

Charlemagne in Hell

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On Sunday 11 September 813, an assembly of bishops and abbots, dukes, counts and highborn imperial officials gathered in the palace chapel at Aachen, where they saw the emperor Charlemagne crown his son Louis with a golden crown, making him co-emperor, before they all heard Mass.¹ The once-tall emperor was bowed down, old, sick and limping from gout. Feeling himself to be declining in strength, he leaned on his son's shoulder on the way to and from the church.² Louis was celebrated for his strong arms and broad shoulders, developed by practice in archery and throwing spears. Was he, perhaps, wearing his golden tunic with a golden belt and sword,³ in contrast to the plainer dress of his father? After father and son had prayed together for a long time (Louis was celebrated for praying on his knees with his forehead touching the ground, often in tears), Charlemagne had turned to his son, speaking in that high voice which seemed so out of character to those who looked at his tall body with its protruding stomach, large nose, and friendly face. He charged his son in the presence of all the bishops and great men chiefly to love and fear almighty God and to keep his commandments in all things, to govern the churches of God, and to defend them against wicked men. He was always to show unstinting compassion to his sisters and his younger brothers, his nephews and all of his kin. He was to honour priests as fathers, to love the people as his children, and to direct the ways of proud and wicked men in the path of salvation, to be the consoler of monks and to be a father to the poor, to establish faithful and God-fearing servants who hated unjust gifts. He was to dismiss no one from his honour without just cause and to show himself at all times without reproach before God and all the people. After Louis had promised to obey all of these injunctions he received the consent of all, and was crowned to popular acclamation—with the crown that rested on the highest altar, the altar dedicated to Christ which stood in the gallery of the palace chapel.⁴ During the coronation the people shouted *Vivat imperator Ludovicus*. (The ceremony was customary in

Byzantium, where the emperor's eldest son had been crowned *mitaugustus* from 717 to 867.⁵) Henceforth Louis was granted the title of emperor and Augustus, and in November his father allowed him to return to Aquitaine.

Four months later the emperor was dead.⁶ The intervening time had been spent, we are told, in prayers and almsgiving and in correcting the Gospels.⁷ Einhard affirms that Charlemagne recognised the meaning of the portents of his death: three years of eclipses of both the sun and the moon, and in May of 813 the rapid destruction by fire of the bridge, five hundred feet long, over the Rhine at Mainz, a bridge which had seemed capable of lasting forever. Likewise, the emperor's fall from his horse, startled by a comet, a fall so violent that the buckle holding his cloak tore loose, and his sword belt split, and he was raised up by his servants who hurried to the spot, to aid a ruler without weapons or even his mantle. Inside the palace chapel, where the words *Karolus Princeps* stood inscribed in red around the gallery, several observers noticed that the word *Princeps* had completely faded. In early January, after bathing, he grew feverish, suffering frequent unfamiliar pains in his side. Accustomed to fast against fever, he would only drink a little water.⁸ After archbishop Hildebald of Cologne had given him the sacrament he died around nine in the morning on the 28th January. He had stretched out his right hand and crossed himself, and then folded his arms over his body. His body was buried the same day.

My elaborate reconstruction of the end of the reign of the father of Europe is only the most recent of a long series, for our sense of the moments of Carolingian history, in contrast to the histories of the previous century, depends upon the reconstructions of Carolingian historians. Apart from the terse lines in various local annals there are no contemporaneous accounts of Charlemagne's last days. Einhard, Corepiscopus Thegan of Trier, and the so-called Astronomer all supply narratives of Charlemagne's end as sections of their biographies, reconstructions which they had composed during the twenty years after the event. In those years Charlemagne's achievement was subject to a double revision, including changes both constructed by these biographers and dismantled by the different policies of Charlemagne's heir. In the succession of crises which checked the imperial enterprise, the first, in which the new emperor was twice to do penance for his policies and once to be deposed by his assembled bishops, was certainly not the least formative.⁹ It may have set a model for political change: it certainly began that sequence of rewriting Carolingian history which shows no signs of an end.

Here I want to investigate the touchpaper, so to speak, which flamed up and set off that enterprise of literary revisionism, the memorialising of Charlemagne. That touchpaper, I shall suggest, was the composition and circulation of visions of the other world which burst the bounds of the monastic deathbed vision to explore the deserts to be expected by those who wielded earthly power in the present. My investigation is indebted to a recent study, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire*, by the Canadian historian Paul Dutton, which subjects the visions (for Dutton dream texts) of the Carolingians to close and detailed scrutiny from a distinguished expert in Carolingian history.¹⁰ I want to investigate Dutton's suggestion that one of these visions, that vouchsafed to the monk Wetti, provides a previously overlooked clue to the vexed question of the date of Einhard's *Life* of Charlemagne.¹¹

Charlemagne's death was commemorated across Europe. The pocket-sized Psalter copied at Rheims which later came to the court of Wessex contains his obit, together with obits for Pippin of Italy, Bernhard of Italy, count Worad and Himiltrud: "All these are to be celebrated according to the rites of computus. Lord grant him eternal rest and let perpetual light shine on them." (*Haec omnia superscripta iuxta ritum compoti celebrandi sunt Requiem eternam dones ei dominus et lux perpetua luceat eis.*)¹² Charlemagne's name featured in the banks of names assembled in the confraternity books of the great Carolingian monasteries, the lists of those people worth praying for. He was the first, for some the only, ruler to earn the title of emperor:¹³ in St Gall they called him the best of emperors.¹⁴ His name is found in the earliest necrologies of Reichenau, Lorsch, Wissembourg, and Freising,¹⁵ St Germain, St Denis and Auxerre.¹⁶ Gozbald of Wurzburg, for example, noted: *Eadem die obiit nobilissime memoriae dominus Karolus imperator, qui regnum Francorum catholica religione sanctissime decoravit.* He also records the deaths of Einhard, Clemens Irmgarda, Pippin, Louis the Pious and the bishops of Le Mans, Regensburg, Salzburg, Lisieux, Mainz, and Verdun.¹⁷ Even in the wastes of Wessex the Anglo-Saxon chronicle recorded: "here King Charles passed away and he ruled 45 years."¹⁸ At Bobbio a lament was composed which was sung across the empire: "From the rising of the sun to the shore where it sets, lamentation beats upon men's hearts. Alas for me in my misery. Rivers of tears flow without end for the world laments the death of Charlemagne. Francia, which has endured harsh sufferings, has never suffered such grief. Alas for me in my misery."¹⁹ "Les défunts," as Carozzi reminds us, "réclament tous que l'on s'occupe d'eux."

Einhard tells us that Charlemagne caught pleurisy, fasted, took communion, and died. Thegan's detailed account of Charlemagne's deathbed thus reveals concerns about the death of a Christian which demonstrate how central death had become to the membership of the Christian community. Thegan's emperor died a Christian death, a death preceded by meditation on scripture, hallowed by the sacraments as a strengthening of his spirit, marked by the sign of the cross on his forehead, his breast, and all of his body, and concluded while murmuring a psalm verse commending his spirit to God. As Peter Brown has recently written, "the *hora mortis* was precisely that, it was the last hour of a life where every hour counted," drawn out by a sense of the long, penitential process that led up to the throne of God. All outstanding accounts must be paid off, and in detail. Daily contemplation of death was the duty of each Christian. A deathbed confession was regarded as essential, together with unction and the deathbed chanting of seven penitential psalms and of private prayers—all of them institutions created to ensure the successful passage of the soul. But death was no more than the prologue. In his imperial laws, Charlemagne's son has the following capitula for 818: "According to the apostle we shall all stand before Christ's tribunal, and each shall have to answer for what he has done, most of all we who in rank stand above other mortals. We must humbly pray to God with continuous prayers to show his face to those who make humble confession and fitting emendation."²⁰ This echoes what Alcuin had told Charlemagne about the rendering of accounts on Judgment Day.²¹

Those who lived in this present world glimpsed the next world. In the eighth century monks had been granted visions of what heaven and hell were like. Bede recorded the vision of Drythelm of Melrose, the correspondence of Boniface included the vision of the monk of Wenlock, and also recorded was the vision indicating the punishments of Æthelbald of Mercia and queens Cuthberga and Vinala, in fires up to their armpits or above their heads because of carnal pleasure.²²

We are dealing with a sense of the self no longer held in abeyance by the vast hope of divine amnesty...What now mattered for the visionary was a view of the sum total of human secrets. The basic model for such revelations was no longer a longing to embrace the universe from a high point in the stars. It was a longing to unveil the hidden things of the religious life, secret sins, secret virtues, secret practices, told in the confessional or whispered into the ears of holy hermits—in sum, to penetrate the secrets of the individual."²³

This emergence of the individual has, since Burckhardt, been the teleology of historians disillusioned with freedom. Within a decade of Charlemagne's death, therefore, his reputation was being investigated by messengers who had been vouchsafed a glimpse of what the next world held.

The monk Rotcharius,²⁴ sleeping in the infirmary because of illness, on the morning of the 5th of May fell into a deep sleep and saw an angel shining in a splendour which illuminated the whole building and the church of St Benedict with splendour. As the monk marvelled at this splendour (the word is repeated three times as I have done), the angel began to lead him along a beautiful road. The monk, led on by great love, followed him until they came to a huge and beautiful dwelling, constructed not of planks or stones but constructed in the shape of a throne. There he said he saw the multitude of the saints assembled. They sparkled so brightly that he was scarcely able to gaze at their splendour. Among them he saw Charles wholly splendid, not among the first but in the middle. And he spoke to him and said, "Son, know that I am Charles and that, on account of the most devout prayer of God's faithful I was snatched from punishment and placed in this glory." For he said he had seen another dwelling in which the majesty of the Lord was shown present, and because the dignity of his beauty shone forth more brightly he was unable to look. In a third dwelling placed below and not decorated with such splendour but filled with deformity he saw a multitude of clerics and common people sitting and a very black servant who administered fire from the soles of their feet to their breasts, and poured boiling water over their heads without stopping. For in their midst was set a vessel under which an undying fire was kindled to heat the water, from which the hideous servant drew water unceasingly. Among them were three of our brothers who are still alive: Isachar, Gaudius, and Winemundus. But two were tortured sitting and the third, Gaudius, was punished in the same way standing. And in these tortures they uttered horrible cries.

The vision ends with an epistolary formula which suggests that a monk is writing to his abbot: "Knowing this matter we made it known to your paternity." The Vision is preserved in a single Rheims manuscript in St Petersburg as a one-page text following an illustrated manuscript of the *Visio Barontii*.

In Rotcharius' vision the presence of Charlemagne in heaven was assured by the prayers of the faithful. He was the only person identified among the saints. Gregory the Great had taught that such visions were for the benefit of the living.²⁵ Afterwards, no one will obtain any remission of sin, unless remission is deserved through good deeds in this life.²⁶

Ninth-century manuscripts from Reichenau, St Gall and Tegernsee preserve the vision of the poor woman of Laon.²⁸ A certain poor woman in the *pagus* of Laon who was snatched in ecstasy told upon her return many wondrous things. A man dressed in a monk's habit led her where she saw the rest of the saints and the punishment of the wicked as Paul wrote in his letter. There she saw a prince of Italy in torments, and many other famous people, some in torment, some in glory. She asked her guide if that prince would return to eternal life and he said that indeed he would. For if his offspring the emperor Louis were to give seven memorial *agapes* for him he should be set free. Bego, who once was a friend of this king, lay flat in torments and two black spirits melted gold and poured it into his mouth saying, "You thirsted for this in the world and could not be satisfied, now drink to saturation." Louis' queen Irmingard lay in torments with three molars above her—one over her head, one over her breast, and one over her back, and they always drowned her in the deep. For she shouted to the woman saying, "Go and ask my lord emperor to help me and give him a sign that he knows you were sent by me, that at the time of my deposition (probably an error for betrothal, since Irmingard was never deposed) I spoke alone with him in an orchard and he will know this at once, for that conversation is hidden from everyone except us."

When they went on, her guide showed her a wall whose top stretched up to the sky, and in front of it another one completely covered with gold letters. She asked what this was: "It is the earthly paradise where none will enter until they are found written here." He asked her to read it but she replied, "I haven't learned letters." "I know," he said, "but still read." And she read and found the name of the former king Bernhard in shining letters like none of the others, and afterwards the name of the king Louis so dark and obliterated that it could barely be recognised. And she said, "Why is this name so obliterated?" He said, "Before he murdered Bernhard no name shone brighter, but his slaying was his obliteration. Go and take care that you hide none of this from the kind." But she didn't dare and kept silent. Not long after he warned her again and she kept silent as before. The third time he came and said: "Why did you not follow God's words?" She answered, "Lord, I am a poor creature and I dare not announce these things in public." So he said, "You will not enjoy your eyes until you have told these things before the kind." And she lost the sight of her eyes. And after many days she came to the king's presence and told him everything and recovered her sight.

The prince of Italy is Charlemagne, in torments together with Bego and Queen Irmingard. And Louis the Pious is no longer certain of his own celestial reward, since he is subject to a crescendo of criticism rising in the south of the empire, but localised in the diocese of Rheims.

Born in 809 and educated at the great monastery of the Reichenau, at the age of eighteen Walahfrid Strabo completed the versification of the vision of Wetti, who had died on 4 November 824.²⁸ In the early morning of November 3rd he had recounted to his abbot the vision he had seen during the night. One of his audience, the monk Heito, set down the vision in prose. The poem is dedicated to Grimald, chaplain of the imperial court, to whom Walahfrid had already sent a versified request for patronage. Grimald was a relative of Wetti. In the prose preface Walahfrid asserts that, "certain people judge this vision to be nothing more than empty dreams, and refuse to accept, believe, or even listen to it."

The poem invokes Christ, who is asked to cleanse the author of unspeakable sins. "Spurn high honours for fear that the mighty day of judgment may bring dishonour" is the exhortation after the account of Heito's resignation from the abbacy. However, the poem is an account of Wetti's vision, his illness, his great pains of unusual severity, and then the appearance of the spirit of guile dressed as a priest, carrying instruments of torture and threatening Wetti with torture. He is followed by an armed horde, but monks drive them all away and an angel in a red cloak summons him. Awaking, he asks for prayers and requests God's mercy. Then an angel in white comes and leads him down a pleasant path beside mountains and a river of fire containing a vast throng of damned souls, priests proud in the flesh, women adulteresses, a fort containing monks shut up to purge their sins. On a lofty mountain an abbot is held, exposed to wind and rain and many a danger besides—to purge his neglect and enter into the reward of the saints: "Much is won by pious prayers. But do not be confident that when your life is over the fires which you build by your own evil deeds will be dispersed by the pleas of another."

Most significant for our purposes is the next section, which I quote in full:

He also observed among illuminated fields one who once had held imperial sway over the West and the exalted Roman people. He was rooted to the spot, and in front of him an animal was tearing at his genitals as he stood there. The limbs on the rest of his body were blessedly free from laceration. When Wetti saw this sight he became dumb with fear and said:

“This man’s destiny made him the defender of justice while he lived in the body, and in our new age he has caused the flourishing of great teaching on the Lord’s behalf and provided the faithful with the shield of his pious protection, and, as it were, reached a new summit in this world, upholding the right and borne from land to land on the sweet wings of popular favour. But here he is caught in this awful plight, enduring the dire punishment of this grim affliction. Please explain.”²⁹

Then his guide replied: “He remains in this tortured state because he sullied his good actions with shameful debauchery, thinking his sins would be buried under the great quantity of his virtuous acts, and chose to end his life in a squalor to which he became habituated: yet even so he will attain a blessed life, and joyfully assume the office that the Lord has set aside for him.”

The devil’s assistants are setting out gifts, cloths, vessels of gold, horses, which belonged to counts who administered the law unjustly. Then Wetti is taken to the walls of a supremely beautiful place, shining and glittering with arches and golden ornaments. In their abode the saints prostrate themselves before the throne, and entreat Christ to remit Wetti’s sins. But a voice from the throne booms that Wetti wallowed in indolence, shirking the task of inspiring his fellow monks. He sees martyrs and virgins who learn how Wetti may obtain divine forgiveness. He is to speak out against abuses in monasteries, notably against the excesses of gluttony, drunkenness, excess in dress and pride.

All three of our visions were composed in the period after the blinding of King Bernhard of Italy, a blinding so brutal that he died of the pain. Their open criticism of Charlemagne, and in the case of the vision of the poor woman, of both Charlemagne and Louis, is a new development in Carolingian political discourse. But we must not blur distinctions. Rotcharius is silent about the reasons why Charlemagne was punished before the prayers of the faithful had rescued him. The poor woman said he would only be freed by Louis. Only Wetti keeps Charlemagne in hell, despite his appearing almost alone in defence of the catholic faith. Was his punishment for debauchery a lesson to those who did not attain his power, but might match his failings? The canonical penalty for adultery was three years penance, abstaining both from sexual relations and the use of weapons, or seven years of penance. Walahfrid’s versification charges men to govern their lives in every respect.

Charlemagne's lust is recalled in a little-known late Carolingian text, the life of St Amelberga by archbishop Radbod of Utrecht, a virgin who lived with her brother in Flanders in the time of the rulers of the Franks called Carolides. Their life was spent in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, but she was the most beautiful girl in the land and the splendour of her body almost caused her downfall. Charlemagne loved her and sent courtiers offering marriage. When his servant told her of his arrival she prayed, and fell as if rooted to the ground when he entered the oratory. Offering worldly honours, he grabbed at her to carry her off—and broke her arm though she kept her chastity, trusting in Christ, her true bridegroom.³⁰

The problem in the vision texts is the text which lies behind so many of them, but which is concealed: the *Revelatio* of St Paul, mentioned by Augustine in John 98: 8, quoted by Caesarius, attacked by Aldhelm, a source for the Blickling homilist, and translated for Wulfstan into Old English. Paul was carried up into the third heaven to visit the dwellings of the righteous and the wicked. He met angels without mercy and angels with radiant foreheads awaiting the dead. At sunrise and sunset, angels presented to God the works of men. One angel had a chirograph with all of the sins of the sinner. Paul witnessed the death of a good man whose soul was entrusted to the saints and the wicked soul which falsely said it had not sinned. Outside the golden gate of the heavenly city were tablets inscribed with the names of the righteous, a land flowing with milk and honey where those continent in marriage dwell and see the city of Christ with twelve walls and twelve gates and golden thrones. Beside an altar David sang psalms: *Subdita creatura Deo est, humana autem gens sola peccat*. The wicked received separate punishments. Buried in a river neither hot nor cold, submerged to their knees, their navels, their lips or their hair were the secular sinners. Those who did not trust in the Lord were in pits three thousand feet deep. A sacrilegious priest who ate, drank and fornicated was speared on a trident. A wicked bishop who lacked piety was immersed in a fiery river and attacked with fiery torches; a fornicating deacon eaten by worms, a wicked lector had his lips and tongue cut; usurers, sorcerers, and virgins who had lost their chastity were dragged off in chains; parents who abandoned their children were confined in a region of ice and snow. Dragons attacked monks who lacked charity. Paul wept for the sinners and was rebuked, "Why should you have more mercy than God?" In a pit sealed with seven seals were those who denied the incarnation, the virgin birth, and the redemption.³¹ The particular legacy of this influential and difficult text was the detailed description of heavenly rewards and punishments, with the certainty that sin was the fundamental human characteristic. The world of Augustine was vulgarised, in its cruder form sin entailed specific punishment, and redemption was uncertain.

So the Carolingian Renaissance depended on inculcating a sense of sin. *Brevis est ista vita, et incertum est tempus mortis, quid aliud agendum est, nisi ut semper parati simus. Cogitemus quam terribiliter est incidere in manu Dei (Admonitio Generalis)*. Hope for God's compassion that our daily sins be redeemed by confession and penance.³² *Humanum est peccare, angelicum est emendare, diabolica est perseverare in peccato*. Priests were to preach with all diligence for what crimes they were sent with the devil into eternal punishment.³³

“Each soul was thought of as having been registered in its every act.” The world of penance is currently, and fortuitously for my purposes here, the subject of some of the finest early medieval scholarship. During the Carolingian Renaissance, penance provided a comprehensive system of insurance against a life of eternal punishment. Human sins could be remitted, according to elaborate tariffs calibrated to each sin, so as to attain a purity which secured heavenly bliss. The reconciliation of penitents has recently received a detailed treatment by Hubertus Lutterbach.³⁴ They might be reconciled in Easter week, at a Maundy Thursday mass. The priest prayed over them as they waited on their knees at the back of the church, barefoot and in sackcloth. Chrodegang had penitent canons lying outside the church door. The priest reminded them that they did not know what was held in shadows, waiting in the flames, and they were turned from the way of error to the path of justice. The priest or bishop laid his hands on them and then, clasping each by the hand, brought the penitent into the bosom of the church. Bishop Halitgar of Cambrai records the rite with the instruction, “No priest or bishop can heal sins’ wounds or drive sins from the soul save by his care and the prayer of tears, and we, dear brothers, must care for the sins, for we are mutual. When the sinner sees a priest grieving and weeping for his own sins then he grieves more and is filled with shame for his sins. When he has fasted, then his sins are forgotten.”³⁵

Compassionate and merciful God, who destroys the sins of the penitent according to the multitude of your mercies, and by the pardon of remission voids the blame of former crimes, look on this your brother and grant remission to him of all his sins by full confession of his heart and hear his prayer remove from him, most pious father, whatever is corrupt by earthly frailty or is violated by the fraud of the devil and restore him to the sanctity of the members of the body of your church by full remission; have pity lord on his groans, on his tears, and admit him, trusting only in your compassion, to the sacrament of reconciliation.³⁶

The priest asked:

Have you sinned in thought or word or deed? Have you sworn on the Gospel or on the altar; have you sworn on your brother's hand or any other man's hand or on a consecrated cross? Have you spoken evil in anger? Have you had envy? Have you had lust or greed? Have you thought a vile thing? Have you lusted after something you should not with your eyes? Have you sinned with lustful love of gold? Were you harsh to the poor? Did you visit Christ in prison? Did you receive strangers into your house? Did you wash the feet of your guests as you promised at baptism? Did you visit the sick? Did you recall those feuding to concord with a whole spirit? Did you eat on fast days before the hour? Were you busy in idle tales standing in church hearing the holy reading? Did you think something unfitting while singing psalms or praying? Did you speak lustful or insulting words? Were you sacrilegious? Did you thieve? Did you fornicate? Did you commit adultery with another woman? Or with a virgin? Or a nun? Or a widow? Or with a mare or with other animals? Did you willingly kill a man, either in war or at your lord's command? Were you a thief? Did you bear false witness? Did you rage in your evil members? Did you rage in lust of your eyes touching phantoms for wicked delight? Did you see something with your eyes which is not allowed? Did you neglect to hear what is taught or were you silent when you should have spoken? Were your hands active in what is not lawful? Did you walk with your feet where it is not lawful? Did you ignore what was ordered? Did you think or speak when you wanted to or did not want to, either knowingly or unknowingly against God's will, or did you speak or act? How did you look after father and mother or godfather or godmother? How have you kept the Lord's day or other holy feasts? Have you eaten something stolen or unclean? Have you taken bribes, have you kept them? Have you vomited through drunkenness? Have you desired to fornicate and been unable to? Have you kissed shameful things? Did you willingly pollute yourself in dreams? Did you copulate with your wife from behind? Have you worshipped tricks or charms or incantations? Have you consented to a murder? Have you spilled blood? Have you born insults? Were you lustful or greedy or proud? Have you eaten carrion flesh? Have you kept anger in your heart? Have you fornicated like a sodomite?³⁷

These were the daily sins of early medieval society, the common symptoms which differed from the elaborate practices of the penitentials. The Aachen capitulary of 801-

13 required bishops to visit their parishes and inquire about incest, parricide, fratricide, and adultery. Each priest was to have lists of major and minor sins by means of which he may know them and preach to his subjects so that they beware the snares of the devil.³⁸

Do you wish to forgive the sins of those who sinned against you? For the Lord said, 'If you do not forgive men their sins, your heavenly father will not forgive you your sins.' I do, and [then] ask him carefully; if he is incontinent and does not want to forgive the incests you cannot give him penance.³⁹

The people come to the church at the sixth hour: "I confess to you Lord, father of heaven and earth, that I have sinned against your law in thought and words and deeds and my sins are many, and I neglected God's works and my order. I sinned by vainglory, pride, detraction, fornication, theft, false witness, perjury, adultery, the works of God which I did neglectfully, carnal desires, laughter, and in all my faults which I neglectfully performed. So I ask pardon, Lord, for I acknowledge myself guilty; forgive what I did and grant that I do no more."

Et in nobis, quam donavit salus vera maneat. Theodulf reminded the sinner that every day we must confess our sins in our prayers to God, once, twice, or as often as we can. The confession of sins to God helped us to rid ourselves of the stain of sin, for as often as we remember our sins, so often does the Lord forget them, but as often as we forget them, the Lord remembers them.⁴⁰ Confession was a vomiting forth of the poison of sin. This emphasis on personal confession, as Lutterbach has shown, was a crucial innovation in the process of penance.

When Louis reached Aachen early in March 814 having sought the protection of saints by visiting the shrines of the Holy Cross and St Aignan at Orleans, St Mesmin at Micy, St Genevieve, St Germain and St Denis he took care to implement Charlemagne's will, drawn up and witnessed in 811, *summa devotione*⁴¹ spending treasures to secure the repose of his father's soul. He also reformed the royal household. Einhard affirms that Charlemagne had wanted to make heirs of his daughters and the children of his concubines, but he was unable to finish this.⁴² Louis drove his sisters, "the whole female mob, which was very large" from the court to the estates and nunneries which their father had granted them.⁴³ Louis' sons were urged to marry. Charlemagne's cousin Adalhard was exiled to Noirmoutiers and Wala sent as a monk to Corbie, Bernhard to Lerins, and Gundrada to Poitiers. There was a general

investigation of morals in Aachen, with searches for prostitutes and strangers at court and in the homes of nobles, Jews, merchants, and the clergy. Sexual offenders were to be whipped in the marketplace.⁴⁴ We may doubt whether Janet Nelson is right to see hints of an incestuous Charlemagne, but she is certainly right that such charges were a code for political opposition. The values of the new reign were expressed by Thegan in his portrait of Louis, able to recognise the spiritual and moral and anagogical sense of all writings, spurning the pagan songs he had learned in his youth, not wanting to hear, read, or teach them. Louis was concerned for psalmody and lections.

Current historical orthodoxy, as represented by Rudolph Schieffer, Joseph Semmler, Karl Ferdinand Werner, and Meijke de Jong, regards Louis' penance in autumn 821 as an exemplary imitation of the penance of the emperor Theodosius, representing not a humiliation but an enhancement of the role of the ruler as mediator for his people before God.⁴⁵ This was not the view of Paschasius Radbertus.⁴⁶ But that penance was a transformation of the gestures of politics, for Louis made a public confession and public penance, in the presence of all the people, for the enforced tonsuring of his half-brothers, and for what he had done to his nephew Bernhard, to Adalhard, and to Wala,⁴⁷ and he swore to correct whatever similar things could be found to have been done by him or his father. This led to the accusation of cruelty against Bernhard.

Walahfrid had publicised the just punishment of Charlemagne; Einhard, nourished at Charlemagne's court, strove to secure his memory by composing a biography which paid tribute to Charlemagne's greatness, defined and defended in classical terms. Latin secular biography was a new genre, created by Einhard. But was Einhard asserting that Charlemagne belonged outside the categories of a Walahfrid or a Wetti? He used in this depiction the secular virtues of magnanimity, tenacity, patience in adversity, fortitude, constancy and generosity: the classical and Christian virtues thus found a place in a public sphere which became the theatre for individual greatness. Classical norms of behaviour, eloquently formulated by the meticulous imitation of classical models, enabled Einhard to ennoble Charlemagne, the greatest and most famous man of his age, and to assert that his contemporaries were incapable of imitating his deeds.

Einhard's preface affirms how remarkable it is that he, a barbarian trained in Roman locution, should dare to think that it might be possible for him to write something decent or fitting in Latin. His resolve to compose in the language of erudition, eloquence, and empire was dictated by his need to show that his age could

match the standards of antiquity. The ideal of commemorating a ruler was a bold affirmation of Charlemagne's achievements, but also of the power of a classical tradition. Yet Einhard tells of Charlemagne commanding that the Germanic songs about the deeds and wars of former kings should also be written down. By acknowledging Charlemagne's origins in a different heroic tradition with its own vernacular culture he recognised that Latin culture could no longer enjoy a monopoly in Charlemagne's empire. But he affirmed that greatness needed to be commemorated according to the norms of that culture. Without a fitting eloquence there could be no security of memory.

The preface of Einhard's life was sent to his friend Gerward, the palace librarian.⁴⁸ Gerward supplied verses for a copy which he presented to Louis the Pious. But Walahfrid Strabo supplied his own preface and chapters, perhaps for his pupil, Charles the Bald, in a rewriting of the life which made it a much more explicitly Christian work. His chapters include: How he increased the splendour of the church. With what love he cherished the Roman see and when he was elevated to the imperial name. A series of chapters transforms the will: How he sent two parts to holy places, to where the third part was sent, what he ordained about his chapel and his books.

In 828, Einhard related how a blind man named Aubrey from Aquitaine had been transported along the Rhine from Mainz to Mulinhein, where he remained for two years, and every night he dreamed of the martyrs. One night he told Einhard's notary, Ratleic, of a vision of a man with white hair, dressed in white and carrying a golden staff, who had said: "Aubrey, understand everything I am about to tell you and hold it firm in your memory, so that you can repeat it to those who will write it down. For I wish these things to be written down and shown by your master to the emperor Louis, who should read them. For they are most necessary for the prince not only to know but also to do." Ratleic was supposed to make up a booklet containing twelve or more chapters and take it to Einhard, who was staying at the palace. Einhard took the booklet and read it and corrected it, made a new copy, and presented it to the emperor. And in truth he read and received that little book, but of the things that he commanded or advised him to do, he bothered to accomplish few." The *Translatio* does not list the contents of the *capitula*.⁴⁹ At the same time, another book was brought from the basilica containing the words and arguments of a certain demon who called himself Wiggo. At Hochst a girl aged about sixteen was possessed; she was taken by her parents to the church. As she lay in front of the tomb of

the martyrs and the priest was reading an exorcism, the demon began to tell, in Latin, how and when he possessed her, though the girl only knew German. The demon said, "I am a follower of Satan and for a long time I was doorkeeper of Hell, but for the past eleven years with my mates I have been ravaging the *regnum Francorum* and we have destroyed corn and vines and all other crops which grow from earth for men's use, as we were ordered, and we killed cattle and sent plague to men and all the adversities and evils which they suffer for their merits happened to them at our doing." (The Royal Frankish annals record rains and famine in 820-21, hail destroys crops in 823, and lightning strikes houses and plague. There is a cold winter in which men and animals freeze in 823-4.) When the priest asked him for what reason he was granted this power, he responded: "Because of the wickedness of this people and the manifold wickednesses of those set in authority over them, who love bribes and not justice, who fear men more than God, who oppress the poor and will not hear widows and orphans crying to them, and do no justice except for money. Friend does not believe friend, brother hates brother, father does not love son. Few pay tithes, fewer still give alms."⁵⁰

Louis' response to the words of Gabriel and Wiggo can be found in the *Epistola generaliter legenda*: "Is there anyone who does not feel that God has been offended and roused to anger by our most wicked deeds? When he sees how for so many years in the kingdom he entrusted to us his wrath has raged with various scourges, continual famine, death of livestock, pestilence attacking men and sterility of almost all crops, and as I might say by the very various disasters of disease and great poverty he has miserable vexed the people of this realm and completely stolen from them abundance of all things....Our sins have done this, for which we are rightly chastised by him and through which we greatly offended him, so that we may correct our faults."⁵¹

Compare the vision of a certain pious priest of the land of the English, as revealed to him after Christmas while he was transported out of his body. In AD 839, as sent to Louis the Pious by Æthelwulf, the prophecy said that for three days and nights a very dense fog would spread over their land and then all of a sudden pagans would lay waste with fire and sword most of the people and land of the Christians. But instead, if they are willing to do true penance immediately and carefully, atone for their sins according to the Lord's command with fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, then they may still escape those punishments and disasters through the intercession of the saints.⁵²

Let us close with a comparison recorded in Rome some 1400 years ago:

Imagine a pregnant woman sent to prison where she gives birth, and the boy grows up in prison. If his mother were to tell him about the sun, moon, stars, mountains and fields, birds flying or horses galloping he, born in the prison, would know nothing but the shadows of the prison. He heard that they all exist, but since he doesn't know it from experience he doubts if they really exist. Thus men born in this blindness of their exile, when they hear of the highest invisible things, doubt if they are true, for they only know these poor visible things in which they are born.

We may rejoice at finding Plato's myth of the cave transmitted in the Dark Ages. But Gregory, on whom we have been eavesdropping, explained that this was why mankind needed redemption: "And as much as we have received the Spirit, pledge of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14) we do not doubt the life of invisible beings." By asserting that even Charlemagne was to enter into that life, Carolingian thinkers set all of human history in a framework of grace and its absence. The ruler whose favourite reading was the *City of God* would not have objected. For, as Claude Carozzi has reminded us, "Eternal punishment can remain hidden, but a hell from which we can be redeemed must be made known, to ensure that we pray for our dead."

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Notes

Note: This paper is printed in the form in which it was delivered.

1 J-F Böhmer, E. Muhlbacher, *Regesta Imperii I: Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern 751-918* (Berlin, 1908), 479b. Cf. W. Wendling, "Die Erhebung Ludwigs des Frommen zum Mitkaiser im Jahre 813 und ihre Bedeutung für die Verfassungsgeschichte des Frankenreiches," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 19 (1985), pp. 201-38; P. Classen, "Karl der Grosse und die Thronfolge im Frankenreich" in *Festgabe für H. Heimpel, III* (Göttingen, 1972), pp. 109-34. Wendling suggests that the ceremony had to wait until Charlemagne's peace treaty with Byzantium had been ratified (p. 231).

2 Thegan c.6. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* p. 184.

3 Thegan c.19, pp. 200-204.

4 *Gesta Rezension B2*, p. 261 and note 2.

5 Georg Ostrogorsky, "Das Mitkaisertum im mittelalterlichen Byzanz," in E. Kornemann, ed. *Doppelprinzipat und Reichsteilung im Imperium Romanum* (Leipzig, 1930), pp. 166-67.

6 Einhard, c. 30. The standard edition is that in *Scriptores Rerum Germanicum*, but also commonly used is the edition with French translation ed. L. Halphen (Paris, 1923).

7 Thegan c. 7, pp. 184-6.

8 Einhard, *Vita Karoli* c. 31.

9 T. Schieffer, "Die Krise des Karolingischen Imperiums," in *Aus Mittelalter und Neuzeit: G. Kallen zum 70 Geburtstag*, ed. J. Engel, H.M. Klickeberg (Bonn, 1957), pp. 1-15.

10 P.E. Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

11 "Writing in the mid-820's Einhard was, I believe, attempting to answer Wetti and the other dream critics." (Dutton, *Politics*, p. 55).

12 B.L. Cotton Galba A xviii, f. 28r.

13 *Libri Memorialis von Remiremont, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Libri Memoriales I. Liber viventium Fabariensis* Faksimile-Edition (Basel, 1973), p. 24.

14 MGH Nocr. I, p. 466.

15 J.F. Böhmer, *Monumenta Historiae Patriae* III:140, IV:310, 462, 586.

16 A. Molinier, *Obituaries I*, pp. 250, 273, 208.

17 H. Wellmer, *Persönliches Memento im Deutschen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1973), pp. 13-20. Also Grimald of St Gall, *ibid.*, p. 22.

18 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 814.

19 *Planctus Karoli*, ed. and trans. P. Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (London, 1985), pp. 206-11; cf. H. Lowe, "Columbanus und Fidiolus," *Deutsches Archiv* 37 (1981), pp. 1-19 on the composition of this text. Translations throughout the paper are my own.

20 MGH Cap I, pp. 273-74.

21 MGH Ep IV, p. 209. *unusquisque rationem reddendum est in die iudicii.*

22 Boniface, Ep. 115, *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus* ed. M. Tangl. MGH Epistolae Selectae I (Berlin, 1955), pp. 247-50.

23 P.R.L. Brown, art. cit.

24 W. Wattenback, ed. "Aus Petersburger Handschriften," *Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit* 22 (1875), pp. 72-4; Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*, pp. 60-63.

25 Gregory, *Dialogues IV*, 40.

26 Gregory, *Dialogues IV*, 41.

27 H. Houben, ed. "Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris. Überlieferung und Herkunft eines frühmittelalterlichen Visonstextes (mit Neuedition)," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 124 (1976), pp. 31-42.

28 The translation quoted is that of David A. Traill, *Walafriid Strabo's Visio Wettini: Text, translation, and commentary* Lateinische Sprache und Litteratur des Mittelalters 2 (Bern/Frankfurt, 1974).

29 *Visio Wettini*, 446-461; Traill, pp. 55-56. The acrostics spell out "Carolus Imperator."

30 *Patrologia Latina* 132 *Omnium SS. Patrum, Doctorum Scriptorumque Ecclesiasticorum*, cols. 550-5; cf A. Poncelet, *Analecta Bollandiana* (1912), pp. 401-09.

31 C. Carozzi, *Eschatologie de l'au dela, Recherches sur l'Apocalypse de Paul* Publications de l'université de Provence (Aix, 1994).

32 "Admonitio Generalis," *MGH Capitularia I*, cf. p. 110.

33 *ibid.*, p. 61.

34 H. Lutterbach, *Die Bussordines in den iro-frankischen Paenitentialien*. Schlüssel zur Theologie und Verwendung der mittelalterlichen Bussbücher FMS 30 (1996), pp. 150-72.

35 "Ordo Halitgarii," ed. H.J. Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher und die Bussdisciplin der Kirche* (Mainz, 1883-98), II, pp. 292-3.

36 "Reconciliatio Penitenti ad mortem, Supplementum Anianense CII" J. Deshusses, *Le Sacramentaire Gregorien Spicilegium Friburgense* 16 (Fribourg, 1971), pp. 456-7.

37 Cotton Vespasian A XX, f. 15r, a continental interrogation of a penitent.

38 *MGH Capitularia Regum Francorum I*, ed. A. Boretius (Hanover, 1883), p. 179.

39 F.H. Wasserschleben, *Poenitentiale Pseudo-Beda*, p. 252.

40 *MGH Capitula Episcoporum I*, ed. P. Brommer (Hanover, 1984), Theodulf Capitula I 30, p. 127ff.

41 Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 41.

42 Einhard, *Vita Karoli* c. 33; cf. Weinrich, p. 27ff.

43 Astronomus c. 23; Nithard I, c. 2; cf. R. Schieffer, "Karolingische Tochter," in *Herrschaft, Kirche, Kultur Festschrift für F. Prinz* ed. G. Jenal, pp. 125-40; J. Nelson, "Women at the court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment?" in her *The Frankish World* (Hambleton, 1996), pp. 223-42.

44 *MGH Cap. I*, p. 298.

45 K.F. Werner, "Hludovicus Augustus Gouverner l'empire chrétien—Idées et réalités," pp. 3-124, pp. 58-60; J. Semmler, "Renovatio Regni Francorum: Die Herrschaft Ludwigs des Frommen im Frankenreich 814-829/30," pp. 125-46, p. 136, both in *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)* eds P. Godman and R. Collins (Oxford, 1990); R. Schieffer, "Von Mailand nach Canossa: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der christlichen Herrscherbusse von Theodosius dem Grossen bis zu Heinrich IV," *Deutsches Archiv* 28 (1972), pp. 352-6.

46 *Patrologia Latina* 120, 1534.

47 *Annales Regni Francorum* 822, *MGH* p. 158.

48 The identification of the "tibi" of "en tibi librum" has not interested historians. But it is more likely to be specific than general, and London B.L. Cotton Tiberius C. ix, the only copy of the *Annales Xantenses* composed by Gerward, bears a rubric "Einhardus G carissimo suo" above the preface. I would identify the G with Gerward.

49 *Translatio et Miracula SS. Marcellini et Petri* *MGH SS VI*, p. 252.

50 *ibid.*, pp. 253-4.

51 *MGH Capitularia II*, pp. 4-5.

52 The role of the Vikings as the visible instrument of God's punishment is repeatedly stressed in Carolingian legislation of the second half of the ninth century; cf. S. Coupland, "The Rod of God's Wrath or the People of God's Wrath? The Carolingian Theology of the Viking Invasions," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991), pp. 535-54.