

Boniface: Preaching and Penance

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1 Introduction

Boniface was a man of action. He played a central role in mission, in organizing the church and in Frankish politics; he was a schoolteacher and a founder of monasteries. Yet, Boniface was also a priest and as such he must have been active in a pastoral role, though his pastoral activities are not nearly as richly documented as his more political ones. While he was praised for his preaching qualities, it is difficult to establish exactly what his sermons may have looked like. As a priest and bishop, he probably heard confession and assigned penances for sinners, particularly since he was so driven by a desire for correction and discipline, but we have no clear indication how he may have acted in this way. This chapter will discuss a collection of sermons ascribed to Boniface and an 8th-century penitential, the *Excarpus Cummeani*, which was composed in Corbie. Both can arguably be related to Boniface and thus may provide us with some insights into his preaching and how he may have dealt with sinners.¹

2 Preaching

That preaching was important to Boniface is made clear in the famous letter to his mentor, bishop Daniel of Winchester, in which our missionary deplored the fact that he had to communicate with unworthy priests and clerics when at court, living a life that was contrary to what the canons taught. He felt obliged by his oath sworn at the grave of St Peter in Rome not to consort with such persons, but still had to interact with them to some extent in order not to jeopardize his preaching to the people.² He therefore was willing to cooperate with

1 This chapter covers similar ground as Rob Meens, "Aspekte der Christianisierung des Volkes," in *Bonifatius: Leben und Nachwirken*, eds. Franz J. Felten et al. (Mainz: 2007), 211–29, but includes a discussion of scholarly contributions that have since then been published.

2 Tangl, no. 63, 130; Emerton (repr. New York: 2000), no. 51, 92–93. For a discussion of this letter in context, see Theodor Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius und die christliche Grundlegung Europas* (Freiburg: 1954), 235–36, and Lutz E. von Padberg, *Bonifatius: Missionar und Reformier*

clerics he regarded as unworthy of their office, in order to be able to spread the Word. Furthermore, he solicited from Egbert of York exegetical works written by the Venerable Bede particularly because of their usefulness in preaching.³ So there is no doubt that preaching was important to Boniface.

Boniface also received advice on the subject of preaching from Daniel, who gave detailed guidance on how to convince a pagan audience of the superiority of the Christian faith, or, in Daniel's words, how to "generate sons of Christ" by tilling the earth with the plough of preaching.⁴ In his well-known letter from 723/724, Daniel set out a rhetorical strategy that should be successful when trying to convince a pagan audience. Since this is one of the few texts discussing preaching to a pagan audience, it merits some attention. Given Boniface's esteem for his mentor, we can imagine that he followed Daniel's advice, although some historians have regarded the approach advocated by Daniel as too theoretical to be useful.⁵ Daniel's approach is twofold. First, he advises Boniface to criticize a polytheistic cosmology by questioning the origins of the gods as well as of the cosmos. As an example, he proposes that Boniface question the stories about gods begetting other gods. If this were so, then either there had to be an infinite number of gods, or they had to have stopped reproducing at some point. Both stances could be rationally criticized, Daniel suggests. The other part of the strategy regards the material rewards that pagans hoped to gain from their gods. The fact that Christians lived in better material conditions, inhabiting "lands rich in oil and wine and abounding in other sources," would suggest that pagan gods are no good. They can also be shown to be lacking in power, because they are unable to punish Christians when these destroy their shrines. Daniel moreover recommends discussing such matters with the pagans calmly and in a moderate way in order to avoid offending or angering them.⁶ We do not know whether Boniface followed his mentor's advice. Certainly, chopping down sacred trees does not appear to conform to such a moderate approach, yet the strategy in itself does not seem implausible. It is remarkable that in his letter Daniel not only instructs Boniface to actually enter into a rational discussion with pagans, but that he also pays respect to pagan beliefs in talking explicitly about gods, where generally in Christian discourse

(Munich: 2003), 77–78. For Boniface's oath in which he promised to avoid contact with bishops who did not live according to ecclesiastical rules, see: Tangl, no. 16, 28–29.

3 Tangl, no. 91, 207.

4 Tangl, no. 23, 38–41.

5 For example, von Padberg, *Bonifatius*, 45.

6 Tangl, no. 23, 38–41; Emerton, no. 15, 26–28.

pagan gods were represented as demons. This may suggest that here Daniel drew on his own experience confronting paganism in Wessex.⁷

Boniface lived on in memory as a talented preacher, or at least that is how Willibald described his activities in this field:

He burned with such a zeal for Scripture that he often with all effort tried to imitate and to hear it; and what was written for the education of the people, he himself revealed to them through preaching with admirable eloquence and strengthening it with an ingenious employment of parables. He owned such a moderation in discernment that the vigor of his correction did not lack clemency, nor did his clemency lack vigor of correction, but he whom the zeal of vigor stirred, the clemency of love tempered. He taught the same sacred discipline to the rich, the powerful, the free and the unfree and he did not soften the rich by flattery, nor did he press the unfree and the free through harshness.⁸

Willibald gives us a glimpse of the practice of preaching when he tells us that in England priests and clerics went to visit people in their homes in order to preach, a practice he describes as particular to “those regions.”⁹ It is unclear whether we can infer from this remark that such a practice remained limited to Boniface’s homeland, or that Boniface and other English clerics clung to this way of preaching when working on the Continent.¹⁰

7 As suggested by Barbara Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain c. 600–800* (Harlow: 2006), 134, and John-Henry Clay, *In the Shadow of Death: Saint Boniface and the Conversion of Hesse, 721–54* (Turnhout: 2010), 55–58.

8 Willibald, *VB*, c. 3, 12: “In tantum enim scripturarum exarsit desiderio, ut omni se intentione earum imitatione et auditione sepius coniungeret; et quae ob doctrinam populorum conscripta sunt, ipse quippe populis mira eloqui disertitudine et sollertissima parabularum adsertione efficaciter praedicando retexuit. Cui tale discretionis temperamentum inerat, ut et vigore correptionis mansuetudo et vigor praedicationis mansuetudine non deerat, sed quem zelus accenderat vigoris, mansuetudo mitigabat amoris. Divitibus ergo ac potentibus liberisque ac servis aequalem sanctae exortationis exhibuit disciplinam, ut nec divites adolando demulceret nec servos vel liberos districtione praegravaret.” (The translation in the text is my own.) For the way hagiographers presented Boniface as preacher, see Christoph Galle, “Bonifatius als Prediger: Zum Wandel des Predigtamtes und zur Entwicklung eines Predigerideals anhand hagiographischer Quellen des 8. bis. 11. Jahrhundert,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 97.1 (2015), 5–45.

9 Willibald, *VB*, c. 1, 5.

10 As implied by Lutz E. von Padberg, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontationen: Theorie und Praxis der Missionspredigt im frühen Mittelalter*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 51 (Stuttgart: 2003), 194–95.

A number of texts can be related to Boniface's preaching activities, although the relations of these text to the missionary remain tenuous. I will briefly discuss them here because they give an impression of sermons used in a missionary context roughly in the region and period in which Boniface was active as a preacher. Two short sermons are found in a manuscript that can be closely related to Boniface himself, in a collection of miscellaneous religious and legal texts that Michael Glatthaar has named the *Sententiae Bonifatianae Palatinae*, in a manuscript now kept in the Vatican Library.¹¹ Although this manuscript was written in the late 8th century, it contains a wealth of material related to Boniface, a relation that can also be argued for the two sermons found in it.¹² The first of these is a short sermon titled "Alloquutio sacerdotum de coniugiis illicitis ad plebem," which discusses several illicit sexual behaviours with an emphasis on incestuous relations.¹³ It should possibly be seen in relation to the council of Estinnes, which forbade incestuous marriages.¹⁴ The second sermon in the manuscript is even shorter. It is generally named "Rogamus vos" after the first two words of the text and deals with a topic that indicates an early stage in the process of conversion, since it responds to a criticism of the moment at which the Christian faith was preached. This sermon tried to address the complaint that because of the recent propagation of the Christian message, many thousands of men and women, including the family and ancestors of recent converts, will have perished without hope of salvation.¹⁵ Such a question was probably rather urgent in an early phase of Christianization and we know that Boniface had to respond to views propounded by the Irish monk Clemens, who seems to have opened up the possibility of salvation for forefathers who had not been baptized.¹⁶ These two sermons address specific issues that can be

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- 11 Ms. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 577; see Michael Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg: Zur politischen Dimension eines Rechtsbegriffs*, Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 17 (Frankfurt: 2004), 455–93.
- 12 See Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*, 484–90; the sermons were without convincing argumentation attributed to Augustine of Canterbury by their editor Machielsen, see L. Machielsen, "Fragments patristiques non identifiés du ms. Vat. Pal. 577," *Sacris Erudiri* 12 (1961), 504–05.
- 13 Edited in Machielsen, "Fragments patristiques," 533–35.
- 14 Karl Ubl, *Inzestverbot und Gesetzgebung: Die Konstruktion eines Verbrechens (300–1100)* (Berlin, New York: 2008), 244–45. *Concilium Lifniense*, ed. Werminghoff, MGH Conc. 2.1, c. 3, 7.
- 15 Edited as Sermo 11 in Machielsen, "Fragments patristiques," 535.
- 16 See Sven Meeder, "Boniface and the Irish Heresy of Clemens," *Church History* 80 (2011), 275–77; Rob Meens, "With one Foot in the Font: The Failed Baptism of the Frisian King Radbod and the Eighth Century Discussion about the Fate of Unbaptized Forefathers," in *Early Medieval Ireland and Europe: Chronology, Contacts, Scholarship. A Festschrift for Dáibhí Ó Cróinín*, eds. Pádraic Moran and Immo Warntjes (Turnhout: 2015), 584–85; Alban

related to Boniface because of their manuscript context and because of the particular topics that are being discussed.

Apart from these two sermons which can be closely linked to Boniface, there is another group of fifteen sermons that have a less secure connection to Boniface but have been edited as Bonifatian sermons. This link was first made in the 18th century by Edmond Martène and Ursinus Durand, who regarded them as genuine works composed by Boniface. They conceded that these sermons were written in a simple manner and did not always follow the rules of Latin grammar, but claimed that “Boniface instructed barbarian peoples and therefore he was sometimes forced to address them in a barbarian manner.”¹⁷ They edited them on the basis of a manuscript then in the possession of the royal chancellor Henri François d’Aguesseau, probably ms. Paris, BnF, lat. 10741, the earliest extant manuscript; it dates from the second half of the 9th century and contains 14 of the 15 sermons. Martène and Durand collated this manuscript with 10 sermons of a collection found in two other manuscripts identified by Jean Mabillon in the library of Queen Christina of Sweden that had by then entered the Vatican Library.¹⁸ They added a 15th sermon that was preserved in a 9th-century manuscript from Melk under the name of Boniface, which had been edited by Bernhard Pez.¹⁹ The collection of 15 sermons thus assembled was then reprinted by Migne in the *Patrologia Latina* among the works of Boniface, the edition which is most often used today and whose numbering is followed here and by other scholars.²⁰ Although the fifteenth sermon is similar to the other fourteen and closely resembles sermon 5, there is no manuscript evidence suggesting that it belonged to the same collection. The other fourteen are found only in the Paris manuscript as a complete set, but in another

Gautier, *Beowulf au paradis: Figures de bons païens dans l’Europe du Nord au haut Moyen Âge* (Paris: 2017), 177–78.

- 17 The collection was edited in Edmond Martène and Ursinus Durand, *Collectio amplissima veterum scriptorum et monumentorum*, vol. 9 (Paris: 1733), cols. 185–218; see the introduction on cols. 185–88: “Barbaros populos instruebat S. Bonifatius, quos etiam barbære alloqui quandoque cogebatur.”
- 18 Now Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Reg. lat. 457 (dating from the 12th century) and 562 (16th century). A similar collection is also found in the 12th-century manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 340, fols. 53–64.
- 19 Melk, Stiftsbibliothek, 597 (Q. 52); see Bernhard Pez, *Thesaurus anecdotorum nouissimus* 4.2 (Augsburg: 1723), 3–6; for four other manuscripts containing this sermon, see Gerhard Schmitz, “Bonifatius und Alkuin: Ein Beitrag zur Glaubensverkündigung in der Karolingerzeit,” in *Alkuin von York und die geistige Grundlegung Europas. Akten der Tagung vom 30. September bis zum 2. Oktober 2004 in der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen*, eds. Ernst Tremp and Karl Schmuki (St. Gallen: 2010), 75.
- 20 *PL* 89, cols. 813–72.

mutilated manuscript from the 10th century, now divided in two parts, the first and the last sermons are included while the original table of contents indicates that the codex contained “sermons of the holy martyr Boniface for people and about baptism and other topics,” which describes the whole series rather adequately.²¹ So we have two manuscript witnesses to a collection of 14 sermons, three to a collection of 10, and a number of manuscripts containing singular sermons. Whether these were taken from the collection, or whether the compiler of the collection drew on existing sermons, still needs to be established.²²

In the late 19th century a lively debate erupted among German scholars about the authorship of the sermons, fuelled by conceptions of the true nature of Christianity and ideas about the question of what mission entailed. In this discussion Bonifatian authorship was accepted by Cruel and Nürnberger and rejected by Müllenhoff and Scherer, and by Hahn. The argument revolved around the (alleged) missionary character of the sermons, their compatibility with themes addressed by Boniface in his councils and letters, and the level of linguistic skills evident in the sermons, sometimes regarded as being too basic for an eminent ecclesiastic personality such as Boniface.²³ Albert Hauck’s rejection of their Bonifatian lineage carried the day for most scholars in the 20th century.²⁴ Consequently the sermons appear neither in Theodor Schieffer’s highly influential study of the missionary that was published 1200 years after Boniface’s martyrdom, nor are they discussed in the collection of articles published on the occasion of that anniversary; Reinhold Rau’s 1968 collection of sources does not include them.²⁵ Jean-Paul Bouhot, who charted

21 Manuscript Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 214, fols. 119–120v and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS NAL 450, fol. 1r; for the table of contents, see fol. 1v of the Vatican manuscript: “Sermones sancti Bonifacii martiris ad populum et de bap-tismo et aliis rebus.”

22 The most detailed analysis of the manuscript tradition is to be found in Jean-Paul Bouhot, “Alcuin et le ‘De catechizandis rudibus’ de Saint Augustin,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 15 (1980), 184–91.

23 Karl Müllenhoff and Wilhelm Scherer, *Denkmäler deutscher Poesie und Prosa aus dem VIII–XII Jahrhundert*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: 1873), 504–05; Rudolf Cruel, *Geschichte der deutschen Predigt im Mittelalter* (Detmold: 1879, repr. Darmstadt: 1966), 13–28; Heinrich Hahn, “Die angeblichen Predigten des Bonifaz,” *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte* 24 (1884), 584–625; August Josef Nürnberger, “Die angebliche Unechtheit der Predigten des heiligen Bonifatius,” *Neues Archiv* 14 (1889), 111–34.

24 Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: 1958), 446, n. 3. For the effect of this judgment on later scholarship, see Schmitz, “Bonifatius und Alcuin,” 73–74.

25 Theodor Schieffer, *Winfried-Bonifatius und die christliche Grundlegung Europas* (they are not mentioned in the afterword added in the 1972 reprint from Darmstadt); *Sankt Bonifatius: Gedenkgabe zum zwölfhundertsten Todestag [754–1954]* (Fulda: 1954); Reinhold Rau

their manuscript transmission, also denied Bonifatian authorship.²⁶ In two of Lutz E. von Padberg's biographies of Boniface from the late 20th century, the sermons were not discussed.²⁷ In his detailed study of missionary sermons published in 2003, however, von Padberg, regarding the issue of authorship as undecided, devoted ample attention to their contents, characterizing them as specimens of Carolingian catechetical instructions.²⁸

The discussion of this pseudo-Boniface collection of 14 sermons has mostly centred on its relationship with the missionary and church reformer. The connections between the sermons and Boniface are tenuous, although individual sermons as well as some manuscripts containing them can be related to insular circles on the Continent. One manuscript containing sermon 11 is written in a Continental Anglo-Saxon hand, while another one was written in a hand that displays insular traces alongside a different part of the manuscript written in an insular hand. In one of these the Bonifatian sermon is found in an insular context of Irish sermons.²⁹ Some of the sermons contain themes that can be linked to insular sources.³⁰ Moreover, the earliest manuscripts were written in the Rhineland and Bavaria, both regions in which Boniface was

(ed.), *Briefe des Bonifatius, Willibalds Leben des Bonifatius: nebst einigen zeitgenössischen Dokumenten*. Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe 4b (Darmstadt: 1968), 373–74.

- 26 Jean-Paul Bouhot, "Alcuin et le 'De catechizandibus rudibus,'" 19: "Aucun détail ne permet de rapporter ces prédications à un moment particulier du ministère de saint Boniface († 754) auprès des peuples de Germanie, ni même de tenir pour assuré qu'elles ont été adressées à des chrétiens récemment convertis et baptisés" ("No detail allows us to relate these preachings to a particular moment in the ministry of St Boniface to the peoples in Germania, nor to regard as certain that these were addressed to recently converted and baptized Christians").
- 27 Lutz E. von Padberg, *Wynfret-Bonifatius* (Wuppertal: 1989), 124–38; Marco Mostert, *754: Bonifatius bij Dokkum vermoord* (Hilversum: 1999).
- 28 von Padberg, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontationen*, 195–202. Von Padberg based his views on a then still unpublished study of the texts, that later appeared as Rob Meens, "Christianization and the Spoken Word: The Sermons Attributed to St. Boniface," in *Zwischen Niederschrift und Widerschrift: Hagiographie und Historiographie im Spannungsfeld von Kompendienüberlieferung und Editionstechnik*, eds. Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger, and Meta Niederkorn-Bruck (Vienna: 2010), 211–22. For a Dutch translation of these sermons, see Auke Jelsma, trans., *Het Leven als Leerschool: Preken van Bonifatius* (Laren: 2003).
- 29 It concerns Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 212 and Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 220; see the detailed descriptions at http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/digi-pdf-katalogisate/sammlung52/werk/pdf/bav_pal_lat_212.pdf and http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/digi-pdf-katalogisate/sammlung51/werk/pdf/bav_pal_lat_220.pdf.
- 30 Meens, "Christianization and the Spoken Word," 215–16.

active.³¹ The 14 pseudo-Bonifatian sermons as a whole show clear parallels with Chapter 80 of the *Admonitio Generalis*, the programmatic capitulary that Charlemagne issued in the year 789 in which he formulated the main goals of the reform program. In this long chapter Charlemagne and his advisers, among whom Alcuin must have been prominent, formulated the main themes for preaching, dictating that priests being established in the dioceses should only preach useful, honest, and rightful things, and those things that will lead to eternal life.³² The themes addressed in the *Admonitio Generalis*, including the Trinity, the Creation, the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection, and the Last Judgment, are all addressed in this collection. The first sermon, for example, “De fide recta,” is mostly an exposition of the creed and explains the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.³³ The second sermon, “De origine humanae conditionis,” relates how God created Adam and Eve and continues to speak about their fall from paradise, as well as the Incarnation.³⁴ The Day of Judgment is addressed in almost all of the sermons. Likewise, both the *Admonitio* and the pseudo-Bonifatian collection of sermons elaborate on the vices which are to be avoided and the virtues a Christian should hold dear and put into practice and outline the punishments meted out to sinners and the merits with which the just will be rewarded in the hereafter.³⁵ There is no fixed order in the enumerations of sins and virtues, but the most important sins in the sermons are idolatry, drinking, sex, and violence, while among the virtues love (*caritas*), humility, patience, mercy and obedience rank the highest. The close correspondence with the *Admonitio* suggests that the pseudo-Bonifatian sermons were influenced by Charlemagne’s legislation.³⁶ Gerhard Schmitz has

31 Meens, “Christianization and the Spoken Word,” 215–17. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 212, 220, 485, and Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6293 (written around 800 in Freising); I see no reason to assume a Bavarian origin on the basis of manuscript provenance, as claimed by Maximilian Diesenberger, *Predigt und Politik im frühmittelalterlichen Bayern: Karl der Große, Arn von Salzburg und die Salzburger Sermones-Sammlung* (Berlin and Boston: 2016), 231.

32 *Die Admonitio generalis Karls des Großen*, eds. Hubert Mordek, Klaus Zechiel-Eckes, and Michael Glatthaar, MGH Fontes iures 16 (Hanover: 2012), c. 80 (c. 82 in the earlier edition of Boretius), 234: “Utilia, honesta et recta et quae ad vitam ducunt aeternam praedicate aliosque instruite, ut haec eadem praedicent.” For Alcuin’s role, see 47–63. See the detailed discussion of this chapter in Thomas Martin Buck, *Admonitio und Praedicatio. Zur religions-pastoralen Dimension von Kapitularien und kapitularienahen Texten (507–814)*, Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 9 (Frankfurt: 1997), 116–56.

33 Sermo 1, *PL* 89, cols. 813–15.

34 Sermo 2, *PL* 89, cols. 815–17.

35 Meens, “Christianization and the Spoken Word,” 218–20; and in more detail Schmitz, “Bonifatius and Alcuin,” 79–82.

36 See Mordek, Zechiel-Eckes, and Glatthaar, *Admonitio*, 142.

stressed the relationship of the sermons to the *Admonitio*, in particular with one of the main architects of the *Admonitio*, Alcuin. The pseudo-Bonifatian sermons reflect Alcuinian thought, even though they may not necessarily have been composed by the Anglo-Saxon scholar at Charlemagne's court. If these conclusions are correct, they would rule out the possibility of Boniface having authored these sermons,³⁷ though this would only be true for the collection as a whole, and not necessarily for the individual sermons in the collection, some of which might have predated the *Admonitio*.

Definitive conclusions regarding this collection of sermons attributed to Boniface must await a modern critical edition which will provide more answers to the question of its unity and the possibility that individual sermons might predate the collection.³⁸ A thorough investigation of its sources will also provide more information on the issue of its date and intellectual milieu in which it originated. For now, we can say on the basis of the available studies that we are dealing with a collection of sermons that is closely connected with the Carolingian program of reform in the field of preaching. There are indications that the collection originated in an "Alcuinian milieu." The collection may have used existing sermons, or preaching materials, that can be connected to insular circles on the Continent, thus explaining their attribution to Boniface. In general, they provide an impression of the themes that were addressed by someone preaching to a diverse lay audience in the 8th and 9th centuries, informing and admonishing them about proper Christian morality and behaviour.³⁹

3 Penance

The sermons attributed to Boniface devote ample attention to the vices a Christian should avoid and the virtues he should practice, and some discuss ways to make up for one's faults. For example, in Sermon 8 penance is

37 Schmitz, "Bonifatius and Alcuin"; a conclusion apparently shared by James McCune, "The Preacher's Audience, c. 800–c. 950," in *Sermo Doctorum: Compilers, Preachers, and their Audiences in the Early Medieval West*, eds. Maximilian Diesenberger, Yithak Hen and Marianne Pollheimer, *Sermo: Studies on Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation Sermons and Preaching* 9 (Turnhout: 2013), 311: "the collection known as Pseudo-Boniface, which was likely composed c. 800 and may be from the circle of Alcuin."

38 For such an edition, the use of Sermon 10 in manuscript Cologne, Dombibliothek, 171, fols. 3v–4r, should also be considered; see Raymond Étaix, "Le sermonnaire d'Hilbold de Cologne," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 23 (1988), 116 (I owe this reference to Bart van Hees).

39 For a summary of the topics discussed, see Rob Meens, "Aspekte der Christianisierung des Volkes," 215–18.

discussed as the most important remedy for sins, for in confession and penance all sins can be abolished: “In confession and penance all sins can be erased.... Let him [the fallen sinner] rise through confession and penance and return to the Lord, his God.”⁴⁰ This theme recurs in most of the sermons and many of the sins that are being castigated here are also found in penitential manuals. We may assume that Boniface as a priest and bishop was well acquainted with ways to deal with sinners, particularly because of his interest in acceptable and unacceptable forms of Christianity, as demonstrated by the reform councils over which he presided. The Concilium Germanicum of 742,⁴¹ for example, not only condemned clerics to do penance for their transgressions, but also admonished the ruler to take bishops and priests with him when he travelled with the army, in order that they could hear confession and assign a proper form of penance.⁴² Moreover, Pope Gregory III admonished Boniface to assign penance to those who ate horseflesh, indicating that he expected Boniface to employ penance as a disciplinary tool.⁴³

In England, where Boniface had been raised, handbooks of penance based on teachings by Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury had been composed in the late 7th and early 8th century. One of these referred to a *Libellus Scottorum* or “a little book by the Irish,” probably the 7th-century penitential of the Irish abbot Cummean.⁴⁴ We may assume that a number of such books were known in missionary circles on the Continent; surviving Irish penitential books are mostly known from a small number of Continental manuscripts.⁴⁵ The traditions based on Theodore of Canterbury also mostly survive in manuscripts that were copied on the European mainland. The penitential attributed to Egbert, Bishop of York, survives in a copy that is now preserved in the Vatican Library, a precious manuscript written in an Anglo-Saxon hand that we can date to around 800. The text therefore may be Anglo-Saxon and could have

40 Sermo 8, *PL* 89, 859B: “in confessione et poenitentia omnia possunt deleri peccata.... surgat per confessionem et poenitentiam et revertatur ad dominum Deum suum.”

41 Michael Glatthaar has argued for this date in *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*, 594–599.

42 *Concilium Germanicum*, MGH Conc. 2.1, c. 1–2, c. 6.

43 Tangl, no. 28, 50.

44 For penitential books in general see Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600–1200* (Cambridge: 2014); for those works circulating in Anglo-Saxon England, *ibidem*, 88–100.

45 Raymund Kottje, “Überlieferung und Rezeption der irischen Bußbücher auf dem Kontinent,” in *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. Heinz Löwe, vol.1 (Stuttgart: 1982), 511–24; Rob Meens, “The Irish Contribution to the Penitential Tradition,” in *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe: Identity, Culture and Religion*, eds. Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (New York: 2016), 131–45.

been known to Boniface, who was in contact with the bishop of York.⁴⁶ The Irishman Columbanus, who had travelled from his native country to Francia and later to Lombardy in Italy, had written a penitential manual, or perhaps authorized the use of a particular one, and this work became an inspiration for a number of Frankish books of this kind.

Insular penitential books were therefore known in Francia, particularly in the northern parts, where Boniface was most active. We can assume that they played their part in the process of Christianization, as instruments helping a recently converted population to adhere to Christian forms of behaviour. The early 8th-century penitential known as *Paenitentiale Oxoniense II*, named after the place where its only surviving manuscript is being preserved, is clearly addressed to a group of recent converts to Christianity. The text alludes to cooperation between Christians and their non-Christian neighbours, which indicates that it was written with a mixed audience in mind. These non-Christians, *gentiles* as the author calls them, also applied pressure on Christians to return to their earlier non-Christian beliefs, and they enticed them to do so by offering material benefits. The text can be dated to the first half of the 8th century and, moreover, can be associated with particular Frisian customs, such as the license to kill an unwanted newborn baby as long as it had not been fed. This could therefore be a book that Boniface might have used when dealing with sinning Christians. However, the remarkably lenient attitude towards sin in this penitential does not seem to fit with the ways in which Boniface writes about misbehaving fellow Christians. The *Paenitentiale Oxoniense II* should therefore rather be associated with Boniface's compatriot and teacher, Willibrord, than with the bishop of Mainz himself.⁴⁷

There is, however, another penitential book, composed in the first half of the 8th century, that can be associated with Boniface: a manual known as the *Excarspus Cummeani*.⁴⁸ This text was composed in the northern French monastery of Corbie in close connection with the revision that was being made

46 Tangl, no. 75 is addressed to Egbert. For the penitential and the Vatican manuscript (Vat. Pal. lat. 554), see the discussion in Meens, *Penance*, 96–100.

47 For this text, see Rob Meens, “Willibrord’s Penitential?: The *Paenitentiale Oxoniense II* Revisited,” in *Transforming the Early Medieval World: Studies in Honour of Ian N. Wood*, eds. N. Kivilcim Yavuz and Richard Broome (Leeds: 2020).

48 Unfortunately, a modern edition is still lacking, and scholars have to rely on Hermann Joseph Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher und das kanonische Bussverfahren* (Düsseldorf: 1898, repr. Graz: 1958), 597–644. The text has been thoroughly analysed in Franz Bernd Asbach, “Das *Paenitentiale Remense* und der sogen. *Excarspus Cummeani*: Überlieferung, Quellen und Entwicklung zweier kontinentaler Bußbücher aus der 1. Hälfte des 8. Jahrhunderts,” PhD Diss. (University of Regensburg: 1975).

there of an extremely influential collection of canon law texts, the *Collectio Vetus Gallica*.⁴⁹ Boniface entertained close connections with the monastery of Corbie, in particular with its abbot Grimo, for whom he requested the *pallium* from the pope in the year 744. It can be demonstrated that Boniface and Corbie were in close correspondence and must have exchanged texts that were used to enforce Christian discipline.⁵⁰ It is hard to imagine that Boniface would not have heard about the ambitious new penitential book the monks of Corbie were compiling, given his interests in disciplinary rulings. The *Excarpsus Cummeani* was by far the most successful of the 8th-century penitential books, surviving in more than 20 manuscripts.⁵¹ The book is a composition almost entirely based on earlier works, mostly the Irish penitential of Cummean, the penitential judgements of Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury, and the first generation of Frankish penitentials that elaborated upon Columbanus's work. It is a rather comprehensive work, organized in 14 chapters and containing almost 300 individual judgments. On further inspection it becomes clear, however, that the compiler (or compilers) did not attempt to produce an all-inclusive penitential, but carefully decided what to include and exclude.⁵²

The *Excarpsus Cummeani* addressed many issues that we know Boniface was worried about, confirming that the text was composed in a cultural environment that was shared by our missionary.⁵³ We know, for example, that Boniface worried seriously about the proper behaviour of clerics. The Concilium Germanicum that he convoked in 742 dealt with "false priests and adulterous and fornicating deacons." The council declared their ecclesiastical income forfeited and that the sinning clerics be deposed and forced to do penance.⁵⁴ In a letter from the same year to Pope Zachary, Boniface was even more outspoken when he complained about deacons who, while entertaining four or five concubines, had nevertheless been promoted to the priesthood

49 The Corbie provenance was established by Ludger Körntgen, "Der *Excarpsus Cummeani*, ein Bußbuch aus Corbie," in *Scientia veritatis: Festschrift für Hubert Mordek zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Oliver Münsch and Thomas Zotz (Ostfildern: 2004), 59–75. The *Collectio Vetus Gallica* has been analysed thoroughly by Hubert Mordek, *Kirchenrecht und Reform im Frankenreich: Die Collectio Vetus Gallica, die älteste systematische Kanonensammlung des fränkischen Gallien. Studien und Edition*. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters 1 (Berlin and New York: 1975).

50 Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*, 384–89.

51 See the list in Meens, *Penance*, 229–30.

52 Rob Meens, *Het tripartite boeteboek: Overlevering en betekenis van vroegmiddeleeuwse biechtvoorschriften (met editie en vertaling van vier tripartita)* (Hilversum: 1994), 269–97 and 314.

53 As I argued in "Aspekte der Christianisierung," 218–27.

54 *Concilium Germanicum*, MGH Conc. 2.1, c. 1, 3.

without them changing their lifestyle and sometimes were even made into bishops.⁵⁵ This suggests that deacons, priests, and bishops were leading a life that was hard to distinguish from an aristocratic one, as is also suggested by the fact that the Concilium Germanicum ruled against clerics carrying weapons or going out hunting.⁵⁶ These issues are also addressed in the *Excarspus Cummeani*, which censures bishops, priests, and deacons who “fornicate”: they should be deposed and do penance according to the judgment of their bishop.⁵⁷ After receiving a clerical ordination, the text decrees, men were no longer allowed to go hunting. A cleric sinning in this way had to do penance for a year, a deacon for two years, and an extra year was added for a priest who went hunting.⁵⁸

Clerical discipline was perhaps the main concern of Boniface, but the issues of marriage and sexuality also attracted his attention quite regularly.⁵⁹ As we have seen, it is the main theme of a sermon from Boniface’s circle, the so-called “Alloquutio sacerdotum de coniugiis illicitis ad plebem.” The sermon discusses incest, explaining and tabulating the degrees of relationship within which marriage and sexual relations were taboo. In the 8th century incest was a topic of hefty discussion, with different positions being taken on the question of who was allowed to marry whom.⁶⁰ On this topic Boniface was confronted with three major, diverging sources of authority. In Gaul bishops and kings had legislated widely on incest and targeted not only relations founded on blood, but also ones based on affinity through marriage. The papacy, one of the main sources of authority for Boniface, had come up with different precepts. Pope Gregory the Great discussed this issue in a letter sent to Augustine of Canterbury, a widely disseminated letter known as the *Libellus Responsionum*, the authenticity of which was doubted by Boniface. Pope Gregory II had widely expanded the incest regulation in the Roman council of the year 721, when he also considered forms of spiritual kinship established by acting as godparent as proscribing marriage. Irish and Anglo-Saxon texts expressed little or no interest at all in the question of kinship established by affinity or godparenthood. Boniface’s correspondence demonstrates that he felt uncomfortable with such diversity and that he had particular problems with some of these rules. The *Excarspus Cummeani* also dealt with this issue and by its adherence to rules

55 Tangl, no. 50, 82–83.

56 *Concilium Germanicum*, MGH Conc. 2.1, c.1–2, 3.

57 *Excarspus Cummeani* 11.1, ed. Schmitz, 608.

58 *Excarspus Cummeani* 1.33, ed. Schmitz, 607.

59 Karl Ubl, *Inzest und Gesetzgebung*, 218–19.

60 See in particular Ubl, *Inzest und Gesetzgebung*, 219–51 in a chapter titled “Bonifatius und der Zusammenstoß der Kulturen.”

such as Theodore of Canterbury had established, and its stance in general concurs with that of Boniface. That the *Excarpsus* was sometimes read in conjunction with papal texts discussing incest legislation might suggest an early interest in matters of marriage and incest legislation in Corbie that could have been related to an interest of Boniface himself.⁶¹

In general, the topic of sexual relations is a major concern in penitential books, and this also applies to the *Excarpsus Cummeani*.⁶² In Chapters 2 and 3 many forms of human sexual behaviour are discussed and censured. Here we find rules condemning sexual activities by clerics or boys living in a monastery, but also many forms of extra-marital sexual activities. These rules furthermore regulate sexual behaviour within marriage, specifying sexual positions a married couple should refrain from as well as indicating specific periods in which sexual activity was not allowed. Man and wife should, for example, not have sex during periods of fasting, on Saturday or Sunday night, or during pregnancy or menstruation.⁶³ Irish penitentials strongly defended the matrimonial union, leaving little or no room for dissolving a marriage. The penitential of Cummean, one of the sources of the *Excarpsus Cummeani*, ruled that man and wife should remain continent if the wife should be barren, implying that such a marriage should not be dissolved.⁶⁴ Since it is hard to imagine that it was possible at the time to establish whether the woman was to blame for the couple's failure to produce offspring or the man, this rule must have been intended to be employed every time a couple was unable to beget children. We know from his correspondence that Boniface had to deal with a similar problem: he appears to have consulted Pope Gregory II in a case in which a man was unable to have sex with his wife because of her illness. Cummean had decided that it would be better for the couple to refrain from sexual activity, and in 726 the pope replied that this was indeed the best choice, but that not many would be able to do so. Therefore he allowed the man in question to remarry, but only if

61 As argued in Ludger Körntgen, "Bonifatius, Bayern und das fränkische Kirchenrecht: Zur Überlieferung des Capitulare Papst Gregors II. für Bayern (716)," in *Konstanz und Wandel. Religiöse Lebensformen im europäischen Mittelalter*, eds. Gordon Blenneman, Christine Kleinjung, and Thomas Kohl. Studien und Texte zur Geistes- und Sozialgeschichte des Mittelalters 11 (Affalterbach: 2016), 33–56.

62 For discussions of sex in these sources see Pierre Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550–1150* (Toronto: 1984); see also Erin V. Abraham, *Anticipating Sin in Medieval Society Childhood, Sexuality, and Violence in the Early Penitentials* (Amsterdam: 2017).

63 *Excarpsus Cummeani* 111.18, ed. Schmitz, 614.

64 *Paenitentiale Cummeani* 11.28, ed. Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials, with an Appendix by D.A. Binchy*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 5 (Dublin: 1963), 116.

he would continue to take care of his first wife.⁶⁵ Although the *Excarpsus Cummeani* adopts many rules from Cummean's work, it leaves out the ruling concerning man and wife refraining from sexual activity when they could not beget children. Is this perhaps due to the letter Boniface received from Pope Gregory II?

Boniface also had to deal with the issue of violence among Christians, lay and clerical. From a response by Pope Gregory III it becomes clear that Boniface had sought advice on how to deal with people who had killed their father, mother, brother, or sister. The pope replied that such people were to be excluded from receiving the Eucharist until the end of their life.⁶⁶ In a letter to Pope Zachary from the year 742 Boniface complained about bishops who went to war fully armed and killed not only pagans but also Christians. Although the theme of parricide is not explicitly addressed in the *Excarpsus Cummeani*, it deals in great detail with matters of violence, ranging from what look like innocent blows carried out by children to premeditated murder. It also discusses clerics, deacons, priests, and bishops committing murder. In such a case a simple cleric had to fulfil five years of penance, a deacon seven years, a priest ten, and a bishop twelve years.⁶⁷

As a missionary Boniface was confronted with forms of paganism among people he encountered, though perhaps less so than one would expect since he seems to have been more active in organizing and disciplining a recently converted population than as a preacher to the unconverted. Boniface frequently addressed the problem of recent converts entertaining certain practices or beliefs that he regarded as out of line with Christianity. It is important to realize that the boundaries between the lawful and the illicit in this respect were not always clear-cut. This is exemplified in the famous list of religious practices and beliefs found in a Bonifatian context in the manuscript Vatican Palatinus Latinus 577, a list misleadingly titled *Indiculus Superstitionum*. In the manuscript, the list lacks a title and the interpretation of this enumeration of sometimes rather enigmatic practices and beliefs as representing forms of paganism or superstition does not seem justified. It is more reasonable to see this text as a list of problematic issues that needed to be decided upon during conciliar meetings, most probably the Concilium Germanicum.⁶⁸ That Boniface regularly encountered behaviour that he regarded as pagan is clear

65 Tangl, no. 26, 45.

66 Tangl, no. 28, 51.

67 *Excarpsus Cummeani*, ed. Schmitz, Chapter VI, 622–25, for murder committed by clerics see Chapter XVI; for the blows of little ones, see Chapter XXVI.

68 *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH Capit. 1 (Hanover: 1883), 222–23. See esp. Michael Glatthaar's contribution to this volume, Chapter 10.4. For

from his correspondence. In one of his letters Boniface complained about a priest who had made sacrificial offerings to Jupiter and had taken part in meals related to pagan festivals.⁶⁹ Famous is also Boniface's complaint to Pope Zachary in the year 742 that Alemanni, Bavarians, and Franks had witnessed festivities celebrating the New Year in Rome itself, even near the church of St Peter. These festivities included singing and dancing, eating and drinking, and were in Boniface's eyes a clear manifestation of a pagan custom. How could he combat pagan festivities if members of his flock saw such things happening in Rome itself?⁷⁰ Like many other penitential books, the *Excarsus Cummeani* includes a number of judgments dealing with religious beliefs and practices that Boniface would find intolerable and in general would denounce as pagan. For example, Chapter VII deals with Christians taking part in festive meals near pagan cult sites and those eating sacrificial food.⁷¹ It also addresses the festival of the New Year in which people would go around in some sort of disguise (the terminology is not very clear but probably in the guise of a calf or a deer). For taking part in this "cult for demons" (*daemonium*), three years of penance is required.⁷²

The last topic that is addressed both by Boniface and in the *Excarsus Cummeani* concerns dietary rules. Boniface was clearly worried about specific kinds of meat that a Christian could or could not consume, and penitential literature very often contains rules on the proper kinds of food for Christians.⁷³ Pope Gregory III insisted around the year 732 that Boniface should under no circumstances allow that people eat horse meat whether from wild or domestic animals, because that was unclean and abominable.⁷⁴ Almost twenty years later, the issue of eating horse meat was apparently not yet clear to Boniface, since Pope Zachary responded to an inquiry of the aged bishop that wild horses were

a contrasting view on the circumstances of the list's compilation, see Marco Mostert's contribution in this volume, Chapter 14.3.

69 As is clear from the response of Gregory III in Tangl, no. 28, 51.

70 Tangl, no. 50, 84.

71 *Excarsus Cummeani* VII.10 and 17, ed. Schmitz, 627.

72 *Excarsus Cummeani* VII.9, *ibidem*.

73 See Rob Meens, "Pollution in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of the Food-Regulations in Penitentials," *EME* 4, no. 1 (1995), 3–19; *idem*, "Eating Animals in the Early Middle Ages: Classifying the Animal World and Building Group Identities," in *The Animal/Human Boundary*, eds. Angela Craeger and William Chester Jordan (Rochester, NY: 2002), 3–28; Alain Dierkens, "Equus non prohibetur ad manducandum, tamen non est consuetudo: Goûts, dégoûts et interdits alimentaires pendant le haut Moyen Âge," in *L'Alimentazione nell'alto Medioevo: Pratiche, simboli, ideologie: Spoleto, 9–14 aprile 2015*. Settimane di studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 63 (Spoleto: 2016), 413–44.

74 Tangl, no. 28, 50.

not to be served at the table, and neither were beavers or hares. Jackdaws, crows, and storks were also prohibited by the pope.⁷⁵ The fact that Boniface found it necessary to inquire once more into the question of the permissibility of horse meat was probably not motivated by his lack of memory, but should rather be explained by the judgment found in the *Excarpsus Cummeani*, that it was not forbidden to eat horse, but that it was not customary to do so either. The penitential adds that eating hare was allowed.⁷⁶ It seems probable that Boniface knew that these rules were based on judgments made by Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury, whom the same pope had characterized as “the Greco-Roman Theodorus, once a learned philosopher at Athens, then ordained and given the pallium at Rome and then sent on to Britain” and as a person who had produced authoritative judgments.⁷⁷ Since Theodore had explicitly condoned the consumption of horse meat and hare, Boniface must have been confused on this issue, and for that reason probably felt pressed to inquire once again into this issue.

We can therefore conclude that clerical discipline, incest regulations, sexual behaviour, forms of violence, improper religious rituals, and dietary rules are not only themes that concerned Boniface as his letters and councils clearly demonstrate, but that these also form the core of the penitential handbook that was composed in Corbie during his lifetime. This suggests that Boniface might have been personally involved in the composition of the *Excarpsus Cummeani*.

4 Conclusion

This chapter is rather speculative. It deals with sermons attributed to Boniface and with the penitential handbook known as the *Excarpsus Cummeani*, texts which were produced in a cultural environment that was arguably close or even very close to the Anglo-Saxon missionary and reformer. Although these texts do give us an idea of the ways in which Boniface might have preached, heard confession, and assigned penances, conclusive evidence that he authored, knew, or used these texts does not exist, nor is there any other evidence indicating which texts Boniface may have used in such circumstances. Boniface’s rich correspondence and other documents that demonstrably can be associated with him do, however, indicate that the sources that we have

75 Tangl, no. 87, 196.

76 *Excarpsus Cummeani* 1.23–24, ed. Schmitz, 607.

77 Tangl, no. 80, 173.

considered in this chapter fit the cultural environment of the missionary as well as what we know of his personality. They illustrate how sermons transmitted basic knowledge of the Christian faith and thereby suggest which aspects of Christianity were deemed important and which ones less so in this early phase of Christianisation; the Creation, the Trinity, the coming of Christ, and the Last Judgment were presented as basic tenets of the Christian faith. Christians should also know the Creed and the Pater Noster. In addition, preaching treated the theme of the vices and virtues, and the sermons discussed here are particularly interesting for the way in which they speak about specific forms of behaviour expected of the old and young, men and women, the poor and the rich. Confessing sins and doing appropriate penance for them was also frequently addressed in sermons, as these texts indicate.

The *Excarpsus Cummeani* gives us an idea of what sins were particularly important for Boniface and his entourage when hearing confession and how they imagined that those infringements should be remedied through penance. This penitential book was composed in Corbie in the first half of the 8th century, and Boniface was probably aware of the enterprise leading to its composition, and may have been somehow involved in its production. This remarkable penitential book clearly addresses several issues that were of great concern for Boniface. It deals with clerical discipline, incest regulations, sexual behaviour, forms of violence, improper religious rituals, and dietary rules, all themes discussed in some way or another in Boniface's correspondence and councils. Although neither the sermons attributed to Boniface nor the *Excarpsus Cummeani* can demonstrably be linked to the person of Boniface himself, they do give us a good impression of ways in which priests and missionaries might have preached and heard confession when ministering to their flocks in the region and the period in which Boniface worked.