

The state of the church: *ecclesia* and early medieval state formation¹

MODERN HISTORIANS AND EARLY MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY

It is difficult to achieve a dispassionate distance with regard to a religious past of which one is still a part, for historians as well as for anthropologists. As Sir Edmund Leach remarked, rather acidly, in 1966, “if anthropologists are to justify their claim to be students of comparative religion, they need to be less polite. So far they have shown an extraordinary squeamishness about the analysis of Christianity and Judaism, religions in which they or their friends are deeply involved.”² Since this complaint was voiced, historians and anthropologists alike have certainly become less squeamish. Early medieval Christianity has been the topic of two seminal studies, Robert A. Markus’ “The End of Ancient Christianity” (1990) and Peter Brown’s “The Rise of Western Christendom” (1996 and 2003), both of which lack the apologetic undertone characteristic of older syntheses of this kind. Here, Christianity is treated as a historical phenomenon that needs neither defence nor critique.³ Over the past decades, the once separate discipline of Church History has been transformed into the history of religion, and now tends to be part of mainstream history rather than of theology. Historians of late antiquity and the early modern period took the lead, but early medievalists were quick to follow.⁴ Even the view of Charlemagne himself, that last bastion of gruff royal secularity, has been affected by this new interest in religion.⁵ This ruler’s Christianity, long perceived as an instrument of royal power politics, or at best as a version of the ritualistic devotion deemed typical of early medieval laymen, is presently discussed in terms of the king’s own ethical convictions.⁶

¹ A first version of this paper was delivered on 6th January 2007 at the Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society (EHS) in London. In view of this audience I included some introductory remarks explaining German discussions on ‘Staatlichkeit’; I have retained these here, for the benefit of anglophone readers. I am grateful to the editors for allowing me to publish the final text in this volume, to Rosamond McKitterick and Janet L. Nelson their helpful comments on an intermediate version, and to Veronika Wieser for her editorial assistance at the last stage.

² Edmund Leach, Virgin birth. The Henry Myers lecture 1966, in: Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (1966) 33–49, at 46.

³ Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge 1990); Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (Oxford 2003).

⁴ A full bibliography is impossible, but two influential works from the early 1970s should be mentioned: Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, A.D. 150–750* (London 1971); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London 1971). Arnold A. Angenendt did much to put Christianity onto a more general historical agenda, then mostly defined as ‘history of mentalities’; for a bibliography of his earlier work see id., *Geschichte der Religiosität im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt 1997). Janet L. Nelson’s collected articles, ed., *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London 1986) are a good example of a new awareness of the role of religion in political life. See also *The Early Middle Ages, Europe 400–1000*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (*The Short Oxford History of Europe* 3, Oxford 2001); in this volume of *The Short Oxford History of Europe*, the customary chapter on warfare has been substituted by one on ‘religion’, cf. Mayke de Jong, Religion, in: *The Early Middle Ages, Europe 400–1000*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (*The Short Oxford History of Europe* 3, Oxford 2001) 131–166.

⁵ Stephan Waldhoff, *Alcuins Gebetbuch für Karl den Grossen. Seine Rekonstruktion und seine Stellung in der frühmittelalterlichen Geschichte der libelli precum* (*Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen* 89, Münster 2003); Janet L. Nelson, The voice of Charlemagne, in: *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages. Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. Richard Gameson/Henrietta Leyser (Oxford 2001) 76–88; Mayke de Jong, Charlemagne’s church, in: *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester 2005) 102–135; Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge 2008) 292–380.

⁶ Nelson, Voice of Charlemagne; Henry Mayr-Harting, Charlemagne’s religion, in: *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung. Das Epos Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799*, ed. Peter Godman/Jörg Jarnut/Peter Johaneke (Berlin 2002) 113–124.

Ironically, it was only after the Second Vatican Council that medieval historians without a clerical background turned to the study of liturgy, calling it religious ritual. In other words, by the time this had become an increasingly popular topic for historical research, the Latin rite had virtually disappeared from the contemporary churches, and those wishing to learn about it had to turn to scholarly literature. All the same, this break in continuity was also responsible for the renewed interest in religion. Since the 1970s and 1980s medievalists, liberated by the new concept of the ‘history of mentalities’, increasingly turned to cultural anthropology for new concepts, questions and topics. The overlapping fields of popular religion, religious ritual and the cult of the saints moved to the top of the research agenda, and so did, in a more general way, the otherness of the medieval religious past.⁷ A significant contribution to this new religious history of the western Middle Ages was made by interested outsiders with a Jewish, Islamic or agnostic background, to whom Christianity was sufficiently unfamiliar to merit an anthropologically-oriented historical investigation.⁸ While scholars concentrated on popular religion and culture, developing new methods for studying those whose voice had not been heard, the institutional and conceptual history of the church attracted much less attention. This, after all, was old-fashioned ‘Church History’.

The result of this neglect is that modern assumptions continue to dominate our understanding of early medieval references to *ecclesia* and its derivatives. Broadly speaking, ‘The Church’ has two basic modern connotations, the one broad, the other restricted. On the one hand, *ecclesia* refers to the universal community of the faithful which transcends political boundaries; on the other, it denotes the clerical hierarchy with its separate institutions and property. These two meanings of *ecclesia* have a long pedigree. The universal church which existed regardless of political structures is an ideal expressed most elaborately and influentially in Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*. Christ’s Incarnation had inaugurated ‘Christian times’ (*tempora christiana*), in which religious cults and secular politics no longer coincided. With the beginning of the Christian era, the Sixth Age, the true *cultus divinus* and true Christians had become detached from the earthly City, progressing to their ultimate salvation within political structures, but without being dependent on them.⁹

This powerful ideal had an enduring impact upon Western culture. It has been at the core of post-medieval arguments for the separation of Church and State, and it remains the cornerstone of modern Christian and secular identity, as becomes evident in present-day confrontations with fundamentalist Islam. The more restricted meaning of ‘the Church’ as the corporate body of the clergy, the exclusive mediators between God and mankind, also has a long history, but its more precise articulation occurred in the late eleventh century during the so-called Gregorian Reform and the ensuing conflict over lay investiture. From this period onwards, notions of clerical prerogatives and separateness were further developed, often in opposition to so-called heretical movements which contested the clergy’s claim to the sacred domain as its exclusive prerogative. These two images of the Church, the universal community of the faithful on the one hand, and a well-organised and distinct clerical institution on the other, are not helpful for a better understanding of early medieval perceptions of *ecclesia*, and neither is a persistent notion of ‘real Christianity’ as a Christendom constantly involved in a struggle to distance itself from the world, in which it is embedded of necessity, but contrary to its ultimate purpose.

⁷ For an overview and appraisal, see Mayke de Jong, *The foreign past. Medieval historians and cultural anthropology*, in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 109 (1996) 326–342.

⁸ For example, Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 1991); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore 1993); Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481–751* (Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions 1, Leiden/New York/Cologne 1995); David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence. Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton 1996). An excellent modern example: Ruth Harris, *Lourdes. Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (New York 1999).

⁹ Robert A. Markus, *Tempora Christiana revisited*, in: *Augustine and his Critics. Studies in Honour of Gerald Bronner*, ed. Robert Dodaro/Gerald Lawless (London/New York 2000) 201–213; Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (Oxford 2003) 72–92. For a comprehensive treatment of Augustinian thought in relation to a Carolingian historiographer, see Nikolaus Staubach, *Christiana tempora. Augustin und das Ende der alten Geschichte in der Weltchronik Frechulfs von Lisieux*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 29 (1995) 167–206; for an in-depth study of the understanding of ecclesiastical architecture in relation to biblical exegesis and Augustinian interpretations of *ecclesia*, see Dominique Iogna-Prat, *La Maison Dieu. Une histoire monumentale de l’église au Moyen Âge, 800–1000* (Collection L’univers historique, Paris 2006).

Predictably, historical manifestations of this ideal fall short of it, and most of all early medieval varieties of Christianity. In this world, boundaries were important – between the human and the divine, or the ecclesiastical and the secular – but they were drawn differently. Spheres which, from a modern point of view, should have remained separate, tended to be entwined, which met with scholarly opprobrium. For example, there was the anomaly called “césaropapisme,” of which not only Byzantine rulers were accused but also Charlemagne.¹⁰ This same intellectual heritage, dominated by the separation of Church and State, has yielded the concept of “Augustinisme politique”, that is, clerics who massively and illegitimately invaded the domain of secular power.¹¹ This was seen mainly as a feature of the early medieval West, where ‘the Church’ increasingly turned its religious authority into a political leadership, claiming the superiority of sacerdotal authority over royal *potestas*.

Yet if one wants to treat Christianity as a topic of historical research, rather than as a phenomenon transcending time and space, it is not modern notions of what constitutes ‘real Christianity’ that matter, but the historical shifting of the boundary between religious norms and what is perceived as deviance.¹² In other words, it is Charlemagne’s question “are we really Christians?”, and the contemporary answers to this question, which should interest us.¹³ Such religious strategies of distinction and their development over time are an important topic for research in present-day Western Europe, where the wish of Islamic immigrants to express their faith in public space clashes head-on with a resistance on the part of the natives that is phrased in anti-religious terms (“we Western Europeans had an Enlightenment, you Muslims did not”).¹⁴ Crash courses on Christianity such as ‘Who is who in the Bible’ at my own university may attract students by the hundreds, but this interest coexists with a pervasive uneasiness in Dutch society about the role of religion in public life. To the majority of younger Dutchmen, Christianity has become an interesting curiosity, something from a once familiar world we have now lost.¹⁵ That only one generation ago a bewildering variety of churches dominated both the public sphere and private lives of the majority of the Dutch population has become a vague memory at best.

When it comes to tackling Christianity as a historical topic, the early Middle Ages are ‘good to think with’, for this was indeed a radically different world. Kings ruled together with bishops, and both rulers and clerics were involved in ‘ordering’ the church, both in the sense of the Christian people they governed, and of the clerics, monks and nuns who safeguarded a divinely approved order by serving as intermediaries between God and mankind. The history of the post-Roman polities in the early Middle Ages is characterised by a complex interdependence between rulers and their churches.¹⁶ This mutual reliance only worked if there was a recurrent redrawing of boundaries between the domain of the ecclesiastical and the secular. In modern scholarly parlance, this repeated re-creation of distance is usually referred to as ‘ecclesiastical reform’, with the implication that there was a return to an older

¹⁰ Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre. Étude sur le ‘césaropapisme’ byzantin* (Bibliothèque des histoires, Paris 1996).

¹¹ Henry-Xavier Arquillière, *L’Augustinisme politique. Essai sur la formation des théories politiques du Moyen Âge* (L’Église et l’État au Moyen Âge 2, Paris 1955). Cf. Alain Boureau, *Des politiques tirées de l’écriture. Byzance et l’Occident*, in: *Annales HSS* 55 (2000) 879–888; id., *Sacrum palatium et ecclesia. Sur l’autorité religieuse Carolingienne, 790–840*, in: *Annales HSS* 53 (2003) 1243–1269.

¹² A point made by Markus, *End* 13–16; and further developed by De Jong, *Religion* 131–164.

¹³ Nelson, *Voice of Charlemagne* 81, on Charlemagne’s interrogation of his bishops, counts and abbots in 811: *utrum vere christiani sumus?*

¹⁴ On the rising tension and anti-religious sentiments in the Netherlands over the past years, see Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam. The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (London 2006).

¹⁵ The course ‘Who is who in the Bible’, taught since 2003 by my colleague Dr Rolf Strootman, attracts more than 300 students per year; ‘Who is who in Greek mythology’ enjoys a comparable popularity.

¹⁶ Well recognized by Aloys Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie im frühmittelalterlichen Okzident. Die Aussage konziliarer Texte des gallischen und iberischen Raumes* (Spanische Forschungen der Görres-Gesellschaft 36, Münster 2001), who with regard to Merovingian synods writes (at 76) of a “synergetic-binary structure” of kings and bishops; see also Yitzhak Hen, *The Christianisation of kingship*, in: *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung*, ed. Matthias Becher/Jörg Jarnut (Münster 2004) 163–178; id., *Roman Barbarians. The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Medieval West* (London 2007). An important source of inspiration for these publications has been Eugen Ewig, *Zum christlichen Königsgedanken im Frühmittelalter*, in: *Das Königtum. Seine geistigen und rechtlichen Grundlagen*. Mainauvorträge 1954, ed. Theodor Mayer (Vorträge und Forschungen 3, Lindau/Konstanz 1956) 7–73.

and more perfect situation, when the integrity of the church was unchallenged. This was also what the rhetoric of early medieval ‘reformers’ tried to convey, along with the need for new distance, yet one should be wary of projecting later ideals of clerical independence onto earlier periods.¹⁷ Because of the continuity of the discourse of reform throughout the centuries, it is easy to be misled into thinking that the arguments and the context remained the same, but this is by no means the case. For example, when bishops in 829 cited Gelasius’ famous letter to the Emperor Anastasius on episcopal authority and royal power, they had no intention of proclaiming a doctrine of the two swords, or of undermining the position of Louis the Pious; on the contrary, these bishops dealt with an extremely powerful ruler, and tried to reaffirm their own authority (*pondus sacerdotum*) by projecting themselves as the only valid mediators between an enraged deity and a penitent leadership – royal, ecclesiastical and secular.¹⁸ In this complementary order of things, the ruler transcended the divide between the sacred and secular, while he was at the same time responsible for maintaining the distinction between the various ‘orders’ (*ordines*).¹⁹ ‘Ecclesiastical reform’, early medieval style, was in fact an eminently royal response to the blurring of these boundaries. This was usually perceived and presented as a dangerous deviation from the norms of the early church, but the distinctions imposed were novel, and inspired by contemporary practice. The persistent efforts of Carolingian monarchs to distinguish between *monachi* and *clerici canonici* is one case in point,²⁰ and so is the rise of public penance from 800 onwards.²¹ The so-called reform councils of the early decades of the ninth century bolstered royal authority as well as the synergy between the various orders. Only if the different limbs knew their own place and duty, the body politic could flourish.

At first glance, all this may look very similar to later ecclesiastical reform movements, to the point of being invested with an almost ahistorical continuity, but this impression is deceptive, and the same goes for an entire Christian terminology with apparently unchanging semantic fields – such as, for example, *ecclesia*. This, in a nutshell, is the challenge modern historians are confronted with when they are researching early medieval Christianity: to defamiliarise the familiar so similarities as well as differences can be recognized and investigated, without going overboard in the direction of either continuity or otherness. In what follows, I shall elaborate on this by discussing some ninth-century conceptions of *ecclesia* in biblical commentary, to show how subtle shifts of meaning did affect this apparently most unchanging concept of all. In order to understand more of the typically Continental debates on early medieval religion and politics, however, it is necessary to sketch some background. The ‘Kulturkampf’ of the 1870s is long over, yet its impact is still felt in the scholarly literature with which the present generation of senior medievalists was trained. The same holds true for a Francophone tradition of anti-clericalism, which inspires a persistent distrust of Carolingian bishops and their motives.²² The recent accusation that in the 820s and 830s these devious churchmen simply falsified the

¹⁷ For a pertinent critique of the modern concept of reform in relation to sources connected with Boniface, see Timothy Reuter, ‘Kirchenreform’ und ‘Kirchenpolitik’ im Zeitalter Karls Martells. Begriffe und Wirklichkeit, in: Karl Martell in seiner Zeit, ed. Jörg Jarnut/Ulrich Nonn/Michael Richter (Beihefte der Francia 37, Sigmaringen 1994) 35–95; the classic study is Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform. Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge-Mass. 1959).

¹⁸ Pierre Toubert, La doctrine gélasienne des deux pouvoirs. Propositions en vue d’une révision, in: *Studi in onore di Giosuè Musca* (Bari 2000) 519–540. I am grateful to Philippe Depreux for alerting me to this excellent article. On the context of the Synod of Paris, see Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge 2009) 176–184.

¹⁹ Olivier Guillot, Une ordination méconnue. Le Capitulaire de 823–825, in: *Charlemagne’s Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 455–486.

²⁰ Joseph Semmler, Mönche und Kanoniker im Frankenreich Pippins III. und Karls des Großen, in: *Untersuchungen zu Kloster und Stift* (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 68, Studien zur Germania sacra 14, Göttingen 1980) 78–111; id., Benedictus II. Una regula, una consuetudo, in: *Benedictine Culture (750–1050)*, ed. Wilhelm Lourdeaux/Daniel Verhelst (*Medievalia Lovaniensia* 1/11, Louvain 1983) 1–49; Martin A. Claussen, *The Reform of the Frankish Church. Chrodegang of Metz and the Regula Canoniorum in the Eighth Century* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 4/61, Cambridge 2004).

²¹ Mayke de Jong, Transformations of penance, in: *Rituals of Power from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Frans Theuvs/Janet L. Nelson (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 8, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2000) 185–224.

²² Jaqueline Lalouette, *La République anticléricale, XIX^e–XX^e siècles* (L’univers historique, Paris 2002).

main body of the sources we now rely on, may seem extreme, but the notion that ‘the bishops’ were out to undermine the emperor Louis’ authority, is part of mainstream historical scholarship.²³ The nineteenth century is not quite so long ago as it may seem.²⁴

ECCLESIA AND ‘STAATLICHKEIT’

More than their colleagues in the Anglophone world, German historians have been inclined to stress the otherness of early medieval Christianity. In doing so, however, they have not adopted the anthropological frame of reference that usually informs publications in English.²⁵ In Germany, the shadow of ‘Staatlichkeit’ looms large over any aspect of history, and religious history is no exception. Since the late nineteenth century the interrelation of religion and politics in the early Middle Ages has been viewed as the distinguishing characteristic par excellence of this period, with the Investiture Contest as the crucial watershed. Perspectives on the early medieval church were and are informed, and often dominated, by debates on the nature of the early medieval state.²⁶ But was it really a state? This question has been answered negatively, by the highly influential school of institutional history (‘Neue Verfassungsgeschichte’) which characterised early medieval polities as a ‘Personenverbandsstaat’, a state which, unlike the modern and ‘real’ version thereof, depended on personal ties of loyalty rather than on transpersonal institutions. By implication, royal authority was unstable and superficial, for it depended largely on the extent to which the aristocracy was prepared to willing to comply with the ruler’s command.²⁷

After the Second World War, this remained the basic frame of reference for political and institutional history: early medieval kingdoms were no states, for in this period, it was claimed, lordship (‘Adelsherrschaft’) and personal loyalty were the dominant social mechanisms, not royal authority or stable institutions supporting the ruler; attempts at centralisation inevitably foundered because of aristocratic self-interest. All this led to a quite peculiar view of the church’s role within the polity. A

²³ Élisabeth Magnou-Nortier, *La tentative de subversion de l’État sous Louis le Pieux et l’œuvre des falsificateurs*, in: *Le Moyen Âge* 105 (1999) 331–365, 615–641; in a similar vein, Monika Suchan, *Kirchenpolitik des Königs oder Königspolitik der Kirche? Zum Verhältnis Ludwigs des Frommen und des Episkopates während der Herrschaftskrisen um 830*, in: *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 111 (2000) 1–27. For an equally impassioned rebuttal of Magnou-Nortier, see Gerhard Schmitz, *Echte Quellen – falsche Quellen. Müssen die zentralen Quellen aus der Zeit Ludwig des Frommen neu bewertet werden?*, in: *Von Sacerdotium und Regnum. Geistliche und weltliche Gewalt im frühen und hohen Mittelalter. Festschrift für Egon Boshof zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz-Reiner Erkens/Hartmut Wolff (Köln/Weimar/Wien 2002) 275–300. On Louis the Pious and bishops in historical scholarship, see De Jong, *Penitential state*.

²⁴ Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton/New York 2002); Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe. A Cultural History* (Amsterdam 2006).

²⁵ Arnold Angenendt’s work, for example, is primarily inspired by a strong German tradition of ‘Religionswissenschaft’; see Angenendt, *Geschichte der Religiosität* 1–29.

²⁶ Johannes Fried, *Der karolingische Herrschaftsverband im 9. Jahrhundert zwischen Kirche und Königshaus*, *Historische Zeitschrift* 235 (1982) 1–43; see also id., *Gens und regnum. Bemerkungen zur doppelten Theoriebindung des Historikers*, in: *Sozialer Wandel im Mittelalter. Wahrnehmungsformen, Erklärungsmuster, Regelungsmechanismen*, ed. Jürgen Miethke/Klaus Schreiner (Sigmaringen 1994) 73–104. Fried’s position has been sharply attacked by Hans-Werner Goetz, *Regnum. Zum politischen Denken der Karolingerzeit*, in: *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germ. Abt.* 104 (1987) 110–189; on this debate, see Jörg Jarnut, *Anmerkungen zum Staat des frühen Mittelalters. Die Kontroverse zwischen Johannes Fried und Hans-Werner Goetz*, in: *Akkulturation. Probleme einer germanisch-romanischen Kultursynthese in Spätantike und frühem Mittelalter*, ed. Dieter Hägermann/Wolfgang Haubrichs/Jörg Jarnut (RGA Erg. Bd. 41, Berlin/New York 2004) 504–509. A recent volume of papers by German, British, French and Austrian historians attempts to shed a new and more internationally oriented light on these issues, including the historiographical context of the German sensitiveness to the problem of ‘Staatlichkeit’, see *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 11, Wien 2006), which includes an article by Hans-Werner Goetz, *Die Wahrnehmung von ‘Staat’ und ‘Herrschaft’ im frühen Mittelalter*, in: *ibid.* 39–58, which continues the discussion with Fried.

²⁷ Walter Pohl, *Staat und Herrschaft im Frühmittelalter. Überlegungen zum Forschungsstand*, in: *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 11, Wien 2006) 9–38; see also the informative status quaestionis in Steffen Patzold, *Die Bischöfe im Karolingischen Staat. Politisches Wissen über die politische Ordnung im Frankenreich des 9. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 11, Wien 2006) 133–162, at 133–140.

general pessimism about the effectiveness of kingship reflected on its natural ally, the church. This in turn yielded the familiar notion of clerics being the ones to lend legitimacy to rulers, and undermining royal power in the process by making kings and emperors dependent on their approval. The classic case is Louis the Pious' supposed subservience to ecclesiastical authority in general, and his imperial coronation in 816 by Pope Stephen IV in particular. Furthermore, the idea of a failed state, with public power unduly privatised and fragmented, had its parallel in church history. The influential concept of the 'proprietary churches' ('Eigenkirchen'), popularised by Ulrich Stutz (1868–1938) owes a lot to the discussions about the medieval state that raged during his lifetime.²⁸ Only recently, Susan Wood offered a serious challenge to Stutz' older paradigm; yet this rich and deeply learned study of the medieval proprietary church does not reveal much about the intellectual context of older notions of 'Eigenkirche'.²⁹

Public power ending up in private hands, and the failure of both king and church to counter this process – these two themes represent a long-term 'Leitmotiv' in German political history and church history. The fragmentation of the once universal church into 'Germanic churches' going their own way, apart from Rome, is a mirror-image of the polities depending on personal ties just outlined. Initially, such churches were perceived in ethnic terms, as typical of 'Germanic Christianity', but then, after the Second World War, the preferred expression became 'national churches' ('Landeskirchen'), that is, churches in the restricted sense of the word (organisations of clerics) which identified with kings and kingdoms, rather than with Rome, and therefore had lost touch with the ideal of Christian universality embodied by the papacy. There have been other attempts at characterising the connection between early medieval kingdoms and churches, such as a 'political religion' ('politische Religion'), in which the cultic community coincides with the polity, yet this is one more variation on the theme of "Augustinisme politique".³⁰ Another way to define this anomaly of the early medieval situation is to contrast the universal church of the late Roman Empire with a multitude of 'Gentilkirchen',³¹ churches that derived their cohesion from a polity with a shared ethnic identity. Supposedly, the clergy's obedience to proper ecclesiastical authority was not only limited by the demands of secular lordship, but also by another alternative focus of loyalty, the *gens*. This ethnic notion is usually translated into German as 'Stamm' (tribe), but it also had the more modern connotation of 'nation'. In the older German historiography, such Germanic tribal or national loyalty on the part of clerics and lay Christians stood in the way of universal Christendom, a viewpoint that still has its advocates. Only the Carolingians' cooperation with the papacy, it was recently maintained, ensured that Europe did not fall back entirely in 'alten Gentilstrukturen'.³² In other words, the Franco-papal alliance of the mid-eighth century revived real Christendom and ultimately saved Western civilisation.

All this presents some obvious problems. First of all, its implied contrast between Roman-Christian civilisation on the one hand, and authentic Germanic cultures on the other, has been undermined by recent research into the formation of early medieval peoples. It is now widely recognized that the shared sense of identity among the elites of the post-Roman kingdoms owed much to Roman imagery and ideas, to the extent that the 'Germanic successor states' have disappeared even from the textbooks. Furthermore, in the long-term process of what has come to be called 'ethnogenesis', Roman classifications played a crucial role, providing the labels and categories around which future political identities

²⁸ Ulrich Stutz, *Die Eigenkirche als Element mittelalterlich-germanischen Kirchenrechtes* (Berlin 1895/repr. Darmstadt 1959).

²⁹ Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford 2006).

³⁰ Arnold Angenendt, *Das Frühmittelalter. Die abendländische Christenheit von 400–900* (Stuttgart 2001) 40; cf. also id., *Geschichte der Religiosität* 1–20.

³¹ Arnold Angenendt, *Der eine Adam und die vielen Stammväter. Idee und Wirklichkeit der Origo gentis im Mittelalter*, in: *Herkunft und Ursprung. Historische und mythische Formen der Legitimation*, ed. Peter Wunderli (Sigmaringen 1994) 27–52.

³² Lutz von Padberg, *Unus populus ex diversis gentibus. Gentilismus und Einheit im früheren Mittelalter*, in: *Der Umgang mit dem Fremden in der Vormoderne. Studien zur Akkulturation in bildungshistorischer Sicht*, ed. Christoph Lüth/Rudolf W. Keck/Erhard Wiersing (Beiträge zur historischen Bildungsforschung 17, Hildesheim 1997) 155–193, at 184. Cf. Walter Pohl, *Gentilismus*, in: *RGA* 2. Aufl. 11 (Berlin/New York 1999) 91–101.

could cluster.³³ As Patrick Geary has argued, to a large extent the Germanic world with its multitude of *gentes* was a Roman creation, based on centuries of interaction within and across the *limes*.³⁴

The emergence of the new medieval polities was sustained by texts, initially produced by Romans or Romanised barbarians, and then by those who had been raised in this melting-pot and no longer perceived a difference between Romans and barbarians.³⁵ These authors stressed common origins and shared histories, thus contributing to the formation of new polities which derived their coherence from an ethnic identity that was perceived as originating in a common descent. Recent research into early medieval 'ethnogenesis' is all about understanding this process as a cultural and political phenomenon, rather than a natural or biological one. The writing of history in the early Middle Ages has been an important source of information in this respect, for historiography reveals the ways in which a common past was invented, shared, used and also manipulated.³⁶ Although biblical history also belonged to this common past, and Christianity was a crucial ingredient in the formation of new political identities in the post-Roman West, it has not played much of a role in these discussions, probably because implicit assumptions about the 'the Church' tended to interfere. This was a domain that was either too limited (just the clergy) or too universal (the transnational community of all the faithful) to affect the formation of peoples and states.³⁷

Yet the tension between ethnic and religious discourses merits further exploration. Although the literate elite of the post-Roman kingdoms in the West developed parallel and competing ideologies which underlined the exclusive bond between God, king and people, "the leaders of each 'micro-Christendom' fastened with fierce loyalty on those features that seemed to reflect in microcosm, in their own land, the imagined, all embracing macrocosm of a world-wide Christianity"³⁸. The Rome imagined in the North that attracted so many pilgrims, including Charlemagne, was the Rome in which the Apostles were thought to have lived and died – a world of a pristine and true Christianity represented by the martyrs and the Fathers. The memory of this original and universal Christian world lived on in early medieval minds, within a political configuration of rulers and peoples which defined their identity in terms of their alliance with 'their' God. In short, early medieval religious discourse oscillated between the exclusivity of God's favour bestowed on one particular people, and the lingering memory of an *ecclesia* that had once transcended such boundaries. This tension had a real impact on mainstream political history. At first glance, the vast Carolingian empire may seem the very opposite of a micro-Christendom, yet it grew out of an entity of this kind, the Frankish kingdom. Rather than saving the barbarian West from a definitive decline into 'Gentilismus', the Carolingian focus on Rome was rooted in a long tradition of post-Roman polities that had continued to cherish the Eternal City as the embodiment of authentic Christianity. Apart from the obvious uses of the papacy for the legitimacy of the Carolingian dynasty,³⁹ Rome was a treasure trove of sacred resources into which the new

³³ Geary, *Myth of nations* 41–92. For a summary of this research tradition, see Walter Pohl, *Tradition, Ethnogenesis und literarische Gestaltung. Eine Zwischenbilanz*, in: *Ethnogenesis und Überlieferung. Angewandte Methoden der Frühmittelalterforschung*, ed. Karl Brunner/Brigitte Merta (VIÖG 31, Wien/München 1994) 9–26; id., *Ethnicity, theory and tradition. A response*, in: *On Barbarian Identity – Critical Approaches to Ethnogenesis Theory*, ed. Andrew Gillett (Turnhout 2002) 221–240; id., *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung und Integration* (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln 2002).

³⁴ Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany. The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York 1988) IV.

³⁵ See for instance Geary, *Myth of Nations*; Hen, *Roman Barbarians*.

³⁶ For a recent example of this approach by a younger and truly European generation of scholars, see *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini/Rob Meens/Christina Pössel/Philip Shaw (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 12, Wien 2006); *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages. Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. Richard Corradini/Max Diesenberger/Helmut Reimitz (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 12, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2003).

³⁷ Mayke de Jong, *Ecclesia and the medieval polity*, in: *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 11, Wien 2006) 113–132, at 115–123.

³⁸ Brown, *Rise* 364.

³⁹ For a thought-provoking discussion of these issues, see Rosamond McKitterick, *Paul the Deacon and the Franks*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999) 319–339; ead., *The illusion of royal power in the Royal Frankish Annals*, in: *English Historical Review* 115 (2000) 1–20. A mixture of traditional and more challenging perspectives is offered by *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung*, ed. Matthias Becher/Jörg Jarnut (Münster 2004).

Frankish rulers tapped more effectively and systematically than their predecessors – not purely tactically, but also religiously.⁴⁰ One may also wonder whether Rome as a papal seat with an increasingly universal appeal would have survived without the ‘great expectations’ of rulers and peoples north of the Alps, who held St Peter’s see to be a fount of authoritative Christendom and were willing to ensure that these sacred resources remained intact by a variety of means, including military might.

Only if one forgets about the peculiarity and continuity of this Northern orientation on Rome, does the Carolingian *ecclesia* seem to present itself in the relevant sources as a sudden and dramatic revival of the ideal of Christian universality. Likewise, Carolingian reflections on the *ecclesia* appear very similar to modern conceptions of the universal Church – but they are not, and this is precisely what makes such texts so difficult to interpret. Without being on any scale that could be characterized as small or local, Carolingian universality definitely had its limits. For one thing, it pointedly excluded that other universal Christendom called Byzantium. Furthermore, the notions of *populus dei* or *populus christianus* which increasingly sustained the Carolingian polity were based on the ruler’s accountability to God for the salvation of his people. This conviction was expressed in Charlemagne’s *Admonitio generalis* (789), and also in the almost contemporary history known as the Royal Frankish Annals. The annalist justified the Frankish campaign against the Avars in 791 by stressing the “all too many intolerable evils committed by the Avars against the Holy Church or the Christian people” (*sancta ecclesia vel populum christianum*).⁴¹ Even if one assumes that the word *vel* clearly distinguishes the *ecclesia* and the *populus*, which is debatable, it is obvious that if the Franks were pitted against their enemies, *sancta ecclesia vel populus christianus* could be one way of defining the identity of the Frankish polity. How much ‘universality’ did the author of the Royal Frankish Annals have in mind when he coined this expression? This is not the real question; what is needed is a better assessment of the specific way in which older and authoritative representations of universality were appropriated by early medieval polities, and appropriated in a new context.⁴²

The Frankish polity was usually called the ‘kingdom of the Franks’ (*regnum Francorum*) and this expression did not disappear when the imperial title was added. Yet another definition of this kingdom manifests itself in the Royal Frankish Annals, connected with *regnum* but also exceeding its limits: the Christian people or the holy Church. Here, the Frankish kingdom was no longer defined in ethnic terms as the kingdom of the Franks, but as a polity comprising the ‘Christian people’ in the process of being guided to its salvation by its leaders. *Sancta ecclesia vel populus christianus*, moreover, allowed for the integration of newly converted *gentes* into an expansive kingdom. Once converted, they became part of a state that hinged on the two meanings of *ecclesia*, exclusive and inclusive: a clergy that ministered effectively, and a people that found mercy in the eyes of God. Regardless of some marginal debates about correct baptism or the use of force in conversion, any territorial expansion of the Franks under Charlemagne was legitimated with reference to these two constituent elements.⁴³

⁴⁰ Cf. Julia M.H. Smith, Old saints, new cults. Roman relics in Carolingian Francia, in: Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West. Essays in Honour of Donald Bullough, ed. Julia M.H. Smith (Leiden 2000) 317–339, this issue is addressed by a number of papers collected in this volume.

⁴¹ *Annales regni Francorum* (ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [6], Hannover 1895) 58: ... *propter nimiam malitiam et intollerabilem, quam fecerunt Avari contra sanctam ecclesiam vel populum christianum*. On the composition, transmission and ideology of the Royal Frankish Annals, with references to older literature, see Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge 2004) 84–119.

⁴² On the Franks and their reception of Christian Rome history, cf. McKitterick, *History* 185–244.

⁴³ Helmut Reimitz, Conversion and control. The establishment of liturgical frontiers in Carolingian Pannonia, in: *The Transformation of Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, ed. Walter Pohl/Ian Wood/Helmut Reimitz (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 10, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2000) 189–207; for an interesting contextualisation of Alcuin’s criticism of forced conversion, see Michel Lauwers, La glaive et la parole. Charlemagne, Alcuin et le modèle du rex praedicator. Notes d’ecclésiologie carolingienne, in: Alcuin, de York à Tours. Écriture, pouvoir et réseaux dans l’Europe du haut Moyen Âge, ed. Philippe Depreux/Bruno Judic (*Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l’Ouest* 111/3, Rennes 2004) 221–244.

THE CAROLINGIAN *ECCLESIA* AND BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

When Louis the Pious succeeded in 814, the court-connected discourse about the Frankish polity moved even further away from its originally ethnic parameters. Whereas Charlemagne had insisted on a correct Christian practice in his realm, supported by royal enquiry and instruction, Louis initiated a coherent reflection on the nature of his imperial rule and its divinely-approved foundations. According to a programmatic capitulary of 825, Louis ruled over a Christian polity perceived as a *corpus Christi*, which derived its unity from the *sancta ecclesia*.⁴⁴ This is not to say that ‘church and state’ coincided, or that bishops ruled the roost, but it did show that the care of the Holy Church (*sancta ecclesia*) and divine worship was an integral part of legitimate imperial authority. Einhard also underlined this in his *Vita Karoli magni*, and well before this Charlemagne had become an emperor, whoever wished to be a legitimate Christian ruler made it his business to correct its monks and priests, thus ensuring a divine cult that would be an effective one. This was part and parcel of the rise of the Carolingian dynasty, from the 740s onwards when the mayors of the palace, Pippin and Carloman, convened synods and thus assumed the royal religious authority of their predecessors. Their proclaimed goal was restoration of the *lex Dei et aecclesiastica religio*, an expression that covers both a correct interpretation of Scripture and worship pleasing to God.⁴⁵ By the time Louis the Pious reigned, the ‘state of the entire Holy Church’ (*status totius sanctae ecclesiae*) was very much the responsibility of the emperor; however much Louis’ sons may have resented and resisted their father’s dominance, the royal sense of responsibility for the *cultus divinus* was something they shared with him.⁴⁶

Did imperial rule change contemporary perceptions of the *ecclesia*, reinvesting ‘the Church’ with a new universality? Without elaborating too much on the complex issue of *imperium* and its early medieval meanings, it should be pointed out that this was an expression that most often referred to imperial rule, and only rarely to ‘the Empire’ in a territorial sense.⁴⁷ Yet a surprisingly tenacious modern historiographical tradition insists on making a clear distinction between Roman imperial rule (which Charlemagne supposedly rejected) and a ‘Germanic’ version thereof, based on the Frankish king’s dominance over many peoples.⁴⁸ The fact that Charlemagne ruled over many *gentes* was certainly at the heart of the Frankish understanding of empire, but there is nothing particularly Germanic about this. Roman Christian imperial models such as Constantine and Theodosius went very well with the idea of a ‘people of the Franks’ expanding its rule with justification because it drew the pagan *gentes* into the Christian fold. The Romans had seen themselves as a people (*populus*) that derived its coherence from shared law, history and citizenship, as opposed to the *gentes* outside the empire, which

⁴⁴ Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 303–307; cf. Guillot, *Ordinatio*; De Jong, *Penitential State* 131–133.

⁴⁵ The expression occurs in the preface to the Concilium Germanicum (742/743) issued by the mayor Carloman as a capitulary, cf. *Karlmanni principis capitulare* (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 24–26, at 25: the first chapter refers to *aecclesiae iura et relegio Christiana*, gone to ruin in the days of rulers bygone; in a similar vein, Pippin’s Capitulary of Soissons refers to the *lex Dei et aecclesiastica regula*, cf. *Pippini principis capitulare Suessionense* (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 28–30, at 29.

⁴⁶ Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris* 32 (ed. Ernst Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [64], Hannover 1995) 279–555, at 392: ... *nichilque intactum reliquit, quicquid ad honorem sanctae Dei ecclesiae perficere posse visum fuit*. The religious interests of Charles the Bald have been treated well by Nikolaus Staubach, *Rex christianus*. Hofkultur und Herrschaftspropaganda im Reich Karls des Kahlen 2. Die Grundlegung der ‘religion royale’ (Pictura et poesis 2, Köln/Weimar/Wien 1993) 21–104, as well as in Charles the Bald. Court and Kingdom, ed. Margaret T. Gibson/Janet L. Nelson (Aldershot 1990), with special and enlightening attention to the king’s youthful training. See now also Elina Screen, The importance of being Emperor: Lothar I and the Frankish civil war, 840–843, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 12 (2004) 25–51; and Eric J. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire. Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817–876* (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past, Ithaca/London 2006).

⁴⁷ Janet L. Nelson, *Kingship and empire in the Carolingian world*, in: *Carolingian Culture. Emulation and Innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1994) 52–87; Steffen Patzold, Eine loyale ‘Palastrebellion’ der ‘Reichseinheitspartei’? Zur Divisio imperii von 817 und zu den Ursachen des Aufstands gegen Ludwig den Frommen im Jahre 830, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 40 (2006) 43–77.

⁴⁸ Henry Mayr-Harting, Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the imperial coronation of 800, in: *English Historical Review* 111 (1996) 1113–1133.

could be identified and distinguished by common descent and geographic location; a similar opposition can be found in the Latin versions of Scripture, which contrasted the people (*populus*) of Israel with the heathen *gentes*.⁴⁹

One encounters a similar terminology in ninth-century authors who reflected on the nature of the Frankish polity. Einhard's *Vita Karoli* is a case in point. Here, the civilised and Christian 'people of the Franks' is contrasted with the savage 'nation' of the demon-worshipping Saxons.⁵⁰ Only their conversion to Christianity would bring peace, Charlemagne had stipulated, for it would enable the Saxons to become united with the Franks, as one people.⁵¹ Einhard's idiom resembles that of the *Annales regni Francorum*, which associate the Frankish *populus christianus* with the *sancta ecclesia*. Firmly interlinked, to the point of becoming identical, people and church formed a united front against perfidious Avars; the advantage of this definition of the polity was that it was eminently capable of absorbing new membership through conversion. Depending on the context, Frankishness could be either highlighted or played down; whatever the case, it was only through converting to Christianity that one became fully a part of the people of the Franks.

All this was perfectly compatible with the imperial imagery typical of the reign of Louis the Pious – and of Charlemagne, for that matter. The *gentes* were still out there, beyond the boundaries of civilisation, albeit now in a different role: as 'gentiles' (that is, pagans) waiting to be converted by the Christian ruler and his *populus*. In this guise, the *gentes* populated the many pages of productive biblical commentators such as Hraban Maur. According to the patristic tradition which was part of the early medieval *sacra pagina*, the victorious *ecclesia gentium* had superseded the Synagogue, the Old Israel that had rejected Christ.⁵² No self-respecting biblical scholar would ever have argued, by the way, that his polity was 'Israel', let alone the 'New Israel'. On the contrary, most of these authors would have contended that to read Scripture literally was to fall into the error of the Jews, and that the history of the Jews (or *veritas hebraica*) only gained its real meaning if its spiritual significance was grasped: that every passage in the Old Testament signified and predicted the truth revealed in the Gospels and the texts associated with the Apostles. The vanquishing of the Synagogue by the *ecclesia gentium* and its valiant fighters, the *praedicatores*, was paralleled by the exegetical victory of the spirit over the letter. This patristic scheme was elaborated upon by Bede and taught to his Frankish pupils by Alcuin. Hraban retained this basic structure in his countless commentaries written for rulers, bishops and abbots.⁵³

⁴⁹ Geary, *Myth of Nations* 49–53.

⁵⁰ Einhard, *Vita Karoli magni* 7 (ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [25], Hannover 1911) 9: *Quo nullum neque prolixius neque atrocius Francorumque populo laboriosus susceptum est; quia Saxones, sicut omnes fere Germaniam incolentes, et natura feroces et cultui daemonum dediti nostraeque religioni contrarii neque divina neque humana iura vel polluere vel transgredi inhonestum arbitrabantur.*

⁵¹ Einhard, *Vita Karoli magni* 7, ed. Holder-Egger 10: ... *ut, abiecto daemonum cultu et relictis patriis caeremoniis, Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susciperent et Francis adunati unis cum eis populus efficerentur.* For a comparable distinction between *populus noster* on the one hand and a person from a *barbara natio* on the other, see a capitulary issued by Louis the Pious in the late 820s, *Capitula de praescriptione temporis* 1 (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL *Capitularia regum Francorum* 2, Hannover 1890–1897/repr. 2001) 25f.

⁵² Augustine, *De civitate Dei libri viginti duo* XVIII, 31 (ed. Bernhard Dombart/Alphons Kalb, CC SL 47, 14, Turnhout 1955): *Quo modo defenderent, nisi per evangelii praedicationem salvos faciendo eos qui crediderunt, ut eruerentur de potestate tenebrarum et transferrentur in regnum Dei? Quod consequenter expressit addendo: Et erit Domino regnum. Mons enim Sion Iudaeam significat, ubi futura praedicta est salus et sanctum, quod est Christus Iesus. Mons vero Esau Idumaea est, per quam significata est ecclesia gentium, quam defenderunt, sicut exposui, resalvati ex monte Sion, ut esset Domino regnum. Hoc obscurum erat, antequam fieret; sed factum quis non fidelis agnoscat?*

⁵³ For a more extensive discussion, see Mayke de Jong, *The Emperor Lothar and his Bibliotheca Historiarum*, in: *Media Latinitas. A Collection of Essays to Mark the Occasion of the Retirement of Lodewijk J. Engels*, ed. Renée I. A. Nip (*Instrumenta Patristica* 28, Turnhout 1996) 229–235; ead., *The Empire as ecclesia. Hrabanus Maurus and biblical historia for rulers*, in: *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzhak Hen/Matthew Innes (Cambridge 2000) 191–226; ead., *Exegesis for an empress*, in: *Medieval Transformations. Texts, Power and Gifts in Context*, ed. Esther Cohen/Mayke de Jong (*Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions* 11, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2001) 69–100. On Carolingian exegesis, *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era*, ed. Celia Chazelle/Burton Van Name Edwards (*Medieval Church Studies* 3, Turnhout 2003); Michael M. Gorman, *Biblical Commentaries from the Early Middle Ages* (*Millennio medievale* 32, Florence 2002).

Even though exegesis was a highly conservative genre, authors of biblical commentary remained members of their own societies. Obliquely, they therefore commented also on their own political communities. Thus, notions of *ecclesia* could become an important conceptual framework for reflection on the Christian polity. When Bede wrote of the *ecclesia gentium* as a biblical ideal to be resurrected in the present, this expression took on a new meaning, that is, those of the many *gentes* he was confronted with in a politically fragmented England which needed to be forged into a new unity.⁵⁴ In a different context, Hraban Maur opposed the Old Testament Jews, the ‘prior people’ (*prior populus*), to the *ecclesia gentium* which had wrested the Sword of Judah from its predecessors.⁵⁵ As in Bede’s case, Hraban’s notion of the *ecclesia* was inspired by the political reality he lived in, yet for Hraban this political reality was a multi-ethnic realm which extended as far as the rule of the Christian Emperor Louis reached. This Frankish polity encompassed many *gentes*, as the Roman Empire had earlier; those who belonged gained membership by being converted to Christianity and thus joined the Frankish *ecclesia*/Christendom.⁵⁶

This is not to say that the difference and occasional tensions between various ethnically defined groups were completely obliterated. On the contrary, Hraban himself provides a glimpse of the ideals of those who favoured Frankish imperial rule, and of the arguments of those who refused to bow. In 829 Gottschalk, a young and noble Saxon monk, maintained that his oblation as a child to the monastery of Fulda had been illegal according to the legal tradition of his *gens*, which required exclusively Saxon witnesses if a Saxon’s liberty was infringed upon, “not anyone of the Franks or Romans or any other *gens*”.⁵⁷ Of course Hraban was scathing about the very notion of a monastic conversion implying a loss of liberty. Furthermore, he argued that Christianity could not have spread if the *gentes* had refused to accept the truth about Christ from the Jews; conversely, the Jews could never be converted if they refused to heed other witnesses. After all, the Evangelist Luke was a Syrian, a doctor from Antioch, and from him both Jews and *gentes* should learn the *veritas* which transcends every truth and condition.⁵⁸ For a moment, it seems as if imperial Frankishness did not matter, but then Hraban reminded his audience (and Louis the Pious, primarily) that the Franks had both conquered and converted the Saxons, so the latter had no right to reject Frankish witnesses; moreover, one could read in all histories that all of Asia had obeyed the laws of the Persians and their satraps, just as all the *gentes* had been subjected to Roman imperial rule. To be a Roman citizen, however, had once meant enjoying great dignity and admiration among all nations, and the Franks were heirs to this lofty status. In this passage, Hraban defended the legitimacy of Frankish imperial rule by the conquest and conversion that had brought the *gentes* in general, and the Saxons in particular, into the Christian fold.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Georges Tugène, *L’idée de la nation chez Bède le Vénérable* (Paris 2001).

⁵⁵ Hrabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in libros Machabaeorum* II, 15, PL 109, 1256A/B: *Hic ergo dedit gladium aureum Judae cum divinam Scripturam sensu spiritali fulgentem ad munimentum totius Ecclesiae defensionem populi sui concessit doctoribus, quatenus contra hostes universos armatura uterentur ...* See also id., *Expositio in librum Esther* 11, PL 109, 661A.

⁵⁶ De Jong, *Empire*, much inspired by Nikolaus Staubach, *Cultus divinus und karolingische Reform*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984) 546–581.

⁵⁷ On Gottschalk’s oblation and its context, see Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel’s image. Child oblation in the early medieval West*, in: *Studies in Intellectual History* 12 (1996) 77–91; Stephanie Haarländer, *Hrabanus Maurus und die Verbindlichkeit des Klostereintritts von ‘Kindermönchen’*, in: Hrabanus Maurus. *Gelehrter, Abt von Fulda und Erzbischof von Mainz*, ed. Franz J. Felten/Barbara Nichtweiß (Neues Jahrbuch für das Bistum Mainz, Mainz 2006) 159–176.

⁵⁸ Hrabanus Maurus, *De oblatione puerorum*, PL 107, 431B–432A.

⁵⁹ Hrabanus Maurus, *De oblatione puerorum*, PL 107, 432A–432C: *Quis enim ignorat sub hac plaga mundi habitans, Francos ante Saxones in Christi fide atque religione fuisse, quos ipsi postmodum suae dominationi subegerunt armis, atque superiores effecti, dominorum ritu, imo magis paterno affectu, ab idolorum cultu abstrahentes, ad fidem Christi converterunt? Sed nunc a quibusdam primatibus de ipsa gente secundum carnem editis ingratis spernuntur, ac contra jus coeli contraque jus fori, ne testes esse veritatis valeant, indigne abjiciuntur: cum hoc nec ratio humana, neque divina id fieri debere ullo modo dictet, nec talis ordo unquam in orbe triquadro fuerit. Narrant enim historiae totam Asiam, sub centum viginti satrapis constitutam, legibus Persarum obedisse. Sic etiam Romanorum dominationi omnes gentes censu ac sensu secundum sancita imperatorum per diversas provincias suis temporibus subjectas esse, civemque Romanum ascribi pro magna dignitate ac veneratione apud omnes nationes haberi. Sed non mirum quod isti, qui legibus divinis contraria sentiunt, foedera pacti humani rite non servant; errantes enim, et in errorem mittentes, apud Deum culpabiles et apud homines vituperabiles fiunt. Denique veritas, quae ubique regnat, omnia vincit; licet multos inimicos habeat, ipsa tamen*

The Liber de oblatione was an appeal to Louis the Pious himself, so it is not surprising that imperial authority is praised as the one legitimate agency that could and should solve conflicts between different peoples and their legal traditions. Yet what really transcends all the *gentes* united under imperial rule is the *sancta ecclesia* “founded on the strongest rock”; it is *veritas*, truth, which reigns everywhere and vanquishes everything. If Christian truth came from a member of a different *gens*, Hraban argued, or from the Jews (who were of course not a *gens* but a *populus*), their testimony should be heeded. The only reason that the Franks were superior to the Saxons was their earlier conversion and their better understanding of Scripture. Even if in this particular treatise Hraban never identified the *sancta ecclesia* explicitly with the Frankish empire, the development of his argument suggests a close association between the expanding Frankish polity and the Holy Church; likewise, there is a historical development from the imperial trappings of the past – Persian great kings and Roman emperors – to the *sancta ecclesia* victoriously pitted against her insidious enemies. Hraban’s claim to the supremacy and universality of the Frankish secular law (*lex humana*) was founded on the Franks’ earlier conversion, but also, implicitly, on their undisputed leadership in the defence of the Holy Church. The Frankish polity derived its identity from its religious orthodoxy and correct worship; beyond its confines, the challenge of heresy and paganism awaited the Frankish armies as well as the “saintly preachers and doctors” of biblical commentary.

CONCLUSION: *ECCLESIA* AND POLITICAL INTEGRATION

From the mayors of the palace, Pippin and Carloman, onwards, but more explicitly in Charlemagne’s and Louis’ reigns, the protection of the *sancta ecclesia* was one of the defining characteristics of royal authority. Charlemagne set the tone of a discourse that would be further developed in the reign of his son Louis and his grandson Charles, presenting himself as the “*rector* of the kingdom of the Franks and the devout defender and helper of the holy church (*sancta ecclesia*)”⁶⁰. This notion of ‘the holy church’ was a flexible one, referring on the one hand to a polity understood as the community of those who worshipped ‘correctly’, in a way that pleased God, and on the other it denoted the clergy who mediated between God and His people. With this double meaning, *sancta ecclesia* figured in the ninth-century discussions about the nature of the Christian polity. It would be a mistake to exclude the *ecclesia* in both senses from present-day research on early medieval ‘Staatlichkeit’, simply because *regnum* and *ecclesia* were not overlapping categories, or because ‘the Church’ was too universal a notion to serve as a suitable framework for conceptualizing the polity in a transpersonal way. In recent discussions, expressions such as *res publica*, *regnum* and *utilitas publica* have attracted most attention, for such notions are closest to modern notions of transpersonal statehood. This also holds true for a recent analysis Astronomer’s Life of Louis the Pious, a rich text written not long after the emperor’s death in 840.⁶¹ Yet from the Astronomer’s perspective, the *regnum* or *res publica* he wrote of could only flourish if the *cultus divinus et sancta ecclesia* did, under the aegis of the ruler. It was the guardianship of the divine cult which earned Louis and other kings the praise that they were “like a bishop.”⁶² With

victrix omnes hostes suos aeterna superabit victoria, cujus sancta Ecclesia fidelissima observatrix ac custos, in soliditate firmissimae petrae fundata, nulla recipit consortia perfidorum. Unde nec portae inferi praevallebunt adversus eam.

⁶⁰ Admonitio generalis, prologus (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 52–62, at 54; on the religious nature of this capitulary and Charlemagne’s close involvement in its genesis, see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789–895* (Royal Historical Society Studies in History 2, London 1977); Thomas M. Buck, *Admonitio und Praedicatio. Zur religiös-pastoralen Dimension von Kapitularien und kapitulariennahen Texten, 507–814* (Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 9, Frankfurt am Main 1997).

⁶¹ Hans-Werner Goetz *The perception of ‘power’ and ‘state’ in the early Middle Ages: the case of the Astronomer’s Life of Louis the Pious*, in: *Representations of Power in Medieval Germany (800–1500)*, ed. Björn Weiler/Simon MacLean (International Medieval Research 16, Turnhout 2006) 15–36, at 25–33.

⁶² Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris* 19 (ed. Ernst Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [64], Hannover 1995) 53–155, 279–555, at 334: *His gestis, in propria rex populusque eius Deo propitio concessit. Et regis quidem ab ineunte etate, sed tunc quam maxime, circa divinum cultum et sanctae ecclesiae exaltationem piissimus incitebatur animus, ita ut non modo regem, sed ipsius opera potius eum vociferantur sacerdotem.* On the Astronomer and his portrayal of kingship,

regard to Louis' big assembly in Aachen in 819, the Astronomer highlighted all Louis' decisions in favour of the "state of the church" (*status ecclesiae*). This is a complex concept, with inflections of enduring societal stability, but also with a meaning akin to and reinforced by the "honour of God's Holy Church" mentioned in the same sentence.⁶³ There is no doubt that the Astronomer distinguished between secular and ecclesiastical aspects of Louis' activity; he also mentioned the additions to the *leges* made during this assembly which, he claimed, were still in full force when he wrote his *Life of the Emperor Louis*.⁶⁴ All the same, it is not obvious where this author drew the line, and the same holds true for the still extant capitularies connected with the important assemblies of the year 819.⁶⁵ To the Astronomer and other contemporary authors, upholding the *honor sanctae ecclesiae* represented the hallmark of legitimate rule,⁶⁶ but there was also the 'honour of the churches' dealt with by the supposedly secular *Capitula legibus addenda* of 819. These opened with a longish chapter entitled *de honore ecclesiarum*, concerning churches defiled by homicide and the punishment of the culprits.⁶⁷ These two different levels, that of the comprehensive *sancta ecclesia* on the one hand, and the plurality of local churches and religious communities on the other, were interconnected in ways that still require further investigation.⁶⁸ To relegate this connection and similar ones to the secluded domain of 'ecclesiastical reform' would be a mistake. This was a world which perceived a direct relation between God's favour and the 'stability of the realm'. The history of the Christian cult, both as an institution and a practice, should therefore be included in modern accounts of early medieval state formation.

To sum up: the expression *ecclesia* had many connotations, ranging from the concrete – a church building or a religious community – to the eschatological: the victorious *ecclesia* of biblical commentary. Yet in between, there was a level at which the Frankish polity could be equated with the *sancta ecclesia vel populus dei*, this signified a unity that was capable of including and integrating conquered *gentes*, provided they became Christians. At least in part, the strength of this conception of *ecclesia* accounts for the relative weakness of 'empire' as a territorial notion. If the *ecclesia gentium*, the church of the peoples already converted and of those still waiting to be, became the prevailing way of speaking about the realm and responsibility of a Christian emperor, as I think it did, this means that the discourse about empire was firmly anchored in the domain of the eschatological. Not terrestrial kingdoms or empires mattered, but the future salvation of God's people. This view and similar ones represent the ninth-century version of political theory, which should not be relegated to the domain of ecclesiology, merely because the *ecclesia* was a central element in conceptualising the political order.

With some success the Franks managed to impose this framework onto the elites of the conquered and converted peoples. Regardless of his rebelliousness, the child oblate Gottschalk was typical of the

see Helena Siemes, *Beiträge zum literarischen Bild Kaiser Ludwigs des Frommen in der Karolingerzeit* (Freiburg 1966); De Jong, *Penitential State* 79–89.

⁶³ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris* 32, ed. Tremp 390–392 (Assembly at Aachen, 819): *Qua hieme imperator in eodem palatio conventum populi celebravit publicum et renuntiantes sibi missis de omni regno suo, quos pro statu ecclesie, restaurando deiecta vel confirmando stantia miserit, et quicquid utile iudicavit, sancta impellente devotione superaddidit, nichilque intactum reliquit, quicquid ad honorem sanctae Dei ecclesie proficere posse visum fuerit.*

⁶⁴ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris* 32, ed. Ernst Tremp 392: *Interea capitula quedam legibus superaddidit, in quibus cause forenses claudicare videbantur, que actenus veluti pernecessaria servantur.* Cf. *Capitula legibus addenda; Capitula legi Salicae addita* (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 280–285 and 292–293.

⁶⁵ *Hludowici prooemium generale ad capitularia tam ecclesiastica quam mundane; Capitulare ecclesiasticum; Capitula legibus addenda* (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 273–293. The manuscript tradition of these capitularies is considerable, and should be further investigated; cf. Hubert Mordek, *Biblioteca capitularium regum Francorum manuscripta. Überlieferung und Traditionszusammenhang der fränkischen Herrschererlasse* (MGH Hilfsmittel 15, München 1995) 1094–1095.

⁶⁶ Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmen in honorem Hludowici caesaris* (ed. and trans. Edmond Faral, Ermold le Noir. *Poème sur Louis le Pieux et Épitres au Roi Pépin. Les classiques de l'histoire de France au Moyen Âge* 14, Paris 1964) 1764–1793.

⁶⁷ *Capitula legibus addenda* 1, ed. Boretius 281. The main issues are homicide and asylum, see now Rob Meens, *Sanctuary, penance and dispute settlement under Charlemagne: The conflict between Alcuin and Theodulf of Orléans over a sinful cleric*, in: *Speculum* 82 (2007) 277–300.

⁶⁸ But see now Iogna-Prat, *Maison*, and, at the level of clerical practice, Patzold, *Bischöfe*; Carine van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord. Priests and Episcopal Statutes in the Carolingian Period* (Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 6, Turnhout 2007).

early stages of the conversion of the Saxons; his father had been a count who owed his office to the new Frankish rulers. Many were to follow, to the extent that – at least in some circles – Saxon identity hinged on Christianity and the emperor who brought it. The anonymous Saxon poet who, between 888 and 891, wrote about the deeds of Charlemagne, hailed the emperor as vastly superior to the Romans; whoever read of Charles' exploits would cease to be impressed by ancient history.⁶⁹ The Poeta Saxo then pictured Charlemagne in Heaven, as David's equal, in the company of Constantine and Theodosius. In the final reckoning, it would be Charles' conversion of Saxony that would swing the balance in his favour. "Who can count how many souls he gave to the Lord, when he made the Saxon peoples believe?"⁷⁰ This precious gift, and all the monasteries and churches he built in Saxony, merit Charlemagne his eternal reward. On the Day of Judgment, he will be nearer to the ranks of the apostles than anyone. While Peter leads the converted Jews, Paul the saved gentiles of the entire world, Andrew the Greeks, Matthew the Ethiopians and Thomas the Indians, "then the rejoicing throngs of Saxons will follow Charlemagne to his glory and eternal delight"⁷¹. This universal vision of Christendom is at the same time limited and exclusive; the Franks have receded to the background, the Saxons take their place as Charlemagne's (and God's) very special people. The poet expresses a wish to be among those of 'our people' who would be saved; what bound "us Saxons" together, in his view, was their submission to Christ. What had once been imposed by force, had now been appropriated and adapted to become one of the building blocks of Saxon identity.

⁶⁹ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de gestis Caroli magni imperatoris libri quinque* (ed. Paul von Winterfeld, MGH AA Poetae latini aevi Carolini 4, 1, Berlin, 1899) 1–71; for a recent discussion of this text, see Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne* 22–27.

⁷⁰ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de gestis Caroli magni imperatoris* V, 71, ed. von Winterfeld 667–668: *Quis numeret quantas animas, dum credere fecit/Saxonum populos, reddiderit domino?*

⁷¹ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de gestis Caroli magni imperatoris* V, 71, ed. von Winterfeld 687–689: *Tum Carolum gaudens Saxonum turma sequetur/illi perpetuae gloriae laetitia.*