virtue of their "power of the keys," bishops were now the ultimate judges of the kings, and so in a position to undermine royal power.<sup>41</sup> In the absence of a clear distinction between office and incumbent, the ruler was a "son of the Church," whose moral conduct was subject to episcopal judgment: not as the king, but rather "only as an individual, as a father or a lord."<sup>42</sup> This was the Carolingian "dualism" that supposedly emerged in the reign of Louis the Pious, with bishops assuming ultimate moral responsibility for the realm. But this depiction of the situation is at best one-sided.

One should keep in mind that the joint governance by kings and bishops had been the norm in late-antique and early-medieval history.<sup>43</sup> In Merovingian Gaul and Visigothic Spain, the new rulers relied on an already existing infrastructure of local episcopal leadership and on a late-antique tradition that had considered the Christian emperor to be the "real leader of the bishops." This is not to say that there were no conflicts between rulers and bishops, but the prevailing pattern that gradually grew more pronounced in Merovingian conciliar acts was one of a "synergic-binary structure,"<sup>44</sup> whereby the king and the bishops jointly shared the responsibility for the well-being of the Christian people (*populus christianus*). This dual authority among the Merovingians was clearly expressed at the Neustro-Burgundian council of Mâcon convened by King Guntram in 585. Bishops were aware of being leaders of an ecclesial body (an *ecclesia*) that surpassed the boundaries of kingdoms (*regna*), but they also voiced the need for a new political unity

<sup>40</sup> Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 230, MGH Epist. 4 (1895), 374–75.

<sup>41</sup> Compare the comments of Alain Dubreucq (ed. and trans.), Jonas d'Orléans, *Le métier du roi*, SC 407 (1995), 85–90.

<sup>42</sup> Nelson, "Kingship and Empire," 211–51, at 224.

<sup>43</sup> On Gregory of Tours's vision of the cooperation between bishops and the Christian ruler (*christianus princeps*) within the framework of the *ecclesia*, see Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours* (538–594) (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994); and, with a broader chronological and geographical scope, Aloys Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie im frühmittelalterlichen Okzident. Die Aussage konziliarer Texte des gallischen und iberischen Raumes*, Spanische Forschungen der Görresgesellschaft 36 (Münster: Aschendorf, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie*, p. 76, speaks of a synergisch-binäre Struktur. He derived this concept from Karl-Ferdinand Werner, *Naissance de la noblesse. L'essor des élites politiques en Europe* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 150.

under one ruler, who would embody and strengthen this church.<sup>45</sup> When Chlotar II convened a synod in Paris in 614, which many leading laymen as well as clergy attended, this new political unity had been achieved. It was conceptualized as a tripartite ecclesiastical body (*corpus ecclesiae*) consisting of the people (*populus christianus*), the clergy (*ordo ecclesiasticus*), and the ruler (*princeps*). This *ecclesia* was ruled by a king who was supported by the bishops and his leading men (*proceres*). The synod discussed “what is most useful [*utilis*] to the king and to the salvation of the people, and what the ecclesiastical order should observe for its own benefit.”<sup>46</sup> A later gathering in Clichy (626/7), also dominated by Chlotar II, hailed the king as David, because he governed his realm with divine providence and fulfilled a prophetic ministry.<sup>47</sup>

This is the context in which the notion of Frankish kingship as a divinely bestowed “ministry” first emerged. The notion was further articulated among the Carolingians in the 820s, but its contours are already visible in the Merovingian period. At least from the early seventh century onward, kings and bishops were seen as jointly responsible for the salvation of the Christian community (*populus christianus*) and for the right worship of God. The bishops who compared Chlotar II to David and credited him with a “prophetic ministry” (*ministratio prophetica*) were referring to this dual responsibility. Basing themselves on older structures and traditions, the new rulers used synods as public forums for the business of the realm in the widest sense, including worship and the clergy. In 742, Carloman, as mayor of the Merovingian palace, convened the so-called German Council (*Concilium Germanicum*) with his “bishops and magnates” (*episcopi et optimates*), calling for the “restoration of the Law of God [*lex Dei*] and ecclesiastical discipline [*aeclesiastica religio*], which have fallen into ruin under past rulers of bygone days.” He wondered “how the Christian people [*populus Christianus*] can reach salvation and will not perish because of false priests.”<sup>48</sup>

By assuming royal authority, the mayors of the Merovingian palace (the future Carolingian dynasty) made themselves accountable to God for the salvation of the people, and thereby for the worship of God (*cultus divinus*). This had to be performed correctly and regularly, for the good fortune of the Frankish kingdom (and later of the empire) was dependent on right worship as well as on divine

<sup>45</sup> Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie*, 103–05.

<sup>46</sup> Council of Paris (614) prologue, ed. Jean Gaudemet and Brigitte Basdevant, *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens (V<sup>e</sup>–VII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, SC 354 (1989), 508: “quid quommodo principis, quid saluti populi utilius competeret vel quid ecclesiasticus ordo salubriter observaret.”

<sup>47</sup> Council of Clichy (626/627), prologue, ed. Gaudemet and Basdevant, SC 354, 528.

<sup>48</sup> *Concilium Germanicum*, prologue, MGH Conc. 2.1 (1906), 2: “quomodo lex Dei et aeclesiastica religio recuperetur, que in diebus preteritorum principum dissipata corruit, et qualiter populus Christianus ad salutem animae pervenire possit et per falsos sacerdotes deceptus non pereat.” On Merovingian royal involvement in synods as a model for the religious authority of Carolingian rulers, see Philippe Depreux, “L’Expression ‘statutum est a domno rege et sancta synodo’ annonçant certaines dispositions du capitulaire de Francfort (794),” in Berndt, *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794*, 1:80–101.

benevolence and obedience to divine precepts. The notion that true Christian kingship was defined by the ruler's ultimate responsibility for the "worship of the true God" (*cultus veri dei*) was explicitly and famously formulated in the prologue to Charlemagne's *Admonitio generalis*, issued in Aachen in 789:

For we read in the Books of Kings how the saintly Josiah, by visitation, correction, and admonition, strove to recall the kingdom that God had given him to the worship of the true God. I say this not to compare myself with his holiness, but because it is our duty, at all times and in all places, to follow the examples of the saints, and necessary for us to gather together whomever we can to apply themselves to a good life in praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup>

The ruler's responsibility for "worship of the true God" and for his people's salvation is fully articulated in the biblical text itself. Josiah, upon discovering God's law in the Temple that he was engaged in rebuilding and realizing how far the conduct of God's people had become removed from what was demanded by God's law (*lex dei*), tore his clothes in a gesture of penance (IV Kgs 22:11–13). Disobedience to God's law (i.e., to Scripture) called for atonement, first of all by the ruler who had failed in his duty to visit, correct, and admonish his subjects. Charlemagne presented himself in the *Admonitio generalis* as the "rector of the kingdom of the Franks and the devout defender and adjuvant of the holy church [*sancta ecclesia*]."<sup>50</sup> The kingdom (*regnum*) and the church (*ecclesia*) were not perceived as identical, but the king's leading role in both domains drew the two spheres together.

In order to guarantee right worship of God, successive synods and assemblies, mostly initiated by the rulers, insisted on ever stricter distinctions within the "ecclesiastical order" (*ordo ecclesiasticus*), which mediated between God and mankind. This pattern is already visible in the *Admonitio generalis*, which addressed a broad category of priestly men (*sacerdotes*) that included not only the leading priests, especially bishops, but also monks and canons. The two classes were related but separate entities. It also addressed nuns and those virgins who were dedicated to God but not leading a regular life in a religious community. Finally, the *Admonitio* was directed at "all," that is, to the *populus Dei* that the ruler was to visit, correct, and admonish. This differentiation between the various "orders" comprising the church became increasingly complex. Churchmen (*ecclesiastici*) comprised a distinct category by virtue of their sacerdotal ministry, but this does not mean that Carolingian reform can accurately be described as "ecclesiastical."<sup>51</sup> It was Charlemagne who, in

<sup>49</sup> *Admonitio generalis*, prologue, MGH Capit. 1 (1883), 54. On the religious nature of this capitulary and on Charlemagne's important role in its conception, see Thomas M. Buck, *Admonitio und Praedicatio. Zur religiös-pastoralen Dimension von Kapitularien und kapitularienahen Texten (507–814)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> *Admonitio generalis*, prologue, 53: "Ego Karolus, gratia Dei eiusque misericordia donante rex et rector regni Francorum, et devotus sanctae aecclisiae defensor humilis adiutor . . ."

<sup>51</sup> For an excellent recent reassessment of Carolingian reform, see Philippe Depreux, "Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l'époque carolingienne," *Revue historique* 307.3 (2002): 721–51.

809, initiated an inquiry into the correct form of baptism, eliciting a wide response from his bishops, of which over sixty answers are still extant.<sup>52</sup> During a penetrating interrogation of his leading men in 811, when he engaged them in collective and individual self-examination, the emperor himself asked the crucial question: “Are we really Christians?”<sup>53</sup> On this occasion, bishops, abbots, and counts had to sit in distinct blocs, so that they were recognizable as separate orders with their distinct ministries. Nevertheless, the agenda of the meeting was a common one, as was the exposure of individual failure in the presence of the entire gathering.

The ninth-century *ecclesia* was not the church as later understood, consisting of the clergy as a separate domain. Nor was this the universal Church of theology, which transcended political boundaries. Already at an early stage, the expression *ecclesia* had come to denote and define the Carolingian polity. According to the Royal Frankish Annals of 791, Charlemagne, having consulted the Franks, the Saxons, and the Frisians, set out to avenge the “unbearable evil” committed by the Avars against “the Holy Church and the Christian people” (*sancta ecclesia vel populus christianus*).<sup>54</sup> The term *ecclesia* was not used here to refer to the church as a separate institution. Nor was it a premodern society’s way to refer to the body politic in the absence of more abstract terms.<sup>55</sup> Rather, it was an articulation of the identity of an expanding Frankish polity that was derived from the same “worship of the true God” as was mentioned in the *Admonitio generalis*. In 796, when the Avar khaganate had fallen, Carolingian bishops gathered at the new frontier – not only to convert the heathens, but also to eradicate deviant forms of baptism dispensed by “illiterate clerics,” that is, by Avar priests pronouncing baptismal formulas that were incorrect in the eyes of the bishops who followed in the wake of Carolingian armies. This concept of the “holy church” (*sancta ecclesia*) was both inclusive and exclusive. It defined the boundaries of the polity by including as the entire “people of God” all those who lived according to “correct” religious worship and doctrine, whereas it excluded those who did not do so.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Susan A. Keefe, *Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> For an illuminating analysis of two capitularies from 811, with references to older literature, see J. L. Nelson, “The Voice of Charlemagne,” in R. Gameson and H. Leyser (eds.), *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 76–88. On Charlemagne’s urgent concern with religious unity during the last years of his reign (but here interpreted from the traditional perspective of a sharp discontinuity between the reigns of Charles and Louis), see also Johannes Fried, “Elite und Ideologie oder die Nachfolgeordnung Karls des Großen vom Jahre 813,” in Le Jan, *La royauté et les élites*, 71–109.

<sup>54</sup> *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 791, ed. Rau, *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte* I, p. 58: “propter nimiam malitiam et intollerabilem, quam fecerunt Avari contra sanctam ecclesiam vel populum christianum.”

<sup>55</sup> As Fried assumes in “Der karolingische Herrschaftsverband im 9. Jhd.”

<sup>56</sup> Helmut Reimitz, “Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen im karolingischen Mitteleuropa,” in H. Reimitz and W. Pohl (eds.), *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter*, 105–66. Helmut Reimitz, “Conversion and Control: The Establishment of Liturgical Frontiers in Carolingian Pannonia,” in

Because of the ruler's religious authority, the palace itself transcended such divisions. The synod of Frankfurt (794), where the expression *sacrum palatium* was first used to designate Charlemagne's palace, decreed that all archbishops should reside in their respective dioceses, but with one notable exception. With the express consent of Pope Hadrian, it had been decided that Archbishop Hildebold of Cologne, later designated as "archbishop of the sacred palace," should reside at the palace.<sup>57</sup> He did so, allegedly, "in view of ecclesiastical affairs": a phrase that should be construed as "being in charge of the worship of God." The sacred palace was meant to be the center of an *ecclesia*. As Janet Nelson put it, Aachen became "a new kind of religious center, a theatre for the rites of rulership." But the question remains whether the absence of a local bishop who might steal the royal show made all that much difference.<sup>58</sup> The palace enforced ecclesiastical structures and distinctions between the social and ecclesiastical classes (*ordines*), but these did not govern the palace community itself, which was the center of the *ecclesia*. Bishops such as Leidrad of Lyon looked to the palace for models of the right worship of God.

This vision of the Frankish body politic as an *ecclesia* was elaborated in liturgical texts, and above all in biblical commentaries commissioned by or dedicated to rulers. Works of history commissioned by Carolingian kings are rare, and whether Carolingian rulers ever read the royal Frankish Annals remains unknown, but royal appreciation of biblical exegesis is crystal clear. Charlemagne surrounded himself with superb biblical scholars such as Theodulf and Alcuin, and he commissioned a commentary on Genesis from the otherwise unknown cleric Wigbod.<sup>59</sup> Working within an authoritative tradition of spiritual exegesis established by Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, and Bede, these biblical scholars created a lively Carolingian exegetical tradition that lasted for at least three generations. Kings and queens were among the main recipients of such commentaries, especially of those on Old Testament books.<sup>60</sup> This was not the result of a simplistic equation of

W. Pohl, I. Wood, and H. Reimitz (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the Carolingians* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 189–207.

<sup>57</sup> *Concilium Francofurtense* (794), c. 56, MGH Conc. 2.1, 171.

<sup>58</sup> Nelson, "Aachen as a Place of Power," 224–25.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Gorman: "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 17 (1982): 173–201. Michael Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," *Revue Bénédictine* 107 (1997): 40–76; and "Theodulf of Orléans and the Exegetical Miscellany in Paris. Lat. 15679," *Revue Bénédictine* 109 (1999): 278–323. The *Libri carolini* provide evidence of biblical scholarship at Charlemagne's court and of the ruler's personal involvement in it. For an edition, see Ann Freeman with Paul Meyvaert (eds.), *Opus Caroli contra synodum (Libri Carolini)*, MGH Conc. 2, supplement (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1998).

<sup>60</sup> On exegesis for rulers, see De Jong, "The Empire as ecclesia," 191–226; and De Jong, "Exegesis for an Empress," in E. Cohen and M. de Jong (eds.), *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power and Gifts in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 69–100, with further references. On the Carolingian image of the *rex sapiens* and its consequences for royal involvement in theological debates, see Staubach, *Rex christianus*, 21–104 (esp. 12 n. 45, on biblical commentary for rulers and the royal preference for allegory).

the Franks with the “New Israel.”<sup>61</sup> What mattered was the allegorical or spiritual level of exegesis that transformed the history of the “earlier people” – of the Synagogue that had forfeited its right to be God’s elect by not having acknowledged Christ as a Savior – into the deeper truth of a victorious *ecclesia* that had succeeded Israel as God’s Elect. The deeper meaning of the Old Testament could be grasped only if it was read allegorically, or spiritually. A thorough knowledge of Scripture was of the utmost importance for rulers who were in charge of correcting their *ecclesia*. Thus, Louis’s biographer Thegan portrayed Charlemagne as correcting the Gospels on his death bed, and Louis as an expert on the allegorical sense of Scripture.<sup>62</sup>

Only the truly wise ruler (*rex sapientissimus*), who was capable of grasping the multiple levels of meaning in Scripture, could be a true leader (*rector*) of his Christian people. This became an integral part of definitions of good kingship, but there is also much evidence for rulers taking an active interest in exegetical work. When it came to the orthodoxy of such texts, authors awaited the royal judgment with trepidation. Hraban Maur, abbot of Fulda and archbishop of Mainz (d. 856), became the main provider of Old Testament exegesis to Louis the Pious, to his sons Lothar and Louis the German, and to the empresses Judith and Ermengard. His dedicatory letters evoke a lively image of rulers attempting to complete their essential exegetical library and sitting down with their “most learned readers” (*sapientissimi lectores*) at the court in order to digest and judge its contents. To Hraban, Old Testament *historia* (the literal level) was itself sacred history, but its true significance was revealed at the spiritual level, where the “earlier people” became a victorious church of all peoples and nations (*ecclesia gentium*). In the context of an expanding Carolingian empire, such time-honored themes of patristic exegesis gained a new meaning.<sup>63</sup> In Hraban Maur’s biblical commentary for kings and queens, the *ecclesia gentium* that included all the peoples ready to recognize Christ, in contrast to the Synagogue, figured as a powerful image of the contemporary polity. In 830, when the Empress Judith was accused of adultery, Hraban dedicated two commentaries on the Books of Judith and Esther to her, likening the empress in distress to two biblical heroines, both of whom were interpreted as “types” of the *ecclesia*. The author called himself “a particle of the people governed by you.”<sup>64</sup> This close association of the empress Judith with an *ecclesia* and with the *populus christianus* that she ought rightfully to “govern” was powerful ammunition indeed. It also provides us with an example of the ways in which Carolingian polity could be defined in exegetical terms. Some supposedly political texts used similarly religious language. For example, according to the *Ordinatio Imperii* of 817, by which Louis the Pious and his *fideles* (his entourage of ministers and defenders) attempted

<sup>61</sup> For a perceptive discussion of this issue, see Garrison, “The Franks as the New Israel?”

<sup>62</sup> Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici* cc. 7 et 19, ed. E. Tremp, *Thegan, Die Taten Ludwigs des Frommen*, 184–86 and 200.

<sup>63</sup> De Jong, “The Empire as *ecclesia*,” 223–26. Staubach, “*Cultus divinus*,” 555–57.

<sup>64</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, MGH Epist. 5, no. 17a, p. 420. De Jong, “Exegesis for an Empress.”

to safeguard both the unity of the realm and the aspirations of his sons, the unity of the empire was to be preserved by God. It should not be torn apart by human division, “lest this cause scandal in holy church and we incur the wrath of him in whose power all the rights to kingdoms remain.”<sup>65</sup> It is to this fear of God’s wrath that we now turn.

### PURITY AND DANGER

The ruler was responsible for restoring order in the realm by placating God’s wrath. A capitulary issued in 806 and addressed “to all,” which discusses what action should be undertaken in the case of famine, mortality, pestilence, bad weather, or any other tribulation, warned “that men are not to wait for our decree but are straightway to pray for God’s mercy.”<sup>66</sup> Apparently, the “all” to which this warning was addressed had become accustomed to a ruler and a court who identified “tribulations” and then took the lead in any empire-wide intensification of prayer. It seems that one could not initiate fasts and litanies *without* having received proper instructions from the palace. From the 790s onward, episodes of collective atonement by fasting, almsgiving, and litanies appear in the sources.<sup>67</sup> During the campaign against the Avars, for example, the Carolingians implored God for victory in this way not only before the army crossed the frontier but even at Regensburg, where Queen Fastrada and her entourage (*fideles*), at Charlemagne’s request, organized the appropriate litanies.<sup>68</sup> Again, in 805, when famine raged, a general royal call for fasting and prayer was directed to bishops and possibly also to the counts. Charlemagne’s letter to Bishop Ghaerbald of Liège on this subject has survived. After due consultation with his liegemen (*fideles*), both spiritual and secular, Charlemagne urged Ghaerbald to organize three-day fasts, which were “to be observed by all of us, without exception.”<sup>69</sup>

The most striking feature of such palace-initiated acts of atonement is their collective nature. All persons were to be involved, according to their position within the structure of complimentary classes (*ordines*). Those incapable of fasting for reasons of infirmity were allowed to find another suitable atonement, but all were expected to gather at the ninth hour in their local church and, if the light and location permitted, to go in procession singing litanies, before returning to church to

<sup>65</sup> *Capitulare missorum in Theodonis villa datum secundem generale*, c. 4, MGH Capit. 1, no. 44, pp. 122–23.

<sup>66</sup> *Karoli ad Ghaerbaldum episcopum epistola*, MGH Capit. 1, no. 124, pp. 245–46.

<sup>67</sup> *Capitulare episcoporum* (780?), MGH Capit. 1, no. 21, pp. 51–52, which is probably connected with the Avar campaign.

<sup>68</sup> E. Dümmler (ed.), MGH Epist. 4, no. 20, pp. 528–29. Cf. Janet L. Nelson, “The Siting of the Council at Frankfurt: Some Reflections on Family and Politics,” in Berndt, *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794*, 149–66. For Charlemagne’s letter to Fastrada, see E. Dümmler (ed.), MGH Epist. 4, no. 20, pp. 528–29. On intercessory prayer in wartime, see Michael McCormick, “The Liturgy of War in the Early Middle Ages: Crisis, Litanies and the Carolingian Monarchy,” *Viator* 15 (1984): 1–23.

<sup>69</sup> *Karoli ad Ghaerbaldum episcopum epistola*, 244–46.



sing psalms and hear the mass. Every priest was to celebrate mass, and all clerics, monks, and women consecrated to God who were capable of doing so should sing fifty psalms. Churchmen and religious had special duties, but it was the entire people of God, defined in this letter as “parts of the body of the holy church,” who were called upon to appease God’s wrath by doing penance. For this reason, the letter was to be read out in all monasteries and baptismal churches (i.e., churches maintained by the episcopal diocese). God’s displeasure had manifested itself in abnormal and extraordinary phenomena that were reported across the entire empire, such as barren soils causing famine, intemperate weather causing crop failure, and pestilence and incursions of pagan enemies on an unprecedented scale. It was God’s people who had sinned, and who should therefore atone collectively:

And we can most certainly conclude from these external signs that we who are obliged to suffer such ills outwardly are in every way displeasing inwardly to the Lord. Wherefore it seems to us wholly right that each of us should strive to humble his heart in truth and on whatever occasion he should discover that he has offended God, whether in deed or in thought, should atone by doing penance, should lament by weeping, and in the future should guard and protect himself to the best of his ability against these ills.<sup>70</sup>

Such collective penitential action at times of crisis remained a feature of Louis’s reign, but in assuming the burden of sin and the responsibility for atonement, the ruler and the palace played an even more central role. For example, the capitulary that resulted from the assembly at Attigny (822), where Louis reconciled himself with his enemies, depicted the emperor as taking the lead in a public confession of his sins, giving a “most salubrious example” to his bishops.<sup>71</sup> Following suit, the bishops also confessed publicly, admitting their negligence in fulfilling their episcopal duties (*ministerium*). This was a further expression of the notion that the ruler was accountable for the salvation of “the people committed to us by God,” with the bishops in the role of his “helpers” (*adiutores*). One of Louis’s biographers, known as Astronomer, emphasized the spontaneous and voluntary nature of the ruler’s atonement, comparing this Carolingian emperor to his Roman predecessor Theodosius the Great, for this was humility of a truly imperial kind.<sup>72</sup>

In 811, as we have seen, Charlemagne had discussed the crucial issue with his bishops and leading laymen: “Are we really Christians?” In the winter of 828/29, when Louis’s inner circle met in Aachen, the question was now: “How have we offended God?” A series of military defeats, famines, and ominous portents, duly recorded in the Royal Frankish Annals, induced a call for concerted prayer and reform. Some in the palace were treated as scapegoats and ousted, blamed with

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 245–46.

<sup>71</sup> *Capitula ab episcopis ad Attiniaci data* (822), prologue, MGH Capit. 1, no. 174, p. 357.

<sup>72</sup> Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 35, MGH SRG 64, 406.

misfortunes that were perceived as God's punishment. Earlier, in February 828, counts Matfrid of Orleans and Hugh of Tours had been deprived of their *honores* (offices and the property that went with it) for the alleged mismanagement of a campaign against the Saracens: a controversial measure that was to cost Louis dearly in the years thereafter.

Two subsequent political and religious upheavals have dominated interpretations of the preceding years. In 830, the empress Judith was accused of adultery with Bernard of Septimania. In 833, a public penance was imposed on emperor Louis himself. Whenever texts from this period reveal anxiety about a lack of purity among the *populus christianus* and express a sense of the imminent danger of God's retribution, modern historians have read them as religiously veiled criticisms of a weak emperor.

Einhard's *Translatio Marcelli et Petri* is a case in point. This narrative about the successful theft of Roman martyrs and their transfer to Francia features the demon Wiggo, who lists the people's sins that have brought on plagues and pestilence in the realm over the past years. Einhard also mentions a written communication from the archangel Gabriel, concerning matters to be urgently known about martyrs. He brought this to the emperor Louis, who read it throughout, albeit without implementing all of its precepts. Clearly, Einhard was deeply concerned about the disasters that had struck the realm, identifying disobedience of divine precepts as the cause of adversity. Moreover, he attributed a special responsibility to the ruler, who was accountable to God for the sins of his people.<sup>73</sup> Yet this text is not the blatant indictment of the emperor that some scholars have made it out to be. Nor should Einhard's celebrated *Life of Charlemagne (Vita Karoli)* be interpreted as presenting a "counterimage" as an implicit critique of Louis. Scholars have deduced from this interpretation that the *Life* should be dated to the troubled years 828–829.<sup>74</sup> But such interpretations are based on the assumption that the urgent call for religious reform was a one-sided clerical attack on royal authority. This ignores the possibility that the emperor himself played a leading role in the anxious search for ways to placate God, with strategies that included confession and self-incrimination. Louis had led his bishops in a public confession of sin at the assembly of Attigny in 822.

Scholarly interpretations of the royal missive that followed the anxious winter assembly of 828–829 provide us with another example of the modern tendency to confuse collective anxiety with clerical critique of the ruler.<sup>75</sup> This letter exists in two versions. The shorter one, written by emperor Louis, called for a new three-day fast

<sup>73</sup> Einhard, *Translatio Marcellini et Petri* II, cc. 13–14, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS (in Folio) 15,1 (1887), 252–54. Trans. Paul E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier: The Complete Einhard* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998), 100–05.

<sup>74</sup> For the image of Einhard as a fierce critic of Louis, see Tischler, *Vita Karoli*, 167–87; and Paul E. Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 91–101.

<sup>75</sup> *Hludowici et Hlotharii epistola generalis*, MGH Conc. 2.2, 599–601.

after the octave of Pentecost that was “to be observed by all with the utmost devotion.” Then, in order to combat the enemies that had upset the holy church (*sancta ecclesia*) and infested “the realm committed to us by God,” all men with military duty had to prepare themselves for fighting. Furthermore, after consultation with the bishops and with the lay magnates, it was decided that four synods would meet in the spring of 829: in Mainz, Paris, Lyon, and Toulouse. The longer version of the letter was jointly issued by the emperors Louis and Lothar. This includes an extensive digression about God’s wrath, the trials and tribulations that were inflicted upon God’s people, and about the reasons for all this. One reason was that “scandals caused by tyrants had occurred in this realm” (“*scandala per tyrannos in hoc regno exsurgunt*”). This idea reveals the influence of an Irish treatise, Pseudo-Cyprian’s *Twelve Abominations of the World*, the ninth abomination in which was an unjust king (*rex iniquus*), whose errors would bring trials and tribulations of cosmic dimensions on the people: barren soils causing famine, intemperate weather, crop failure, pestilence, and incursions of pagan enemies (also mentioned in Charlemagne’s letter to Ghaerbald of Liège).<sup>76</sup> Bishop Jonas of Orléans cited this section of Pseudo-Cyprian in his edition of the acts of the Council of Paris (829). He did so again in his *Via regia*, written in 831 for Pippin of Aquitaine.<sup>77</sup>

Modern scholars have made much of the accusation of being an unjust king (*rex iniquus*) as an instrument by which bishops criticized the emperor Louis. The reference to the “scandals caused by tyrants” has led to the conclusion that the longer version of the imperial letter, which called for atonement, was “a bishop’s forgery.”<sup>78</sup> Others have argued that Pseudo-Cyprian’s idea of the unjust king became an Irish building block for new Frankish “episcopal models” of Christian kingship.<sup>79</sup> This particular vision of unjust kingship and of its cosmic consequences for the people and the realm did indeed originate in Ireland, but one should keep in mind that the Irish treatise drew upon biblical texts that were also available and intensely read on the Continent. This was one of the reasons why its argument fell on fertile ground there. The idea of a ruler whose iniquities spelled ruin for his people was

<sup>76</sup> On the *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* of Pseudo-Cyprian, see Michael E. Moore, “La monarchie Carolingienne et les anciens modèles Irlandais,” *Annales HSS* 51 (1996): 307–24; and Rob Meens, “Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible: Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm,” *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998): 345–57.

<sup>77</sup> Jonas, *De institutione regia*, c. 3, SC 407, 188.

<sup>78</sup> Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 99–100, with reference to A. Werminghoff’s assessment in his introduction to the two versions of the letter (MGH Conc. 2.2 [1908], 597–98).

<sup>79</sup> Moore, “La monarchie Carolingienne,” also stresses that this was a model that primarily served episcopal ideology and its critique of the ruler: “Pour Jonas, c’était la justice du roi à son adhésion au modèles épiscopaux qui garantissait la paix de royaume, la vigueur de la nature et la capacité de rois à regner” (p. 323). But cf. Martina Blattmann, “Ein Unglück für sein Volk.’ Der Zusammenhang zwischen Fehlverhalten des Königs und Volkswohl in Quellen des 7.-12. Jahrhunderts,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 30 (1996): 80–102, who argues convincingly that the theme of the immoral king who ruins his people is a much more general early-medieval theme derived mostly from the Old Testament.

a familiar Old Testament theme. Moreover, rather than automatically assuming that any reference to the *rex iniquus* or variations on this theme is an instance of episcopal criticism of errant kings, one should take into account the possibility of royal self-criticism in accordance with the example of David, whose humility and penance were an integral part of this biblical ruler's authority. The longer version of the imperial letter presents the image of two penitent rulers declaring that they had "sinned all the more because we should have been the embodiment of salvation [*forma salutis*] for all and should have had the care [for the salvation] of all [*cura omnium*] because of our imperial authority."<sup>80</sup> If this was indeed a forgery produced by a bishop (which one may well doubt on the grounds of manuscript transmission), it was also an eloquent statement of royal religious authority.

The synod that gathered in Paris in 829 as a result of the imperial call for collective atonement has become well known in the history of political ideas because Jonas of Orléans cited in his summary a short passage from the celebrated letter of Pope Gelasius to the emperor Anastasius (see Chapter 14 in this volume). In the late eleventh century, this letter became one of the key texts supporting the superiority of pontifical authority (*auctoritas*) over imperial coercive power (*potestas*). As a result, the synod of Paris has become in modern scholarship the classic case of an emerging dualism of secular power and episcopal authority, wherein both lords were supreme within their own sphere of competence, but the bishop was just a little more supreme than the ruler.<sup>81</sup> This synod supposedly was the first concerted effort "to erect ecclesiastical government irrefragibly as an integral political entity apart from secular institutions."<sup>82</sup> Yet the contention that the central aim of this gathering was the separation (*Abgrenzung*) of kingdom (*regnum*) and priesthood (*sacerdotium*) is the result of an excessive concentration on the phrase "two august empresses by whom the world is ruled": a garbled quotation of Gelasius's letter.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the interpretation totally disregards the rest of this long text as well as the context within which it was drawn up.

The synod of Paris was convened in 829 in order to identify the sins of the leaders and the people, and thereby to pacify an offended God. According to a time-honored tradition of Carolingian "correction," the aim of the synod of Paris was to combat "confusion," that is, to restore order by clarifying and reimposing distinctions among the social classes and offices (*ordines*). The ecclesiastical and royal spheres had to be clearly distinguished, therefore, but these two legal "persons," respectively sacerdotal and royal,

<sup>80</sup> *Hludowici et Hlotharii epistola generalis*, MGH Conc. 2.2, 600.

<sup>81</sup> Jonas, *De institutione regia*, SC 407, 175. *Concilium Parisiense* (829), MGH Conc. 2.2, c. 55 [1], 649: "Duae sunt, inquit [Gelasius], imperatrices augustae, quibus principaliter hic regitur mundus: auctoritas sacra pontificum et regalis potestas. In quibus tanto est gravior pondus sacerdotum, quanto etiam pro regibus hominum in divino sunt examine rationem reddituri."

<sup>82</sup> Karl F. Morrison, *The Two Kingdoms: Ecclesiology in Carolingian Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 45.

<sup>83</sup> For "Abgrenzung," see Egon Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 176.

were integral parts of an all-embracing *ecclesia*, which was equivalent to the “Christian people.” Unlike the original letter of Gelasius and its later interpretations, the ruler and the bishops at the synod of Paris were perceived as being both part of the *ecclesia* and directly accountable to God. There was, indeed, a certain “dualism” here, but it was one in which the ordering was mutual and complementary. Bishops and rulers are portrayed as responsible for each other’s well-being and salvation, with the ruler having a right to correct his bishops by virtue of his own “ministry.” Rather than the hierocratic vision of episcopal leadership that a superficial reading of Jonas’s citation of Gelasius’s letter might suggest, the acts of the synod of Paris reflect anxiety on the part of bishops faced with formidable imperial might, who were trying to defend their rights against a ruler who had freely helped himself to ecclesiastical property in order to reward his followers. More importantly, the complementary “ministries” of the ruler and of the bishops, who had mutually invaded each other’s spheres of competence, should be disentangled and more clearly defined, for it was this disorder that was perceived as the root of all the evils that had assailed the *populus christianus*.<sup>84</sup> This, as we have seen, was part and parcel of an older Frankish tradition, as was construing kingship as a form of “ministry.” In the *Admonitio generalis*, Charlemagne had been portrayed as the *adiutor sanctae ecclesiae*: the one who aided Holy Church. All modern authorities agree that this had nothing to do with subservience, but when Jonas did the same with regard to Louis, historians explain this as an instance of royal subservience to bishops, typical of this particular age and emperor.<sup>85</sup> Yet the notion that a *ministerium* was divinely conferred on kings did not necessarily imply an enfeeblement of royal power (*affaiblissement du pouvoir royal*). On the contrary, the concept of ministry was derived from a long tradition of reflection upon the sacerdotal office, and to apply this notion consistently to kingship meant a recognition and articulation of royal religious authority.

What was at stake in 828–829 was that both “persons,” royal and priestly, perceived themselves as having neglected their God-given *ministerium* and as being in need of correction.<sup>86</sup> It was not only the rulers who were to blame but also the bishops. Indeed, the first and by far the largest section of the synodal proceedings (*acta*) deals with the many ways in which the bishops themselves felt that they had failed. It consists of a long litany of the bishops’ sins: simony, avarice, cupidity, vanity, lack of hospitality, using church property for their own glory, oppressing the faithful, leading less than chaste lives. In short, it was better to have no bishops at all than negligent ones. The second section is devoted to “kings and princes and, more generally, to all the faithful,” as Jonas put it. This is where we find the “unjust king,” but Pseudo-Cyprian pales into insignificance compared to many other authoritative texts cited, particularly biblical ones, for Scripture contained all that kings needed to

<sup>84</sup> *Concilium Parisiense*, c. 93 [26], p. 679.

<sup>85</sup> Jonas d’Orléans, *Le métier du roi*, SC 407, 88. Magnou-Nortier, “La tentative de subversion de l’État.”

<sup>86</sup> See Hans Hubert Anton, “Zum politischen Konzept karolingischer Synoden und zur karolingischen Brüdergemeinschaft,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 99 (1979): 55–132.

know about fulfilling their ministry.<sup>87</sup> Above all, the acts of the synod of Paris were a statement about the joint need of the two “persons” to identify their sins and do penance for the scandal that they had caused in the sacred church (*sancta ecclesia*). In this setting, the term *scandalum* refers to public and scandalous sins that disturbed a divinely inspired social order, and that should therefore be expiated by an equally public form of penance. “Scandal” of the kind that prompted divine retribution is often mentioned in the acts of the synod of Paris – which is not surprising, given that the central issue on this meeting’s agenda was the question how God had been offended. Still, because this synod is often perceived in terms of bishops imposing their superior authority on the ruler, it is worth pointing out that the term *scandalum* occurs most frequently in the “ecclesiastical” section of this text, in which the bishops outlined their *own* manifold sins.<sup>88</sup> That the sacred palace, too, was a potential source of scandal comes to light only toward the end of a summary of the deliberations that the bishops had presented to their ruler: “It is fitting that your sacred house should appear admirable and imitable, and that its good reputation should spread abundantly to others subjected to your government, as well as to foreign nations.”<sup>89</sup> Here, the potential danger that might threaten the reputation (*fama*) of the palace – and, by proxy, of the realm – is identified more generally as dissension and discord. Soon, however, the palace was to become the very center of a scandal of the most dangerous kind. An empress was accused of adultery, and thereby of contaminating the order and well-being of the political community.

## SCANDAL

The preceding years of soul-searching, mutual blame, and self-incrimination go a long way toward explaining why empress Judith (d. 843), Louis’s second wife, could become a scapegoat upon whom the fears of an anxiety-ridden court community were temporarily concentrated. The empress was made to atone not only for her own sins but also for her alleged contamination of the polity. This was the crux of the scandal, for it was the leaders of Carolingian polity – those who were tasked with a special “ministry” – who were most capable of offending God and the *ecclesia*. For similar reasons, the public atonement of kings, queens, bishops, and other “leading men” was considered to be most effective in placating an irate deity.<sup>90</sup> Judith was

<sup>87</sup> *Concilium Parisiense*, cc. 8–9, pp. 659–61.

<sup>88</sup> *Concilium Parisiense*, cc. 16, 19, 25, 53.

<sup>89</sup> *Concilium Parisiense* c. 91 [c. 24], p. 678: “Decet quippe, ut sacra domus vestra cunctis spectabilis appareat et imitabilis existat et fama suae opinionis sive alios imperii vestri subiectos sive exterarum nationes habundantissime perfundat. Ubi igitur omnes dissensions et discordias dirimende et omnis malitia imperiali auctoritate est comprimenda, necesse est ut quod malis corrigere decernit in ea minime reperiatur.”

<sup>90</sup> Mayke de Jong, “Power and Humility in Carolingian Society: The Public Penance of Louis the Pious,” *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992): 29–51. Mayke de Jong, “What Was Public About Public Penance? Paenitentia publica and Justice in the Carolingian World,” in *La giustizia ne’l alto*

accused of adultery because she was considered crucial to the well-being of the polity: both as the guardian of the honor and purity of the palace, and as a queen who also had a “ministry,” namely, the duty of governing the empire, or *ecclesia*, with her husband. As archbishop Agobard of Lyon put it, “If the queen is incapable of governing herself, how then can she guard the honor [*honestas*] of the palace, or how can she effectively handle the reins of the realm?”<sup>91</sup> In the 820s and 830s, anyone with “ministry” was likely to become a scapegoat, but one should not perceive a ministry bestowed on the rulers by God as an ecclesiastical straightjacket on royal power. One should remember that clerics defined their own office as a ministry as well: the *ministerium sacerdotale*. They surely did not think of this role as subservient or dishonorable. On the contrary, humility elevated both bishops and rulers.

In 833, Louis’s eldest son and co-emperor Lothar took charge of the situation. As a result, in October, the large crowd that had gathered in the church of Saint-Médard in Soissons witnessed an emperor, Louis, lying prostrate before the main altar, tearfully confessing his crimes and asking for a public penance, for he had scandalized the *ecclesia*. Following this public confession, Louis handed a written list of his sins to the bishops, who laid this on the altar. The emperor in turn laid his weapons (*cingulum militiae*), signifying his royal ministry, on the altar, and he exchanged his royal attire for the robes of a public penitent.<sup>92</sup> We owe this account of what Halphen has called an “odious comedy”<sup>93</sup> to the bishops who administered the penance. In a joint statement, they defended the legitimacy of the proceedings, stressing that this was an entirely voluntary penance. But Louis’s biographers, reflecting on the matter after Louis had regained power, argued that this penance was imposed on the ruler for sins for which he had already atoned in Attigny in 822, and they emphasized the involuntary nature of the penance, which in their view had rendered it invalid. All in all, this revolt was as short-lived as the one of 830, for already on March 1 of 834, Louis was solemnly rehabilitated in the abbey church of Saint-Denis. Nevertheless, the mainstream view in modern historiography has been that the shameful humiliation in Soissons had rendered the emperor politically impotent for the rest of his reign.<sup>94</sup>

There is no doubt that Louis had acted under duress, but this does not mean that the bishops engineered his deposition by turning the ruler into a private sinner

*medioevo (secoli IX-XI) II, Settimane di studio sull’ alto medio evo 42* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di studi sull’ alto medioevo, 1997), 863–902.

<sup>91</sup> Agobard of Lyon, *Liber apologeticus* I, c. 4, ed. L. van Acker, *Agobardi opera omnia*, CCM 52, 311: “si qua regina semetipsam regere non novit, quomodo de honestate palatii curam habebit? aut quomodo gubernacula regni diligenter exercet?”

<sup>92</sup> *Episcoporum de poenitentia quam Hludovicus imperator professus est, relation Compiendensis*, MGH Capit. 2, no. 195, pp. 51–55. Agobardi *cartula de poenitentia ab imperatore acta*, *ibid.*, no. 198, pp. 56–57.

<sup>93</sup> Louis Halphen, *Charlemagne et l’Empire carolingien* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947), 291: “odieuse comédie.”

<sup>94</sup> The discussion is summarized in Depreux, “Louis le Pieux reconsidéré,” 184–86.

subject to their ecclesiastical jurisdiction, nor that they had organized the first Stalinist trial in history. Bishops who sided with Lothar, notably Ebbo of Reims and Agobard of Lyon, had imposed the public penance on the emperor, whereas bishops who rallied to Louis's cause reconciled him in Saint-Denis, restoring his royal garb and armor to him. Thus, "the bishops" did not present a united front in an effort to undermine imperial authority or "the State." Nor was the public penance of 833 the infamous humiliation that it has been made out to be. At the time, the controversial question was not whether an emperor could or should atone publicly for sins that had affected the well-being of his realm – Louis had done this in 822, to great acclaim – but rather whether he had done so voluntarily or not. Furthermore, whether a penance of this sort would render the emperor permanently incapable of ruling was a matter for debate, which was why his adversaries tried to press him to take monastic vows. The public penance of 833, therefore, was not a simple act of deposition. This was not an ecclesiastical discipline by which "the clergy succeeded in imposing new standards of conduct on laymen whom penance hit where it hurt, namely, in the zone of military and sexual activity."<sup>95</sup> First and foremost, public penance was an instrument of royal authority.

Public penance, as distinct from its private counterpart imposed for sins that had not created scandal, first re-emerges around 800 in texts closely connected to the royal court.<sup>96</sup> It was one of the key issues on the agenda of Charlemagne's synods of 813, and it was the issue that the bishops gathered in Tours to consider, hoping for further instruction from the *sacrum palatium*.<sup>97</sup> Its more eloquent advocates presented public penance Carolingian-style as a return to an ancient canonical discipline that had flourished in the pristine Christianity of the early church, but this supposed revival of an ancient discipline really represented a new kind of penitential discipline: one directed primarily against flagrant crimes of a violent or sexual nature – rebellion, rape, robbery, incest – that had upset the order of Christian society. The key word was *scandalum*, which denoted dangerous dissension, strife, and confusion of the kind that contaminated the entire Christian community (*ecclesia*), offending a divinely inspired social order and, ultimately, God Himself. Because leadership of the *ecclesia* was more capable of causing such dangerous offense than others, public penance was especially appropriate for members of the elite, whose sins, because of their leading position and their ministry, tended to be notorious and scandalous.

Churchmen were not excepted from this regime of public penance. There was a clerical version called "canonical penance," which also required a withdrawal

<sup>95</sup> Janet L. Nelson, "Rituals of Power: By Way of Conclusion," in F. Theuvs and J. L. Nelson (eds.), *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 477–86, at 484.

<sup>96</sup> *Paenitentiale Remense* IV, cc. 50–51, ed. F. Asbach, *Das Poenitentiale Remense und der sogenannte Excarpsus Cummeani* (doctoral dissertation, Regensburg, 1975), 30. Theodulf of Orléans, *Capitulare* II, c. VII, 8, ed. P. Brömmmer, *MGH Capit. Episc.* 1 (1984), 166–67.

<sup>97</sup> See de Jong, "What Was Public About Public Penance?" 893–98, for a fuller discussion of these texts.



from public office and an atonement that was, as in other cases, usually carried out within the confines of a religious community. One leading cleric punished in this way was archbishop Ebbo of Reims, the scapegoat of the rebellion of 833. After seven years of atonement in the monastery of Fulda, Ebbo felt that he should now rightfully return to his archepiscopal see. Arguing his case, the archbishop remarked: “Clearly, the modern authority of the palace has compelled the laity, both men and women, to assume the monastic habit of the penitent only to allow them to return to their former secular status once peace has returned. There is nothing unseemly, therefore, in a lapsed cleric who after humble satisfaction reclaims his rightful office.”<sup>98</sup> The practice this lapsed bishop referred to scathingly as the “modern authority of the palace” (*moderna auctoritas palatii*), – i.e., withdrawal to a monastery as a temporary atonement that could be ended “once the peace had returned” – was a reflection on the many instances in which Louis had used public penance as a key instrument of royal discipline. In the wake of the rebellions of 818 and 830, political adversaries, clerics as well as laymen, disappeared into monasteries to atone for their political sins, re-emerging again once the tide had turned. The public penance of prominent lay and clerical opponents of royal authority, who were those most likely to cause scandal, was a temporary act of atonement, the duration of which depended on when “peace” was restored: peace in this case being the willingness of the ruler to terminate the penance.<sup>99</sup>

It was this public penance, administered by bishops but as an instrument of royal authority, that Lothar employed against his father in October 833. Rather than regarding this episode as a bid for episcopal theocracy or as a political deposition masked by a deeply humiliating ecclesiastical ritual, one should take its potential open-endedness into consideration. With hindsight, the Astronomer depicted Louis as an emperor with one foot in the monastery, who was kept from following his religious inclinations only by the duties of governance, and whose public confession in 822 turned the emperor into a new Theodosius the Great. Such images were meant to enhance the emperor’s reputation, not to diminish his stature. As in the case of Visigothic kings who became penitents when their sons made a successful bid for succession, the penance of 833 may have been perceived by Louis’s adversaries as an honorable way out for the old emperor, for whom humility and atonement had become part of an imperial idiom.<sup>100</sup> Louis himself, for all we know, may well have taken the ritual in Soissons in his stride, knowing that a public penance was as temporary as the ruler on whom it was imposed. He stopped short of making a subsequent monastic profession, for this would have meant a definitive farewell to his active governing of his empire.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Ebbo of Reims, *Apologeticum, forma 1*, MGH Conc. 2.2, 799.

<sup>99</sup> Mayke de Jong, “Monastic Prisoners or Opting Out? Political Coercion and Honour in the Frankish Kingdoms,” in De Jong and Theuvs (eds.), *Topographies of Power*, 291–328, at 291–92.

<sup>100</sup> *Annales S. Bertiniani*, s.a. 834, ed. R. Rau, *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte II* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 22.

<sup>101</sup> De Jong, “Monastic Prisoners.”

## CONCLUSION

In 885/86, the monk Notker Balbulus wrote of an emperor whom he had never personally known in a palace that he had never visited: Charlemagne and Aachen. In this palace, Notker explained, the emperor could always see what his resident nobles were up to from the vantage point of his private quarters (*solarium*) overlooking the court. Not even the servants escaped Charles's eagle eye:

All the dwellings of the magnates were situated on the second floor, so that underneath not only all their retainers and their servants but anyone might find shelter from rain or snow, cold or heat, without ever being able to hide themselves from the eyes of the most acute Charles.<sup>102</sup>

Was this merely a figment of Notker's monastic imagination, seventy years after Charlemagne's death – a projection of his ideals of monastic discipline onto a court and palace of the past, or, as one historian observed ironically, a monastic author who anticipated Michel Foucault's Panopticon?<sup>103</sup> Or was this vision of the palace as a place of near-monastic discipline – a legacy of Louis the Pious, the emperor who had turned the monastery into a “model for empire”?<sup>104</sup> I should interpret Notker's description as an image that had become familiar among Charlemagne's grandchildren and their contemporaries: that of a ruler who kept a keen eye on his sacred palace and his realm, inspecting his courtiers as well as his *populus christianus*. As Hincmar and his fellow bishops wrote to King Louis the German in 856, “your palace should be sacred, not sacrilegious.”<sup>105</sup> The authors of this letter were “men of the palace,” who knew all about what palaces should be like, as did the royal recipient of their admonition. For bishops and kings alike, the question was still the one that Charlemagne had posed: “Are we really Christians?” Three generations later, the answer was still one to be sought and found in the palace.

## FURTHER READING

First published in French in 2003, this essay was a pilot study for Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious (814–840)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): one of a series of recent English-language monographs on Carolingian rulers that take into account the religious aspects of kingship. Others include: Simon MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Eric J. Goldberg, *Struggle for*

<sup>102</sup> Notker, *Gesta Karoli I*, 30, ed. H. F. Haefele, MGH SRG (Berlin: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1962), 41.

<sup>103</sup> Airlie, “The palace of memory,” 5.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas F. X. Noble, “The Monastic Ideal as a Model for Empire: The Case of Louis the Pious,” *Revue Bénédictine* 86 (1976): 235–50.

<sup>105</sup> *Epistola synodi Carisacensis ad Hludowicum regem Germaniae directa* (Nov. 858), c. 5, MGH Conc. 3, 411–12: “quoniam palatium vestrum debet esse sacrum et non sacrilegium.”

*Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817–876* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Courtney M. Booker, *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). For an excellent general introduction to the Carolingians, which includes extensive references to further literature, see Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See now also the themed issue of *Early Medieval Europe* 25 (2017), edited by Mayke de Jong and Irene van Renswoude, on Carolingian cultures of dialogue, debate, and disputation; and Mayke de Jong, *Epitaph for an Era: Politics and Rhetoric in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)