

CHURCH, CAROLINGIANS AND VIKINGS

It might be thought that the word 'Carolingian' derives from the greatest person of that dynasty, Charlemagne (*Carolus magnus*, Charles the Great), but such is not the case. The word 'Carolingian' derives from Charles Martel, whose son Pepin became the first king of the dynasty. At the height of their power under Charlemagne, the Carolingians controlled a vast area of western Europe, not just the area of modern France nor even of Napoleonic France. The Frankish campaign into Spain famously failed at Roncesvalles (778), giving us the epic 'Song of Roland' (*Chanson de Roland*) and fixed the south-western border of their lands at the Pyrenees. Yet their south-eastern lands extended deep into central Italy. And their power extended from the western sea well into central Europe, including Saxony, Thuringia and Bavaria, thus neutralizing the Avar threat to the eastern borders. In the north, Carolingian dominion stopped only at the inhospitable Danish marsh. Europe was not to see such massive territorial control by one power until the time of Napoleon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and Hitler in the twentieth century. It was in the context of this Frankish aggrandizement that the church was to play a major role. The relationship of the kings of this dynasty, particularly Pepin III (751–68), Charlemagne (768–814) and Louis the Pious (814–40), with the papacy profoundly influenced that institution and the Christian religion more generally. It became a dynasty too soon; it was a dynasty too ambitious in its aims and too weak even at its strongest moment to survive long. Within 90 years from the coronation of Pepin (751) the Frankish lands, the new 'empire', were divided into three parts and soon into even more parts as centrifugal forces left it in pieces. Yet, on that account, its accomplishments should not be denied: they were considerable, like nothing before, and they touched the church on many levels and in many ways that continued long after the grandsons of Charlemagne were engaged in unseemly fratricidal warfare.

Franco-papal alliance

Events in Italy and Francia combined to form the central political alliance of the Middle Ages. More than political and, indeed, more than an alliance, the relationship of pope and emperor provided one of the most significant themes in medieval history; some would say the central theme. With Charles Martel ruling Francia as mayor of the palace and not as king, and with Pope Gregory III being harassed by the Lombard kings, the scene was set in 739 for the first approach by the papacy – which

was not acted upon – to obtain Frankish military assistance. Other approaches would be made and with much greater success. The papal concern was for security of the republic of Rome (*respublica romana*), over which the pope had de facto authority, against the threats of the Lombards, not only from the northern centre of the Lombard kingdom but also from the two Lombard duchies (Spoleto and Benevento) separated geographically from their northern brothers. At issue also was the fate of the exarchate of Ravenna, now without an effective Byzantine presence.

The events of 751–54 may be central to the developing situation. By 750 Charles Martel's son Pepin, the third of that name, had become mayor of the palace. The king was Childeric III, a mere figurehead, who, in fact, had been appointed by Pepin in 743. For reasons not altogether clear to us, Pepin found his situation intolerable. According to the Royal Frankish Annals, written after the events, Pepin, in 751, asked Pope Zachary the famous question: Who should be king, he who has the title but no power or he who has the power but not the title? The annals state that the pope answered that he who has the power should be king. If this is true, then Pope Zachary would have been involved in the creation of a new Frankish dynasty. Exactly what happened we may never know. Perhaps the account in the annals is unreliable and Pepin became king merely by the assent of the Frankish nobility with no papal involvement. The scenario of the annals, however, was taken up by others and became widely accepted. If its account is precise and correct, about which there are now strong doubts, then the pope had done what no earlier pope had done: popes had never before created a monarch or even claimed the right to do so. About two years later the pope (now Stephen II) crossed the Alps to Francia, and there at Ponthion met King Pepin, who acceded to the pope's request for military assistance to thwart Lombard aggression against papal lands. While in Francia in 754, Pope Stephen anointed King Pepin at the church of St Denis outside Paris. This anointing had a sacramental element, which gave the anointed king a place and function in the church with duties, privileges and responsibilities, which would be spelled out in time but were there in seed at Pepin's anointing in 754. The Pope also conferred on Pepin the title 'Patrician of the Romans', the meaning of which still exercises the minds of historians, although it was not as significant as once thought. In the spring of 755 Pepin led a small army into Italy and quickly defeated the Lombards. One need scarcely be cynical to ask whether there was a *quid pro quo* in all this: if the pope in 751 agreed to legitimize Pepin as king – and it would be prudent to have some doubt about this – did he do so in return for a promise of military assistance from the Franks, a promise fulfilled by the Frankish expedition of 755? An alliance with the pope had been struck, whether in 751 or in 755 or at some point in between. Pepin marched against the Lombards, in 756, and not only defeated the Lombards but took the keys to 22 cities and had them sent to Rome. To call this act the Donation of Pepin would be to misconstrue the meaning. Pepin did not conquer Lombard cities and then grant the pope authority over them. The cities in question were not Lombard but were in the exarchate and duchy of Rome and had been only recently held by the Lombards.

Another donation of far greater moment came to light at about this time: the Donation of Constantine. A precise date cannot be given to this forgery, but the document was drawn up at the papal palace (the Lateran Palace) quite possibly in the early 770s. It took the form of a fourth-century grant by the Emperor Constantine to

Pope Sylvester I, which gave the pope authority over the city of Rome and over all the provinces, districts and cities of Italy and the western regions. This claim of the papacy to temporal rule over the West dazzles the mind in its sheer audacity. Whoever drew up the Donation of Constantine might have been more concerned with Byzantine emperors than with Germanic kings, since it seemed to refute the emperors' claims over Italy. No evidence exists that it was trotted out in the eighth century against either emperors or kings. It was to figure in later time as a *prima facie* indication of papal supremacy in the West, yet, even then, there is no indication that these later popes knew it was a forged document. Only in the fifteenth century did Lorenzo Valla prove it a forgery.

The coming of Charlemagne to power in 768, a power shared with his brother till the latter's death in 771, promised a continuation of the policy of papal alliance but in ways beyond imagining. The rift between the Franks and Lombards was seen as healed when, in 770, Charlemagne agreed to marry the daughter of the Lombard king, yet within a year he rejected her – whether he actually married her is not clear. What is clear is that any *rapprochement* with the Lombards had ended. As his father had done, Charlemagne led an army into Italy and defeated the Lombards, but, unlike his father, Charlemagne sent the Lombard king to a monastery and made himself king of the Lombards. During 774 Charlemagne went to Rome, and at Easter time he and Pope Hadrian I went to St Peter's Basilica, where they swore mutual oaths, thus confirming the alliance of Charles's father with the papacy. The meaning of the alliance was spelled out by Charlemagne in a letter to Pope Leo III in 796:

It is our part with the help of divine holiness to defend by armed strength the holy church of Christ everywhere from the outward onslaughts of the pagans and the ravages of the infidels and to strengthen within the knowledge of the Catholic faith.

It is your part, most holy Father, to help our armies with your hands lifted up to God like Moses, so that, by your intercession and by the leadership and gift of God, the Christian people (*populus christianus*) may everywhere and always have victory over the enemies of his holy name and that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified throughout the world.

Here is a vision of a seamless Christian society, to whose well-being both king and pope were bound together in a common effort.

Four years after this statement, at Christmas Mass in St Peter's Basilica, Pope Leo crowned Charlemagne Roman emperor. This barbarian king of a Germanic people received the title of emperor in an event whose full meaning still challenges modern scholarship. There had been no Roman emperor in the West since 476; the only emperor was the woman Irene, ruling the remnant of the old Roman Empire from Constantinople. Four comments can be made about this extraordinary happening in St Peter's. In the first place, whatever the internal confusion of Roman politics and the difficulties experienced by Pope Leo, the conferral of the imperial title had to have been Charlemagne's idea, and the tale told by his biographer decades later of a reluctant, surprised Charlemagne carries no conviction. Second, the conferral of this title by the pope may have followed the

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

precedent of a pope 50 years earlier possibly conferring the title of king on Charlemagne's father. Third, an empire was not created that Christmas Day. The lands held by the Franks, considerably augmented as they had been by the Carolingians, did not now form an empire with imperial administration. What the



Franks had held they continued to hold in the same way: a series of holdings each with its own structure of government, not unlike the Hapsburg holdings in the early modern period. And, fourth, the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor, as it were, crowned the alliance between the papacy and the Franks. It was further confirmed by his son Louis the Pious (814–40), when he met with Pope Stephen IV in Francia in 816 and entered into a 'pact of confirmation' (*pactum confirmationis*). Pope Stephen reanointed Louis much as an earlier pope had reanointed Pepin.

What needs emphasizing amidst all these dates and events is that the Frankish kings took it as a *religious* responsibility to defend the papacy. That there were also political considerations few would deny, but these anointed figures from north of the Alps, themselves not many generations removed from worshipping trees and winds, defined their office as having a spiritual dimension. With reason did those at Charlemagne's court call him 'David'.

As an active, formal, treaty-based relationship, the Franco-papal alliance did not survive the collapse of Carolingian power. When the Carolingian lands were divided in 840 between the three sons of Louis the Pious, there began the process of dismemberment. One of these sons died in 855, and his kingdom was subdivided into three kingdoms. The process of dissolution and decline was well under way. The power of the local nobles, which was held under control by Charlemagne, now reasserted itself. The office of emperor was to be held by increasingly weak and insignificant descendants of Charlemagne. A meaningful alliance could not survive such shifts of political power.

The Carolingians and church practice

Einhard, in his biography, describes Charlemagne as a devout Christian:

Charles practised the Christian religion with great devotion and piety, for he had been brought up in this faith since earliest childhood ... As long as his health lasted he went to church morning and evening with great regularity, and also for early-morning Mass and for the late-night hours.

(Bk 3, no. 26)

It is at the risk of the charge of moral arrogance that a historian would sit in judgement on the sincerity of Charles's religious practices or the depth of his spiritual life. Such knowledge lies beyond the reach even of the most imaginative among us. Yet the policies of the Carolingian state, shaped by its kings, affected the way in which the Christian religion was lived in the Frankish lands.

The consecrated kings of the Franks issued capitularies (each a series of chapters, *capitula*), which regulated both secular and religious matters, the two frequently mixed in the same capitulary. This concern for the state of religious practice can be seen most vividly in a capitulary of 789, generally referred to as *Admonitio generalis*, echoes of whose provisions can be heard in later legislation. It was directed entirely to religious affairs, the first such capitulary of Charlemagne's reign. We should back up 15 years, to 774, when Charlemagne, while besieging the Lombard capital of Pavia, received from Pope Hadrian a collection of canon law. Essentially the collection

which had been made by Dionysius Exiguus in the early sixth century, to which other canons had been added, it is now generally referred to as the *Dionysio-Hadriana*. Without doubt it was the basic collection of canon law used at Rome and, indeed, in other places as well. It became the basis of such law in the Frankish lands, and we are to find much of it in the *Admonitio generalis* of 789. The first 60 of the 82 articles that comprise this capitulary were drawn from the *Dionysio-Hadriana* and, in Professor McKitterick's words, form 'the basic outlines for the administration of the Frankish church'. The first chapter deals with excommunication, citing early general councils. The capitulary moves on to other matters. Bishops are told to investigate candidates for orders. Priests who say Mass and do not themselves receive communion act wrongly. Monks and clerics should not enter taverns to eat or drink, nor should they engage in business. No money should pass hands in the ordaining of bishops or priests. No one should become a bishop before his thirtieth year, because the Lord Jesus did not preach before his thirtieth year. Bishops should not admit slaves to the clerical state without the permission of their masters. And so it runs, directives applying to bishops, clergy and laity, all drawn from Hadrian's collection and applied to a Frankish setting. Yet there is more.

An additional 22 chapters reveal something of the Carolingian genius for originality and invention, perhaps as close as we can come to a Carolingian programme of church discipline and reform. The emphasis is clearly pastoral. Baptism and outward acceptance of Christianity is not enough: a knowledge of that faith is necessary in order to give it depth. Schools should be established at every monastery and every cathedral, where boys should read the psalms and books about grammar and music and numbers as well as 'Catholic books' (the scriptures) and where experienced copiers should prepare copies of the gospels, psalter and missal, if this is necessary. Priests should explain the Lord's Prayer to the people so that they will know what they are asking of God. Sunday was singled out in detail as a special day, a day free from usual occupations. On that day men should not work in the fields or vineyards or woods; nor should they sue pleas or hunt animals or build houses or tend their gardens. They may take bodies to be buried. Prohibitions also reveal much of what women did on the other days of the week: on Sundays they should not engage in weaving, making clothes, embroidering, carding wool, beating linen or doing laundry in public. Sunday should be an honoured day, a day of rest, a day on which Christians go to Mass and praise God. And priests must instruct their people by preaching: how God is one and three, how God became man and will judge the dead, sending the wicked into eternal fire with the devil and the just into eternal life with Christ and the angels. They are to preach love of God and love of neighbour, faith and hope in God, the virtues of chastity and continence, kindness and mercy, concern for the poor, admission of one's sins and forgiveness of others, 'for it is by living in such a way that they will possess the kingdom of heaven'. A modern syllabus of sermon subjects could scarcely improve on this list issued by Charlemagne in 789.

Canon law was thus established as an element essential to the life of the Christian community. Ideals, expectations, *desiderata* are expressed in the canons. That they were always observed need hardly be believed, yet they stood as expressions of the order needed in a community of Christian believers and of the ideal that external behaviour conform to inner beliefs. In the generation after Charlemagne there was

produced
period, and
was a forge
authentic la
real canon
about 100
forger or,
provided t
sequent ce
bishops a
Fingers ca
self-asserti
have arise
souls and
attempts o

Section
reforming
canonists
canons. T
from this
popes or
what their

The fo
Carolingi
adoption
St Bened
Elsewher
son Loui
was anot
by the ne
817, wh
endorser
observed
capitular
observin
ways tha
second
amount
labour v
work ar
The Mo
to gain
have co
the em
Europe
The l
ity of

produced in the Frankish kingdom the most famous canonical collection of the period, and it was a forgery, known to us as the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals. To say it was a forgery is to tell only part of the story. In fact, the collection is a patchwork of authentic laws and made-up laws, and the whole was taken for authentic. It contained real canons from real councils and real provisions from real papal decretals, but about 100 decretals were falsely attributed to early popes and were the creation of the forger or, more likely, of a workshop of forgers, who produced the collection. It also provided the means by which the Donation of Constantine became known to subsequent centuries. Pseudo-Isidore was the creature of disputes in Francia between bishops and their metropolitan archbishop in the middle of the ninth century. Fingers can be pointed at the suffragan bishops of Hincmar of Rheims, the powerful, self-assertive, not wholly attractive metropolitan of that region. The collection may have arisen in an attempt of suffragan bishops to assert their own role as pastors of souls and, by asserting a direct connection with the pope, to try to thwart the attempts of the metropolitan to interfere in their dioceses.

Sections of Pseudo-Isidore were to have a long life when they were taken up by reforming popes in the eleventh century, particularly Urban II (1088-99), and by canonists then and later, who incorporated 'false decretals' in their collections of canons. The formative collection of Gratian (c.1140) contains 375 chapters drawn from this source. It should be quickly added that there is no reason to suspect that popes or canonists knew that they were dealing with forgeries. In any case, no matter what their origin, they were clearly used as instruments to support papal power.

The form of life of monks and clerics was seriously affected by the actions of the Carolingian kings. A variety of styles of monastic life gave way to an almost universal adoption of the Rule of St Benedict. Charlemagne was influential in the adoption of St Benedict's Rule in many monasteries east of the Rhine and in southern Gaul. Elsewhere monasteries tended to follow a mixed rule. It was not until the reign of his son Louis the Pious that the Rule of St Benedict won out. Central to Louis's efforts was another Benedict, Benedict of Aniane, the 'Second Benedict'. Brought to Aachen by the new emperor-king, Benedict presided over two meetings of abbots, in 816 and 817, which produced the Monastic Capitulary. Essentially this capitulary was an endorsement of the Rule of St Benedict; it ordered that this rule and only this rule be observed in monasteries. Imperial officials visited monasteries to ensure that the capitulary was being obeyed. Yet, for all of Benedict of Aniane's strictures about observing St Benedict's Rule, what in fact emerged was Benedict's Rule altered in ways that changed the simple form of life of pure Benedictinism. Now, thanks to the second Benedict, prayers were added to such an extent that monks spent vast amounts of time in choir and were consequently unable to perform the manual labour which was clearly part of St Benedict's vision of a monk's life. The balance of work and prayer was lost, and the liturgy was henceforth to dominate monastic life. The Monastic Capitulary was promulgated by the emperor in 817. Since its aim was to gain observance of the rule by all Frankish monasteries, all abbots were ordered to have copies of the rule made and to have the rule read to their monks. The result was the emergence of the Benedictine form of monasticism as the standard in western Europe.

The life of monks was seriously changed in another way. Hitherto the vast majority of monks were not priests and generally one conventual Mass would be

celebrated daily for the community by a monk-priest. Now, however, two matters intersected. In the first place, more monks became priests and, second, in another innovation, each priest wanted to say Mass each day. Mass as private devotion was at odds with Mass as corporate worship, and with this innovation a corner had been turned in the history of Christian worship. And there were architectural consequences. Since not only the priest but also the altar had to fast before Mass, a multiplication of altars occurred in monastic churches, a phenomenon also occurring in other, non-monastic churches.

The mention of priests living in non-monastic churches brings us to the clergy living in the world (the 'secular' clergy). Their ministry was to care for the pastoral needs of the Christian people, and this they did in ways that are mostly hidden from our view. Some of the secular clergy lived in remote places in the countryside, baptizing, preaching and saying Masses in churches usually provided by the local lord. In English these churches are called proprietary churches and in German *Eigenkirchen*. It was from these that parishes would eventually develop; it was also from this practice of the local lord appointing the priest for his church that, in time, would lead to disputes about the lay appointment of priests and even bishops. Other members of the secular clergy lived in towns in communities gathered about principal churches, and some of these in cathedral cities where they lived with the bishop in his household. Chrodegang, bishop of Metz, c.755, drew up an influential rule for his household clergy. They were to live a common or conventual life, eating and sleeping in the same house, joining together for daily prayers, yet, not bound by a vow of poverty, they could own property. They were said to live according to the ancient canons and were thus called 'canons', and, since each day they would gather to hear the reading of a chapter of sacred literature, their community became known as a chapter. Other chapters of secular canons following Chrodegang's rule speedily appeared not only at other cathedrals but also at large churches like St Denis outside Paris. We are to hear more of this rule in the twelfth century. Chrodegang is also credited with introducing the Roman liturgy, especially Roman chants, into Metz.

It was the relationship of Charlemagne and Pope Hadrian that greatly influenced liturgical development. 'Sacramentaries' (i.e., books used by priests to celebrate Mass and to perform other rites) were commonplace in Francia at this time, but no uniform usage prevailed. About 786, in response to Charlemagne's request for an authentic text, Pope Hadrian sent him a deluxe sacramentary, which probably reflected contemporary Roman usage. A supplement was added to the text to suit Frankish needs, quite possibly by the learned Alcuin of York. This text contained the text and rubrics for the Mass, the central liturgical act of the Christian religion, a re-enactment of the Last Supper, when Catholics believe that Jesus transformed bread and wine into his body and blood. In a quirk of history, in the course of the tenth century this Hadrianic text as supplemented by Alcuin (or someone else) and as refined by usage in Francia was introduced into Rome and became the historic Roman Rite, which remained in use with little change until the 1960s.

Lest one think that the Carolingian kings, particularly Charlemagne, always acted according to the high principles of Christian teaching, which they openly supported, this section must conclude with the sad tale of the forced conversion of pagan Saxons by the Christian king of the Franks. Attempts by the Franks to conquer the Saxons long predated the reign of Charlemagne (768-814) but invariably met with frustrating

failures. To them the law for all the Christianity continued tary efforts extended to 782 Charle prisoners chronicler by the and campaigns alty for an same pena balism an practice. A bined inte superiors,

Faith not f adult then

The con Franks, b versality human n

A profo left the their n their ho Greenla through sailed e Russia. Thor, t pleasure the coa lying bo torians. it. In a one gen used in

failures. To acquire Saxony made much strategic sense to the Franks. It would give them the lands north of Thuringia and east of the Rhine and would stop once and for all the Saxon raiding on their borders. It would also lead to the extension of Christianity to these heathen people. The campaigns began in earnest in 772 and continued with almost annual regularity for over 30 years, ranging from major military efforts to punitive raids. At the end of the war, the victorious Franks had extended their border to the Elbe River, even to its further bank. In one incident in 782 Charles, furious at the outcome of an earlier engagement, beheaded 4,500 Saxon prisoners in a single day. Although the figure should not be taken exactly, the chronicler is telling us that there was a vast slaughter of unarmed prisoners ordered by the anointed king of the Franks. Massive deportations followed after subsequent campaigns. In a celebrated capitulary, possibly of 782, death was decreed as the penalty for any Saxon who refused baptism: *morte moriaturus* ('he will die the death'). The same penalty of death applied to Saxons not only for burning the dead, for cannibalism and for human sacrifice but also for such sins as not observing the Lenten practice. Alcuin of York, the consummate insider, the perfect bureaucrat, who combined intelligence, a worldly wisdom and sensitivity to the words and wishes of his superiors, some years later wrote for the emperor's attention:

Faith must be voluntary not coerced. Converts must be drawn to the faith not forced. A person can be compelled to be baptized yet not believe. An adult convert should answer what he truly believes and feels, and, if he lies, then he will not have true salvation.

The conversion of the Saxons, not the happiest chapter in the history of the Franks, bears witness to what contemporary theologians would have called the universality of original sin and what moderns might describe as the dark side of our human nature.

The Vikings

A profound influence on historical Christianity was had by the warrior-seamen who left the islands and peninsulas of Scandinavia for overseas adventures and who gave their name to an epoch, the Viking Age. Out of fjords and viks (inlets) in their homelands, they sailed westward to the British Isles and further west to Iceland, Greenland and the shores of North America. They sailed southward, coursing through the river systems of the modern Low Countries and France. And they sailed eastward across the Baltic Sea and by river and portage reached deep into Russia. They sailed as pagans as worshippers of anthropomorphic deities like